

**Report to the Diocese of Athabasca Synod  
By Ross Whitelaw**

**Council of General Synod**

I had the distinct privilege of being elected to Council of General Synod by the Province of Rupert's Land delegates at General Synod 2007. I cannot say that the experience was always pleasurable but it was rewarding at times and I would like to believe that a few of us influenced the church, as a whole, to be more moderate in terms of debating issues important to us all.

At our first meeting, we decided to use a consensus model of decision making. For the most part, this model worked well. Where it didn't, we would use a parliamentary model instead. Many assume that, when a motion passes by consensus, it passes unanimously and that is not necessarily true. Those who are opposed to the motion can make the choice that they can live with the decision. What is important here is that everyone must be comfortable sharing their thoughts. Where we erred occasionally was that we were too quick to switch to voting on an issue instead of continuing discussion or tabling the topic to a future meeting.

Members of CoGS are encouraged to serve on committees. I was appointed to the resolutions committee. Our function was to ensure that resolutions put forward in CoGS meetings were worded correctly in terms of language, canons, etc. A bit later on, I was asked to be the CoGS representative on the General Synod Planning Committee. I'll talk about the work of that committee later.

**Some of the Resolutions passed by CoGS:  
(By no means, all inclusive)**

- 1) One of the first decisions that this CoGS made was to recommend to General Synod 2010 that there be no deficit budgets for the work of General Synod after the year 2012. Considering that the church has suffered from declining attendance and subsequent declining income, this decision can have serious repercussions in terms of services offered by church house in Toronto. Already, there have been reductions in staff.
- 2) CoGS endorsed in principle, the Department of Philanthropy's plan, *Achieving Financial Equilibrium: A Development Plan Forward for the Anglican Church of Canada*. (reference # 007-07-08-11)
- 3) CoGS established a Philanthropy Committee for the purposes of providing leadership and support to philanthropy in the Anglican Church of Canada. (reference # 007-08-08-11)
- 4) CoGS authorized the electronic publication to the Web of the authorized worship resources of the Anglican Church of Canada for which the General Synod holds copyright, providing that necessary safeguards are in place to protect the integrity of the texts. (Note that the texts are now available and you can find links to them at [www.dioath.ca/documents](http://www.dioath.ca/documents).)
- 5) CoGS approved the theme for General Synod 2010 as: "Feeling the Winds of God – Charting a New Course."
- 6) Ms. Michèle George was appointed as the Treasurer of General Synod by electronic balloting. (This has turned out to be a very wise appointment.)
- 7) CoGS approved The Rothesay Report: A Theological Rationale for Same-Sex Marriage for the "widest distribution" in the church, including our full communion, ecumenical and international partners, for consideration and response. (Please read the report to gain an understanding of its content and possible implications: <http://www.anglican.ca/about/committees/fwmc/rothesay-report.htm>)
- 8) Council adopted by consensus, the statement A Word to the Church on Questions of Human Sexuality from the Council of General Synod Meeting May 2009. CoGS refused to bring a motion to the floor of

General Synod 2010 on marriage of same sex couples knowing the divisions in the church on the issue are very much present. (Again, I advise strongly that everyone read this document. You can read a copy at: <http://www.anglican.ca/about/cogs/2009-05.htm>)

- 9) CoGS recommended to General Synod 2010 that the Anglican Church of Canada adopt and embrace the Anglican Communion's Marks of Mission. You can find them here: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>
- 10) The council recommended to General Synod 2010 the enactment of the draft Canon on the National Indigenous Ministry (GS2010-GWG-6)
- 11) The council expressed its dismay and concern over the draft proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill before the Parliament of Uganda. It is my understanding that the bill was withdrawn.
- 12) Council resolved it deplores the Canadian International Development Agency's decision to end its funding for KAIROS, and in consideration of the vital work carried out by KAIROS in many troubled parts of the world on behalf of Canadian church members, urges the federal government to reconsider this decision. This motion was put to us electronically. By the way, I voted against the motion because I believe that some of its actions are underhanded and that it has a political point of view different than my own.
- 13) It was proposed by a member of the council that: "General Synod affirms the authority and jurisdiction of any Diocesan Synod with the concurrence of their Diocesan Bishop to make a decision whether to proceed with the blessing of committed same sex unions within their diocese or jurisdictional context." That opened up a can of worms because we already had consensus to the contrary. Although there was no consensus on their proposal, conversation continued and the following statement did achieve consensus: "That the Council of General Synod approve the proposed Sexuality Discernment Process for the conversation at General Synod 2010, as presented by the Chair of the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee."
- 14) The council agreed that the final text of 'The Covenant of the Anglican Communion' be presented to General Synod 2010 for consideration by the Anglican Church of Canada. (Another document that should be read and understood by all concerned. You can find it here: [http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/docs/The\\_Anglican\\_Covenant.pdf](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/docs/The_Anglican_Covenant.pdf))
- 15) The council adopted the Vision 2019 Report; having directed that the detailed wording of the final text be completed within two weeks. Further, it was placed before General Synod for its consideration; and it was recommended that it be adopted.
- 16) The council recommended to General Synod that the Constitution be amended to include in the membership of the Council of General Synod two members appointed by the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples.

At our last session, CoGS members brainstormed messages to convey to the next CoGS. These included:

- We valued unity in the midst of diversity;
- We were grounded in Bible study and worship every day;
- We encourage the next COGS to continue with anti-racism training;
- We encourage the next COGS to continue the commitment to no deficit budgeting;
- We encourage future COGS members to learn how to do consensus decision-making well;
- Future COGS members should mentor and respect youth members and new Council members;
- If the Governance Working Group proposal for a smaller COGS is passed by General Synod, then COGS members will need to be more intentional in sharing their learning's with their communities back home.

While I won't miss the politics, which are always present in groups like CoGS, I will miss many of the people. Bonds of respect and friendship between people even with differing viewpoints are bound to develop and they certainly did. There were some sad moments as we said our goodbyes.

## **General Synod Planning Committee**

I was mildly shocked when I was asked by the General Secretary to be Council of General Synod's delegate on the General Synod Planning Committee. I had no idea how complex the work involved is to hold an 8 day meeting of over 400 delegates and guests. The tasks are far too numerous to mention in this report. I am pleased with the results. Other than the guestrooms being Spartan and some transportation guffaws, I think that things went very well. I won't belabor you with detail. Five items acted on by the Committee stand out for me as resulting in considerable derision from various people across the church. I have to count myself amongst those people as I had my own doubts.

- The theme for General Synod 2010 – “Feeling the winds of God - Charting a New Course.” Some saw this as an attempt by liberal folks in the church to steal the agenda. Like “Draw the circle, draw the circle wider,” the theme of the 2007 Synod in Winnipeg. I was in the sessions where we debated the theme and what was appropriate. We obviously wanted a nautical theme considering the location of the event and many of us truly believed that we needed to encourage delegates to be guided by God's will even if it meant setting a new course for the church.
- The last General Synod passed a motion that General Synod 2010 be planned to be as paperless as possible. Well, that did present some challenges. There are still very few laptops that have battery lives appropriately long enough for all day meetings. Not everyone can afford them. Some like having paper documents. I think we carried it off fairly well although hardly perfectly. Having all documents (as many as possible) posted on the Internet prior to synod starting, having at least one complete copy of every document on each table, having WLAN services available in the plenary hall, and having two very large overhead screens worked for the most part.
- We planned to have delegates seated in “Galley Groups” instead of by diocese. It was thought that it would encourage people to get to know one another a lot better. At first, there was little comment but, as General Synod approached, the rhetoric got quite intense. I think that, in the last two months, prior to Synod, we were making daily changes to the agenda. Folks sat in galley groups part of the time and in diocesan groups for part of the time. The two seating arrangements were close so folks were not getting lost between the two. Even though I had my doubts even up to the first day of the conference, it worked quite well. We all had the opportunity to meet other people and gain some understanding about them.
- We planned to follow up on CoGS desire not to put forth motions on the topic of sexuality at this General Synod. We planned, instead, to have discussion groups made up with four galley groups each. The results from those discussion groups would be used to formulate a motion on the matter for General Synod to vote on. This again worked relatively well.
- We decided to encourage corporate sponsorship of the Synod. There were quite a few jokes floating around. Sponsors did step forward and to results were relatively low keyed. I think many didn't realize the sponsoring had taken place.

Overall, the planning team did very well, especially those folks on local committees. It was an honour to work with them all.

## **General Synod 2010**

General Synod was held over 8 days from June 4<sup>th</sup> to June 11<sup>th</sup>. Far too much went on for me to represent in a comprehensive report. Suffice it to say, it was a much different gathering than General Synod in Winnipeg back in 2007. There was a sense of unity that just was not there in 2007. I suggest that all our Diocesan Synod

delegates review the material on the General Synod Website at <http://www.anglican.ca/g2010/>. The information provided is detailed and extensive. The material will allow you to gain an understanding of the mood in the national church. Resolutions can be found at <http://www.anglican.ca/g2010/resolutions/>. Please pay close attention to them as there are some major changes and some major issues avoided. I found this synod lacked the stress experienced at the previous synod. I believe, however, that we left an elephant on the table and possibly a gorilla in the closet. The coming months will tell as people react to the synod and dioceses continue or not to make decisions they know will distance them further from the wider community.

Is the following nautical image representative of the Anglican Church of Canada?



Or, or is this image more appropriate?



I pray not.

Ross Whitelaw