



# General Council News

Ottawa, Ontario

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## Israel/Palestine Proposal Passed

by Kevin Cox

After a final debate on Friday, August 17, 2012, that included prayer, praise, and some emotional pleas, the United Church has put its stamp of approval on a proposal that includes a call for a boycott of products from the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

An attempt to amend the proposal to remove the

economic action and require the church to remain neutral in the Israel–Palestine conflict was defeated in an intense debate at the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council.

The General Council endorsed the report of The Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy, whose policies and recommendations include recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, a call for renewed peace talks, and an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

During debate earlier this week the proposal was expanded to include a section denouncing ongoing aggression and violence toward the state of Israel and its people and recognizing it as an important contributor to injustice in the region. The section also recognized the ongoing violence and hatred directed at Palestinians by settlers in the occupied territories.

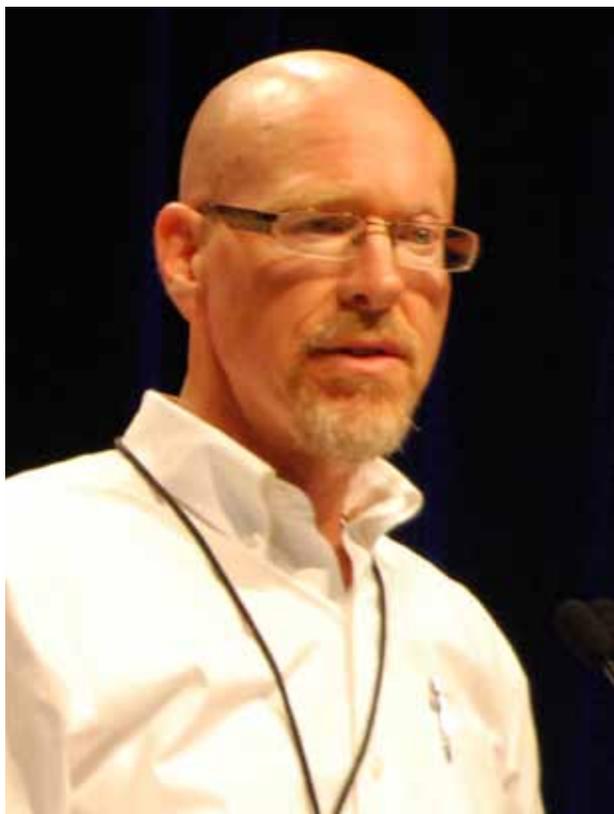
During the final debate on Friday another amendment was approved to send the report and its policies on to church members for “study, prayerful discernment, and personal action.”

It’s now up to the Executive of the General Council to identify products, such as cosmetics and electronics, from the illegal settlements and inform church members, said Bruce Gregersen, General Council Officer for Programs, at a news conference after the proposal was passed.

Gregersen acknowledged that the Canadian government does not require identification of products from the settlements, although some European countries do. General Council will ask the federal government to require that such products be identified.

The church will also encourage members to discuss the report of the working group and contact federal politicians to discuss the federal government’s position on Israel/Palestine, Gregersen said.

The boycott has attracted a great deal of criti-



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David Giuliano, a member of the working group

cism from some members of the Jewish community and from the media. David Giuliano, a member of the working group, acknowledged that some Jewish groups will be offended by the church's action.

"We'll continue to be open, but the bottom line is if the cost of friendship is abandoning our other friends or selling out our own convictions, we can't do that," Giuliano told the news conference.

He also defended the church's stance, saying the church has worked on the issue for many decades and Christian Palestinians have asked the United Church for help and support in their suffering and oppression.

The final emotional debate in the final full day of General Council included singing of "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" and several prayers before the final vote was taken.

James Ravenscroft of Alberta and Northwest Conference said he felt torn about the motion.

"The report brings us to a new stance as a church, which is to take a side when we should be standing in the centre between two parties," Ravenscroft said.

Piotr Strzelecki of Alberta and Northwest Conference said there is a moral paradox with people proposing an economic boycott of settlement products while wearing clothing made in China. He warned that the boycott will lead to misunderstandings and problems in congregations.

"Enshrining economic action as it is misunderstood will lead, not to empowering leadership, but to unnecessary pastoral care, anger management, and straightening out misunderstandings."

But Emily Duggan of Manitou Conference, who travelled on the 2009 Youth for Peace trip to Israel and Palestine, said she was happy to share the church's stance with people she met on her trip.

"They are ready for just peace, they desire this, and I am happy to say that we are responding to their call, and I would encourage us to take the next step and live into our faith and respond to this call..." Duggan said.



## New Possibilities: An Interview with Gary Paterson

by Christine Johnson

**A**lthough the United Church is in the midst of exile, new possibilities are unfolding, says Moderator-elect Gary Paterson. These possibilities include everything from house churches to new communication methods and beyond.

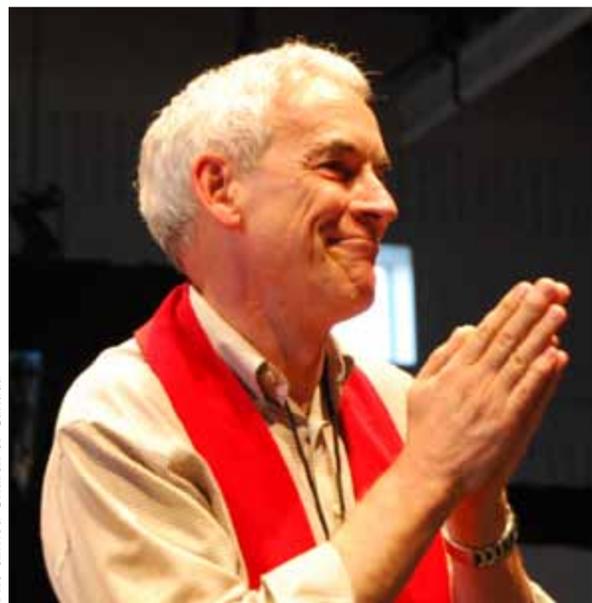
"We need to hang loose a little and see what possibilities are going to emerge," he said in an interview the day after his election. "I am also so excited by what I'm seeing."

Paterson noted that during a recent sabbatical in Jerusalem he learned about the more than 20 times the city was conquered and restored. As a "fan of the prophet Jeremiah," he said he felt like he heard Jeremiah's voice saying, "Exile is a reality that happens... but don't be afraid because God is with you in the exile and there will be something new."

He added that while he was in Jerusalem among colleagues in the Catholic and Orthodox churches, he came to understand "the wonderful vision" of the United Church that includes its commitment to inclusion and theological vision.

"We're in a tough time and I would never want [the United Church's] voice lost," he said.

Paterson describes the newly emerging United Church as being in the midst of a "double narrative."



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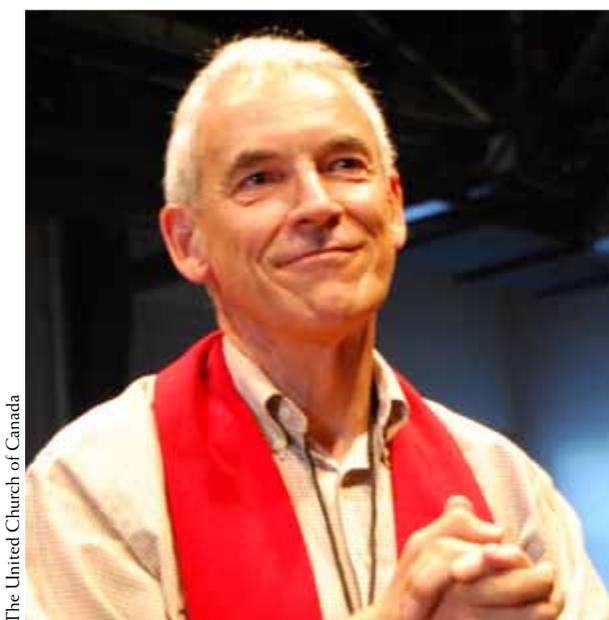
Moderator-elect Rev. Dr. Gary Paterson

On one hand, he said, there will be serious difficulties, referring to a recent suggestion that as many as 50 United Churches may be closing in British Columbia. On the other hand, he noted that the church is not just about palliative care or hand wringing.

He compared possible new models of the church to the biblical story of the resurrection and the fact that the disciples did not recognize Jesus. "Will that be true of the church—that we might not even recognize how we will look in a resurrected form?"

During the interview he recounted the process he went through before deciding to run for Moderator. When people first asked him to consider allowing his name to stand as a nominee, Paterson declined. "There was almost a Jonah moment of trying to run away from it, saying it would be so disruptive." While he consulted with his spouse and friends, he says his humility also led him to ask, "Really? Me?... God, find someone else!"

Another reservation he had was the move to Toronto that becoming Moderator would require. Some of his fears of disruption were alleviated, he said, when he discovered that while he was in Jerusalem, his congregation of St. Andrew's-Wesley United Church in Vancouver operated very well without him under the care of his part-time associate, Kathryn Ransdell. Now that he has been elected Moderator, tentative plans are for Ransdell to assume main duties at the congregation, with the possibility of other ministry staff being added.



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The 63-year-old Paterson is married to Tim Stevenson, who is currently a Vancouver city councillor and who made history as the first openly gay person to be ordained in The United Church of Canada 20 years ago. In June, they celebrated their 30th year of being together. He is the father of three girls from a previous marriage and has four grandchildren.

When asked about his spiritual practices, the Moderator-elect said his primary spiritual practice will change with his new role as Moderator. Every morning he usually takes a 40-minute walk along the sea wall in Vancouver, giving thanks for creation and sometimes saying the mantra, "Lord Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world. Fill my mind with your peace; fill my heart with your love." He quipped that people probably think "he's one of those who mutter to himself."

He says other important spiritual practices that sustain his faith include music and singing, silent retreats, and the process of creating sermons and preaching. Paterson says there are house churches in England, Scotland, and two in Ontario that use his sermons, which he posts on the Internet, to stimulate discussion.

When asked what unique gifts he brings to the role of Moderator, he spoke of being a good speaker and of his love of language. "I stopped being a closet gay person, but I'm still a closet poet," he said. He added that he has a strong sense of theology and appreciates intellectual gifts. He calls himself intense and passionate. "I hope I blend heart and mind," he commented.

Although he said his sexual orientation has not been an issue during the election, he admits that he knows what it's like being a stranger on the outside.

"One of the gifts of the United Church is, in fact, its invitation to gay and lesbian people to say, 'You aren't the strangers, the outsiders. You are welcomed and you are home.' I've seen that at times as a particular calling, not a main emphasis," he said. "To people who have come to our congregations who have been wounded by other Christian traditions we want to say, with due respect, those traditions have done poor theology and poor biblical work. Christian and gay—those are not exclusive terms."





## Open Space a Time for Conversation

by David Allen

When commissioners entered the arena where the 41st General Council is meeting on August 16, 2012, they were greeted by large circles of chairs set up for a day of Open Space technology.

"Open Space gives us an opportunity to have a conversation beyond the proposals and motions and amendments and leaves us open to the matters that you brought that are on your hearts and minds," Moderator Mardi Tindal said as she welcomed people to the process.

Facilitators Michelle Cooper and Marquis Bureau asked the group of nearly 500 people to name discussion topics related to the overall question "What kind of movement is God creating in us today?" There was no shortage of ideas. Topics included, for example, prison ministry, ministry to post-church Christians, Goldcorp, engaging mission in and with neighbourhoods, increasing clergy salaries, young adult ministries, violence and genocide in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and understanding and meeting the needs of smaller congregations.

Much of the day was spent in lively conversation in large and small groups. Open Space is "not everybody's cup of tea," said Thérèse Samuel from Montreal and Ottawa Conference, "but it opens up possibilities that the community might not otherwise have created." Dianne Kempt, a Maritime Conference commissioner, described herself as a "butterfly" moving from group to group. She showed up to discuss one topic, but found the discussion had gone in a different direction.

Toronto Conference commissioner Marg Krauter said she was surprised by the number of topics that people identified for discussion, many of which seemed to overlap. "I like the concept of getting people together to talk," she said.

Rosemary Lambie, Executive Secretary of Montreal and Ottawa Conference, has used Open Space a lot. "I love Open Space," she enthused. "It allows people to bring their energy, and passion, and enthusiasm and allows them to be engaged in what they see needs to be done." In her former work, Lambie said she noticed that Open Space broke down barriers. "It cut out the sense of isolation, especially in rural congregations. They could see they weren't alone."

As the Open Space time came to an end, every person among the hundreds in the circle had an opportunity to say a word that identified how they were

feeling or what they heard. Participants' responses reflected the diversity of the group: "passionately encouraged"; "hopeful for the future"; "in the wilderness, but not lost"; "stop the talk and do the walk"; "discouraged by lack of direction and focus"; "take it easy, it will all work itself out"; "continue with campus ministries"; "new ideas for prayers"; "not only survival but true life."

All of the discussion groups' reports will be compiled by the facilitators, posted on the Web, and given to the new Moderator.



## Environmental Impact of Oil Extraction

by Derek Carlisle

A change in terminology and focus is in store for United Church members interested in the environmental impact on First Nations' lands and waters of oil extraction in nearby areas.

The 41st General Council has approved an amended proposal calling for a denominational response to the rights of Aboriginal Peoples regarding development projects that affect their lands, waters, traditional territories, and resources.

The proposal, which originated from Toronto Conference, was approved by Council in one of three decision-making bodies known as commissions on August 14, 2012.

The principal amendment adopted by commissioners was to add the scientific names for the extraction process (in-situ) and the type of sands that are saturated with a viscous form of petroleum (bituminous).

Nicole Beaudry from Montreal and Ottawa Conference pointed out that there is a singular term in French (sables bitumineux) versus the two terms that are commonly used in English (oil sands and tar sands). Beaudry suggested there be more consistency in United Church references.

This point was echoed by two commissioners from Alberta and Northwest Conference. Jeffrey

Rock noted that "as soon as you say tar sands, you lose people."

Added fellow Conference commissioner Leigh Sinclair. "I hope we can pick the words that I cannot pronounce yet... Everyone will then read and be clear what we are saying."

Church actions arising from this proposal will include calling on the Government of Canada and the leaders of political parties to uphold the right of Indigenous peoples in accordance with Article 32 of the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The proposal noted that Canada has affirmed this UN declaration.

The United Church will also call for independent studies to be commissioned on the cumulative impacts of in situ bituminous sands on health, water, and ecosystems, outlining ways in which they can be addressed.

Commissioners expanded on the proposal's original action of letter writing to encompass a broader campaign in keeping with 21st century communications technology. For advice on communicating with political leaders, commissioners were aided by the presence of a former politician in their midst.

"Having served a number of years as an elected politician, the best way to reach or to have your message reach the caucuses is for everyone in your charge to write a letter to your local member," said Art Buck from Maritime Conference.

"The letters that go to the Premier and the Prime Minister are passed on for someone else to handle it. When the [party] caucuses are wound up and upset [and] come into a meeting saying they have received 280 letters on an issue, then [the local member] starts to get worried about their job," he added.



### Correction

In General Council News Issue 7 in the story "Church Takes a Stand against Gossip" we incorrectly identified a speaker. It should have read "Colin MacDonald of Toronto Conference said it was "utterly impossible for General Council to legislate morality."

# Pastoral Relations Issues Considered by Council

by Derek Carlisle

A number of pastoral relations proposals were considered by the 41st General Council in one of three decision-making bodies known as commissions on August 14, 2012.

Substantive debate took place around a proposal from the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario to change current policy to allow for the appointment of a licenced lay worship leader for extended pulpit supply. The proposal was eventually defeated.

Shannon McCarthy from the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario noted that the proposal had originated in Cambrian Presbytery, where a number of pastoral charges in isolated areas are running into roadblocks because they are not able to turn to the same lay worship leader for more than a couple of Sundays in a row.

"In Cambrian Presbytery, a lot of congregations will never again be staffed full-time. As it is now, lay worship leaders can preach anywhere, but they cannot preach in the same place."

A number of speakers pointed out that policy in this area is not consistent across the courts of the church.

"I am certainly sympathetic to the situations that have led to this proposal," said John Young from Bay of Quinte Conference. "I wonder if a better way to address the concerns about appointment is to think of how many services in a row they can do. There is real variation across the country."

For many commissioners, the inclusion of the word "appointment" in the proposal proved a stumbling block.

"The role of licenced lay worship leaders is not mentioned in *The Manual*," said Ross Bartlett from Maritime Conference.

"Presbyteries are responsible for the spiritual health of congregations.... The language of appointment is incredibly problematic," he added.

Ann Harbridge of Toronto Conference said, "We can't even come to an agreement on designated lay ministry. Now we are proposing to appoint folks. I

started as a licenced lay minister. I would not feel qualified to be a minister, as much as I support lay ministry."

Before the proposal was defeated, Donna Kennedy from the All Native Circle Conference spoke of the need to have more of a ministry in small and isolated areas.

"There are so many communities with churches, but no ministers. We have so many social problems in our communities, and we need this in our communities," she said.

In other pastoral relations-related matters, United Church policy relating to the administration of baptisms in cases of emergencies will be extended to adults along with children as currently outlined. These instances arise in cases of life and death scenarios where the person has not already been baptized. It has proven necessary in the past to administer a baptism in a short time window when the consent of the appropriate congregational body cannot be quickly obtained. The baptizing of adults in such a scenario was not taken into account previously. Baptisms carried out in this manner will be then reported back to the congregation's governing body.

In a couple of cases, it was pointed out to commissioners that revisions to come into effect in the simplified *Manual* will make current proposals before the 41st General Council redundant. As a result, commissioners voted to take no action on proposals relating to

- sabbaticals for persons involved in interim ministry (proposed by Hamilton Conference)
- Conference interviews for interim ministers (proposed by Toronto Conference)

In response to a proposal from Saskatchewan Conference calling for the reinstatement of the former congregational accountable minister category, commissioners voted to take no action. They did support the first part of the Saskatchewan proposal in acknowledging the hardship facing rural churches.

Commissioners also carried a proposal whereby no action can be initiated as part of a 363 review for ministry personnel on approved maternity and parental leave. Reviews that are commenced before the leave must be suspended.



## Global Partners Call for Action

by Kevin Cox

After a week of deliberations that included several sessions that refined the wording of proposals, the 41st General Council heard an impassioned call for active support and witness from several United Church global partners.

Sunita Suna of the Asia/Pacific Region of the World Student Christian Federation exhorted commissioners to continue to find ways to do justice.

"You have expended much energy on the crafting of words this week. We implore you to expend as much energy on giving living expressions to these words," Suna said on August 17, 2012

Miguel Tomas Castro Garcia of Emmanuel Baptist Church in El Salvador said the church must continue to name what he called "structural sin" that causes poverty, hunger, war, and displacement of people.

"We must tell the truth," he said. "The way of life of many in the global North is causing our death. What we need more than anything is for you to help dismantle the system of power and wealth that results in our poverty," he said.



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Miguel Tomas Castro Garcia

"You who understand must help others to understand."

Marilia Schüller of Koinonia in Brazil said Christ is found where people are devastated at a Guatemalan mine site by a thirst for wealth and in a community in northern British Columbia where Native people defend their way of life. She added that Christ is also found in a range of places—at a Bethlehem check-point where Palestinian labourers are harassed or in a wealthy Canadian home where a Filipino nanny works in loneliness.

"Christ is where people fear, where the earth groans, where bodies and souls ache, and where Christ is, that is where the church must be also. You often pledged this week to take the church to where Christ is and we urge you to continue to be led by the Spirit into the faithful journey," Schüller said.

Jennifer Henry of KAIROS insisted that while there can be disagreements, the church and its partners share a passion for justice.

"We offer you in return the gift of solidarity in the face of adversity, wisdom born of struggle against suppression and persistence in our call to be one, and a shared commitment to God's dream of a world made new," she said.

United Church global partners and ecumenical guests are a part of every Council. At the 41st General Council there are seven global partners and six ecumenical guests.



## Partner Shares Stories of Global Youth

by Kristine Greenaway

In the Philippines and India students are protesting destructive mining practices. United Church partner Sunita Suna of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) shared their stories while she was in Ottawa attending the United Church's 41st General Council.

Commissioners heard Suna speak on August 17, 2012, as part of a celebration of global partners

attending Council. She spoke of the students' actions in an interview following the presentation.

The students in the Philippines and India are part of a global network of national organizations associated with the WSCF. "WSCF creates awareness about climate justice and helps students analyze what is happening," Suna said during the interview. "They take that analysis back with them to the Student Christian Movement (SCM) in their home countries and become very much involved in anti-mining issues."

Campaigns such as these are the result of workshops and seminars initiated by WSCF. In 2012 the federation is encouraging students to campaign for equitable and sustainable use of water and land. This includes supporting Indigenous peoples' land rights.

In the Philippines, students are focusing on the impact of mining practices on the country's environment and economy. "Companies are aggressively pursuing profits. Resources are leaving the country without benefitting Filipinos. SCM Philippines is promoting sustainable development to the benefit of local people," Suna notes.

Students in India are protesting decisions by the government to allow a Korean mining company to exploit resources in the state of Orissa in an area where the population is predominantly Indigenous. More than 30 villages will be displaced.

Student concerns in the Asia-Pacific region mirror those that General Council commissioners have been

considering this week in motions related to mining practices of Canadian companies at home and abroad.

Suna points to the Beaconsfield Initiative proposal related to strengthening partnerships and studying the impact of Canadian mining interests in the Philippines that was passed earlier in the week by the Council as one example.



## Youth Struggle to Find Their Voice

*A Youth Forum delegate shares his views*

by Thomas Burton

Throughout this inspirational week at the 41st General Council, members of the Youth Forum have been struggling with a unifying challenge. With so little time spent in the actual Council meeting, Youth Forum participants find their voice has little representation in the court.

This feeling of mal-representation is beginning to create a disconnect between church members who participate in Youth forum, and members who vote in plenary.

For many, the Open Space time was an excellent place for youth to express their opinions and ideas and a fantastic opportunity to learn from commissioners. However, that experience simply cannot compare to that of a week spent developing a working and learning relationship with other members of a table group. Since that option is not always economically feasible, and since the youth community is equally important as a voice, perhaps an equilibrium of time spent in plenary with commissioners and time spent as a group is needed.

Before a decision like this can be made, however, youth need to be consulted and treated as equal members of the church. It would be amazing if a youth could be included on the planning committee of Youth Forum, just as youth were included on the planning committee of the 2011 Rendez-vous youth



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Sunita Suna

event. Out of this representation would come a more efficient working environment.

This is not about communication between two groups but is about working together and communicating as one community. When we give members in Youth Forum the same credibility as commissioners, the barrier between generations begins to break and our community is strengthened.

Since Youth Forum members are not elected, they do not expect a right to vote. What they do expect is to have their voices heard and respected in their own church community. Progress has been made this General Council and hopefully in the next triennium this will cease to be an issue.



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Members of the Youth Forum



## L'Église Unie fait pression pour la fin de l'occupation en Palestine

Stéphane Gaudet

Le 41<sup>e</sup> Conseil général de l'Église Unie du Canada a adopté, avec amendements, la totalité des recommandations contenues dans le rapport de son Groupe de travail sur la politique concernant Israël/Palestine.

Mercredi, toutes les résolutions sauf une avaient été adoptées, y compris celle, controversée, recommandant de ne pas acheter de produits venant des colonies israéliennes dans les Territoires occupés. Pour une raison technique, la deuxième recommandation, exécutoire, qui appelle le Conseil général à prescrire « que les politiques et les actions de l'Église Unie en lien avec Israël et la Palestine reflètent le contenu du rapport », a été séparée du reste des recommandations. Un amendement avait été adopté, à une courte majorité, pour reconnaître et dénoncer la violence et les incitations à la violence dont sont aussi victimes Israël et sa population.

Malgré l'absence de la recommandation exécutoire du rapport, Bruce Gregersen, responsable des programmes du Conseil général, avait déclaré dès mercredi que l'avis du Conseil général était clairement en faveur des recommandations du rapport (1 et 3 à 13), y compris celles qui étaient les plus controversées : la condamnation de l'occupation vue comme facteur important contribuant à l'injustice dans la région et l'appel à éviter les produits en provenance des colonies israéliennes. Il ne manquait donc que le vote de la recommandation 2 pour confirmer cette prise de position.

Les débats ont été vigoureux au Conseil général vendredi au moment où celui-ci était appelé à voter cette dernière recommandation et ainsi entériner finalement les actions préconisées par le rapport. Nicole Beaudry, du Synode Montréal et Ottawa, a manifesté son opposition à ses recommandations qui lui semblent « une condamnation d'Israël ». Elle s'est dite très inquiète de la perception de l'Église Unie par la communauté juive si les recommandations de ce rapport étaient appliquées.

Piotr Strzelecki, du Synode de l'Alberta et du Nord-Ouest, s'est aussi prononcé contre les recom-

mandations du rapport : « Un appel au boycott décidé par des gens habillés de vêtements fabriqués en République populaire de Chine m'apparaît paradoxal. »

Avant d'adopter la deuxième recommandation, les délégués ont spontanément chanté *Lord, Listen to your children praying*, dont l'un des vers demande à Dieu « d'envoyer son Esprit en ce lieu ». Puis, l'ex-moderateur Peter Short, agissant temporairement comme modérateur de l'assemblée en remplacement de Mardi Tindal, a prononcé une prière qui a calmé les esprits.

Bruce Gregersen a cru bon de rappeler que le rapport n'utilisait nulle part le mot « boycottage » et que l'Église Unie ne faisait pas partie du mouvement BDS (pour boycottage, désinvestissement et sanctions).

Le rapport de 28 pages appelle aussi au rejet du recours à la violence par toutes les parties du conflit. Il est le résultat d'une consultation exhaustive comprenant une visite dans la région en 2011, visite au cours de laquelle le groupe de travail, présidé par l'ex-moderateur David Giuliano, a rencontré des représentants des communautés palestinienne, israélienne, chrétienne, musulmane et juive, en Israël et en Cisjordanie.



## Welcome To *General Council News*

*General Council News* is being posted daily on The United Church of Canada's 41st General Council website, [www.gc41.ca](http://www.gc41.ca). Individual news stories are being posted throughout the day. 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 18.

*General Council News* reporters will be covering the highlights and significant happenings of the 41st General Council, rather than recording everything that happens each day. All *General Council News* stories may be reproduced freely.

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