

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Friday, November 8, 2024

Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered at 9 a.m. EST in the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ont.

Opening Eucharist

CoGS held an opening worship service and Eucharist in the chapel.

Opening Formalities

Archbishop Anne Germond, Acting Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, welcomed members to the penultimate CoGS meeting of the 2023-2025 biennium. Members voted in favour of two resolutions on the no-debate list, approving minutes from the previous CoGS meeting on May 31-June 2 as well as the agenda for the current meeting.

Acting Primate's Remarks

Archbishop Germond thanked former Primate Archbishop Linda Nicholls for helping guide and prepare her in her new role as Acting Primate, leading up to the election of the 15th Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada at General Synod 2025. At Archbishop Nicholls' invitation, Archbishop Germond—who had never previously attended a council meeting—attended the previous meetings of CoGS. Archbishop Germond was also invited to visit Church House in Toronto, prior to Archbishop Nicholls' retirement in September, to meet with directors of each of the ministries of General Synod. The Acting Primate said she plans to visit Toronto for a couple of days each month to handle duties at Church House and attend meetings as required.

Since assuming office as Acting Primate, Archbishop Germond said, she had been having weekly meetings with General Secretary the Ven. Alan Perry and administrative associate Jo Mutch. Archbishop Germond chaired a meeting of the metropolitans and National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop and attended meetings of the General Synod Planning Committee and the National House of Bishops Agenda Committee. She has also written monthly columns for the *Anglican Journal*, currently working on her fourth.

Archbishop Germond expressed appreciation to Communications Director Henrieta Paukov for helping her prepare public statements. These have included a message to the church ahead of the first anniversary of Hamas's Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel; an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the situation in Gaza; and a joint statement with National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper on the report of Independent Special Interlocutor Kimberly Murray, which details an Indigenous-led reparations framework for unmarked graves and burial sites of children at former residential schools. The Acting Primate also joined 720 other Christian leaders in signing the Canadian Christian Declaration on Antisemitism, declaring their solidarity with Canada's Jewish communities.

From Oct. 21-25, Archbishop Germond attended the National House of Bishops meeting in Niagara Falls, Ont., which included an orientation meeting for newer bishops led by the four metropolitans and Archbishop Harper.

During the meeting the bishops received the difficult news that Bishop Geoff Woodcroft had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, which affected them deeply. They also heard about the death of Robert Willis, dean emeritus of Canterbury, while Bishop Lydia Mamakwa was unable to attend due to two suicides in her community. "There was an undertone of sorrow for our colleagues," Archbishop Germond said, and the bishops spent much time in prayer. "One thing I noticed was how people took care of each other," the Acting Primate said. "That's what we need to do."

Over two successive days, the bishops welcomed Prolocutor Canon (lay) Ian Alexander and Deputy Prolocutor the Ven. Tanya Phibbs—who spoke to them about the upcoming primatial election—as well as members of the Primate's Commission on re-imagining the church. The House of Bishops conducted a robust discussion on governance and church structures, and Archbishop Germond said she observed a desire of the House of Bishops to be part of these conversations within the church going forward. The bishops invited the church's prayers as it prepares for General Synod 2025, she said—not only for motions, but for the bishops who will be nominated to be the 15th Primate, and for members of General Synod who will be discerning and electing the new Primate.

Archbishop Germond described meeting with Dean Robert Key, director of The Kingdom Come—a worldwide initiative from the Church of England inviting the church to pray between Ascension Day and Pentecost, for which online training sessions are available if any parishes or dioceses wish to take part. After CoGS, the Acting Primate will travel to New Haven, Connecticut, for the funeral mass of Robert Willis, bringing greetings from the Anglican Church of Canada as well as former Primates Linda Nicholls and Fred Hiltz. She plans to

attend the national conference of Alongside Hope, formerly the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, and will preach on New Year's Day at Christ Church Cathedral in Ottawa.

At the end of September, the ecclesiastical province of Ontario held its synod, based around the theme "Standing at the Crossroads". Archbishop Germond, who is also Metropolitan of Ontario, ended her remarks by saying that theme is a timely one for where the Anglican Church of Canada currently finds itself. She closed with a passage from Jeremiah 6:16, in which God says, "Stand at the crossroads and look and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."

Primate's Commission

The Rev. Kyle Wagner and Dean Peter Elliott, members of the Primate's Commission on Reimagining the Church: Proclaiming the Gospel in the 21st Century, spoke to CoGS via Zoom to provide an update on the commission's work. The commission has produced seven hypotheses on potential changes to spark discussion across the church. "People are definitely talking," Wagner said, describing a variety of reactions from Anglicans about the hypotheses: "good and bad, misunderstood, unkind, hope-filled, angry and fear-inspired, supportive and grace-filled, scared but understanding the need, gasps of 'finally we are talking about this.'"

The Primate's Commission has spoken with a variety of groups across the Anglican Church of Canada, including engagements at the House of Bishops and CoGS (approximately 60 people) and all provincial synods (~200 people), four online engagements open to members of General Synod and partners (~100 people), engagements on Oct. 26 with Council of the North (~10 people), on Oct. 29 with the

Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (~10 people), on Nov. 2 with the Niagara diocesan synod (~200 people), on Nov. 8 to CoGS (~40 people) and will speak on Dec. 12 with the evangelism and discipleship working group (~10 people). Wagner summed up overall comments the commission had heard on the hypotheses as, "These are all important, these are difficult conversations to have, we cannot get any rid of them and the time is now" to continue to discuss.

An online survey was provided to all participants in engagements, with 90 responses. The commission also created a website with background material and an online survey, which has garnered 200 responses. Wagner said the commission has heard from people through individual emails and conversations, some of which have included requests for confidentiality, but others of which have been added to the data. There have been several articles in the media on the Primate's Commission and all commission members have offered time to reporters within and outside the Anglican Church.

Regarding membership of the commission, initially members were aware of success in some areas of diversity of membership, but concern in others, Wagner said. As the commission began its work, it felt it could move forward with who it had gathered, trusting that its journey would include more voices along the way. Its expectation has been that the next phase of work will be the more intense stage of research, setting priorities, and implementation planning, and they continue to hope that diverse voices will commit to the work ahead. The Acting Primate has invited one member of the Council of the North and two members of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) to join in the commission's work prior to CoGS. The commission remains concerned that it has only one lay member, Wagner said, while adding

that this relative lack of laity has never been mentioned outside its own ranks.

Elliott presented data from the online survey, which asked two quantitative questions about the hypotheses: 1) How much do you agree with the hypothesis, and 2) How urgent do you believe the issue to be? While the commission will be diving into the data more in the next two months, Elliott said, responses show there is far more high than low agreement for each hypothesis. He also noted that the commission had received "amazing qualitative data" in both its survey and engagement activities. These data and conversations will inform the commission's final report and recommendations.

Survey portals will soon be closed and the commission has created an extensive work plan for distilling and discerning data. Next steps will include writing a report with recommended resolutions for CoGS to consider forwarding to General Synod, which the commission will provide to CoGS Feb. 14. It will incorporate feedback from the next meeting of CoGS into a final report to be submitted by March 14. An online pre-synod town hall will be provided for members of General Synod via Zoom and the commission will present its findings at General Synod.

Members broke for lunch from noon to 1:30 p.m.

2024 YTD Statements and 2025 Budget

Canon Patricia Dorland, chair of the Financial Management Committee, and Amal Attia, treasurer and CFO, presented the 2024 year-to-date statements and 2025 draft budget to CoGS. General Secretary Alan Perry said the documents provided an overview of financial challenges this year. "What you'll see on paper will be that we're in the black and that we have a balanced budget for 2025," Archdeacon Perry said.

The 2025 budget narrative credited the balanced budget to an \$833,000 transfer of internally designated assets to cover Sacred Circle and Assembly meeting expenses, as well as proposing to use as necessary 4% from the Consolidated Investment Fund return on investment to cover the remaining deficit of the budget. Proportional gifts in 2024 are forecast to be \$6.5 million, or \$37,000 below budget. Attia outlined to CoGS the declining revenue of General Synod from 2018 to 2024.

Canon Dorland stressed the need for multi-year financial planning and anticipated that there would be both new challenges and opportunities in the years ahead. The Financial Management Committee recommended approval of the 2025 draft budget to CoGS and a motion to do so carried.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod approve the proposed budget for 2025.

Financial Planning Working Group

The Prolocutor Canon Ian Alexander presented the report of the Financial Planning Working Group, which sought guidance from CoGS on a range of questions. These included the process for developing the annual budget, possibilities for synergy with other Anglican fundraising efforts, the decline in proportional giving from dioceses, drawing on the church's significant investment income to fund operations, how to make necessary budgetary decisions, what General Synod 2025 needed to know about medium-term financial prospects and how CoGS could prepare General Synod to have fruitful discussions at its meeting next summer.

Table conversations followed, with each table tackling a different question. In their responses, CoGS suggested providing budget documents and reports earlier to CoGS and General Synod

and improving fundraising synergy by looking at ways to bring visions of different organizations more in line together. Members responded to the decline in diocesan contributions by speaking about the need to better inform Anglicans what General Synod does. They expressed support for using investment income to fund operations, with some mentioning their experience doing so at the diocesan level. One table recommended leveraging connections with full communion partners in the Lutheran and Moravian churches to work together in areas of shared ministry.

Canon Alexander thanked members for their contributions and said the Financial Management Working Group would incorporate its feedback into their work and hopefully provide an update in March.

Members broke for coffee from 3 to 3:30 p.m.

Pension Committee

Bob Boeckner, chair of the Pension Committee, shared the committee's report and presented a motion on amending regulations for operation of the Continuing Education Plan, which carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the recommendation of the Pension Committee to amend Section 4(b) of Canon XII – Regulations for the Operation of the Continuing Education Plan as follows:

~~Special grants of \$300 or less may be authorized by the Administrator in consultation with the chair of the Administrative Unit or the designate of the chair.~~

"The Administrator may, in consultation with the chair of the Administrative Unit

or the designate of the chair, authorise the payment of disparity grant as follows:

- i) \$750 or less effective January 1, 2025.
- ii) \$900 or less effective January 1, 2026."

Bible Study

The Rev. Carrie Irwin, chaplain to CoGS, led Bible study. Members read and discussed Luke 13:31-35, which describes Christ's lament over Jerusalem.

Digital Video Archives

Lisa Barry, Senior Producer for Anglican Video, introduced the ongoing project to digitize the church's video records. "We believe this project is of national importance," Barry said.

The project began in 2016 when Anglican Video received a request for footage of the 1993 apology by then-Primate Archbishop Michael Peers from the Anglican Church of Canada for residential schools. After being viewed thousands of times, the videotape of the apology had greatly deteriorated. "That was scary for us," Barry said. The realization that tapes comprising decades' worth of footage had started to deteriorate, she said, sparked the project to begin digitizing them.

Anglican Video decided to digitize footage from every General Synod and Sacred Circle since it began filming in 1988. Barry told CoGS they had digitized all Sacred Circle documentaries and video recordings of General Synod from that year onward. The next step was figuring out how people could access this footage. Former General Synod librarian Karen Evans took on the task of watching all the digitized footage, naming and indexing it so that Anglicans can search and find what they're looking for. To date Evans has indexed 325 hours of video from General Synod, with four more General Synods

left to index.

Barry said a major concern is making sure that all interviews with residential school survivors are digitized—not just for the Anglican Church of Canada, but for the country as a whole. Anglican Video were the first to conduct such interviews, Barry said, spurred by Indigenous elders who encouraged them to interview not just survivors, but teachers.

Evans outlined to CoGS some of the challenges as Anglican Video moved past its initial objective of text preservation and online storage. The foundational principle of the digitization project, Evans said, was to ensure the text record was complete and accurate without editing or interpretation. Initially they began with summaries of the video content, then moved to full transcription with lengthy text records. While the latter process takes longer, Evans said it was more efficient to produce one authoritative transcript that eliminated each user needing to make their own. "We wanted to present an accurate and authentic record that was not edited or interpreted," she said.

All digitized videos are now online, with www.archives.anglican.ca serving as the portal for online access. Anglican Video works in partnership with General Synod Archives to ensure consistency across databases. Evans described the use of Simon Says software to help with transcription—though the work remains labour-intensive, with the need for detailed oversight and editing based on knowledge of church history, processes and people. She said the database would benefit historians and allow anyone to be present and fully immersed by observing significant historical events, allowing them to be part of the history of the Anglican Church of Canada.

While much work remains to be done, Evans

said, with support from the church, the digitization project has continually illustrated how the past informs the present. Shane Roberts, production manager for Anglican Video, presented a quick video tutorial showing how users can access any video clip they wish.

Members broke for hospitality and dinner from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

General Synod 2025!

Canon Laura Walton, chair of the General Synod Planning Committee (GSPC), spoke via Zoom about plans for the next General Synod, which as of Nov. 8 was 226 days away. The meeting will take place in London, Ontario, from June 23-29, 2025, at RBC Place and St. Paul's Cathedral. CoGS watched a video clip introducing the diocese of Huron.

The GSPC is now engaging in monthly meetings and has made an onsite visit to the diocese of Huron to see the venues, Walton said. They have also begun work on a pre-General Synod webinar series, with the Rev. Chris Wood as chair, to help attendees understand what they can expect. Work has begun on display and sponsorship programs. General Synod 2025 will include both a primatial election, which will take place at the cathedral, and a primatial farewell to Archbishop Linda Nicholls.

The theme of General Synod 2025 is "They Will Soar on Wings Like Eagles", inspired by Isaiah 40:31, which Canon Walton said inspired the GSPC with its focus on resilience and overcoming challenges by relying on God's strength. She presented the accompanying logo, designed by Saskia Rowley, and said she hoped delegates and Anglicans across Canada would find inspiration in the theme and logo as well.

Key dates in the leadup to General Synod are as follows:

- June 21 – General Synod 2025 staff team arrives.
- June 22 – Set-up, General Synod 2025 staff team meeting, volunteer orientation, youth gathering.
- June 23 – Arrivals, onsite registration, display set-up, youth gathering continued, session committee orientation, opening worship and opening reception.

Canon Walton also presented a draft outline of the meeting agenda:

- June 24 – Business begins.
- June 25 – Primatial farewell
- June 26 – Primatial election
- June 27 – Provincial caucuses (afternoon)
- June 29 – Last day. CoGS meets over lunch, closing worship and installation of primate, closing banquet.
- June 30 – Pack-up and departures

She outlined travel and accommodation details for those who will be attending General Synod. The Prolocutor then introduced discussion on the primatial election to CoGS, with Chancellor Canon Clare Burns outlining the process. Canon Burns presented a motion on new changes to guidelines for the primatial election, such as providing a chaplain for each order and livestreaming the election, which carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that this Council of General Synod:

Adopt in principle the amendments to Appendix A of the Handbook of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada (*Guidelines for the Conduct of a Primatial Election*) as recommended by the Primatial Election Sub-Group of the

Canon Alexander said there were suggestions that bishops nominated for primate should be asked to prepare short responses to three standard questions, which could be made available in writing and/or on video to members of General Synod and all Anglicans in advance of the primatial election. He asked CoGS members to think of potential questions to ask nominees for the primacy. Table groups discussed and presented suggestions.

Among the questions, members suggested asking primatial nominees:

- What is your vision of the relationship of the Anglican Church of Canada to Sacred Circle?
- What verse or story in scripture speaks most powerfully to the church today and why?
- How does the Primate help hold together disparate views in a diverse church while showing love and care for all?
- What is your experience engaging with the work of truth and reconciliation and dismantling racism?
- How will you hold a vision of the transformational commitments before the whole church and in the day-to-day operation of the General Synod?
- What leadership have you given to issues around anti-Black racism and other forms of bias?

The Acting Primate asked council members before evening prayer if there had been any words or sentences they'd heard that day that had resonated with them which they would like to share. CoGS members pointed to Archbishop Germond's message that morning, to the generous willingness of members to listen to each other, and to excitement about the video

archiving of General Synod meetings and Sacred Circles and what is now available.

Holden Evening Prayer

Council held Holden evening prayer in the chapel.

Members held an evening social from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.