



# GENERAL COUNCIL NEWS

Kelowna, British Columbia

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## NO NATIONAL BOYCOTT, BUT CHURCHES ENCOURAGED TO ACT

by Jim Cairney

While officially backing away from declaring an outright boycott against Israel, the 40th General Council of The United Church of Canada has left the door open for that action to emerge from within its constituencies across Canada.

Meeting in Kelowna, British Columbia, the Council adopted a multi-faceted resolution on August 13, two days after it had repudiated the “provocative, unbalanced and hurtful” language that had accompanied a few of the proposals it received calling for action on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

“The United Church has not begun or approved a boycott at the national level,” said the Bruce Gregersen, General Council Officer for Programs, in summing up the actions of the Council.

“However, it has stated its encouragement and recommendation to its member bodies, that they are free to study, discern, and pray, and to undertake their own initiatives, which may include economic boycotts as a means to ending the occupation [of Palestine],” said Gregersen.

With a sense of urgency, the Council recommended that United Church Conferences, presbyteries, congregations, and community ministries immediately enter into consultation, dialogue, study, and prayer, and then undertake appropriate action

toward ending the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. It also asked these bodies to enter into conversation as to how to move the two peoples toward reconciliation, including, but not limited to, economic boycott.

Comments around the debate covered a range of responses.



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Nora Carmi

Nora Carmi, a Palestinian Christian refugee from Jerusalem, and an official guest of the Council, said, “I have had enough of hearing that it is two peoples to blame, and that it is a balanced situation.

“It [a boycott] has to include Israeli items made in the occupied territories.... You can choose the boycott that you want. It is not going to bring down the state of Israel,” said Carmi, who is Coordinator for community-building and women’s programs with the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem and a member of the steering committee of the Christian Peacemaker Teams.

The Rev. Wendy Rankin, of Morden, Manitoba, said, “Boycott is a time-honoured method of making a point.”

In noting that the United Church had previously participated in the Nestle boycott, and the boycott against South Africa in support of ending apartheid there, she asked, “Where has our courage gone?”

The Rev. Mark Ferrier, of Mount Forest, Ontario, said, "Earlier we took no action of proposals that asked for a boycott. This is a back-door way to bring this back. We want to boycott boycott!"

The Rev. Doug Varey, a United Church minister serving with the Zambia Theological College in Kitwe, Zambia, said boycott is nasty, but it is used "in order to exert influence."

Said Varey, "Only an outsider can do something about it."



*Bruce Gregersen*

Speaking later, Gregersen said it was hard for the Council to find the common ground that it was seeking. "However those who were concerned that the church would implement a boycott will be relieved that no national boycott will be undertaken," said Gregersen. "And those who seek strong action by the church to resist the occupation will recognize the importance of what the church has done."

The Council also voted to direct its General Secretary, General Council "to engage in consultation, dialogue, and study with relevant partners and other interested parties concerning implications of past and future actions to end the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and enter into conversation as to how to move the two peoples toward reconciliation, including, but not limited to, economic boycott."

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It has asked that the General Secretary report back to the next General Council (in three years) and provide continuing guidance to the other levels of the United Church in the meantime.

The group voted to record its convictions that a just peace in the Middle East will require:

- the denunciation of human rights abuses committed by Israel and Palestine, as documented by Amnesty International and the United Nations, that will result in member states of the United Nations taking subsequent, appropriate actions
- that the occupation and siege of Gaza by Israel cease, requiring the full withdrawal of

Israeli forces from Gaza

- that the Government of Canada and member states of the United Nations support international efforts to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza
- the withdrawal of Israeli military forces to pre-1967 borders and ending all forms of violence by the Israeli Government upon the Palestinian people
- the cessation of suicide bombings and other violent attacks directed towards Israeli civilians on the part of Palestinians
- recognition that East Jerusalem, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip constitute an integral part of the territory occupied in 1967 and Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem must be dismantled
- the recognition by the emergent State of Palestine of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state within safe and secure borders
- the recognition by the Israeli Government and the emergent state of Palestine of equal citizenship rights, protections, privileges, and responsibilities for all of their respective citizens regardless of religious or national origins

The Council asked the General Secretary to inform the Prime Minister of Canada and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in writing, of the above convictions and urge that Canadian policy and commitments in the Middle East reflect this position.

The United Church of Canada's participation in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel was affirmed by the Council. The church was asked to seek further ways of augmenting its physical presence in the Middle East.

In addition, the proposal passed by the Council supports the principles of the World Council of Churches' Amman Call, particularly those that promote peace-making, bridge-building, and the development of long-term strategies for peace and right relations.

The decisions on the Israel/Palestine issues were made by commissioners meeting in one of three decision-making commissions at the Council.



# LA GRÂCE D'ÊTRE UNE MINORITÉ

par Thierry Delay

Lors de la présentation du rapport du Groupe de travail sur les ministères interculturels, Thierry Delay, l'un des trois francophones qui y siègent s'est adressé à l'Assemblée du 40e Conseil général de l'Église unie. Voici un résumé de ses propos.

Nos communautés francophones vivent une situation de minorité dans l'Église. C'est quelque chose de stimulant, mais aussi de frustrant : ne pas être entendu, ne pas être compris ; ce qui donne naissance à un sentiment d'exclusion.

Vivre cette situation de minorité, c'est aussi faire l'expérience concrète de notre fragilité : nous savons ce que c'est que d'être des vases d'argile (cela rejoint tout à fait le thème de ce 40e Conseil général).

Lorsqu'on est minoritaire, on a le choix soit de se replier sur soi-même, de s'isoler dans un ghetto, ou au contraire de s'ouvrir au monde qui nous entoure. C'est un risque à prendre, mais c'est aussi une grâce et c'est la voie qu'ont pris les francophones de l'Église unie.

Aujourd'hui, l'Église vit une situation assez similaire à celle de l'Église du premier siècle : rencontre de plusieurs cultures, langues, classes sociales... Une dimension d'interculturalité déjà présente lors de l'événement de Pentecôte. De plus, les textes bibliques nous donnent de nombreuses images, paraboles et visions d'une communauté de foi interculturelle.

C'est pourquoi nos communautés francophones se sont pleinement engagées dans le projet de vision transformatrice, pour devenir une Église interculturelle aux côtés des communautés autochtones et des minorités culturelles et linguistiques.

Nos communautés francophones vivent déjà cette diversité : par exemple, ma paroisse à Montréal est composée de personnes venant d'horizons très différents : Québécois, immigrants venus d'Europe, d'Afrique, d'Haïti, et même quelques anglophones d'autres provinces canadiennes ! Nous avons aussi le privilège de partager notre bâtiment avec une communauté latino-américaine de l'Église unie avec qui nous avons des célébrations et activités communes.

Cette diversité est une véritable richesse que nous voulons partager le plus largement possible en mettant en valeur une qualité de « vivre ensemble » que nous pouvons offrir comme Église (et comme disciples de Jésus-Christ) à toute la société.

Mais il est vrai que s'ouvrir ainsi aux autres, vivre un accueil inconditionnel sur une base d'égalité, de mutualité et de respect des personnes peut entraîner un certain inconfort, des sentiments d'incertitudes et même de peur. Cela demande d'abandonner son cadre familial, à s'exposer à la différence ainsi qu'à d'autres approches de la vie.

Mais oser le risque du changement, c'est s'ouvrir à la vie. Car ce qui est statique, ce qui ne change pas est mort. La vie est un flot, une dynamique qui amène à des changements. Alors, n'ayons pas peur de risquer le changement pour que l'Église devienne toujours mieux ferment de transformation et porteuse d'une vision pour toute la société.

Que l'Esprit du Dieu vivant nous inspire et nous conduise dans ce temps de changements et de transformations !



Visit the  
**BOOK ROOM**  
2nd level of gym—behind curtain  
(elevator in main foyer)

TODAY'S FEATURE:  
**Postcards from the Valley**  
by David Giuliano

# CHURCH ASKED TO REACH OUT TO FRANCOPHONE WORSHIPPERS

by Derek Carlisle

The United Church of Canada is being asked to take the next step in reaching out to francophone worshippers looking for a spiritual home.



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*Stéphane Vermette*

During a presentation on French ministries to the 40th General Council on August 12, the Rev. Stéphane Vermette outlined the work of the United Church over the last several years in strengthening intercultural relations.

“Today we would like to lay another stone on this transformative journey that will help us to provide everyone with the opportunity to sing, pray, worship the living Christ in one’s own language, culture, and identity,” said Vermette.

Vermette added that for many different reasons, ministries in French have not flourished in the United Church. At the time the United Church was created in 1925, there were 40 francophone congregations. Of those, only 12 are active today.

In spite of this seeming fragility, Vermette said that hopeful signs have emerged in recent years. “We believe the time is right to renew our commitment to ministry in French and to support its future, its strategies of presence and development for the 21st century,” he said.

Vermette introduced the Rev. Marie-Claude Manga from Montreal and Ottawa Conference to the Council. Manga outlined the faith journey of “Tabitha” from her native Congo to The United Church of Canada. Manga noted that Tabitha was “amazed to discover The United Church of Canada.” Through the church connection, Tabitha found a



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*Marie-Claude Manga*

devoted person who helped her to renew a relationship with God and with Christ.

“Today Tabitha is serving as a minister in a pastoral charge within The United Church of Canada. Brothers and sisters, Tabitha is me, Marie-Claude Manga. I am very proud of being a United Church of Canada member,” Manga said. When asked why it is important for her to minister in French, Manga replied that it is to help the many other Tabithas out there.

The Rev. Darla Sloan from the Saint-Pierre and Pinguet Pastoral Charge in the Quebec City area outlined the hopeful signs she has observed. Referring to the theme of the 40th General Council, Sloan said the potter is busy reshaping lives. Pointing to her Ministries in French colleagues on stage, Sloan noted that with the exception of herself, everyone else was born outside the United Church.

In Quebec City, anglophone and francophone United Church congregations now share the same building. Of the combined membership of Église Unie Saint-Pierre and Chalmers-Wesley United, eight members in the last few years have embarked on paths to ordained and lay ministry.

Sloan said she is often asked whether there is a United Church presence in various communities. “I live in hope that my answer will be ‘oui,’” she said.

Sloan concluded her remarks by mentioning that two new French congregations have opened since the visioning report was written just a few short months ago. Of these, Sloan added that Manga has just been designated as the new United Church minister in a bilingual setting in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec.

Following the presentations by Manga and Sloan, Vermette said there was additional interest in exploring French ministries from areas as diverse as Moncton, Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Edmonton.

“The ministry in French might be small, but we still have this great gift to offer the whole church: the gift of hope, hope of a thriving United Church of Canada present in contextual and meaningful ministries for the people of this land without any restriction of origin, culture, or language,” said Vermette.

Later in the week, commissioners will be considering a visioning report from the United Church for the Ministries in French Unit/Unité des Ministères en Français.

## PARTNERS REFLECT ON COUNCIL THEME

by Pat Elson

During lunchtime gatherings, participants and global, ecumenical, and interfaith guests have an opportunity to meet one another and reflect on the theme of the 40th General Council, “down to the potter’s house.” During these gatherings these guests share their reflections about the theme and dialogue with commissioners.

At one of these gatherings, Marilia Schüller, from Brazil, and Nora Carmi, from Palestine/Israel, called participants to become part of God’s transformative work and reshape the vessel.

Schüller, from the organization Koinonia, told the gathering that as people of God we hold the possibility of transformation in our hands. “We are part of a family, a network, a web of life that depends on strengthening the whole as well as the individual,” she said. “We are called by God to respond to the most vulnerable and marginalized, weaving them into the web.”

In the Brazilian context, Schüller noted, some of the most vulnerable are those who practise traditional Afro-Brazilian spirituality, which is often demonized and devalued. Building a culture of respect for these traditional spiritual communities is an important step in bringing about peace. Koinonia, a United Church partner, is working with communities to build the bridges that will allow them to reach out to each other in respect and love.

Schuller challenged participants to identify the things that block us from living ecumenically, beyond the boundaries of Christianity, in the places participants will return to after General Council.



Marilia Schüller

Nora Carmi, from the organization Sa-beel: Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, described Jerusalem as a city that lives within holy texts. It is a symbol of peace. There are places and streets within its boundaries that are familiar to people

of faith through those texts. It is a city that holds great meaning for the peoples and religions that live within its boundaries. But it is a city held captive by seemingly irreconcilable differences that have literally splintered it in many pieces.

Carmi referred to Luke 19:41–42, where Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, “if you only knew today what is needed for peace! But now you cannot see it.”

Carmi challenged the church to continue to work for and stand for the human rights of all who share the city of Jerusalem and the land of Palestine/Israel. In addition, she called the church to work for the children, the leaders of tomorrow, to build a world of justice, peace, and equality where the human rights of all are held in respect and where people are not held captive in their own land.

“We are asked to be the potters,” said Carmi, “reshaping the vessel in answer to God’s call in Micah ‘to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.’”



## QUE D'ÉMOTIONS !

par Nicole Hamel

Que d’émotions lors du culte d’ouverture du Conseil général en ce magnifique dimanche matin à Kelowna alors qu’on y a célébré le 20<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de l’accueil des personnes GLBT (gais, lesbiennes, bisexuelles et transgenres) à la consécration. La prière d’inclusivité et le chant d’un jeune qui exprimait l’alliance entre sa réalité gaie et sa filiation avec Dieu m’ont particulièrement touchée. Autour de moi, je voyais que je n’étais pas la seule à pleurer de joie.

Cela ne veut pas dire que la mission d’intégration est terminée puisqu’il y a trois propositions à l’ordre du jour qui touchent, entre autres, l’apport à la vie de l’Église des personnes transgenres.

D’autre part, des délégué-es du Conseil général qui sont aussi des membres de la communauté S’Affirmer ensemble/Affirm United ont organisé un dîner, mardi, pour les personnes GLBT et les ami-es. Et 65 personnes s’y sont présentées ! Elles

ont partagé de l'information, des bonnes nouvelles et des préoccupations.

Pour moi l'inclusivité célébrée et en cheminement, continuellement réitérée, est l'une des facettes les plus fondamentales de mon adhésion à l'Église unie.

Comme le dit notre credo : Grâces soient rendues à Dieu.

*—Nicole Hamel est déléguée de la composante francophone de l'Église unie au Conseil général et la co-présidente nationale de S'Affirmer ensemble/Affirm United.*



## YOUTH LEAD COUNCIL IN NEW WAYS OF PRAYER

by Jeff Cook

Youth Forum invited commissioners to come to the potter's house to pray and sing during morning worship at the 40th General Council on August 13.

During the worship time, Karen Bridges, from Alberta and Northwest Conference, invited commissioners to spend 15 minutes in prayer. She said they could pray in a variety of ways—walking prayerfully, knitting, moulding clay, journaling, writing prayers or poetry, through meditative dance, or by reflecting



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*Christine Ciona, playing a djembe drum, and other Youth Forum members lead worship.*

on images being projected on the large screens.

“Do whatever feels most comfortable to you this day,” Bridges said. She asked commissioners to reflect on two questions as they were praying: What are you sensing that God, the potter, is creating out of us as a national church? What are the common patterns that are emerging amongst us as The United Church of Canada?

During the prayer time, a selection of folk music was played by violinist Daniel MacDonald, from Bay of Quinte Conference.

While most commissioners remained at their tables to pray, about 30 walked around the perimeter of the meeting area, or among the tables. Some people walked deliberately, seemingly reflecting on each step they took. Some walked with their hands held palm upwards in front of them. Some people knit. Some moved into the visitor stands to write. Some drew. One person expressed prayer through various yoga stretches.

To assist the commissioners' reflections, images were projected on the screens, including photos of scenery and creation—rivers, rock formations, flowers, a hummingbird at a feeder. Some were children's drawings. Other images were a painting of Jesus carrying a cross towards a hill, a cover from *Sports Illustrated*, a page of sheet music, photos of people, and of a high-level wooden bridge leading into a mountain tunnel. The last image was of a poster bearing the word “gentleness.”

Commissioners moved from prayer to clapping and singing about letting “the Spirit spin at the potter's house.”

Christine Ciona, from Saskatchewan Conference, led the singing while playing a djembe drum.

Bridges then invited commissioners to spend time in table groups sharing what they had discovered during their prayer time.

Earlier in the worship time, five Youth Forum members used body movement to interpret several statements intended to reflect the thoughts and feelings of commissioners at the 40th General Council.

Some of the statements were: I am being pulled in ways that I do not like. I am willing to jump into the unknown, knowing that God will catch me. I am finished fixing and tweaking. I am ready to be transformed.

# CHURCH TO ASK FOR U.S. TO INVESTIGATE TORTURE

by Jim Cairney

The United Church is calling on the United States to investigate its use of torture.

The church's 40th General Council passed a motion calling on partner churches, ecumenical organizations, and human rights groups to join the United Church "in calling upon the government of Canada to petition the government of the United States of America to initiate a non-partisan Commission of Inquiry." The commission would investigate and document the authorization, practices, or complicity in the practice of torture by American agencies, or other agencies it authorizes, to consider the legal issues involved, and to evaluate the most effective means by which those responsible may be held legally accountable.

The action was undertaken by commissioners meeting August 11 in one of three decision-making commissions at 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.

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