



# GENERAL COUNCIL NEWS

Kelowna, British Columbia

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## COUNCIL CONSIDERS CHURCH'S PURPOSE, PRIORITIES

by Ann Perry

**P**resumed consent for organ donation, climate change, and the place of the 20 articles of faith in the Basis of Union are just a few of the issues commissioners will be considering as they gather for The United Church of Canada's 40th General Council in Kelowna, British Columbia.

Close to 400 commissioners from across Canada will consider 173 proposals covering a range of subjects at the week-long gathering. More than 300 guests, observers, youth, children, staff, and volunteers will support and enrich the meeting, which is being held on the campus of the University of British Columbia Okanagan.

Beyond the specific issues before them, commissioners will also spend time reflecting on the church's purpose and priorities in these changing times. The theme of the meeting is "down to the potter's house," from the scripture "Come, go



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*Youth Forum delegates give a street performance.*

down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words" (Jeremiah 18:1). Moderator David Giuliano says he hopes the theme will inspire commissioners to "imagine how we are being shaped as a community of faith, how we are being called to respond to Christ in the world."

Two papers have been circulated throughout the church over the past few months to aid these reflections. "Called to Be Church" invites the people of  
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### GENERAL COUNCIL NEWS GOES GREEN

Actually, *General Council News* will be going into red folders—but only one copy per table group. That's how we're going green.

Every day during General Council table stewards will deliver the latest edition of *General Council News* and place it inside the red folder. Commissioners are asked to not remove the

red folder or its contents from the table. These single copies of *General Council News* are meant for everyone to share.

*General Council News* will also be available online in PDF format at [gc40.united-church.ca](http://gc40.united-church.ca) for those who wish to print copies when they return home.

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The United Church of Canada to consider prayerfully the vision and purpose of their church. “The State of the Church” presents a picture of where the United Church stands, both demographically and financially.

“We know we are in the midst of being transformed by God,” said Michelle Slater, Chair of the Council’s Agenda and Planning Committee. “Now we are called to go down, to listen, and to respond to what new possibilities are emerging.”

“As we move forward as a church there will be some letting go of attachments to who we have been,” Giuliano wrote recently in an e-mail. “We are gathering to discern the ways our community is being shaped. Discernment always first involves recognizing and releasing personal agendas and solutions in order to make space for God’s Spirit.

“Perhaps every General Council senses that they are on the cusp of some great transformation,” Giuliano added. “That said, I am convinced that, as church, we are indeed living in liminal [transitional] times. As a community of faith we have lost our special status in society and are increasingly pushed to the margins of our culture. The good news is that perhaps, from this new vantage, we will be increasingly free to live the gospel in more radical ways, unencumbered by shackles of Christendom.”

Commissioners will also be invited to experience what it means to become an intercultural church, an invitation that was first extended in 2006 at the 39th General Council in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

“Intercultural is not a substitute for ‘ethnic,’” said the Rev. Michael Blair, Executive Minister of the United Church’s Intercultural and Diverse Communities in Ministry Unit. “Rather, it is a whole way of being church together that goes beyond ethnicity, race, culture, and language. In an intercultural church, no culture dominates another.”

A highlight of General Council will be the election of a new Moderator, the United Church’s spiritual leader. There are six nominees: three from Ontario, two from Manitoba, and one from British Columbia. The election is scheduled for Friday, August 14, followed by an installation service on the evening of August 15.

Throughout the week, commissioners will be holding in their prayers the thousands of British

Columbia residents who were evacuated from their homes due to forest fires, as well as the dedicated firefighters who are battling the blazes.



## HARD-WORKING TEAM PREPARES FOR COUNCIL

by Jim Cairney

British Columbia forest fires never threatened to derail the United Church’s General Council meeting at the University of British Columbia Okanagan in Kelowna.

The fires were never close enough to threaten the venue, says the Rev. Kent Israel, co-chair of the Local Arrangements Committee for the Council. “There’s never been any concern,” says the Summerland, British Columbia, minister. The committee never discussed a change of location, he adds.

Israel says the biggest challenge has been to calm people with anxiety over the forest fires, which are still burning. Reports on the fires were an ongoing national news story during the weeks leading up to the meeting.



*Leslie Ross and Leslie Stirling with handmade cloth tote bags for the commissioners.*

The United Church of Canada

To reduce people's anxiety, he wants people to know that the university has a natural fire guard, a vegetation-free area around the campus as a buffer against forest fires.

As the General Council gathers there's a hint of smoke in the valley from the fire across the lake.

Another area of emphasis for the local arrangements team has been making it a green Council, including a serious attempt to reduce paper. The meals, as far as possible, will reflect a 100-mile diet, using locally produced foods.

"In the Okanagan we are conscious of water conservation," says Israel. To reflect that awareness, each table will have on it a drought-resistant plant from a local nursery.

"We are conscious in the Okanagan of planting with local drought-resistant plants. So people will have that kind of experience with the plants on the tables," he says. Israel points out that the university campus has used landscaping and gardening that reduce or eliminate the need for supplemental watering.

Many others have also been at work preparing for the Council. Members of the Sicamous United Church in British Columbia sewed 700 tote bags for use by all those attending the Council.



## SOME ADVICE FOR GENERAL COUNCIL ROOKIES

By Ann Perry

**F**irst-time commissioners and Youth Forum delegates arriving in Kelowna for General Council likely have many questions on their minds. What's it like? Who will I meet? How can I participate?

For answers to those questions and more *General Council News* turned to some experts: two rookie attendees from the 39th General Council in Thunder Bay who were eager to share their experiences.

Ryan McNally went to Thunder Bay as an under-30 commissioner from the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. He was interested in being a commissioner for two reasons. He wanted to understand how the church works at the national level, and General Council was being held in his hometown.

For McNally, one of the best parts of being a commissioner was meeting people from across the country. "I got to 'meet' the diversity of the United Church face to face, and that gave me a better sense of our wonderful diversity," McNally said. "From the experience, I have a better sense of why I belong in the United Church."

One of the biggest challenges was having too little time to debate proposals, he said.

McNally's favourite memory was working on a proposal from the under-30 commissioners. "We poured ourselves into preparing the proposal and had a healthy debate," he said. "We stayed up all night one night and closed our meeting with a group prayer in the parking lot of a nearby Tim Hortons."

McNally's advice to first-time commissioners includes taking time to rest, eat well, and exercise. "You need to keep your body healthy to stay involved in the meeting," he said.

McNally also recommends asking questions and sharing experiences with people at table groups, meals, and in large meetings. "You are there to learn and share and help the church discern the Spirit's guidance. Your full participation is necessary," he commented.

Newfoundland Youth Forum delegate Sam Neil was 17 when she attended the last Council.

"General Council was an amazing experience," Neil said. "There was an energy that completely surrounded the meetings all the time that I had never experienced before. Everyone who attended, no matter what age, was so passionate."

Neil's favourite memory was the Youth Forum coffee house. "The mixture of people...as well as the display of talents was a great way to relax after a long day of meetings," Neil said. The most challenging part was "the lack of sleep."

Neil's advice to Youth Forum delegates is to bring something to keep their hands busy—a colouring book, knitting, a doodle pad, or "anything you

can do that can still allow you to listen in on the meetings. If you sometimes have a short attention span like me, things that keep your hands busy are essential.”



## PRAYER FLAGS ENHANCE WORSHIP

by Jeff Cook

Commissioners to the United Church’s 40th General Council meeting in Kelowna, British Columbia, will find themselves surrounded...by prayer flags.

About 400 flags have been received from congregations throughout the United Church, says Eric Hamlyn, a member of the Council’s Worship Committee.

Several months ago the committee invited every United Church congregation to contribute a pray flag to enhance the worship environment at General Council.

The invitation expressed the hope to use the prayer flags as a symbol of the unity of United Churches across Canada.

“We wanted to have some kind of physical representation of the United Church,” says Hamlyn.

He says the Worship Committee wants the meeting space to be a visible reminder of the entire church, even those not in Kelowna.

The flags will be hung in the gymnasium of the University of British Columbia Okanagan, where the General Council will be meeting.

Hamlyn says they had originally planned to hang the flags high above the commissioners. When he saw the number of flags containing intricate details and writing, he realized they would have to try hanging them at a height from which they can be read.

“It’s a way to reach out to congregations and involve them in any small way,” says Hamlyn.

Prayer flags are a Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

In that tradition, flags are suspended on string, allowing the blowing wind to carry the prayers from the flags across the world.

Hamlyn says the Worship Committee was inspired by this tradition, but notes they were careful to not appropriate another’s tradition. The flags at General Council will be a reminder of the prayers of support and hope offered by congregations.

Some flags were created by Sunday school classes, with each child putting a handprint in paint on the flag. Some flags contain words of hope.

“There are lots of prayers for unity,” says Hamlyn. “There’s a little bit of everything—exactly what we were hoping for.”

Hamlyn says about one third of the flags received were accompanied by letters. One “letter of huge gratitude” came from a congregation that had never been involved in General Council, says Hamlyn. He says members of the congregation asked their minister to explain the General Council meeting to them.

Once they learned what General Council is, “they were honoured to be asked to be a small part of it in any way,” he says.

Hamlyn says the flags reflect the spectrum of theology within the United Church.

“There is something quite beautiful about being able to take these and string them together,” he says. “Side by side they show the diversity of the church.”

Hamlyn notes that there will be two opportunities for commissioners to take away the flags. Near the end of the Council, representatives from congregations or Conferences wishing to have their own flags will have the opportunity to retrieve them. At the end of General Council, all commissioners will be invited to take any remaining flags.



# COMMUNICATING ONLINE IN NEW WAYS

by Derek Carlisle

**L**ive from Kelowna...it's General Council Live! People from across the country will be able to follow developments in real time from the site of the United Church's 40th General Council in Kelowna, British Columbia. For the first time, live webcasts of General Council proceedings will be available for the whole meeting.

Presenting meeting proceedings online--known as streaming--has become common practice for almost all large organizations, notes United Church Multimedia Producer Kate Rodd. "It seemed natural for us to use streaming to try and make these meetings as transparent as possible. It also offers people a chance to see decisions being made in their entirety," says Rodd.

In addition to presenting live streaming, the Kelowna meeting features the first official General Council blog postings ([gc40blog.blogspot.com](http://gc40blog.blogspot.com)) by Bill Steadman, Executive Minister of the United Church's Financial Stewardship Unit.

Steadman says his assignment as official blogger for the General Council is part of a movement by the United Church to communicate Council developments to people through as many media formats as possible. Since arriving in Kelowna, Steadman has blogged about a barbecue salmon dinner for early arrivals on August 7 with smoke from forest fires drifting to the University of British Columbia Okanagan campus site.

"I try to imagine if I were sitting in my office in Toronto or at my camp in Northern Ontario checking the blog to hear what was happening... what the campus is like, what the surroundings are like in Kelowna. We read about forest fires and see some pictures through the media, but what is it like to be in a place so close to raging forest fires with the smoke hanging in the air?"

The 40th General Council website, [gc40.united-church.ca](http://gc40.united-church.ca), will also feature updated Twitter postings ([twitter.com/uccgc40](https://twitter.com/uccgc40)) by United Church Chief Financial Officer Bill Kennedy. "If you look at the official minutes, a lot of what you see is pro-

cedural," says Kennedy. "It is hard to capture some of the excitement of what is going on here as well as the emotional impact."

Around Kennedy's neck is a badge identifying him as "Mr. Twitter." In addition to posting short online comments and observations, known as "tweets," Kennedy will be uploading photos and linking the tweets of other Council participants on his Twitter page.

United Church Web Services Manager Bill Gillard is spending his first General Council meeting onsite. In addition to the live streaming of proceedings, Gillard will be busy refreshing content on the news feed, which includes articles from the General Council News and video production teams.

"For each news story, there will be a direct link to the wondercafe ([www.wondercafe.ca/discussion/general-council-40](http://www.wondercafe.ca/discussion/general-council-40)) site for discussion," notes Gillard. The Kelowna General Council also marks the first time there has been a distinct French-language site. This site will also include a news feed and video clips of French-language proceedings during the Council.



## Welcome To *General Council News*

*General Council News* is being posted daily on The United Church of Canada's 40th General Council website [gc40.united-church.ca](http://gc40.united-church.ca), and sent as an e-newsletter to individuals, congregations, and news media that have requested it.

Each day a single printed copy will also be delivered to all table groups for commissioners to share. The final edition of *General Council News* will be available online within 24 hours of the closing of General Council on Saturday, August 15.

*General Council News* reporters will be covering the highlights and significant happenings of the 40th General Council, rather than recording everything that happens each day. All General Council News stories may be reproduced freely.

*General Council News* is prepared by the following General Council staff and volunteer writers:

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