

GC38 Theme: “There is Hope”

38th General Council (2003)

The 38th meeting of the General Council calls The United Church of Canada to gather from coast to coast to coast in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. We will be concerned with policy changing and the work of policy shaping, but, there is time and need to seek direction as a church and be renewed in vision. The theme is “**There is Hope.**” The five theme presentations focus on selected practices of hope. It is our belief that as we notice, identify, and value everyday practices the gift of hope deepens in us.

For there is hope for a tree,
if it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
and that its shoots will not cease.
Though its root grows old in the earth,
and its stump dies in the ground,
yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth branches like a young plant.

Job 14: 7–9

There is Hope

Canadian theologian Douglas Hall names “despair, quiet and pervasive” as the “spiritual condition of the 21st Century.”* Scott Douglas, in his play, ELIXIR, which was commissioned for this General Council, skillfully invites us to acknowledge the causes of our despair and explore what the Theme Committee calls “cheap hope.”

The Practice of Accompanying Others

Our hope is grounded in the theological expectation that living the Shalom means a move from individualism to solidarity with others, particularly the marginalized. Our panel guests, representing a diversity of perspectives, offer their experiences of personal and corporate acts of accompanying others. They will help us learn and re-learn the “manners” needed in walking with others.

The Practice of Persistence

We note that the culture is “breathing in the toxins of hopelessness” yet the church at its best lives out of the conviction that a new creation has begun.* A prayerful interpretative dance will illustrate how hope is practised as persistence. We will hear stories of persistence and explore how the qualities of *Critique*, *Lament*, and *Vision* inform our prophetic stance in the world and help us profess hope in action.

The Practice of Resistance

Kim Uyede-Kai will help us recall our biblical memory as we examine hope as a practice of resistance. We hear stories, at images, of staying with the costly struggle while faithfully discerning a vision of God’s hope. We are “Christians in exile” and as we move down into the memory of our biblical roots, we explore what it means for the United Church to “*seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile.*” (Jeremiah 29: 7)

The Practice of Celebration

How do we celebrate hope in daily life? We are invited to pay attention to and value, both the things for which we are most grateful and also those things for which we are least grateful. We are fed as we practise hope as celebration.

United Church Reflector

Mardi Tindal will help us reflect on the information shared in word, image, story, dance, and music. She will help us integrate how the gift of hope deepens in us and in the life of our world as we practice hope in accompanying others, through our persistence and our resistance, and in celebrating hope in our daily lives and in our ministries in the church.

Take Home Resource

It is our deep desire that the work done by Commissioners at the 38th General Council will continue into meetings of every Conference, Presbytery, and Pastoral Charge extending the examination of this theme throughout the United Church. Part of our planning involved making available a video of theme highlights and a take home video guide to help us practise hope in other contexts.

Conclusion

After more than a year reflecting on hope, we know ourselves touched and transformed by hope. The word will never be the same! Most of us would admit we use the word more cautiously now. It is a powerful word. It is the gift that beckons us out of bed in the morning and it is the source of our investment in the present and the future. We look forward to further dialogue at the meeting of the 38th General Council!

38th General Council Theme Committee

- Eric Tusz-King (co-chair)
- Janice MacLean (co-chair)
- Stewart Clarke
- Shirley Cleave
- Bernadette DeMone
- Elizabeth Stevenson

*From *Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context*, Walter Brueggemann, ed., Westminster Know Press, Louisville, 2000.