



# 38<sup>th</sup> General Council

# NEWS

Wolfville, Nova Scotia

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## NEW MODERATOR, GENERAL SECRETARY INSTALLED

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*Installation part of a joyous closing worship service.*

BY JIM CAIRNEY

With humour and holy ground, the United Church's 38<sup>th</sup> General Council concluded its week by sharing a high-energy, celebratory worship on August 16 to install the new Moderator and the new General Secretary.

The Rev. Peter Short was installed as The United Church of Canada's 38<sup>th</sup> moderator, and the Rev. Dr. Jim Sinclair as the new General Secretary of the General Council in Convocation Hall, Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Commissioners to the Council were joined by hundreds of visitors for the worship.

Short reminded those at the service of the words of G.K. Chesterton: "Why can angels fly? Because they take themselves so lightly." Humour was profoundly

mixed with holy ground as Short, the Very Rev. Dr. Marion Parody, past moderator, and children and young teens at Council shared in a dramatization of John 21:1-19. In the dramatization, Parody played Jesus and asked Short, who played the disciple Peter, "Peter, do you love me?" Then, as if warning Short about his new life as moderator, Parody continued the dramatization saying, "In days past, you went where you wanted—but now you will follow a different path."

In a holy ground moment of benediction, Short said, "You have just installed the Moderator of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council. This is not about me. The office of Moderator belongs to the church and the church belongs to the gospel, and the gospel belongs to God." Short

invited the assembly to look to Jesus, who had gone before them. "He is not here—He has gone on before you," he said.

The laying on of hands for the Moderator was performed by Robert Breen, QC, the Clerk of Session of Wilmot United Church, Fredericton NB, where Short is part of the ministry team, the Very Rev. Dr. Bill Phipps, the 36<sup>th</sup> moderator, and Susan Short, the new moderator's wife.

The worship sparkled with rich participation from various children, youth, and adults, and the pristine voices of the Annapolis Valley Honour Choir. It included a celebration of the sacrament of communion. The worship was led against a backdrop of pastel quilts from the Atlantic School of Theology.

During the installation of the new General Secretary, Sinclair was presented with the official seal of The United Church of Canada, a Bible, a cup of water, and the staff of office.

The new moderator was presented with a stole, gavel, a staff of office, and a talking stick

presented by Michelle Clifton, a Youth Forum delegate from Skidegate, British Columbia. Pardy passed the mantle of leadership to Short. He signed the historic Bible that bears the signatures of all previous moderators.

The Christ candle for the worship was crafted at Applewicks, a workshop for L'Arche Homefires in Wolfville, and the communion bread was made at The Flower Cart, a local workplace offering employment, training, and support to adults considered mentally handicapped.

The installation service was followed by a reception.



## A Sabbath on Restructuring

BY JIM CAIRNEY

Take a rest from restructuring—at least until the next General Council in 2006. That's what the United Church's 38<sup>th</sup> General Council decided August 16 at its meeting in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

The Council was dealing with the question of where to go next after the remit on restructuring the courts of the United Church failed. (The remit was a way of surveying all United Churches about the issue.) In its final minutes of business, the Council voted for a Sabbath (a rest period or moratorium) on General-Council-initiated formal processes regarding changing court structures.

The decision does not preclude presbyteries and Conferences initiating restructuring.

## Council Commits Church To Becoming More Accessible

BY JEFF COOK

The United Church of Canada has committed itself to “publicly turn away from ableism.”

Meeting in a decision-making commission August 13, commissioners approved a petition asking the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council to refute any practices that suggest that only those who meet set human standards of ability and wholeness or beauty are of value to the realm of God and to the whole of creation.

The decision means the church must avoid discriminating against people on the basis of physical appearance or ability and find ways to make church properties more accessible.

The petition states, “We profess that physical wholeness is not in itself a requirement for ministry within The United Church of Canada, and that the church is called to seek ways in which the ministry of each person, lay or ordered, may be enabled. We trust the church to accommodate those with physical limitations as they seek to exercise their ministry, whether lay or ordained, within the life of the church...”

“We profess that the church is called to make its services of worship and its facilities accessible to all, understanding this accessibility to include reasonable access to all places in worship, study, and reception, providing assistance devices (such as for hearing) and any other adjustments that need to be made to promote the ability of all to participate in and to lead in worship.”



## Camps and Other Concerns

BY JEFF COOK

The United Church of Canada should help relieve the financial struggles of many church camps, the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council decided August 13 in one of its decision-making commissions.

The Council agreed that the General Council Executive will:

- be asked to quickly study the financing of camping ministries
- prepare recommendations for the sustainable financing of camping ministries and take actions on those recommendations
- study ways of providing emergency relief to enable the camps to pay this year's insurance premium costs
- study ways for camps to reduce the long-term costs of insurance for their operations

During the debate, commissioners expressed concerns over rising camp costs, waiting lists of campers, and maintaining the safety of children who attend camps.

In other news, Council also decided that:

- wording in *The Manual* bylaws should be changed to ensure that people who are not members of a congregation may be a member of the church Board with the consent of presbytery

- a review of the transfer and settlement process and policies should be conducted
- ministry personnel serving a pastoral charge should be given notice of a meeting called to consider the pastoral relationship, and be given an opportunity to respond
- anyone settled in or appointed to a pastoral charge as ministry personnel is a member of the court(s) of the pastoral charge
- the United Church should develop a policy statement on cloning
- the church should engage in a study and discussion of the value of life for all people, including those with disabilities and their families. The discussion would also examine mandatory sentencing and restorative justice.
- the number of working hours per week that would define congregational accountability ministry be changed from “less than 14 hours” to “less than eight hours.”
- all streams of ministry personnel, including congregational accountable ministry, meet requirements for discernment, screening, education, and presbytery/district accountability
- General Council should develop a sabbatical policy for those in paid accountable ministry
- the title “lay preacher” should be changed to “licensed lay worship leader”
- while meetings to set up a needs assessment or a Joint Search Committee (JSC), or to hear from and act upon

the report of a JSC will still require notice being given during two preceding public worship services, the meetings may now be held “at any time after the second notice of the meeting” was given. The policy remains unchanged for meetings to accept the request for a change of pastoral relations, a request for retirement or the removal of the current ministry personnel. In such cases, the meeting may not be held any earlier than “on the day immediately following the second Sunday” on which notice was given

- dealing with the quorum requirements at courts of the pastoral charge or congregation needed to be changed to ensure consistency. *The Manual* will now state that quorum at meetings of the Session, Official Board or Church Board requires that at least one of the following be present: a member of the order of ministry settled in or appointed to the pastoral charge, the pastoral charge supervisor, a lay pastoral minister appointed to the pastoral charge or an appointee of presbytery
- membership in commissions any future General Council meetings might choose to establish should strive for a balanced representation from each Conference of order of ministry and lay people, Youth Forum and commissioners, and male and female
- write the federal Minister of Justice urging a thorough re-examination of the Steven Truscott case with a view to

restoring justice to Truscott and encourage United Church members to petition their Member of Parliament urging a re-examination of the Truscott case



## Council Digest

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BY JIM CAIRNEY

- Lay pastoral ministers-in-training, student supply, and candidate supply working in presbytery appointments are now eligible to apply for a license to administer the sacraments on a specific pastoral charge for the duration of the appointment.
- Lay presidents of Conferences can preside at the Lord’s table at Conference but not within the congregations or presbyteries/districts of their Conference.
- There are now new and clearer protocols for the functioning of retired and retained clergy on pastoral charges that they had previously served.
- A request to allow “review engagements” (an accounting designation one level down from that of a full audit) in the auditing process for congregations, rather than a more expensive full audit, was referred to the General Council Executive. (An annual financial audit for

congregations is a *Manual*-based requirement.)

- Candidates may be ordained or commissioned following the minimum of at least 24 months of active membership in a congregation of the United Church *plus* at least 12 months as an inquirer, and 12 months as a candidate.
- Despite some misuse or misapplication of the term “essential agreement”—outside its original and intended context—the church will not take time to define the term. Since 1925, candidates for ordination or commissioning are asked just prior to their ordination or commissioning if they are “in essential agreement” with *The Basis of Union*.
- A motion that would have seen the Mission & Service Fund revenue generation programs in Conferences receive two percent of the monies they raise (for M & S) come back to fund ongoing revenue-generation efforts was narrowly defeated.



## Principles for Christian Education Embraced

BY JIM CAIRNEY

**A** Christian Education Task Group Report was wholeheartedly received by the United

Church’s 38<sup>th</sup> General Council meeting August 13.

Meeting in a decision-making commission, the Council approved eight principles for faith formation and Christian education in pastoral charges or congregations.

The principles state that faith formation and Christian education invite all people of all ages and stages to:

- dynamic life-long learning
- growth in a transforming relationship with God
- active engagement with the Christian story, past and present, and the formation of new stories of “God with us”
- intentionally reflect upon God’s presence in creation and work in partnership with God to reconcile and make new
- discover and celebrate their gifts and enable people for the tasks and expression of ministry
- form community relationships that are mutual, just, holistic, and cross-generational
- engage in endeavours that are mutual, holistic, and justice seeking
- respond to an invitation for all people of all ages and stages to explore and grow in their relationship with God as revealed through Jesus Christ, with the community of faith and with the world



## Children and Young Teens at Council

BY DEREK CARLISLE

**T**hey may be the only group at the United Church’s 38<sup>th</sup> General Council that takes on the big issues, while taking time to sing about sheep.

The 27 participants in the Children and Young Teens Program at the Council meeting in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, have been avidly following the business proceedings both in their time in the meetings and in their meeting space elsewhere on the Acadia University campus.

They have also been having a lot of fun, according to Jen Muirhead, who coordinated the program. Muirhead, who attends Cole Harbour Woodside United in Nova Scotia, recruited a team of nine resource people—eight from the Halifax area and one from Bermuda—to provide leadership.

Moderator-elect the Rev. Peter Short joined the children and young teens for a question and answer session followed by a group photo shoot. The children and young teens did not hesitate to wander beyond topics officially on the Council’s agenda.

“Why is church so boring?” asked Perry Thomson from Toronto.

“Because you’re the moderator, can you change the program of the church?” inquired Miriam Fines from Montreal.

“Why don’t we have a very extensive (youth) agenda for Grades 7 and up?” wondered Erin Bartlett from Halifax.

In response to one question, Short said that although he knew a little bit about what to expect

when he starts his new job, there are bound to be surprises. "It's like someone throws you off a dock and says 'swim!'" he commented.

The recent Nova Scotia election was on the minds of some of the participants when they questioned the Moderator-elect. "Is the election of a moderator similar to the election of a premier?" asked Emily Dewolfe from Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Short assured her that it was not like having one team against the other.

Kaleigh Kingsbury from Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia, and Bartlett told Short about the group's activities during the week, including making crafts such as stained glass and putting on a play about hope.

Dewolfe said her family's hosting experience brought a great bonus: "We got billets to stay at our house and we met Audrey (Liskauskas from Owen Sound, Ontario). "We're best friends now."

Once the youth had exhausted their questions, Muirhead asked Short what would happen at his home congregation of Wilmot United now that he has a new job for the next three years. "My congregation has said go and we'll let you come back. I said 'far out.' While I'm gone, someone else will come and be a minister there," Short replied.

During the photo shoot, the children and young teens taught Short the lyrics and accompanying actions to "I Just Wanna Be a Sheep." After a guitar was produced for him, Short led the group in an impromptu singsong featuring "Inch by Inch" and "This Little Light of Mine."

Before dashing to his next destination, Short was presented with one of the official T-shirts

worn by the children and young teens. On the back of the shirts is an image of a window on the world with a scripture reading from Ephesians 1:18: "...with the eyes of our heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you."



### Guests Thank Church for its Courage

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BY JOHN ASLING

**T**he United Church of Canada was praised for its courage and encouraged to keep talking to churches and faith groups that disagree with it as interfaith, ecumenical, and overseas guests addressed commissioners on the final day of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council August 16.

"I thank you because I am so impressed by your courage," said Rabbi Dow Marmur, Rabbi Emeritus at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto. "I come from a liberal religious tradition, too, and I know how difficult it is to live in the world without being quite of the world."

Marmur, who is also a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Theology at the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, reflected on the challenge of the church: "How do you combine tradition with change? How do you give tradition a vote without giving it a veto?"

Modern societies struggle with the transformative nature of civilization, which both blesses and maims, the rabbi said. "So how does one extract the blessing without yielding too much to the pain?" He said he had learned much from the United Church this week about "not losing one's nerve" in the midst of that struggle.

Marmur said he was impressed by the influence the United Church has on Canadian society and by the fact that it is ready to exercise its influence with a measure of powerlessness, rather than with power. When the church functions this way, it can be a "corrective of politics, rather than an imitation of it," he said.

He said he was "greatly encouraged" to see the United Church in this 38<sup>th</sup> General Council at Wolfville, Nova Scotia, trying to do God's work. "You have not resisted [this work] and therefore there is hope that it will be completed."

The rabbi also stressed the value of the church continuing interfaith dialogue. "By working together, we may find our way," Marmur said.

Dr. William Harrison, Anglican co-chair of the Anglican Church of Canada/United Church of Canada Dialogue, also talked about the "great courage" of the United Church and its willingness to risk and to act in doing God's work. "I applaud you for that," he said.

"You challenge us [Anglicans] to look for God's work in the world. You challenge us to seek every opportunity to participate in that work and that challenge is something that stands there before us and that I will carry away with me."

Speaking of the Anglican Church/

United Church Dialogue, which began in February, he said it is a group that can and will work together but that there will be some difficult issues to talk about. "It isn't going to be an easy road and it hasn't been an easy road. And there are some feelings that we really have to work out and some issues that we really have to work out. We have a joint history as well as a common future. But I want to emphasize that there really are some possibilities for the kinds of things that we can do together.

"And there's a lot of evidence that we can work together faithfully for the reign of God," Harrison said.

The dialogue, which Harrison said was the chief accomplishment of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Marion Parady's term as moderator, will look at First Nations issues and sacraments in the coming months of its deliberations.

Sister Jean Goulet, Director of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, praised the younger members of Council but she admitted that the church's stand in favour of same-sex marriages "puts us on opposite sides of the street." However, she added, "Friends do disagree but let us, as friends, continue to respect and love each other in our differences."

Gerard Granado, General Secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches, praised the church for finding relevant ways of expressing its faith in the Canadian context, and for finding ways for young people to participate in that mission.

"We wish to urge you to continue in the spirit of advocacy and the spirit of daring, both of

which are evident in the ways in which you have chosen to address the critical issues facing this Council," Granado said.



## Conference Can Experiment with Alternative Structures

BY JEFF COOK

United Church Conferences have been given permission to experiment with alternative structures.

Commissioners to the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, voted to encourage Conferences that desire it to consider internal restructuring and "cross-boundary (between Conferences) restructuring measures in consultation with pastoral charges, presbyteries, and districts within their jurisdiction."

The decision asks Conferences "to be creative in their thinking as to the best way of doing ministry within their jurisdiction" and within other Conferences, explained the Rev. Dr. Jim Sinclair, General Secretary.

While Conferences already could do this, said Sinclair, the decision asks them to do it "with an intentionality and accountability which may have been assumed, but this lays it out more clearly."

Commissioners were more split over the following "be it further resolved" motion, which asked the General Council Executive to develop parameters for the

experimentation.

The parameters would address four concerns:

- appropriate and consistent governance during any such experimentation
- funding
- specific timelines for the duration of the experiment
- a process for yearly and final evaluation

The Rev. Donna Bowman-Woodall of London Conference said setting parameters "goes against the spirit of experimentation."

The Rev. Martha ter Kuile, a member of the General Council Executive, expressed concern that the Executive could not set acceptable parameters. "We give them responsibility," said ter Kuile, "and then we blame them when they fail to fulfill that responsibility."

Virginian Coleman, Executive Secretary of the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, said the Executive could "help put some helpful boundaries where there need to be boundaries" and could ensure that Conferences and presbyteries didn't "do something requiring a remit."

Toronto Conference said this section was needed to implement the decision allowing experimentation. He said the Executive was a place where the church gathered as family to discuss its actions.

Scrutineers were asked to count the vote before it was declared carried.



## The Healing Fund to Be Extended

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BY JIM CAIRNEY

The United Church's Healing Fund will continue and it will be strengthened, the church's 38<sup>th</sup> General Council decided. The fund was established in 1994 to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people dealing with residential schools.

In addition, the Council decided to launch a major fundraising campaign for the Healing Fund and to provide additional staffing to manage the Healing Fund campaign. The Rev. Allan Sinclair of the All Native Circle Conference told the Council, "There's a vital need for it to continue. There's not enough funding for all the applications." He added that the number of applications coming in "tells us that there is still a need."

To date, approximately \$2 million has been disbursed by the Healing Fund.



## Lay Administration of the Sacraments

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BY DEREK CARLISLE

The issue of lay people administering the sacraments of baptism and communion generated debate at the United Church's 38<sup>th</sup> General Council meeting August 13. Table group feedback from commissioners had shown a divide on the issue, so the Council's decision-making commission dealing with the issue

invited three panellists to provide pastoral, theological, and ecumenical considerations.

The Rev. David Giuliano described the problem faced by clergy in trying to figure out how to celebrate the sacraments in nearby pastoral charges that are without ministry personnel.

The Rev. Ellie Hummel updated commissioners on the Joint United/Anglican Dialogue, which has recently been renewed. In many locations across the country, United Church and Anglican members worship together with a clergyperson from one of the two denominations. Hummel added that sensitivity needs to be applied, particularly for Anglicans who look to a member of the ordained ministry to administer the sacraments.

Bill Harrison, the Anglican Church guest at Council, asked commissioners to give the issue some time, particularly in light of the fact that they had just received the report from the task group dealing with this issue.

Laurie Kiser of Saskatchewan Conference spoke of her interest as a lay person in taking on the privilege of doing this work in areas lacking clergy. "We have to minister together," she said. "People are hungry for the sacraments."

The Rev. Judy McCallum of the All Native Circle Conference said Aboriginal people turn to the Elders when faced with clergy shortage. "We look up to our Elders. Sure, they do not have the theology, but they are spiritual," said McCallum.

A number of Youth Forum delegates, including Matthew Lord from Hamilton Conference, spoke of the need to recognize alternate ways to work around the numerous

vacant positions.

"I have a lot of respect for ordained ministry," said Lord. "I also understand that anyone in the United Church can talk to God. I don't need an intermediary to talk to the Lord...I'm comfortable receiving the sacraments from anyone willing to share God's love."

In the end, the Council decided that the United Church will continue to study the possibility of appropriately selected, trained, and accountable lay persons presiding at the sacraments.

In addition, the Council offered two principles for the task group examining the issue to consider:

- that we have an understanding of the sacraments as being significant, holy, and not to be taken lightly
- that the sacraments are meant to be celebrated within the community of faith

The Council voted to commend the work of the task group and affirmed the task group's desire for broad consultation across the church.

The relevant petitions and the feedback and the response of the commission were referred to the General Council Executive for consideration by the task group. The Executive has been directed to bring a final report and recommendations to the next General Council.

## Statement of Regret for Deaconesses and Women Clergy

In other business, Council voted in favour of an amended motion to express sincere regret to deaconesses and ordained women clergy who once had to relinquish

their ordained ministry when they married. The Rev. Susan Eagle of London Conference spoke against the amended wording that replaced the phrase “formally apologize” with “express our sincere regrets.”

“What we’re talking about is lives altered. It’s time for us to have the guts to say we did something wrong,” said Eagle.



## Ministry-Based Ordination Education

BY DEREK CARLISLE

The 38<sup>th</sup> General Council has agreed to officially establish community-based programs for ordination in The United Church of Canada’s theological education network. The resolution passed by the Council noted that ministry-based programs already exist, with 110 graduates currently serving the church as ordained ministers. Another 25 students are currently enrolled in First Nations community-based programs.

The Rev. David Giuliano of the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario told commissioners meeting in one of the Council’s decision-making commissions that he had studied community-based programs for thesis requirements and discovered that they are instrumental in attracting women and those in vocational programs into the ministry.

Another motion approved by the Council means that those enrolled

in the ministry-based program would not have to do an internship. Some concern was expressed by commissioners from Atlantic Canada. Maritime Conference commissioner the Rev. Ivan Gregan said he felt that an internship for candidates outside their home Conference would broaden their perspective. The Rev. Paula Gale from Newfoundland and Labrador Conference echoed this sentiment.

“I am thrilled that I went to another Conference. The experience of that benefited me and will benefit the outlying remote communities where I serve,” said Gale.

The Rev. Sue Jackson from Hamilton Conference said that as a single parent, she was fortunate to have found a community ministry placement within a short drive of Emmanuel College in Toronto. Uprooting children during the school year and the lack of finances available to most students are major deterrents in applying for internships, added Jackson.

The Rev. Allan Jacques of the All Native Circle Conference pointed to a perception problem that could arise if it came to be seen that the experience of Aboriginal candidates was less worthwhile because they had not completed an internship. “The mandate we had was in a Prairie context where candidates for ministry come out of communities they know and live in,” he said.



## New Target for Beads of Hope Campaign?

BY JIM CAIRNEY

While the United Church’s 38<sup>th</sup> General Council rejected a new \$6 million annual target as an unrealistic goal for the church’s Beads of Hope campaign, it did make two requests that may see the results of the overall campaign increased. Beads of Hope is a fundraising, awareness-raising, and advocacy campaign the United Church has launched to respond to the HIV/AIDS global pandemic.

Working in one of the decision-making commissions, the Council voted to request that the federal government increase its givings towards the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In light of the success of the campaign to date, the Council also recommended that the Beads of Hope Campaign Committee seriously consider an increase in its goal.



## Questions and Answers about Commission Decisions

BY JEFF COOK

Questions about same-sex marriages and the mandate of the General Council Executive were raised August 16 during the reporting time of the decision-making commissions of the United

Church's 38<sup>th</sup> General Council.

Earlier in the Council meeting, the approximately 400 commissioners divided into three commissions, each of which made decisions on behalf of the entire Council. After those decisions were reported, commissioners were given an opportunity to submit questions to the commissions in which they had not participated.

Several questions were directed to Commission A regarding the decision "that the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council call upon the government of Canada to recognize same-sex marriage in the marriage legislation."

The Rev. Dr. Jim Sinclair responded to a question about what choices congregations could make regarding this decision. The Session of a congregation has "responsibility and accountability for the use of the building," said the Acting General Secretary, "as to just exactly what functions may take place within the building."

Sinclair reminded commissioners that the church will hear pastoral concerns for which there are no simple answers. He asked commissioners to remember that "we are people of the covenant," needing to relate to each other with respect and care.

Responding to a question about what definition of marriage the church was supporting, the Rev. Susan Tough, who chaired Commission A, responded that the church was asking that the current legal definition of marriage apply to gay and lesbian relationships as well as to heterosexual ones.

When Commission A discussed the motion regarding same-sex marriages, Tough ruled as acceptable an amendment that changed the original wording from

"same-sex unions" to "same-sex marriage." Tough said she ruled the amendment was in order (i.e. that it did not substantially change the intention of the original motion) after hearing speakers from Saskatchewan Conference, the source of the original motion. Tough said Commission A wanted to approve a resolution that was as clear as possible, and that the use of the word "marriage" seemed to clarify the intent.

Commissioners raised concerns about the role of the General Council Executive after Commission C defeated a motion to establish a new mandate for the Executive. The Rev. Michelle Slater, a member of the General Council's Project Governance Team, explained that the original motion had attempted to clarify the mandate as listed in *The Manual*, especially in response to the restructuring of the General Council Offices. "We believed we needed to get a much better grip, as an Executive, on what our role is," said Slater.

The Rev. Fred Monteith, secretary for Commission C, said the main concern raised in that commission concerned "accountability." Monteith and Laura Thomson, who chaired Commission C, also apologized to the General Council for the manner in which that commission dealt with some of its business.

Monteith said that he had advised that petitions be dealt with as petitions, not as resolutions. The consequence of following that advice was that the commissioners could not amend the petitions. Monteith said that in retrospect, that was bad advice. He apologized for the "angst, frustration, and anger" that resulted. "I am truly

sorry," he said.

Thomson also apologized, but assured the General Council that the members of Commission C had done lots of good work in a responsible manner.

The Rev. M.J. Perry, a member of Commission C, said there were "many influencing factors" in that commission, for which Monteith and Thomson should not bear total responsibility. She thanked them for recognizing the frustration being felt by some members of Commission C and ensuring there was time for table group discussions.



## Remit Not Needed to Clarify Sending Remits

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BY JIM CAIRNEY

One of the decision-making commissions of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council was asked by Peter Scott, its parliamentarian, to reconsider a decision it had made earlier in the day on August 13 asking the church to issue a remit on the classification of remits. (Some remits go to congregations only, some to presbyteries or districts only, and some go to both.)

Scott, the Executive Secretary of London Conference, said issuing a remit on classifying remits was unnecessary. While the use of remits is in the church's *Basis of Union* the classifying of remits belongs to the office of the General

Secretary, so the motion was unnecessary.

Scott said it would be a “bad precedent to send a remit when we don’t need to. If every decision goes to the church as a remit, it will drive the church crazy!”

The commission heard the wisdom of its parliamentarian, reconsidered the original motion, and defeated it.



## Responses to a Statement of Faith

BY JEFF COOK

Commissioners heard each others’ responses to discussions about a new statement of faith during the report from one of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council’s reading and reporting groups. These groups consist of several commissioners who read and reflected upon the written responses received from table groups after hearing presentations on denomination and faith shaping issues earlier in the week.

Clark Saunders reported on behalf of the “R & R Group” for the presentation on a new statement of faith (see related story from the August 12 newsletter). Among the comments received were the following:

- When relating to people of other faiths our goal is to speak to them in a way that respects their faith “yet doesn’t apologize for ours.”
- Why can anyone with no formal training preach a

sermon, but we limit who can preside at the sacraments? (This question was in response to a question of how our theology is evident in our policies and practices regarding persons ordained and licensed to administer the sacraments.)

- We need to reflect upon our understanding of resurrection and crucifixion.
- When Jesus is referred to as “our judge and our hope” the word “judge” provokes reactions. Is there another way of expressing “accountability” or of speaking of Jesus as “the standard against which our lives are judged”?
- Jesus “may not be the only way, but he is our way.”
- The concept of the Trinity is important to the Christian faith, but perhaps we need better ways of explaining the doctrine or of “playing with different images.”
- Evil needs to be seen as existing at both systemic and personal levels.

Saunders said commissioners also gave advice to the Theology and Faith Committee as it continues to develop a statement of faith. He said some commissioners believed that the process of developing a statement may be more important to the life of the church than the actual statement. Others warned the church against being “faddish.”

Some want the committee to say something about discipleship, said Saunders. Others asked that any drafts of the statement be easily accessible and widely distributed.

Saunders said some people still don’t understand the difference between a statement of faith and a creed. “Some people don’t know

the difference and are confused by it,” said Saunders, “and some are confused and don’t know it.”

All of the comments received from commissioners will be forwarded to the Theology and Faith Committee.



## Council Says “No” to Task Group on Mission

BY JEFF COOK

The United Church’s 38<sup>th</sup> General Council was given a chance to establish a task group on a vision for mission, but voted against doing so.

Commissioners were asked to mandate a task group to research existing reports that have a mission focus, consult with mission units locally and globally, consider financial strategies, and “propose a renewed and integrated vision of mission for The United Church of Canada.”

Before it was defeated, the motion prompted extended debate.

The church does not need another task group and consultation said the Rev. Andrew Jensen of London Conference. “Let us be,” he said, requesting that congregations be given time to develop their own sense of vision and mission. Another national study might “actually increase the sense of distrust” present throughout the church, Jensen added.

The Rev. Chris Miller of Toronto Conference said the church is a

“people of the book” and needs to learn what it means to be biblically mandated.

Several speakers said the General Council Executive should be doing the work of defining vision and mission.

The United Church has already articulated a vision with its “Mending the World” document, said former moderator The Very Rev. Bob Smith. Smith said the General Council Executive needs a mechanism to carry out that vision.

Speaking in favour of the motion, the Rev. Arlyce Schiebout of Montreal and Ottawa Conference said a task group was the only way the church could look at a mission and vision.

Ted Kostecki of London Conference said such a task group represented an opportunity for the church to develop a “very definite statement” about mission.

The United Church “already has a mission, but we are blind to it,” said Penny Nelson, a Youth Forum member. “We are defenders of people who don’t have a voice,” she said. “We are the ones who hang out with the other ones who aren’t accepted in society.”

The Rev. Michelle Slater of British Columbia Conference and a member of the General Council Executive said, “There is a deep yearning in our congregations which will not be met by another task group.” She said the church needs to help congregations discern God’s will for mission where they are. “If that was the direction given this General Council Executive,” she said, “I would be just delighted to take it on.”

The motion to establish a task group was presented by the reading

and reporting group that studied responses from commissioners to two presentations made earlier in the week. The presentations were on mission and its funding and on future directions following the defeat of a remit that asked for a change in the church’s current four-court structure.



## Council Thanks David Iverson

By JEFF COOK



Photo: Ian Fraser

The Rev. David Iverson has made “a major contribution to the ministry and life and work of The United Church of Canada,” The Rev. Dr. Jim Sinclair told commissioners to the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council.

Sinclair, the General Secretary, made the comments while thanking Iverson for his 12 years of service as General Council staff.

Iverson served as the Executive Secretary for Bay of Quinte Conference for four years, as the

General Secretary of the former Division of Mission in Canada, as a General Council Minister, and as the General Council Officer for the Residential Schools Steering Committee.

Iverson also made a “significant contribution to the world whose mending we share and to the life of Canada,” said Sinclair, “and to the personal spiritual growth of many of us who count Dave as a friend and colleague.”

Sinclair praised Iverson for his leadership, his commitment to walking in right relationship with First Nations people, and his passion for the United Church Foundation. He said Iverson always reminded the General Council of the importance of consulting with the congregational “grassroots” of the church.

Iverson, who is returning to congregational ministry at St. Margaret’s United Church in Kingston, Ontario, was presented with an Iroquois stone carving from the Six Nations Reserve.

Working with First Nations people, said Iverson, had reaffirmed for him that “we must learn to listen to one another.”

Iverson said he is “not getting back into the ministry,” but is “moving into a new phase” of his ministry in service of Jesus Christ. He added that the national church may expect to hear from him again as a volunteer or elected member.

Commissioners expressed their appreciation for Iverson’s service and work with a standing ovation.



## Women's Group Gets Names Change

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By JOHN ASLING

The umbrella group for women's organizations in The United Church of Canada has a new name—Women's Ministry Network—and a new acronym (WMN).

Commissioners at the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council decided to change the name from the Women of The United Church of Canada (WUCC), a name adopted just three years ago at the last Council, after receiving a recommendation August 13 from the church's Support to Local Ministries Unit.

The preamble to the unit's motion stated that "due to the rushed nature of the decision, some issues were not taken into consideration at the time" of the reorganization of nationally coordinated women's work within the church at the 37<sup>th</sup> General Council.

The preamble also states that the original name was vague. "Women's Ministry Network more accurately reflects the nature of the new entity, emphasizing the intent of the body to connect the myriad of women's groups within the church while not trying to turn all women's organizations into one large organization," it noted.

While some commissioners wondered about using the word "ministry" in the new name, Pat Beach of Bay of Quinte Conference supported the change. "We are all in ministry together," she told commissioners.

Bonnie Driver of Hamilton Conference, a former member of the National Consultation of United Church Women, supported

the name change, saying it reflected the inclusive nature of the national umbrella group.

In other Council news:

- The National Consultation of United Church Women will also get a name change and becomes the National United Church Women.
- A request to get the United Church to initiate a magazine for teenage girls was referred to the Permanent Committee—Programs for Mission and Ministry.
- A remit will be held to grant Conferences permission to experiment with alternatives to annual or biennial meetings, providing they are held at least once during a General Council cycle and prior to and in the same year as the General Council.
- The Council agreed to commit the necessary resources to actively participate with other churches and non-governmental agencies to influence the federal government to assure that 0.7% of Canada's Gross National Product goes annually for the direct relief of poverty and starvation in developing countries. It will also ask the federal government to clarify the central role of southern civil society organizations in the implementation of Canada's new overseas aid directions.



## Worship and Theme Roundup

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By JIM CAIRNEY AND DEREK CARLISLE

In the middle of a busy business agenda, commissioners at the United Church's 38<sup>th</sup> General Council meeting in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, were treated to a variety of worship services and theme presentations.

### Celtic Worship

One lasting memory for many was the Celtic worship service on the third evening of the Council. Worship service planners at this Council sought to incorporate Maritime-related elements, including the Shining Lights Choir from Halifax. At one planning meeting, someone suggested a Celtic worship and heads turned to the Rev. Ivan Gregan of Port Wallis United Church in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

"We started with trying to present something that would be unique to us, that's of us, in our culture and in our people and still in the Maritimes," said Gregan. "It's something we offer the church in terms of alternative worship."

The Rev. Robyn Brown-Hewitt from Wolfville, Nova Scotia, and Martha Martin from Halifax presided at the service along with Gregan. Bruce and Cheryl Harding and ceilidh guests Evans & Doherty provided accompanying music.

The worship service incorporated elements from what is understood to be a Celtic service, with a welcoming of Christ into the midst, singing praises and hearing God's word, offering prayers, and concluding with singing and walking out into the world. The

service is “basically a movement into and out of God’s presence,” summarized Gregan.

Feedback was very positive, according to Gregan. One of the young participants told him that the Trinity had suddenly become clear. He said people told him taking part in the worship was like entering another dimension. “I met one woman going down the corridor ahead of me and she was singing ‘For he’s here when we call him,’” he said. “Then she realized she was singing at the top of her lungs going out through the corridor. Somehow that hit her.”

#### Youth Forum Worship

While large parts of North America were powerless, the Acadia University chapel was the scene of much naturally generated energy during the August 14 evening worship service provided by Youth Forum.

Following a candlelit procession into the church, Youth Forum participants divided commissioners into four groups, one of which remained in the church for a worship service with a strong musical focus.

On one of the few starry nights at this Council, two groups rotated outside to watch a dramatic presentation of the Lazarus story and participate in a small group discussion time. The fourth station was in the basement of the church, where commissioners viewed video and art displays of activities carried out by Youth Forum participants.

The evening service came to a close with the four groups reassembling in the chapel for more signing, followed by a recessional chorus of “Amen, Amen,” with voices piping out over the moonlit Annapolis Valley sky.

#### Children and Young Teens Worship

The Children and Young Teens at Council led commissioners through a series of readings and songs at the last morning service at Council. Before the service, Coordinator Jen Muirhead was thanked by Friend in Council Ron Holotuk for spending her honeymoon at Council.

“This week we focused on windows of hope through which we were able to see hope, wait with hope, be hope, imagine hope, and live with hope,” said Muirhead. The songs were chosen by the children themselves, with backup accompaniment from Bruce and Cheryl Harding and Paul Rumbolt.

#### The Practice of Persistence

The third theme presentation featured Cape Breton native Catherine Barkhouse, who offered interpretations of the qualities of critique, lament, and vision through dance. Barkhouse, who is currently a student at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, has been dancing since the age of two.

“It is my wish that these offerings of dance will be as prayerful for you as they are for me. I am forever grateful that I am able to dance and each time I do so, it is one more chance to say thank you to God for every blessing in my life.”

#### The Practice of Resistance

Kim Uyede-Kai shared with the Council some deep and diverse reflections on the practice of resistance during one of the theme sessions. Her reflections were based around the image of bamboo.

Uyede-Kai drew on the book *When the Bamboo Bends: Christ and Culture in Japan* by Masao

Takenaka. Takenaka says of the bamboo grove that it invites a clean wind, it bends and is flexible, its roots stretch in solidarity, and a bamboo branch is hollow and empty, Uyede-Kai noted. “For Christians, Jesus is the original root of the bamboo,” she said.

Uyede-Kai, who is in the church’s Ethnic Ministries Unit, told of visiting the Seodaemun Prison History Hall in Seoul. It graphically documented the Japanese military invasion and occupation of Korea from 1910–1945, including authentic representations of torture cells with mannequins and sound effects. The display powerfully showed “the futile resistance, the violence and the torture, and the unquenchable human spirit,” said Uyede-Kai.

Her soul-searching and learning as a Japanese-Canadian were quite personal: “Am I the torturers? Yes! And I am those tortured women. And I am those stupid, laughing tourists,” said Uyede-Kai.

Referring to the recent book *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* by J.K. Rowling, Uyede-Kai said, “In the climactic scene of struggle and knowing he was about to die, Harry had unknowingly emptied himself of his arrogance, anger, and fear. And that emptiness was instantly filled with something he also couldn’t empty himself of—love, love for the one with whom Harry longed to be reunited.

“Harry Potter, fictional wizard, 15-year-old boy, non-Christian, shows us the difference between human self-emptying of pride and emotion, and Christ emptying himself to be born as a human,” said Uyede-Kai.

Christ is not empty of human thought and emotion or even of human suffering, but emptied

himself to be filled with love and a longing to be united with us, the ones he loves, said Uyede-Kai.

#### The Practice of Celebration

The theme presentations wrapped up on the final day of Council with a focus on celebrating hopeful moments in everyday life. Following a video presentation,

table groups explored moments for which they were least and most grateful. The final questions touched on the nourishment and direction that had been received from these times. Commissioners were encouraged to apply the practices of hope illustrated throughout the week in their own congregations.

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## Welcome To *General Council News*

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*General Council News* is being sent by fax, e-mail, or mail to congregations and news media that requested it, and is being distributed to General Council commissioners. It may be reproduced freely. *General Council News* reporters will be covering the highlights and significant happenings of the 38th General Council, rather than recording everything that occurs.

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