



General Council News

Corner Brook, NL

Monday, August 10, 2015

Vol. 42 No. 2

Sessional Committee Bringing a Road Map to Council about Comprehensive Review

by Kevin Cox

After driving through hundreds of pages of reports and proposals related to the Comprehensive Review Task Group (CRTG), the Sessional Committee is ready to present a road map to the 42nd General Council.

The 17-person group was made up of representatives of each Conference and people appointed by the Executive of the General Council.

The committee has reviewed the proposals for church reform put forward by the CRTG. It has also looked at 142 pages of responses sent in by individuals, congregations, presbyteries, and Conferences that resulted in over 90 proposals dealing with everything from naming the proposed three governing bodies to how much each church should pay to support the proposed new structure.

"Everything is still on the map, and there is a highlighter through the route that we think we've heard the church suggest," said Sessional Committee co-chair Larry Doyle. Doyle, of Bay of Quinte Conference, was interviewed on Saturday afternoon, August 8, as members of the committee cleaned up the classroom where they had prayed, pondered, sang, and even recited poetry for four days before the Council began.

"We have no power to change anything. We discern, we take what we've heard, and we offer a path,"

explained Doyle. "The Council doesn't have to take the highlighted route, but it is there for them if they want. They can take the highlighted route or ask for another one or go off the map."

No one is saying what that route is or how many proposals will be presented to commissioners after the Sessional Committee looked for duplication and sought ways to combine the wisdom and principles of various proposals. When the proposals from the Sessional Committee are put forward today, they will acknowledge the reports and proposals that were received.

The CRTG proposed that there be three governing bodies—communities of faith, regional councils, and a denominational council. The proposals in its report also included one calling for funding for new directions of ministry called Chasing the Spirit and one proposing a College of Ministers to accredit, oversee, and discipline clergy.

The congregations, presbyteries, and Conferences responded with proposals that included a



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Jean Brown and Larry Doyle.

total review of the implications of the report, setting boundaries for regions, renaming the Chasing the Spirit initiative, including representation of the United Church Women on governing bodies, and emphasizing interfaith and ecumenical action.

Sessional Committee co-chair Jean Brown of Newfoundland and Labrador Conference admitted that she was anxious and uncertain as the process began, but after the first day, she felt the group had the gifts and skills and the will to put together the proposed map.

"Some of the people here have been to six General Councils. When you have that kind of experience and that kind of people on your team, it's very reassuring," she said.

"I went from anxiety to a great degree of confidence," she added, noting that no one was pushing a personal agenda during the work.

Doyle called the work exciting and exhausting and said the committee members broke into scripture, prayer, poetry, song, and laughter to pull their map together.

Brown said the eight- to 10-minute daily worship sessions gave her energy. "One of the people on the committee is from the Caribbean, and he used the Caribbean metaphors and music, and I found that so energizing but also soothing," she said.

Now the two co-chairs are anxious to get on with the work and worship of General Council. "I don't think anyone is going to solve all our problems. It doesn't work that way," said Doyle. "But I'm hopeful this helps the church and what we're going to do over the next week."



Connect with Council Online

by Aaron McCarroll Gallegos

Online communications have transformed the way the people of The United Church of Canada connect around the triennial General Council meeting.

Online engagement with the Council has a surprisingly long history. According to David Shearman, a retired minister and long-time participant in United Church Internet community development, it all began in 1986 with the 31st General Council in Sudbury,

Ontario. It started on a computer bulletin board called the United Church Users Group (UCHUG) and has kept pace with emerging technologies ever since. This General Council will be the first covered on the popular photo-sharing service, Instagram.

Social media will play a greater role than ever at this General Council. A significant United Church community has taken shape on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Contrary to what you may think, social media is not just for the young. According to *Adweek*, almost 50 percent of all Facebook users are over the age of 35, and 17.7 percent are over 55.

In the weeks leading up to General Council, there have been many wide-ranging online discussions about the complex issues going to General Council, such as the Comprehensive Review, the proposal for one order of ministry, the call for the church to divest from fossil fuels, and the United Church of Canada Act.

In addition, the communal nature of social media encourages those present to share their experiences and offers those viewing from home a unique, first-hand perspective of the event.

There are many ways to connect with the 42nd General Council online, on the platform of your choice:

- **Watch the livestream at GC42.ca.** Almost all of General Council will be livestreamed. You can also join in the online chat alongside the livestream by visiting us on YouTube Live and login with your Google ID.

- **Share your thoughts on Facebook.** Follow the United Church Facebook page, facebook.com/UnitedChurchCda, for official news and updates from General Council. There is also a Facebook group dedicated to the work of GC42: facebook.com/groups/GC42work—where commissioners and others are talking about the proposals and sharing their experiences from Corner Brook.

- **Chat on Twitter.** There's a flock of United Church people tweeting about GC42 on Twitter. Use the hashtag #GC42 to follow along and share your own tweets.

- **Follow along on Instagram.** There are a number of people posting on Instagram from General Council in Corner Brook using #GC42.

—Aaron McCarroll Gallegos is Digital Content Strategist for The United Church of Canada.

Colourful Worship Opens Council

by Jeff Cook

The 42nd General Council got off to a colourful beginning on August 8 with evening worship. Purple, green, red, blue, orange, and yellow banners bearing the GC 42 logo of a Christian fish symbol atop three stylized waves were carried down the centre aisle and placed upon the main stage.

"We are all pilgrims on a journey," said Maya Landell, Worship and Music Coordinator, as she welcomed everyone and introduced a photo montage of the youth commissioner pilgrims who travelled across Canada before arriving in Corner Brook.

Greetings were offered by Charles Pender, Mayor of Corner Brook; Mary Bluehardt, Vice-President of Grenfell Campus; and Vice Chief Kevin Barnes of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation.

Barnes told the people to follow the way of the caribou, "to journey together, to work in union, to live in a community together, and to prosper." Accompanying himself on a drum, Barnes sang "Amazing Grace" in Mi'kmaq. He invited everyone to join in singing the last verse.

"I believe in togetherness," he said. "One is good. Many is powerful."

Several languages were spoken, prayed, and sung during the opening worship service.

Commissioners were also reminded of the challenges and decisions they will be facing during the coming week.

"All throughout the ages we have been called to act boldly, to discern what is it we are called to be as a church," said Ian March-McCuish. "Again, this is one of those times when we find ourselves trying to discern who we are to be as church.

"This week, in this sacred time, as we are called to give leadership to the church, may we put our weak and trembling hands into God's strong hand and not be afraid," said March-McCuish. "May we know and believe in Jesus' presence with us in the past, in the now, and in the future."

Ian March-MacCuish was preaching a sermon written by his spouse, Faith March-MacCuish, who was unable to participate due to being on restorative care.



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Vice Chief Kevin Barnes

During the worship service, Moderator Gary Paterson officially constituted the court. Members of the Planning Committee and the Local Arrangements Committee were introduced. An offering was collected, to be used to help offset the carbon footprint of General Council 42.

The service also included table group time, during which commissioners and guests began to introduce themselves to each other. Commissioners and guests shared communion in their table groups, while visitors celebrated in the bleachers.

General Council 42 is meeting in a hockey arena in the Civic Centre of Grenfell Campus of Memorial University in Corner Brook, NL.



Pourquoi l'Église Unie est-elle encore nécessaire ?

Traduit et adapté de Kevin Cox

C'est la question difficile qu'a posée le modérateur sortant Gary Paterson aux membres de l'Église Unie du Canada au moment même où près de 600 personnes convergeaient vers Corner Brook, sur la côte ouest de Terre-Neuve, pour le 42e Conseil général de l'Église. Le Conseil général, instance décisionnelle suprême de la première confession protestante en importance au pays, se réunit tous les trois ans et a lieu cette année du 8 au 14 août.

« Qu'est-ce que ça change dans votre vie ou dans votre communauté de faire partie de l'Église Unie ou d'être chrétien ? Parfois, je crois que nous ne disons pas assez clairement que ça change quelque chose », a affirmé le modérateur vendredi le 7 août alors que le campus Grenfell de l'Université Memorial et le Corner Brook Civic Centre commençaient à recevoir les premiers participants à l'événement.

En entrevue, Gary Paterson a expliqué pourquoi il croit que l'Église Unie a encore un rôle à jouer. Il la voit comme un lieu où les gens peuvent penser par eux-mêmes et réfléchir sur comment Dieu agit dans le monde. Au cours de son triennat, le modérateur a parcouru le Canada et a pu constater par lui-même que l'Église Unie fait une différence quand elle s'occupe de banques alimentaires, de refuges pour sans-abris, et qu'elle cherche des solutions aux problèmes de pauvreté et d'injustice. Mais il reconnaît du même souffle que l'Église Unie n'attire plus tellement l'attention des médias ou des hauts-lieux du pouvoir.

« L'un des plus grands défis auquel nous faisons face est que nous avons moins de ressources qu'avant et peu de poids politique. Nous n'allons pas émouvoir ceux qui gouvernent, pas plus que ne l'ont fait les chrétiens au 1^{er} siècle. »

Au cours de la semaine, les 356 délégués-es des 13 synodes du Canada auront à voter sur des rapports et des propositions qui pourraient modifier en profondeur le visage de l'Église et son organisation. Près de 90 des 190 propositions qui sont amenées au Conseil général ont trait à la Révision globale, processus de consultation qui visait à trouver de nouvelles façons de faire et d'être Église, notamment en simplifiant la

structure et en éliminant les lourdeurs administratives.

D'autres propositions reflètent le souci historique de l'Église Unie pour les questions de justice sociale, économique et écologique. Il sera entre autres question des compagnies minières, du commerce des armes et du conflit israélo-palestinien.

Gary Paterson, premier chef ouvertement homosexuel d'une confession religieuse d'importance au monde, a été un ardent promoteur de l'accueil des personnes LGBT et de la célébration de la diversité dans l'Église comme dans la société. Une proposition que l'Église vive le pardon en mettant sur pied un programme de dialogue et de réconciliation avec les communautés LGBT sera discutée lors de ce Conseil général.

Certaines des propositions sur lesquelles devront voter les délégués-es sont complexes et le modérateur reconnaît que tout le monde aura du pain sur la planche dans les tout prochains jours, avant que ne prenne fin son mandat non renouvelable et qu'il laisse la place à la personne qui sera élue le jeudi 13 août parmi les 12 personnes nommées pour le poste.

Comment faire face à cette charge de travail ardu qui attend le Conseil général au cours de la semaine qui vient ? La réponse du modérateur est simple : « Prier. »



Youth Pilgrims

by Jeff Cook

"This whole experience has given me a new outlook on the church and myself. I don't think I can go home the same person I was."

Katie Vardy's words capture the experiences of the 13 youth commissioners who participated in a 34-day pilgrimage to General Council.

The pilgrims—one from each Conference—travelled across Canada to Corner Brook for the 42nd General Council. The pilgrimage began in Vancouver on July 4 and included stops in Fort McMurray, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Sudbury, Hamilton, London, Toronto, Kingston, Montreal, and Miramichi.

Vardy and fellow pilgrim Max Martin spoke with *GC News* about the experience. Vardy, 18, lives in St. John's. Martin, 18, was born in Halifax and raised near Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia.

"I feel like I've taken pieces from every Conference and a piece of all the people I met," said Martin. He said that the energy of the people they met kept them going.

"We have been to so many quirky spots," said Martin. He recalled falling into the water while canoeing near Sudbury and driving by bus on back roads in Alberta.

In Alberta, they visited the oil sands. Vardy said Sun Core personnel told them about the benefits of the oil sands. "We saw what they wanted us to see," she said.

Then the pilgrims met with First Nations people in Fort McKay, and Martin recalled how they said the river is now so polluted that they can't swim in it without getting sores on their bodies.

The pilgrims visited an outreach centre in Vancouver. The ministry has no Sunday worship service, but offers daily chapel time. "It kind of taught us that you don't need a formal worship service to feel connected to Christ," said Vardy.

At Sydenham Street United Church in Kingston, Ontario, they learned about Affirming churches, which work for the full inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

"It was so beautiful," said Vardy. "It was one of my favourite presentations and was so educational."

The pilgrims shared a meal with Aboriginal Elders and learned about residential schools. Vardy said it was hard and frightening to hear the stories of residential schools, but it was also very educational.

Throughout the pilgrimage, they were moved

by the hospitality of people. "The generosity that the church has shown us was a common theme," said Martin.

"There has been an abundance of food," added Vardy.

Someone in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, purchased a train ticket, not to ride the train, but to ensure the train would stop at that station so the pilgrims could be given a bag of cookies.

Martin said he was continually asking himself, "Where do I find God in this journey?"

"I've realized how little I know, yet at the same time, I realize how willing I am to learn," said Martin. The best part were the conversations they had with people, he added.

"Everywhere we've been everyone has been so loving and caring and open to our ideals as different people from across the country, even if it doesn't exactly match with their ideals," Martin recalled. "I learned to be more open and respectful of others' boundaries."

The pilgrims were accompanied by two young adult leaders, James Aitchison and Alana Martin.

During the pilgrimage, participants shared their experiences through Twitter, Blog and Instagram.



Une touche de français dans l'Église

Stéphane Gaudet

Adding a touch of French to church life. C'est le titre d'un Atelier bilingue qui sera donné le mardi 11 août à 12 h 30 par Nicole Beaudry et le pasteur Étienne LeSage.

« Certains pasteurs et leaders sont pleins de bonne volonté et souhaitent faire des choses en français dans leur communauté de foi, mais souvent ils n'ont pas d'outils et se sentent démunis. Ils ne savent pas comment faire ni par où commencer », a constaté Nicole, une laïque de la région d'Ottawa depuis longtemps



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Max Martin and Katie Vardy

active dans le développement des ministères en français dans sa région.

L'atelier a pour but de présenter les ressources – souvent gratuites et en ligne – qui sont à la disposition des pasteurs et leaders de même que de faire connaître des expériences qui ont bien fonctionné.

« Il est possible d'ajouter du français dans les célébrations et dans la vie d'une paroisse sans recourir à Google Translate ! », ajoute Nicole en riant. La boutade n'est pas sans fondement, la tentation d'utiliser cet outil est forte quand le temps presse et que les ressources en français ne sont pas connues.

Mais pourquoi une paroisse de l'Église Unie hors du Québec voudrait-elle faire des choses en français ? « Des francophones, il y en a partout au Canada, y compris dans des régions où n'existe aucun ministère en français. On commence l'atelier en présentant les statistiques qui le prouvent. Donc, il est possible qu'une paroisse, n'importe où au Canada, reçoive une demande pour un mariage ou des funérailles bilingues. Notre atelier veut montrer comment on peut répondre facilement à de telles demandes. »

Et Kristine Greenaway, responsable des Ministères en français (MiF) au sein de l'Unité L'Église en mission, tient à rappeler que l'Église Unie du Canada est officiellement bilingue depuis l'adoption, en mai 2014 par l'Exécutif du Conseil général, du Protocole pour les communications en français dans l'Église Unie du Canada. « Il ne s'agit pas d'un bilinguisme total à l'instar du gouvernement fédéral canadien, mais d'un bilinguisme fonctionnel et pratique. Le but n'est pas de tout traduire, mais de s'assurer que les francophones et les allophones dont la langue seconde est le français se sentent inclus et puissent participer pleinement à la vie de l'Église. »

Mais que faire des résistances qui peuvent apparaître dans la paroisse face à l'idée d'ajouter du français aux célébrations ? « Étienne et moi avons de l'expérience pour ce qui est de faire du français de façon ludique dans des milieux non francophones. Il est possible de s'amuser en parlant ou en chantant en français. Avec cette approche, on ne se fait pas d'ennemis », répond Nicole Beaudry.

L'atelier présentera, entre autres ressources, les liturgies, les podcasts, le glossaire qu'on trouve sur le site egliseunie.ca, les prières en français dans *Gathering* et *Worship For All Seasons* ainsi que les chants en français dans les recueils de chants – il y en a 47 dans *Voices United* et 34 dans *More Voices*.

Nicole ajoute : « On montrera de bons exemples et de mauvais exemples de bilinguisme. Et surtout, des expressions pratiques à adopter et des fautes à bannir. Par exemple, je ne suis plus capable de lire ou d'entendre "Prions-nous" ! »

Kristine Greenaway, qui participera à l'animation de l'atelier, invite toutes les personnes qui ne se sentent pas assez compétentes en français à venir à l'atelier bilingue. « Nicole et Étienne sont des pros ! Nous avons des idées à vous suggérer, peu importe votre niveau de maîtrise de la langue. Venez, et vous verrez ! »



L'Église Unie du Canada

Étienne LeSage



Nicole Beaudry



Setting Priorities

by Jim Cairney

At the outset of its work, and before making any major decisions, General Council 42 voted to prioritize the work that will flow from its decisions.

Nora Sanders, General Secretary of the General Council, encouraged the Council to pay attention to priorities. "We can do anything, but we can't do everything," Sanders said in her General Secretary's Accountability Report.

"Everything can't be a priority," said Sanders. "When too many things get named as important, our members lose focus, and we give the impression that nothing is important."

The Council voted to wholeheartedly support the proposal of the General Secretary to direct the Executive of the General Council to prioritize all the

work of the General Council Office, in order to implement the decisions made by this Council to the fullest extent possible, having regard to the importance of:

- supporting the life and ministries of communities of faith
- focusing at the denominational level on work best done at the denominational level
- transitions the church must make to meet the needs of the 21st century
- responsible stewardship of the financial and other resources of the United Church

Further, the General Council declared:

- Any decision made by this General Council in response to the recommendations of the Comprehensive Review Task Group takes precedence over any other decision it makes, to the extent that the two may be in conflict.

- All decisions made by this General Council be understood to include modifications needed for consistency with decisions made in response to the recommendations of the Comprehensive Review Task Group.

Later in the week, there will also be a voting process for commissioners to prioritize some of the Council's new work.



Electronic Ballots Debut at Council

by Kevin Cox

There was a hush over the General Council Sunday morning, Aug. 9 as commissioners pulled out "clickers" for the first time and, with a tap on the button, cast their first electronic ballots.

With a flash of green lights, the agenda was approved. By the third vote, Moderator Gary Paterson, who had been pushing for the time-saving technology, was beaming.

"I think I could start to enjoy clickers," he said.

On each table there is a reminder of the old tech-

nology—each commissioner still has their voter's card. Business Chair Fred Monteith said the rose-coloured cards are part of the back-up plan, should there be a breakdown in the electronic technology.

For many university students, electronic clickers are part of their educational equipment, used in multiple-choice tests and to provide feedback to instructors. But the technology is relatively new for church gatherings. The Anglican Church of Canada used the clickers at its General Synod in 2013, and there is some controversy among Anglicans about casting secret ballots instead of standing up and being publicly counted on a controversial vote.

Monteith said the United Church began looking at using the clickers after Paterson and General Secretary Nora Sanders attended meetings of the United Church of Christ in the United States and saw the technology.

"They came back wondering if they [clickers] could be helpful for us in increasing the amount of time we have for discernment and debate," Monteith said.

Alberta and Northwest Conference tested the technology at its annual meeting earlier this year. David Pollard gave it top marks. He said some older delegates were leery of using the devices, and many young people were anxious to try the new technology.

"Once everyone understood and knew how they worked—that you just clicked and voted—everything went smoothly. Within the first 10 motions, everyone was getting it."

The instant results eliminated the need for distributing ballots on some questions and having tellers do manual counts of close votes.

"The clickers speeded up the business. There were a lot of proposals around the Comprehensive Review and a lot of Conference stuff, and this allowed us to be more thoughtful and prayerful about the decisions we make," he said. "We didn't have to waste time waiting for standing votes."

The new technology does change the dynamics of voting, since commissioners vote instantly. They can't wait to see how many voting cards are in the air before deciding to join the crowd or dissent.

Pollard said that strategic voting shouldn't be an issue within the church.

"I think we come to vote in the church led by the Spirit, so there's not a lot of strategy involved," he

said. "What have you prayed about, what is the Spirit saying to you at this moment, so if there is any voting strategy, it would be led by the Holy Spirit."

Pollard noted that some of the delegates who were reluctant to try the technology at the beginning of the Conference annual meeting didn't want to part with their clickers at the end. "We wondered why it took so long for this technology to get to us. Maybe it wasn't as slick or as ready as it might have been, but at this time, every large gathering should be using this."



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Kenji Marui



Run/Walk Honours Alvin Dixon

by Kevin Cox

As Jeff Mailloux led the field of about 30 runners up a challenging hill, he thought of British Columbia Aboriginal leader and General Council Executive member Alvin Dixon, in whose memory the five-kilometre trek was being run.

"Out on that hill I thought of Alvin as a runner, and that hill was exactly what he would have wanted," Mailloux, of Manitou Conference, said after leading the fun run home on August 9.

Dixon was on the minds of many of the runners and walkers who got themselves in motion early in the 42nd General Council proceedings to raise money for Aboriginal education in memory of Dixon, who died in July of last year. Dixon was an avid runner who was diagnosed with cancer after he noticed he was fatigued during his runs.

Former Moderator David Giuliano recalled Dixon

as a friend who offered sage advice and leadership in areas such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "It was more than just the work," Giuliano said. "He was just a decent, funny guy. He always had a good joke. I never ran with him. We were always sitting in a meeting. I felt like I ran with him today."

Cheryl Jourdain of the All Native Circle Conference joined the two-kilometre walk to honour the memory of her friend and colleague. There were other benefits. "It's good for us to move after sitting around. There's sunshine and a nice breeze and good friends," she said.

Organizers Steve Lowden and Tom Smart said the Executive of the General Council wanted to honour Dixon as a runner and also to get people moving early in General Council. "There's a lot of sitting around on your rear end at these conferences. It's good to get the blood pumping, build a little community, and build a little fitness," he said.

Lowden, who worked with Dixon on the Executive, said the fun run and walk provided a change of pace from the formal proceedings. "It's a chance to participate in something where you share a common interest. There is a chance to chat, probably more with the walkers than the runners."

The runners' course was designed to take participants up to a scenic lookout over Corner Brook. But with a fast downhill awaiting, few bothered to admire the scenery.

The donation total from the run/walk is still being tallied, but \$3,000 has been raised so far, and more donations could come in over the coming week.



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Alvin Dixon