



GENERAL COUNCIL NEWS

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COUNCIL REPUDIATES BACKGROUND LANGUAGE OF MIDDLE EAST PROPOSALS

by Jim Cairney

The United Church's General Council has repudiated the written background material attached to three proposals before the Council on the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Meeting in one of three commissions that are handling a portion of the Council's business, commissioners passed a motion declaring that the 40th General Council "repudiates and regrets language used in the background provided" for the proposals, which is "provocative, unbalanced, and hurtful."

The background material had drawn a small firestorm of criticism and media attention that focused more on comments in the material than the actual proposals.

An official guest of the General Council, Rabbi Reuven Bulka

from Ottawa, told the Council, "Shelve all of it!" saying they were proposals "born out of hateful comments."

Said Bulka, who is past co-president of the



The United Church of Canada

Jesse Root, one of the speakers during the debate.

Canadian Jewish Congress, "We were hurt by the blatant and obvious antisemitism in the background materials.... It's basic lunacy to call it [Israel] an apartheid state."

In making the motion, the Rev. Doug Varey, overseas ministry personnel serving in Zambia, said the background material was "upsetting," like it

came from a "soapbox."

The commission spent two hours in reflection, discussion, and debate on the complex issue.

No further decisions on the proposals had been made when the commission broke for supper. It will return to debate the issue on August 13.



DIALOGUE AVEC LE FORUM JEUNESSE

par Anne- Marie Carmoy

Le Forum jeunesse présent au Conseil général est composé de 82 jeunes âgés de 15 à 20 ans et de 23 accompagnateurs. Ils viennent des 13 synodes de

l'Église unie. En plus de participer régulièrement aux discussions en plénière, ils et elles ont leurs activités propres. C'est ainsi que ces jeunes ont demandé que quelqu'un de la communauté francophone vienne leur parler du rapport *Une Vision pour les ministères en français*. Cela s'est passé vendredi le 7 août en après-midi.

Cent-cinq paires d'yeux, d'oreilles, cent-cinq visages attentifs, prêts à écouter, formant trois-quarts d'un cercle. Me voilà impressionnée. Je pensais ne donner qu'un bref aperçu du rapport sur les ministères en français (lequel sera présenté dans quelques jours en plénière aux délégué-es du 40^e Conseil général), mais en y réfléchissant, je pense avoir reçu beaucoup plus que donné : un accueil enthousiasme et attentif de la part d'une jeunesse dont la majorité parle français soit par les études soit par immersion

Ensemble, nous avons parlé de la situation de l'Église unie au Québec, des relations complexes des Québécois avec la religion, de l'état du français au Canada, de l'évolution des ministères en français de l'Église unie, et, bien sûr, du programme que notre rapport soumet à la sagesse, et au vote, du Conseil général : ouvrir cinq nouvelles paroisses francophones au cours des cinq prochaines années.

Après une période de questions (sur certains pourcentages ou encore le budget prévu), j'ai « osé » à mon tour soumettre le groupe à la question : seriez-vous pour ou contre les recommandations du rapport des ministères en français ? Réponse : pour ! Majorité absolue.

Membres du Forum jeunesse, de tout cœur merci pour votre engagement, pour votre support et votre message d'espoir.

L'Église unie a la bénédiction de compter avec une nouvelle génération inclusive, interculturelle et qui s'est approprié le français sans problème.



PARTNERS AT COUNCIL LEARN, SHARE, AND HOPE

by Christie Neufeldt

General Council is a place to experience the many aspects of global, ecumenical, and interfaith partnerships that the United Church holds with organizations in Canada and around the world. Up to 19 partners will be present and participate in all aspects of the Council during its seven-day meeting.

Johnson Mbillah of the organization Program for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa says that



Johnson Mbillah

the Council is an opportunity to experience the life of the United Church. It has been an opportunity to learn new things, for example the “innovative” manner in which table groups are used during plenary time to enable all people to have

a voice, including those who are shy or timid. He appreciates the opportunities that he, in turn, has to enter into deeper discussions with participants at the Council. For example, he and Canadian Imam Hamid Slimi led a lunchtime discussion on Canadian—Muslim relations.

Necta Montes Rocas of the World Student Christian Federation in Asia notes that while she has known The United Church of Canada through General Council staff she has met over the years, she came to the Council to find out why the United Church would support a small organization like hers. She wondered whether the people of the United Church are passionately involved in issues of justice. “As partners of The United Church of Canada we have a responsibility to interpret the United Church in our own context—to share with people what the United Church is like,” says Rocas.

She observes that the United Church is at a

crossroads: Can it grow in size, rather than continuing to diminish, and maintain its core commitments and mission? This is a challenge facing many



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Susan Towner-Larson

churches around the world. Rocas hopes that General Council 40 will develop concrete ways to address this. She also hopes that the ideas and voices of young people are part of the decision-making process at the Council.

Susan Towner-Larson of The United Church of Christ in the United States says that her denomination and The United Church of Canada are very similar in many ways, but the United Church of Canada has moved to some amazing places, for example, by adding new dimensions and challenging us to refine what it means to be an intercultural church.

“It is my prayer that the United Church will have the courage to live into the dream and vision that you have. We look to you for your extravagant welcome, inclusivity, and intercultural vision that we lift up in the world. We are encouraged by that.”



UNE COMMISSION POUR RETISSER DES RELATIONS JUSTES

par Pierre Goldberger

Le triple visage du Christ nous a rendu visite ce lundi après-midi au Conseil général.

Il portait, comme toujours, les marques de ses blessures, dans son corps et dans son cœur avec le lourd fardeau de l'abandon, les traces de l'humiliation, du fouet, du rejet et de la souffrance de l'innocent.

Son triple visage méconnu a pris la forme de trois « Indiens », survivants des pensionnats amérindiens du Canada.

Tous les trois, avec dignité et dénuement, ont partagé l'histoire qui est commune à quelque 80,000 survivants des « pensionnats indiens » qui est l'envers de l'histoire du Canada construit sur les souffrances, l'humiliation et le génocide spirituel, intellectuel, économique et social des peuples autochtones du Canada.

Chacun à sa manière a relaté l'enlèvement de leur famille par les officiers des Affaires Indiennes, leur incarcération dans les pensionnats régis par les Églises, où la peur, les abus de toutes natures - sexuels, moraux, spirituels et physiques - ont formé le lot quotidien de ces enfants innocents, dont le seul crime était d'être « Indien ». Chacun a parlé de sa descente en enfer subséquente à son enfance volée, puis des situations d'alcoolisme, de violence, de rage et de mépris de soi. Puis ont suivi les récits d'une lente et tenace émergence à la vie, à la dignité, à l'amour de leurs enfants, et, la plus improbable résurrection, la volonté de « brûler la haine » en eux et de pardonner. De se pardonner - de s'accepter - et de pardonner aux autres. On pouvait sentir l'Assemblée totalement engagée dans l'effort de l'Église unie de tisser des relations nouvelles.

Bâtissant sur ces témoignages, Jamie Scott, responsable des questions touchant les pensionnats et les réparations, a fait un bref rappel de l'origine de la création de la Commission nationale Vérité et Réconciliation et a présenté madame Marie Wilson, de Yellowknife, récemment nommée l'une des trois nouveaux Commissaires.

Marie Wilson présenta les objectifs principaux de la Commission Vérité et Réconciliation :

Faire la vérité sur le phénomène et l'impact destructeur des « pensionnats indiens »

Recueillir les récits des survivants, à travers leur témoignage, les documents d'archives audio, imprimé, filmé

Rendre ces documents accessibles au grand public

Établir des lieux de mémoire pour éveiller la conscience de la population canadienne des abus faits aux enfants, aux familles aux communautés autochtones

Inviter à une vigilance publique afin que de tels abus ne se reproduisent jamais

Établir des recommandations pour que le gouvernement du Canada agisse.

Marie Wilson, membre de l'Église Unie - et qui parle bien le français -, appellera l'Église unie à s'engager à tous les niveaux dans un processus d'éducation, de participation, d'écoute des témoignages et de construction de relations nouvelles.

« Imaginez, dira-t-elle, si au cours des audiences de témoignages, il n'y avait personne de la population pour les recevoir ! » Ce serait comme un second viol par le mépris, *in absentia*.

Le Christ souffrant, de nouveau, nous a montré son visage parmi nous. Il s'agit pour nous de panser les blessures et de guérir : les Autochtones, de leur souffrance et de l'abandon, et nous les non-Autochtones, de notre ignorance, de notre mépris et de notre injustice.

L'Église unie doit vivre sans hésitation sa demande de pardon face aux Autochtones et s'engager à tisser des relations nouvelles, mutuelles et justes a rappelé Marie Wilson.



REPORT SHARES VISION FOR ABORIGINAL MINISTRIES

by Derek Carlisle

A flock of United Church “geese” and one self-described “duck” are leading the way for a new vision of Aboriginal Ministries in The United Church of Canada.

The Rev. Maggie McLeod of Hamilton Conference drew the attention of commissioners at the 40th General Council in Kelowna, British Columbia, to key developments in the creation of the Aboriginal Ministries Circle. This new unit of the General Council Office was formally established following a vote of the Executive of the General Council in November 2008.

On a day when most commissioners in Kelowna



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Maggie McLeod

were wearing shorts, McLeod told of a wintry time in 2007 when the United Church Aboriginal Steering Committee met in the First Nations community of Saugeen, Ontario, where McLeod serves.

“The amazing thing is that folks from neighbouring First Nations communities drove through that snowstorm...to come and share with the Steering Committee their joys, their challenges that they experience as they offer ministry in their communities,” she said. This planning stage was marked by a commitment of the participants to be agents of change and transformation in their communities, added McLeod.

Several Steering Committee members addressed the Council, including the Rev. Russ Burns from the All Native Circle Conference. Burns described himself as the “duck” of the Steering Committee. He added that he was proud to be part of the flock of “geese” who “picked him up in Alberta” to be part of the process.

“Through the years they have taught me well. They have allowed me to become part of their flock, part of their group and to be part of them,” said Burns. As a result of visits by the Steering Committee to First Nations across the country, Burns said he came away with the vision that it was time for First Nations peoples to control their own destiny in the church.

Alberta Billy of the We Wai Kai tribe in the Laichwiltach Nation based in British Columbia also used the flock of geese analogy in her remarks to Council. “We’ve always been the geese in good formation, always,” she said. “We’re very grounded people as First Nations people. At the General Council Executive, when we presented our work to the court, I said, yes, we were the ducks.”

Billy said when she was made aware of the work of the Steering Committee, she noted that the goals were nothing new to her. In fact, she said, she and others had taken similar concerns forward to the United Church 30 years earlier.

“We really need to put this into action now,” she said, adding that the Steering Committee has worked hard for two and a half to three years. Billy said the action needing to happen cannot wait another 30 years.

Billy has five living generations in her family. “We have so much dysfunction,” she said. “I don’t want my great-grandson to grow up in a dysfunctional family. He’s too beautiful.” She added that it was time for The United Church of Canada to walk with First Peoples equally. “We as United Church people need to be the leader, not the duck, and we need to do it soon.”



The United Church of Canada

Alberta Billy

The presentation ended with Burns involving the entire Council in a traditional round dance. Later in the week, commissioners will discuss proposals to revise both the United Church’s Basis of Union and the church’s crest to acknowledge the historical contributions, spirituality, and sacred land and territory of First Nations peoples.



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, 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.

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