



General Council News

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Moderator Nominees Address the Council

On August 10, the nominees for Moderator addressed the General Council at three different times in five-minute speeches. Here is an snapshot of what they had to say presented in the order in which they spoke.



Rev. Debra Bowman is coordinating minister at Ryerson United Church in Vancouver, British Columbia. "I think the Holy Spirit has a message for The United Church of Canada. Move. Now. C'est le temps d'agir. We have for some time been in a liminal place. That middle place, right in the doorway.... It makes

sense that we've been there, as we've been reeling at the collapse of the church as we've known it, and at the impact of our past, the impact of our colonial history of which we've been a part," said Bowman.

"We're being called, invited, lured, booted out (it depends on your theology), out of this place into a new reality, a new time." Bowman said that as we move out of the liminal space, we are going to have to be agile, "because obsessing over jots and tittles and perfectly correct doctrines of faith is not what God is calling most of us to do at this time."

She noted that the church's restructuring is a means to an end. "It has to serve us, not take up all our energy and time.... We need to be open to the kenosis, the pouring out that we have witnessed in Je-

sus, to be willing to pour out our personal preferences for the service of the gospel, trusting in the power of the resurrection to accomplish more than we could have imagined."



Rev. Jim Ball is a team minister at Harcourt Memorial United Church in Guelph, Ontario. "We know gospel when we encounter it. We meet it in ordinary lives, in people of every expression and distinction who are willing to face things, inside and out, in order to be fair and loving in a shared landscape," he said.

"We would live more deeply such a gospel. For its sake we would face what is daunting and hard. We would bear the ache and stretch of reform of our structure and of our hearts. We would let go of the fear and grief and denial that has kept us from one another and our lives. The journey requires much attention to soul and structure. To go farther we are invited to go deeper in the gifts of relationship and remembrance."

"This is a time to breathe and to let go. It's a time to go deep into identity and find direction in our shaping story, to listen carefully to our neighbours and the earth, to build just relationship outward and do the work inward that frees and heals. It is a time to address humbly what we can, and move."



Rev. Brian Cornelius, minister at First United Church in Ottawa, Ontario, said he'd been asked why he would give his energy to a sinking ship.

"If true, I'm actually proud to go down with this ship because I'm proud of the way the United Church has embodied the Christ

faith," said Cornelius. "But...we are not a ship. We are a people, and I have energy for people. We are a people, born of the Spirit, that same Spirit that danced in and with Jesus, a Spirit that has a life-giving love as well as a transformative vision for a just and compassionate society.

"So the question about sinking ships is really grappling with the changes happening in our world and impacting our church and requiring us to operate differently," he said. "I joined this church because when we step on another's foot in the dance, we can say we're sorry. I won't be part of a church that can't say sorry, because at times I'm wrong, and at other times I have been wronged. There is a face that shows grace and a face that receives grace because grace matters. It's the core to our Christian story. It's a grace that calls us to live in truth and reconciliation."



Rev. Bill Thomas, who serves in team ministry at Silver Spire United Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, spoke about evangelism. He contrasted the approach of the United Church with that of urban street corner evangelists who buttonhole people and bark, "Are you saved? Are you washed in

the blood?"

"We are a church that has a different understanding of the gospel and an understanding that is worth communicating," said Thomas.

"We need to take this message into the world. We're a church that has a message counter to the guy on the street corner."

He added, "If we don't take it into places where it needs to be heard, then we have failed."



Rev. Shaun Fryday, minister at Beaconsfield United Church, Quebec, called on the church to chart a new course that includes political engagement, social justice, and human rights.

He said the church should draw on billions of dollars in assets to create

permanent funds to re-establish language and culture among Indigenous peoples as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Fryday added that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities need to hear a full apology from the church for being part of a culture that subjected them to hatred and violence.

He spoke of witnessing environmental devastation and community dislocation caused by mining companies. "We really need to swing our compass and keep swinging it until a brand new course is set for all church investments, from congregational holdings right through to the pension plan."



Rev. Jordan Cantwell, minister at Delisle-Vanscoy United Church in Delisle, Saskatchewan, insisted that the church must keep the gospel at the centre of its work as it streamlines budgets and sets priorities for mission work and balances budgets.

"We ooze commitment to the gospel," she said.

Cantwell added that God is calling young leaders with vision and courage who are finding new ways of being the church. She asked the commissioners to choose to be filled with hope for the future.

"It is hope that fuels our vision and gives us courage and allows us to follow joyfully wherever the Spirit may lead."



Rev. Karen Hilfman Millson, who ministers as a Facilitator of Significant Conversations with congregations and lives in Orillia, Ontario, said people have been telling her for years that she should let her name stand for Moderator. The Holy Spirit told her that this is the time, she said.

"I am not afraid. I am hopeful and excited. There is a spiritual awakening happening around the world, and we get to be part of it," she said.

Hilfman Millson noted that there are many people who are committed to social justice and environmental sustainability and committed to creating what she called "cultures of trust."

"Evidence abounds, including in our workbook, that Spirit is at work in the world, guiding us toward the kingdom of God when the power that reigns is love," she said.



Rev. Dr. Andrew Richardson, minister at Trinity United Church, Summerside, P.E.I., urged the commissioners to look to the resurrection story at times when they are confronted with Sunday schools that are shrinking and churches that are closing.

"The malaise of our church and the mainland church is not so much structural or financial, it is theological. In the midst of death, do we believe in life?" he asked.

He offered commissioners his deep belief in the hope of resurrection, which he insisted is already happening inside and outside the United Church. He pledged that as Moderator, he would be "curator of our Easter stories."



Ann Harbridge is a designated lay minister serving Trinity Centennial United Church in Rosemont, Ontario. She called the church back to Jesus' mission statement: "to proclaim good news to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness... to comfort all who mourn."

"My hope for the church is that we can be a joy-filled place, a place that honours and praises the One who created us. My hope is that our structures and our need to have everything clearly laid out won't hold us back from opening our hearts and minds to the possibilities that might exist if we simply focus on the reason we have church in the first place."

She suggested people in the church need to talk less about how and why and get on with living the gospel message.



Michael Shewburg, a designated lay minister serving as the minister to The Go Project at Islington United Church in Toronto, Ontario, used a campfire image, saying the church needs to add new fuel of relationships to be resurrected from its glowing ashes.

"All too often we fight resurrection, not wanting to let what we love die. How can we be a resurrection people if we fight new life?"

Shewburg called commissioners to discipleship, acknowledging that it is often easier to be an institutional people. "The Comprehensive Review is not going to save the church—the discipleship of its members will," he said.



Rev. Dr. John H. Young, a faculty member at the School of Religion, Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario, showed photos from the 1964 General Council meeting in Newfoundland that showed the commissioners being hosted by Premier Joey Smallwood and Lieutenant-Governor Fabian O'Dea.

Governor Fabian O'Dea.

Young noted that was a different world and the church has been culturally and socially displaced since then. He said the church does social action well, but needs to share its faith story that motivates the social action.

He defined this as "being ready to answer when someone asks what we believe or why we act the way we do. In our secular society, religious traditions that do not do that will die."



Rev. Dave Jagger, minister at Trinity United Church in Elmira, Ontario, insisted that the rules for the church—loving God and loving our neighbour—haven't changed, but the playing field has.

He posed this question to commissioners: "In this time of unknowing, what if,

instead of spending the next three years only arguing about structure slowly sucking the life out of everyone and potentially fracturing the church; what if we spend an equal amount of time having those energy-creating, passion-stirring 'anything is possible' conversations in order to discover the common mission and purpose God is calling us to be about?"

Jagger said those conversations could tell the church how to live out its rules.



Comprehensive Review Handed Over in Worship

by Jim Cairney

In a time of worship, the Comprehensive Review Task Group (CRTG), handed off its report to the General Council.

The CRTG acknowledged that the report, which outlines a major restructuring of The United Church of Canada, has generated a wide range of emotional responses.

The central scripture used in the worship was the story in the Book of Ezra of the laying of the foundation for the second temple in Jerusalem, an event that engendered joy or lament in those who were witnesses:

"When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, "For [God] is good, for [God's] steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away" (Ezra 3:10-13).

"It's our prayer that we may glimpse the new thing that God is doing," said Kathy Hamilton, chair of the CRTG. "We give, and we share the work of the Comprehensive Review.

"When we first met, we were overwhelmed by the scope of what was before us," recalled Hamilton.

The CRTG reported frequently and consulted widely. It received over 1,000 emails.

"We did as much as we could to bring many voices into the conversation," said Hamilton.

Since the release of the report, more than 100 proposals and responses to the CRTG have come to the General Council.

A special Sessional Committee that started before the rise of this General Council has been looking at the responses.



Sessional Committee Report on CRTG: Overview

by Jim Cairney

The special Sessional Committee dealing with the report of the Comprehensive Review Task Group (CRTG), and the over 100 responses to the report, has brought to the General Council a series of recommendations.

Most notably, the committee's recommendations affirm a major change to a three-court system of governance from the current four-court system.

The sessional committee began its deliberations four days before the full General Council meeting began. It has offered a road map forward on the CRTG's sometimes-contentious plan of restructuring the denomination.

The committee affirmed the values and principles of the original CRTG report and used those nine principles in evaluating the responses and the recommended changes to it.

On the seven proposals of the CRTG, the Sessional Committee is recommending the following broad strokes:

- Proposal 1, Chasing the Spirit: adoption
- Proposal 2, Aboriginal Ministries: adoption
- Proposals 3 and 4 were addressed together.

Proposal 3, A Three-Council Model: adoption. The three councils would consist of communities of faith, regional councils, and a denominational council. Just how many regional councils remains an open question. The committee is recommending an "instrument" to determine how many regions. Proposal 4, College

of Ministers: take no action. However, the Sessional Committee recommends creating a new office of vocations at the denominational level.

- Proposal 5, Association of Ministers: adoption
- Proposal 6, Funding a New Model: adoption of principles to guide a new funding model and budgeting process. The committee recommends that a task group be formed to "define a precise method of assessment."

- Proposal 7, Remits and Meeting of the 43rd General Council: to be referred to the Business Committee of the General Council

The Sessional Committee's recommendations form a "working document" for the General Council to consider. The full report of the Sessional Committee was released to the commissioners at noon Aug. 10, with the instructions that it not be shared beyond the bounds of the Council.



CRTG Sessional Committee Unveils Its Report

by Jeff Cook

The Sessional Committee considered all 100-plus proposals responding to the report of the Comprehensive Review Task Group (CRTG), committee co-chair Larry Doyle told commissioners on the afternoon of Aug. 10.

In its second plenary presentation of the day, Doyle and co-chair Jean Brown reviewed the details of the Sessional Committee's report, which had been distributed to commissioners during the lunch break.

"You were heard," Doyle said, emphasizing that "every single proposal" was looked at, although the committee "may not have adapted language from every proposal."

In addition to offering recommendations on the original seven proposals from the CRTG, the Sessional Committee presented seven other recommendations, primarily concerning work to be done after the completion of this 42nd meeting of the General Council.



The United Church of Canada

Larry Doyle

These recommendations include addressing in the future such issues as:

- determining the number of regions to be created if the three-council model is approved
- determining membership of regional and denominational council executives
- UCW representation
- appointment of a task group to define "a precise method of assessment"
- a thorough review of the church's property and investments at all levels

Commissioners were given table group time to discuss the Sessional Committee report. They were invited to submit questions in writing to the committee.



Moderator's Accountability Report

by Jeff Cook

Ido not think there would have been a Christian home for me in this country without you," the Rt. Rev. Gary Paterson said during his Moderator's Accountability Report to the 42nd General Council on Aug. 9.

Paterson said that his election as Moderator three years ago "was the first time an openly gay person was elected to lead a Christian denomination almost anywhere in the world."

He reminded commissioners that discussions about the place of gay and lesbian people in the church had almost torn the United Church apart in the 1980s.

After the decisions made at the 1988 General Council, the church grew into being more affirming, said Paterson, to such an extent that the election of a gay Moderator was not news in the United Church in 2012.

Paterson thanked the church for being a community in which he could offer his ministry gifts and serve in leadership.

"You said 'welcome home,'" said Paterson, "and I thank you."

Paterson said the United Church continues to discover what it means to be "one community," learning to be a home for those with disabilities and to be an intercultural church.

"We are a denomination where we are going to draw the circle wide," he said.

The Moderator said that the church must continue to be a voice of hope, to address concerns such as child poverty and nuclear armaments, and to continue the ongoing journey of reconciliation. "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a significant step," he said, "but it will take generations to undo the damage and to move forward."

Paterson thanked the church for "the sense that we are on the journey together.

"The job ain't done," Paterson said, "but God is with us. Thanks be to God. We are not alone."

After Paterson finished his report, several people came to the microphones to voice their appreciation for his three years as Moderator.

Youth Forum delegates said that he had been an inspiration to youth. Others thanked him for his courageous leadership. Lorna Standingready, of All Native Circle Conference, thanked Paterson for opening his heart to many cultures.

Commissioners thanked Paterson with a standing ovation when he finished speaking.



Moderator Gary Paterson

Aboriginal Ministries Council Report

by Jeff Cook

Respect, mutuality, and equity are the keys to building relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the church, Ray Jones told the 42nd General Council on Aug. 10.

Jones was presenting the report of the Aboriginal Ministries Council, which he chairs. He introduced several people who spoke about the three aspects of building relationships.

Lewis Coffman, a non-Aboriginal person, said we show respect to Aboriginal people when we "accompany them in community, listen intently, and we offer the ministry of our presence."

Gabrielle Lamouche said respect involves remembering that "the old still have a lot of wisdom we need to hold onto."

As an expression of mutuality, First Nations people invite the conversation to involve not only human beings, but all creatures that walk, crawl, swim, and fly, said former Moderator Stan McKay.

Mutuality must acknowledge our Lord, Maker, and Creator, said Lorna Standingready. "Mutuality begins in the home, in family," she noted. "Before we can ever begin to work together, it begins in the home."

Adrian Jacobs spoke of the 402-year-old Two Row Wampum Treaty Belt, which symbolizes equity. On the belt are two lines representing the river of life. Jacobs said one line represents Aboriginal people in their canoe with their laws, leaders, and people. The other line represents non-Aboriginal people in their canoe with their laws, leaders, and people.

"There has been a co-opting of our canoe" by colonialism, said Jacobs. "We've been shoved to the back. We are working our way back up to the front, gently working your leg out of the canoe," he said.

Jacobs said everyone will benefit when there is equity between the canoes. "It will be good for you as a church," he said.

Janet Sigurdson and Russell Burns performed a humorous skit covering topics ranging from church meetings to powwows.

During the skit, Sigurdson said that she used to be called "Native," then "Indian," then "First Nations."

"I don't know why they don't just call us 'Original,'" she said.

Sigurdson concluded the report by singing an Honour song.



Play Celebrates 90th Anniversary

by Jeff Cook

A revised, extended version of the play *Maybe One* evoked laughter and reflection during a celebration of the United Church's 90th anniversary at General Council 42.

The play was originally written by Manitoba playwright Scott Douglas to celebrate the denomination's 75th anniversary. Scott revised some scenes and added new ones for the 90th anniversary.

The new scenes included "Moderator Jeopardy," in which former Moderator Bill Phipps was a guest on the game show. When Phipps chose the category "Canadian Economic Politics," he was asked for his view on the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Other new scenes included a magician called the Great Uccini, and one depicting the church as a ship sinking while the crew rearranged deck chairs.

The play was performed by members of London Conference the evening of Aug. 9.



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Maybe One



Beaucoup de français dans une province peu francophone

Stéphane Gaudet

C'est en français d'abord que le modérateur Gary Paterson a ouvert samedi soir le 42^e Conseil général, avant de répéter sa déclaration en anglais. Un geste qui n'est pas banal alors que le Conseil général a lieu dans la province qui compte la plus faible proportion de francophones, toutes provinces et tous territoires confondus.

Selon Statistique Canada, 0,6 % des Terre-Neuviens, soit 3 000 personnes, avaient le français comme langue maternelle en 2011, et 0,8 % le parlaient à la maison. Les Franco-Terreneuviens sont concentrés dans trois régions principales : la péninsule de Port-au-Port, seul district officiellement bilingue de la province où les villages toujours francophones des descendants d'Acadiens, de Bretons et de Basques côtoient des villages anglophones ; la capitale, St. John's, qui attire des francophones de l'extérieur de la province et de partout dans le monde ; et Labrador City, à la frontière avec le Québec, où vivent beaucoup de Québécois.

La journaliste Jacinthe LaFrance a été rédactrice en chef du *Gaboteur*, le seul journal francophone de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, dans les années 1990, période de revendications dans la communauté franco-terreneuvienne. « À l'époque, les gens se battaient pour l'établissement d'un conseil scolaire francophone, pour que la chaîne de nouvelles RDI soit disponible... et ils ont gagné ! La communauté a plus de services qu'à l'époque où j'y étais, et dans les écoles, il est moins nécessaire aujourd'hui de faire appel à des Québécois et des Néo-Brunswickois pour trouver du personnel francophone. » Elle avait le sentiment très clair de lutter pour la cause francophone en mettant en valeur dans sa publication tout ce qui se faisait en français. « C'était une question d'identité et de fierté. Par exemple, *Le Gaboteur* a participé à un programme d'alphabétisation dans la région de Port-au-Port pour permettre aux francophones qui avaient été scolarisés en anglais d'apprendre à lire en français et de se réapproprier leur langue. »

Alors, comment se fait-il que dans une province où la communauté francophone est si petite, le français

soit si présent à ce 42^e Conseil général ?

Maya Landell, coordonnatrice des célébrations, évoque l'engagement ferme de l'Exécutif du Conseil général pour le français. « Dès le début, nous avons travaillé avec l'équipe des Ministères en français pour qu'on puisse vivre réellement cet engagement. Nous voulions que tout le monde se sente inclus. Évidemment, les francophones ne sont pas les seuls, nous avons dû gérer des demandes de différents groupes. Mais les commentaires que les francophones nous font sont positifs, et personne ne se plaint. Nous travaillons fort pour traduire les prières et certaines parties des chants. »

Le coordonnateur de la musique, Andrew Atchison, avait un peu peur au début d'avoir à utiliser le français dans le programme musical du Conseil général. « Mais finalement, je trouve plus facile de chanter que de parler en français. C'est plus lent, les syllabes sont clairement détachées, il y a la mélodie qui facilite les choses. » Maya rappelle : « La plupart d'entre nous n'avons eu que des cours de français à l'école pendant 8 ans ! Étienne LeSage [pasteur francophone qui participe à tous les moments de célébration – NDLR] nous aide énormément avec la prononciation et le rythme. »

Andrew trouve normal de faire une place au français dans ce Conseil général. « Cela fait partie de notre identité canadienne », affirme-t-il. Selon Maya et les dires d'autres personnes qui ont participé aux précédentes assemblées du CG, le français est plus présent cette année qu'auparavant. Une situation assez paradoxale quand on connaît la faible présence francophone à Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador.

