



General Council News

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Will of the Church Is to Divest of Goldcorp Shares

by Kevin Cox

The United Church of Canada wants its pension board to sell its shares in Goldcorp.

The motion calling for divestment was approved on Aug. 11 by the Bakeapple (Yellow) Commission, one of three decision-making bodies of General Council 42.

The commission heard passionate arguments about Goldcorp's response to alleged environmental and human rights violations at its Guatemalan Marlin mine and about the merits of shareholder engagement.

The motion instructs the General Secretary "to communicate to The United Church of Canada Pension Board that the will of the church is to divest of its shares in Goldcorp and make public that divestment."

As of June 30, 2015, there were 66,700 shares worth \$1,325,000 held directly by the United Church pension board.

Emma Hebb of Maritime Conference, the Conference that put forward the divestment motion, said that while there are reports of Goldcorp improving its mining operations in Guatemala, the church's partners in that country say they haven't experienced that progress on the ground.

Hebb, who has visited Guatemala and spoken to people affected by Goldcorp's operations, said the local people have not given their consent to mining operations. She said there is political corruption in Guatemala, and people living near mines do not have the protection they need.

She also rejected the idea that shareholder engagement would help those living near a Goldcorp

mine in Guatemala. "No matter what amount of shareholder engagement there is, the company isn't going to stop mining where it has permits to mine," Hebb said.

"This [divestment] is a step we have to take for our partners."

Jean Macdonald of British Columbia Conference noted that the Goldcorp investment only makes up .09 percent of the pension board investment portfolio.

"The business of divesting isn't going to have a huge economic impact, but it is going to give a very large public message, and that is what we are looking for—to raise awareness and influence."

But Ken Thomas of Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario said that the motion sends another message to Goldcorp, which has improved its record on environmental and human rights at the urging of the pension board.

"I am concerned about the message we are sending when we engage somebody and they take positive steps and we say 'go to hell, we are going to divest anyway,'" he said.

Marcus Robertson, chair of the pension board, said some despicable actions at the Guatemala mine took place before Goldcorp acquired it.

"I really do believe there have been some positive changes," Robertson said.

Bill Sheaves of Bay of Quinte Conference said the actions of the pension board and pressure from the United Church pushed Goldcorp to improve its operations. "If we divest, then we will have no say in the actions of Goldcorp, and therefore it will just be a gesture when we could do something positive," Sheaves said.



Council Urges Church to Sell Fossil Fuel Holdings

by Kevin Cox

Commissioners of the 42nd General Council are urging the United Church to sell its \$8.7 million holdings in fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy co-operatives.

The Bakeapple (Yellow) Commission, one of three decision-making bodies of the Council, heard spirited arguments on both sides of the issue before passing a proposal to “encourage the United Church of Canada Foundation and direct the Executive of the General Council to take active steps to sell their holdings in the 200 largest fossil fuel companies.”

The motion also calls for the reinvestment of the funds into renewable energy.

The commission also called for the United Church pension board to review the extent and rationale for its fossil fuel investments and determine if its holdings “align with the Christian imperative of seeking justice, resisting evil, and living with respect in Creation.”

According to background material on the motion, The United Church of Canada Foundation holds \$2.8 million in fossil fuel investments or 5 percent of the portfolio. The Treasury has \$5.9 million in fossil fuel stocks or 4.7% of that portfolio.

Several other faith groups have made moves to divest from fossil fuel companies because of the industry’s contribution to climate change.

Jim Hannah of British Columbia Conference said the church needs to speak out about the role of the fossil fuel industry in climate change. “This is about the survival of this planet. This is about the survival of this species. For my grandchildren’s sake I want to do everything I can,” he said. “It’s going to cost us money, it’s going to cost us jobs. We’re going to have to change how we live in this world. We have to do this.”

Erik Mathiesen, the United Church’s Chief Financial Officer, said a lot of research and lobbying is being done by groups in the church on issues such as responsible investing and climate change. “The concern is that commissioners may not have all the information about everything underway,” he said.

Several commissioners said the church should hold onto its shares and use them to influence the policies of fossil fuel companies. David Pollard of

Alberta and Northwest Conference said some of the large companies are doing valuable research and development work. He suggested that the church should be affirming companies that are environmentally responsible.

But Manitou Conference youth commissioner Aidan Legault said that the church’s voice hasn’t been heard at the corporate table. “Just being at the table, we aren’t making a difference. The way we can make a difference as a church and say we are not going to stand for any irresponsible environmental management by these companies is by divesting,” Legault said. “We can do it by taking our own money and saying we are going to put it elsewhere.”

Hanna Strong of Montreal and Ottawa Conference said the church would have more say if it held onto its stake. She also urged commissioners not to demonize the people who work in the petroleum industry.

“People work in this industry. In the church I have a very difficult time walking up to someone saying we have divested and you don’t have a job,” Strong said.

“It’s all great to be for the environment but there are humans on the other side of these 200 companies.”



Youth Forum Worship

by Jeff Cook

Youth Forum spoke about the church as it is and as it may be as they led the evening worship service at General Council 42 on August 11.

Various youth stated what they like about the United Church—the sense of community, youth programming, that it welcomes all kinds of communities, and that it encourages Indigenous people to continue their traditional teachings.

Throughout the worship, the youth commissioners who were part of a cross-Canada pilgrimage to General Council shared their stories.

Commissioners rose in applause when one of the pilgrims, Aidan Legault, from Manitou Conference, told them, “We don’t have to be afraid of the future,

because the future is bright and happy, and we can make it so."

"Here in Newfoundland, on this rock, we are united to build God's new church," he said. "We are united to do God's work."

Several youth reflected on what they would like to see in the church's future: more camp ministries, places where worship can be fun and silly, a church that connects people through sharing meals, and more prayer expressed to the joyful sound of laughter.

All of Youth Forum and their leaders gathered on stage for the last hymn, an energetic version of "Give Me Oil in My Lamp."



The United Church of Canada

Youth Forum worship



Candidacy Pathway Authorized for Remit

by Jeff Cook

General Council 42 has authorized a category 2 Remit to approve a seven-phase Candidacy Pathway to the order of ministry and to recognition as a designated lay minister.

The seven phases of the Pathway are: call forth, identify, accompany, equip, assess, authorize, and celebrate.

Joe Ramsay, Manager, Ministry Personnel Policies and Programs, said one of the benefits of the Pathway process is that it allows a person to begin a process of inquiry immediately, rather than waiting until they become a member of the United Church. Previously a person had to have been a member for two years before initiating the discernment process. A person would still have to be a member for two years before becoming a candidate for the order of ministry.

The Candidacy Pathway would improve "the speed and effectiveness of the process," Ramsay said.

Michelle Slater of British Columbia Conference said the Pathway had been "piloted" in British Columbia and was "very welcomed" as a process. She said it allowed theological students from other denominations, who found themselves attracted to the United Church, to "start the process right away."

The process is also contextual, she said, allowing different regions of the church some flexibility and variety in the ways they identify people for candidacy.

Some aspects of the Pathway are:

- It provides creative and invitational approaches for calling forth people to serve as ministry personnel.
- A variety of tools or agencies may be used to test a person's giftedness for ministry.
- Students and candidates will be supported by Circles of Accompaniment, people who will have no official evaluative role.
- A variety of supervised ministry education opportunities will be open to candidates for ordained ministry.

Candidacy boards will assess suitability and readiness and authorize candidates for ordination, commissioning, or recognition.

If the remit is approved, the Executive of the General Council will develop a policy document for the Candidacy Pathway and an implementation strategy.

Background information accompanies a category 2 remit, which is voted on by presbyteries.



Nous pouvons changer les choses !

Stéphane Gaudet

« **N**ous, les chrétiens, avons beaucoup de pouvoir. Nous pouvons faire tellement de choses au nom de notre foi ! »

Aidan Legault, 18 ans, originaire de Sudbury, a appris cette leçon au cours du pèlerinage qui a amené 13 jeunes de l'Église, un par synode, à traverser le Canada du Pacifique à l'Atlantique. Partis de Vancouver le 4 juillet, les jeunes pèlerins sont arrivés à Corner Brook un mois plus tard, juste à temps pour le Conseil général. Un périple de 8 000 kilomètres. Chaque pèlerin est aussi l'un des délégués de son synode au CG42, avec plein droit de vote.

Pourquoi ce long voyage avant de venir à Terre-Neuve ? « Nous voulions visiter les 13 synodes, car chaque synode a sa propre culture et est préoccupé par des problèmes différents. » Prenant très au sérieux leur rôle de délégués-es au CG, ils tenaient à avoir une vue d'ensemble de ce qui se fait un peu partout dans notre Église plutôt que de se faire les avocats des seules préoccupations de leur synode d'origine. « C'est important pour nous, qui sommes jeunes, d'élargir nos perspectives. Nous voulions voir à quels problèmes font face chacun des synodes. Et pour ce faire, nous avons eu la chance de parler directement aux membres de nos communautés de foi. »

Ne devenait pas pèlerin qui veut. Pour participer à ce pèlerinage, cinq jeunes par synode ont été invités à une retraite en février. Ils y ont appris sur les structures de l'Église Unie, le fonctionnement du Conseil général, les enjeux du 42^e et particulièrement la Révision globale. Au terme d'un processus de discernement, un seul de ces jeunes était choisi pour siéger au CG parmi les délégués de son synode. Aidan, membre de la paroisse St. Peter's à Sudbury, est du Synode Manitou.

« Quand les gens de foi travaillent ensemble, avec l'appui de nos communautés, ils peuvent changer concrètement la vie des autres. » Aidan cite en exemple les Hamilton Urban Ministries, qui viennent en aide aux personnes défavorisées de la Ville de l'acier, et la First United Church de Vancouver, qui exerce un ministère auprès des sans-abris et marginalisés du quartier Downtown East Side. Même si nous vivons dans des sociétés sécularisées où existe une certaine méfiance envers les religions en général et les Églises

en particulier, Aidan croit que le monde écoute et regarde encore quand les chrétiens prennent la parole et agissent.

Le pèlerinage d'Aidan a été ponctué de nombreux moments de grâce. « Partout, nous avons rencontrés des gens de notre Église si remplis d'amour ! De l'amour pour nous qui leur rendions visite, de l'amour pour notre Église, pour les gens de notre Église et ceux qui n'en font pas partie, de l'amour pour le travail qu'ils font... »

Et comment trouve-t-il son expérience au Conseil général après 3 jours ? « J'avais peur de trouver ça ennuyeux et d'avoir à lutter pour rester réveillé, mais non ! C'est extrêmement intéressant ! » Aidan se dit heureux et très fier de faire partie d'un événement aussi important pour notre Église. « C'est même émouvant pour moi d'être ici. Chaque jour, je réalise combien l'Église est importante dans ma vie. »

Celui qui a livré un discours remarqué lors du culte des jeunes de lundi soir s'intéresse à la constitution et aux droits, et aspire à une carrière politique. Nul doute que son implication dans l'Église Unie le prépare pour cet avenir.



L'Église Unie du Canada

Aidan Legault



Council Reaffirms Right of Self-Determination for Palestinians and Israelis

by Jim Cairney

The 42nd General Council made several key decisions on Aug. 11 related to Palestine and Israel during one of three commissions, which are decision-making bodies.

The commission debated asking the Executive of the General Council to review its long-standing policy on a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. It noted that any change will come in consultation with United Church partners in the region.

Some of those partners are suggesting that the day for a two-state solution has passed due to the prevalence of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

The commission struggled with the question of whether to let go of the church's long-term position advocating and working for a two-state solution to the current Israeli occupation of Palestine.

In the end, the commission backed away from a change in policy by simply reaffirming "the right of self-determination for Palestinians and Israelis so that any choice regarding statehood must be made by the people living in Palestine-Israel."

It reaffirmed the right of Israelis and Palestinians to live peacefully within internationally recognized borders, and it voted to strengthen the strategies and actions taken at the last General Council in 2012 to address the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories by the state of Israel.

This includes "initiating and developing a program of education and advocacy in cooperation with our partners, related to divestment from and economic sanctions against all corporations and institutions complicit in and benefitting from the illegal occupation. This would include education about tourism which bolsters the oppression of Palestinians."

The commission also encouraged "all courts, bodies and members of The United Church of Canada to apply such divestment strategies and sanctions, until such time as the occupation of the Palestinian territories ends."

This was understood as advocacy and encouragement, rather than a mandatory or binding direction to the church.

In a further move toward bridge building and reconciliation, the commission directed the General Secretary of The General Council to develop a resource listing organizations in Canada and in Israel/Palestine that foster the building of relationships of trust between

- The United Church of Canada and the Canadian Jewish community
- The United Church of Canada and Canadian Palestinian groups
- Palestinian and Jewish groups in Canada
- Palestinians and Israelis in Israel-Palestine

Call for Government Inquiry into Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

by Jim Cairney

The Government of Canada should conduct a full public inquiry into the more than 1,200 cases of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada, says General Council 42.

The Blueberry (Blue) commission, one of three decision-making bodies of the Council, voted to call upon the federal government to "support and continue to support the struggle against the devaluation of women by conducting this inquiry."

"It runs deep in my family," said Lorna Standingready of the All Native Circle Conference, urging the Commission to support the request for the inquiry. She explained to *GC News* that several members of her extended family have been murdered or are missing.

"Reconciliation is between the common people, and we will make stronger communities across this great land," said Standingready, who is from the Peepeekisis Reserve, SK.

Churches and ministries of the United Church are further encouraged to "annually remember missing and murdered Aboriginal women through education, and in prayer, particularly on the Sunday immediately prior to Oct. 4, the date of the cross-Canada Spirit Vigil." Individuals are urged to participate in the Spirit Vigil on Oct. 4.

Congregational members are also encouraged to contact their Members of Parliament to voice support for a national public inquiry.

The Government of Canada and all levels of governance are being asked to implement the 16 recommendations made by the Special Committee on Violence against Indigenous Women.

