

General Council NEWS

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UNITED CHURCH ADOPTS PRO-INVESTMENT STRATEGY

by Jim Cairney

The United Church's 39th General Council carefully backed away from the controversial wording of a resolution calling for a process of "selective, phased divestment" with Canadian and international companies and corporations that operate in the occupied territories of Palestine.

After a full three hours of passionate debate and numerous amendments to the original proposal, the Council—meeting in one of its three decision-making commissions on August 17—voted to adopt "a pro-investment strategy."

The pro-investment strategy will be with companies "which engage in ethically responsible business, and contribute to peace and a secure and economically viable Palestinian state alongside a secure and economically viable State of Israel."

The Council also voted to make "financial investments, as they pertain to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, only in peaceful pursuits."

The Council said that "non-peaceful pursuits" would include Canadian and international corporations and companies that

- ◆ provide products, services, or financial support to groups that engage in violence against Palestinian or Israeli persons

- ◆ provide products, services, or technology to any government or organization that refuses to recognize the legitimate rights of the State of Israel including the right to exist as a Jewish State
- ◆ provide products, services, or technology that sustain, support, or maintain the occupation
- ◆ have established facilities or operations on occupied land
- ◆ provide products, services, or financial support for the establishment, expansion, and/or maintenance of settlements on occupied land or settlement-related infrastructure
- ◆ provide finances or assist in the construction and/or maintenance of the separation barrier within occupied territories

Expressing its concerns for positive actions toward peace, the Council also voted to request that the Executive of the General Council develop the means of raising \$1 million "to support projects, initiatives, and groups of any faith working for peace in Palestine and Israel."

Former Moderator the Very Reverend Dr. Bill Phipps, said, "This sends a strong message supporting Muslim, Jewish, and Christians on the ground who are courageously working for peace."

In the debate, Jim McKibbin, of Toronto Conference, said, "It's not a question of sanctions against Israel. It's a question of boycotting the production of products in occupied territories in Palestine."

Ecumenical guest Carmencita Karagdad,

Coordinator of the Peace for Life nongovernmental organization in Quezon City, Philippines, urged the Council to “take a bold step,” and to “witness to peace and justice.”

Rabbi Edward Elkin, an interfaith guest of the Council, speaking to the original proposal involving divestment, said the proposal doesn’t recognize the complexity of the conflict in the Middle East.

“This motion imposes sanctions—punishes one side,” said Elkin, rabbi of the First Narayever Congregation in Toronto. “This motion does not recognize that there is surely blame enough to go around, surely on both sides of the conflict,” said Elkin.

“This motion does not recognize that there is responsibility on both sides to work—to take specific strong action that makes concessions towards a just and lasting peace...that we all advocate.”

Said Elkin, “I implore you not to punish, but rather to work in a positive way for a just and lasting peace.”

The Reverend Jeanette Liberty-Duns, of Saskatchewan Conference, said, “It’s our Palestinian and Jewish partners who have asked us to do this.”

Blair Odney, of British Columbia Conference, said, “It’s about the United Church speaking in one voice that the occupation is no longer acceptable.”

Phipps urged the group to address the issue “with great humility” because the conflict is “most complex” and “most layered.”



EMERGING SPIRIT

Program Will Reach Out to Public

by Derek Carlisle

Wanted: New churchgoers to our family. The United Church’s 39th General Council, meeting in Thunder Bay, Ontario, approved a new public outreach program primarily targeted at Canadians between the ages of 30 and 45.

Up to \$10.5 million, over the next three years, will be allocated from various church bequests to be decided by the Permanent Committee on Finance. Presentations on Emerging Spirit throughout the week stressed that the financing will not impact on the church’s Mission and Service Fund.

Plans in the works for Emerging Spirit include both a print advertising campaign and the development of a website to encourage non-church-affiliated people to seek out information on spirituality. A tool kit for congregations and regional training sessions are also planned.

Consideration on the motion was marred by unease over comments made about Aboriginal peoples in a presentation by the Rev. Keith Howard, Emerging Spirit’s Executive Director.

Commissioners spoke of the need to incorporate intercultural components of the church before rolling out the program.

“I believe that there is a certain amount of concern that this proposal is coming from a place of greed, that we are just looking toward the people who are going to feed us as a church,” said Hannah Mang-Wooley, a Youth Forum delegate from Alberta and Northwest Conference.

Mang-Wooley added her hope that the work around the Emerging Spirit proposal would be “truly welcoming to all people and not just the white, middle-class 30–45 year old people who will give us money.”

Jennifer Gillis, a Youth Forum delegate from Maritime Conference, was one of many voices expressing full support for Emerging Spirit.

“Although I am slightly younger than the age group this is targeting, I was so excited when I learned

about it. I was really excited that the United Church was bringing in new people from the younger age group,” said Gillis.

“When I came here and I learned about it and saw one of the advertisements, I related to it so much, I was overwhelmed.”

Robert Berkowski, a Youth Forum member from British Columbia, expressed dismay over one of the proposed ads from Emerging Spirit. “Not once did I see that they referred to Jesus, except a bobble-head Jesus. I find those ads highly offensive. Why don’t we market our milestones instead?”

The Rev. James Christie, President of the Canadian Council of Churches, questioned some of the language in the supporting documentation.

“When we speak of the ‘only’ church, it does sound triumphalist...We are ‘not alone.’ We are not the ‘only’ church that offers the kinds of things that this project suggests.”

Manuel Quintero, a guest of Council from the Reformed-Presbyterian Church in Cuba, drew on his background in communications to offer his take on the proposed marketing campaign.

“It is very difficult to translate from the marketing language to the language of religion. It is difficult to present a church or a religion as a finalized product for the target group,” said Quintero.

At one point, the Rev. Sharon Moon, of Montreal and Ottawa Conference, proposed an amendment that would have resulted in the implementation of Emerging Spirit to be overseen by an advisory group with intercultural representation.

“Even though we had a vote on an amendment previously...there were a considerable number of people in the court that were concerned...I think our concern is that it would go forward clearly hearing the concerns around justice and intercultural implications and that it truly is the face of the church,” she said.

Moon’s amendment was defeated, along with an additional one that would have added Affirm United to the proposed oversight advisory group.

HURTFUL COMMENTS

First Nations Participants Respond

by Derek Carlisle

Praying and standing together in response to hurtful remarks. Seeking comfort for words of disrespect.

Commissioners at the 39th General Council of the United Church ended August 18, their second-to-last day of proceedings, in quiet reflection following reaction to verbal remarks about Aboriginal peoples made earlier in the day during a presentation on the Emerging Spirit proposal by the Rev. Keith Howard, Emerging Spirit’s Executive Director.

Robert Pike, an Ojibway of the Henvey Inlet First Nation, placed the context of Howard’s remarks in terms of his own new understandings after dialogue throughout the week with members of the All Native Circle Conference.

“When I felt this new pain after hearing the stories from the All Native Circle, I felt as if I was punched in the gut. After hearing Keith Howard’s presentation, I felt that punch again,” said Pike, who currently lives in Toronto.

Howard was taken to task on comments that First Nations participants identified as racial slurs and stereotypes. In those remarks, Howard had called on the church to move beyond Aboriginal stereotypes. In doing so, the First Nations participants felt he reinforced them.

Members of the All Native Circle also found hurtful Howard’s questioning of who would carry on the work of specific Aboriginal Elders in the church.

“If you knew of the teachings you claim to have learned, you would know that there will always be someone there to continue the work and carry the stories of this generation into the next,” added Pike.

Four members of the All Native Circle Conference reflected on Howard’s address: Pike, the Rev. Maggie McLeod, Barrett Prettyshield, and Alberta Billy.

“Deep concerns have been expressed around comments made by Keith Howard...These remarks



serve no other purpose than to reinforce negative images of First Nations people,” said McLeod, from Hamilton Conference, when addressing commissioners.

“We, the United Church General Council, have been given a gift whereby we have leaned into one another in postures of humility that invite dialogue and deeper, more respectful relationships. Our disappointment comes in hearing reports to General Council that point out, or centre out, a Nation of people.”

McLeod said, “I pray that this moment will further our understanding together as sisters and brothers in Christ.”

“I came with these people because they need someone to speak on their behalf and I embraced them,” said Alberta Billy, from the We Wai Kai First Nation in British Columbia.

Billy called Howard’s remarks an “injustice of one and an injustice for all.”

“Whether the church decides to heal does not matter. We will continue to heal and we will always be here,” added Billy.

The day’s proceedings followed closely on the heels of reflection earlier in the week on the 20th anniversary of the apology of the United Church to First Nations peoples. At that time, Billy challenged the church to continue to act on the apology.

Moderator the Rt. Rev. Peter Short introduced Howard, who offered an apology to commissioners.

“My deep desire is that members of First Nations, as well as others, will find a place in congregations and that members of the congregations of all kinds will know and appreciate the variety of First Nations traditions,” Howard said.



THANKS TO SPOUSES

by Derek Carlisle

Spouses of United Church ministers and overseas personnel were recognized with an appreciation of thanks by the 39th General Council, meet-

ing in one of its three decision-making commissions on August 17 in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

In response to a proposal from London Conference, commissioners voted to “honour and pay tribute to those unrecognized and unpaid spouses...who have served and are serving Christ in the work of the church.”

Bruce Cook, from London Conference, outlined the genesis of the proposal.

“This came out of a real desire from one of our members whose mother and father had been overseas. In fact, he was born in China. In those days, there was no recognition of pay, or benefits. It was very clear that they are not asking for compensation. It was simply out of some of the hurt of his heart that he was hoping for some recognition for those in the same positions.”

Former Moderator the Very Rev. Robert Smith clarified that the motion was intended for both Canadian-based and overseas spouses.

“It covers all those people who were ‘two-fers,’ where the church got two for one.”

Pat Milliken, from London Conference, pointed out that spouses of overseas personnel have only recently been paid for work they perform on behalf of the church.

“We are not talking ancient history. Spouses of active overseas personnel are only recently being paid for the work that they have been doing for a number of years. So it’s only a recent change that has shifted this reality and we have many people who need to be acknowledged and thanked.”



DESIGNATION OF LAY MINISTRY

by Derek Carlisle

The designation of two streams of paid accountable lay ministers in the United Church provoked calls for clarification from commissioners gathered August 17 in one of the decision-making commissions of the 39th General Council in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

A motion put forward by the General Secretary called on delegates to continue the work initiated and carried out by the two previous General Councils. The 2000 General Council agreed to establish a category of ministry to be called designated lay ministry that would subsume the categories of lay pastoral minister and staff associate, and to recognize congregational accountable ministry as any paid accountable ministry of less than eight hours a week working in areas “of education, outreach, pastoral care, worship or service.” In 2003 the General Council enacted a remit that said the collective term for lay persons appointed by a presbytery- or presbytery/district-recognized ministry was “designated lay minister.”

The two streams, approved by the 39th General Council, are designated lay ministers, who are accountable to a presbytery and recognized by the Conference, and congregational designated ministers, who are accountable to a pastoral charge and recognized by presbytery.

The policy approved by Council also says that presbyteries shall approve all paid accountable ministry positions by either declaring a vacancy that may be filled by a member of the order of ministry or a designated lay minister or approving a congregational designated ministry position to be filled by someone appropriately qualified according to guidelines approved by the General Council Executive.

The Rev. Laura Sundberg, from Saskatchewan Conference, expressed concern that the motion asked strictly for the policy approving the two streams to be approved. “There’s nothing I can see in the proposal that says this is going to be sent someplace for the details to be worked out,” she said. “I’m concerned about doing it and then maybe we find there are all kinds of problems in the details.”

Jim Blanchard, Chair of the General Council Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services, reassured Sundberg that this motion, which eventually passed, would not be “lost in the woodwork.”

The Rev. Michael Kooiman, from Toronto Conference, echoed Sundberg’s concerns.

“A portion of work has happened, some of the details we have, some we don’t. We’re being asked to say yes to a work in progress, and then more details will be worked out later on. I think that this

sets a precedent for how the General Council does its work. I would be happier if we were presented with a proposal that had all the details in it, so we could say yes or no.”

Ed Bardock, from Alberta and Northwest Conference, raised undefined areas for congregational designated ministers. “Is there any sense that congregational designated ministry is a method by which lower pay can be given to ministry personnel?”

Bardock outlined an example where a youth worker was appointed for 7.9 hours of accountable ministry and the other 10 hours for administration.

“That way you don’t have to pay the salaries that are mandated by the presbytery,” he said. “You can pay lower salaries. Is there any move in this, when you say congregational designated ministry, that this kind of fancy work can continue?”

The Rev. Jim Lochhead, also from Alberta and Northwest Conference, echoed Bardock’s concerns.

“I think the problem remains in the hours and the question of how we treat equitably the people who are under the number of hours that we identify as the boundary line. It doesn’t make it any clearer to me how that is going to happen. I think we need to send it back for more work.”

British Columbia commissioner the Rev. Marianna Harris raised the potential of overstretched volunteers to deal with discrepancies coming forward from congregations.

“I think that what congregations in our presbytery are wanting is some flexibility in how they can employ people...I feel this will create more possibilities for conflict between congregations and presbyteries...This leaves so much up to volunteers to squeeze into the rest of their time, to work these things out with congregations.”



CALL TO PURPOSE

by Jeff Cook

The United Church's 39th General Council completed a week-long discernment process by affirming a statement entitled "Call to Purpose: A message from the church to the church." The action took place on August 19 at the end of the Council, meeting in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

The one-page document represents the report of the Message Group, eight commissioners who listened to comments and questions, read every written submission, and studied every piece of artwork produced during the Council's daily discernment times.

"Call to Purpose" does not give the church a "clear or easy path," said the Rev. Debra Bowman, Chair of the Agenda and Planning Committee.

What it does give, she said, is "an emerging clarity about how we are and who we want to be."

The statement begins by asking the question "What purpose lies at the heart of The United Church of Canada in the beginning of its third generation?"

"Call to Purpose" lists four major discernments about The United Church of Canada:

- ◆ We long for a deeper relationship with God.
- ◆ We long for deeper connections with one another.
- ◆ We acknowledge the brokenness, pain, and fear we carry.
- ◆ We believe that our spirituality and our prophetic voice spring from one source and are lived in one Body.

The Right Rev. Dr. Peter Short said the statement is "marked by humility" and "is imperfect, as we ourselves have imperfections." He described it as a "provisional call to purpose."

He said the "Call to Purpose" is an attempt "to utter a word of truth in a way no General Council has ever been asked to do so before."

While expressing appreciation for the work of the Message Group, commissioners expressed both support for and questions about the statement.

"It is very beautiful," said the Rev. Catherine Christie, from Saskatchewan Conference, "but it

doesn't talk to me about Jesus."

Cari Copeman-Haynes, from British Columbia Conference, said the four discernments listed in the statement would reflect the feelings of people in her congregation.

"These are words of truth," said Charlie Peters from Saskatchewan Conference. "They capture exactly the concepts that have been abounding in this court through the previous week," said Peters, who is a Youth Forum member. Prior to affirming the "Call to Purpose" commissioners voted to allow Youth Forum members to participate in the voting.

The Rev. Darren Liepold Nicholson, from Toronto Conference, said the statement contained "nothing about a call for justice."

He asked, "Where's the heart for God's call to justice?"

The statement was affirmed by a nearly unanimous vote. There were no votes against, and six abstaining votes.



GLOBAL, ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH GUESTS

by Rebekah Chevalier

The United Church's 39th General Council meeting in Thunder Bay, Ontario, August 13-19 has been enriched by the presence of a number of global, ecumenical, and interfaith guests from across Canada and around the world.

The presence of these partners enables the Council "to contextualize our discernment in a world that extends far beyond our own concerns as The United Church of Canada," notes Omega Bula, Executive Minister of the church's Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit.

"Their voices are critical in reminding us that 'We are not alone, we live in God's world,'" said Bula, echoing the words of "A New Creed."

The role of partners at General Council is to attend to and speak out about the implications of General Council discernment and decision making for wider faith communities around the world, for their impact in their contexts, for social and global justice, and for interchurch and interfaith relations.

The guests present include:

- ◆ the Rev. Eugenio Poma Anaguaya, Program Executive for the Indigenous Programme of the World Council of Churches
- ◆ Aisake Casimira, staff of the Pacific Conference of Churches
- ◆ Jennifer Chiwela, Executive Director of People's Action Forum and Chairperson of the Zambia National Education Coalition
- ◆ the Rev. Dr. James Christie, President of the Canadian Council of Churches
- ◆ Mary Corkery, Executive Director of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
- ◆ Rabbi Edward Elkin, rabbi of the First Narayever Congregation in Toronto
- ◆ Dionesia Ganness, a student representing the Presbyterian Church in Grenada and CANACOM (Caribbean and North American Council of Mission)
- ◆ Imam Abdul Hai Patel, Coordinator of Islamic Council of Imams-Canada
- ◆ Dr. Maggie Hodgson, Chair of the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation
- ◆ Kofi Hope, a University of Toronto student and Chair and founder of the Black Youth Coalition Against Violence
- ◆ Carmencita Karagdag, Coordinator for Peace for Life in the Philippines
- ◆ Eunice McMahon, a member of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples
- ◆ the Rev. Dr. Luis M. Melo, representing the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and Director of the Office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs for the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface
- ◆ Manuel Quintero, Director of Frontier Internship in Mission, based in Geneva, and an elder in the Reformed-Presbyterian Church in Cuba
- ◆ Bishop Nelly Ritchie of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina
- ◆ the Rev. William Somplatsky-Jarman,

Associate for Mission Responsibility Through Investment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

- ◆ Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom, a consultant with the World Council of Churches' program for Ecumenical Accompaniment for Peace in Palestine and Israel.

Some invited guests were not able to attend the Council. The Rev. Nzeba Kalombo Berthe was refused a visa to Canada by the Canadian government because of its concern that she would not return to the Democratic Republic of Congo. She is the General Secretary of the Department of Women and the Family in the Eglise du Christ au Congo.

Also absent were Palestinian guests. "It is particularly painful that as the 39th General Council addressed the issue of ethical investment for peace in Palestine and Israel, the voice of our Palestinian partners was absent," noted Wendy Gichuru, the United Church's Program Coordinator for East and Central Africa and the Middle East. "The very nature of the conflict prevented the Palestinian partners who were invited from being with us to speak to this issue."

Gichuru said, "While we are blessed with the presence of so many of our international, ecumenical, and interfaith partners at this General Council, we acknowledge the empty chairs at this figurative table."



ALL ABOUT YOUTH FORUM

Younger Generation Part of Council

by Charlie Peters

I have been quite privileged to be selected by my presbytery to be a (brace yourself; it's a long name) Youth Forum delegate to the 39th General Council of The United Church of Canada.

Whew.

Now that the name is behind us, let me explain a little bit about Youth Forum.

Youth Forum delegates are youth who have come from across the country for 10 days of worship, discussion, and discernment. During Council, Youth Forum delegates sit at table groups and have all the rights and responsibilities as commissioners except the right to vote. Youth Forum delegates are heavily involved, providing their unique wisdom and the experience of a younger generation.

In talking with other youth about Youth Forum, several things stand out as highlights: discernment, worship, and the coffee house. We've all enjoyed being involved in the discernment process. The youth voice needs to be heard and it is! Many people that I have talked to have expressed how they enjoy having youth involved in the process. I also feel that the youth can learn and be challenged by the ideas of people with more life and church experience.

Another time that has proven popular with the youth has been worship. The youth have held worship before Council began and after it was in session. On the night of August 16, the youth led vespers and invited all delegates to come. All who attended were treated to a moving worship that dealt with the church in the context of "The Sleeping Giant."

The coffee house on August 14 also stood out as an amazing and powerful experience. Youth displayed their talents to an audience of delegates and other youth who were invited. The night ended with worship, music and dancing, an event loved by the youth.

We've had some amazing opportunities at General Council. I'd like to thank everyone at General Council for treating the youth so well over the past several days.

I'd like to conclude with this quote from the Youth Forum T-shirt:

"Listen. Pause. Pray. Repeat."



Welcome To *General Council News*

General Council News is being posted daily on The United Church of Canada's website (www.united-church.ca), and sent as an e-newsletter to individuals, congregations, and news media that have requested it.

Each day printed copies of *General Council News* are also being distributed to all commissioners at their table groups. The final edition of *General Council News* will be e-mailed to commissioners once they return home.

General Council News reporters will be covering the highlights and significant happenings of the 39th General Council, rather than recording everything that happens each day. All *General Council News* stories may be reproduced freely.

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