

General Council NEWS

Thunder Bay, Ontario

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ISOLATION IN MINISTRY

by Derek Carlisle

Help is in store for ministry personnel experiencing isolation, whether geographical or emotional.

Commissioners meeting at the United Church's 39th General Council in Thunder Bay, Ontario, August 13-19 accepted the "Isolation in Ministry" report and referred it to the General Council Executive for further consideration and implementation.

"One of the broad questions had to do with this seeming like a wish list," said the Rev. David Boyd, Chair of the Isolation in Ministry Steering Group.

A list of 75 issues to address was whittled down, bearing in mind questions of cost and being faithful to congregations. Recurring themes in presentations on the report were the usage of the employee assistance program (EAP) by United Church personnel and levels of stress.

"The EAP use was twice that of other kinds of people-oriented helping professions, like nursing and social work.... Ministry personnel are in the 88th percentile with respect to stress. That means that there are only 12 percent of the population feeling more stressed than ministry personnel," said Boyd.

Commissioners also discussed a report with recommended changes on compensation matters. (See "Ministry Compensation" story.) Key among the recommendations is a proposal to institute a centralized payroll service.

Boyd said that the ultimate goal of the Isolation in Ministry report is to strengthen the pastoral covenants. "Instead of thinking of it in terms as a cost, I would invite you to think of this as an investment on the part of our national church in strengthening local covenants, so that congregations, pastoral charges, and presbyteries are all strengthened. We can then get on with the work of living the gospel and being the whole people of God."

In its last hour of business on August 19, the General Council voted to refer the proposed actions from the Isolation in Ministry report to the General Council Executive for consideration.

2006

MINISTRY COMPENSATION

by Jim Cairney

After passionate debate with various voices raising concerns about the impact on small or rural congregations, the United Church's 39th General Council decided to move cautiously on changes to ministry compensation and a centralized payroll.

The General Council, meeting in Thunder Bay, Ontario, August 13-19, voted to affirm the "theological principles of justice, fairness, equity, and the principles of sustainability and consistency"

contained in the “Ministry Compensation” report.

The proposed actions in the report were referred to the Executive of General Council for consideration and action consistent with the purposes discerned by this meeting of the General Council.

In its last hour of business on August 19, the General Council also voted to take no action on a denominationally funded salary administration system at this time “until progress is made on other proposed actions suggested by the ministry compensation report.”

“The fundamentals of the pastoral relationship are not altered by a central payroll—just the mechanics of being paid,” said the Rev. Alan Hall, a member of the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services from Toronto.

Hall, who was also Chair of the Compensation Steering Group, said a comprehensive salary, rather than the current method of having a salary and a housing allowance for ministry personnel, will not impact the eligibility for the housing deduction.

Blair Odney, of British Columbia Conference, said compensation should be based upon a stipend that allows one to be free to undertake the cares of the world.

The Rev. Danielle Ayana James, of Alberta and Northwest Conference, cautioned the Council that accounting and compensation models include the “retroactive principle.” She wondered if this might come into play given that the church has been looking at issues of compensation since 1997. She said there could be a decade’s worth of adjustments.

The Ministry Compensation report identified inequities within compensation across the church:

- ◆ Women are paid less than men.
- ◆ There is a significant spread in base salaries in all categories.
- ◆ Manses are usually the least desirable form of housing.
- ◆ Some ministers have to ask for or wait for their salary each pay period.

The report contained five key recommendations:

1. Take steps to implement a denominationally funded salary administration system.
2. Implement a centralized payroll service for all ministry personnel.

3. Provide a comprehensive salary to all ministry personnel.
4. Take steps to move to a new salary structure that includes a minimum and a maximum in each category with a greater differential in the salaries of the order of ministry, lay pastoral ministers, and staff associates.
5. Implement a vehicle to augment compensation in exceptional circumstances.



RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AGREEMENT

by Jeff Cook

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is “very significant,” the Rev. James Scott told commissioners to the United Church’s 39th General Council meeting in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Scott, the church’s General Council Officer for Residential Schools, listed four reasons for that significance:

- ◆ The agreement is historic. It represents “the largest settlement agreement in our country’s history,” Scott said. He noted it is also an “all-party agreement” between First Nations, the federal government, four denominations, and legal counsel representing former students of residential schools.
- ◆ The agreement and process leading to it were “initiated and led by Aboriginal and First Nations people,” Scott noted.
- ◆ The agreement is comprehensive “in the interests of former students,” Scott said. He said the church has grown in its awareness of the harm that residential schools did to individuals, families, communities, and Nations.

- ◆ The agreement is a challenge to the church.

Once the agreement is implemented, which Scott said could take a year, it would free the church “from litigation, court cases, and claims, so we can put our resources into healing.”

Scott said, “Healing is perhaps the longest and hardest part of our journey to reconciliation. This is the beginning of the long-term process around healing and beginning right relations.”

Alvin Dixon, a member of the church’s Residential Schools Steering Committee and a former student of a residential school, said the agreement was a “huge landmark.”

He said, “As former students, it offers us an opportunity for closure. It allows many former students to come forward to talk about our experience.”

Scott concluded the report to Council by reading the United Church’s 1998 apology to former students of residential schools, which was offered by the Very Rev. Bill Phipps.



PERSONNEL AND MINISTRY MATTERS

by Derek Carlisle

Meeting in one of three decision-making commissions in Thunder Bay, Ontario, the United Church’s 39th General Council approved a number of personnel, ministry, and administrative motions on August 17. Among them:

- ◆ amending the human resources policy to comply with legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of age
- ◆ adopting ethical standards and standards of practice for ministry personnel
- ◆ entrenching the requirement for a “vulnerable sector” police records check throughout *The Manual*

The Council also referred a number of motions to the General Council Executive for further development. These motions include

- ◆ reviewing the policy related to the use of manse and housing allowance for ministry personnel on disability
- ◆ establishing a national list of qualified and approved educational supervisors
- ◆ reviewing designation and requirements of interim ministry
- ◆ actively seeking sites for settlement
- ◆ developing a code of ethics for youth ministry
- ◆ reviewing and undertaking further study on the Learning Outcomes Framework with a view to harmonizing it with the Standards of Practice
- ◆ Reviewing the process surrounding the oversight of the conduct of ministry personnel

Some motions were also defeated or resulted in no further action. These included

- ◆ changing the retirement policy so that ministry personnel may retire with full pension if the combination of age and service equals 80
- ◆ rescinding the policy on paid sabbatical leave for ministry personnel
- ◆ including spiritual direction as part of the compensation package for ministry personnel
- ◆ implementing a plan for salary parity for persons in ministry positions in the General Council Office



FIRST COMMISSIONERS

History Looks at 1925 Council

by Derek Carlisle

The Rev. Newton Reed has a thing for commissioners. Not the current ones, though.

As the 39th General Council of the United Church winds to a close, Reed, from Uxbridge, Ontario, is casting his attention back 81 years to the first gathering of commissioners, which took place at the time of church union in 1925.

Reed has taken up the challenge of researching and writing a book on the 348 men and four women who travelled from nine provinces and the Dominion of Newfoundland to Toronto in June 1925 for the historic first General Council.

Reed's interest in early United Church meetings was sparked by his time serving as Chair of the Toronto Conference Archives and History Committee. "At my last meeting, before my tenure was up, I said 'You know, I can find a number of histories of The United Church of Canada, but I've never seen a history of a Conference.' And then five people said, 'Can you do it?'"

As he proceeded with research on Toronto Conference, Reed was struck by the consistency of minutes from one meeting to the next. Not much would change other than the location of the meeting. Church positions, such as opposition to gambling, would remain listed from meeting to meeting.

"And then I came across a remarkable lady, Annie Orchard Rutherford. She was the president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the president of the Methodist and the United Church Woman's Missionary Society, one of the founders of the Women's College Hospital in Toronto and she was elected a reserve commissioner to the General Council."

Once Reed stumbled across the name of a "reservist," he then became intrigued by who the "regular" commissioners were. Clergy dominated the representation at the first General Council with 212 versus 140 lay people. Reed reports that finding

names and details of the lay representatives poses more challenges than the clergy.

The 352 commissioners were joined by approximately 7,500 worshippers for the historic service and first business meeting, which took place on Wednesday, June 10, 1925, at the Mutual Street Arena.

A grand total of two business items were on the agenda that day following the worship service and the declaration of church union, says Reed. Agenda item number one was to admit the American Presbyterian Church of Montreal as a congregation of the United Church. The second item was to designate that the Very Rev. Dr. George Pidgeon, first Moderator of the United Church, would preside at communion.

Reed has been guided in his research by the list of General Council representatives. One stumbling block is that the majority of commissioners are listed only with their first two initials, along with their family name and address. In corresponding documentation, Reed has discovered that the initials are sometimes different.

The rationale for the number of 352 commissioners has yet to be uncovered. Reed's research can find no formula when it came to designating representation by province, city, or rural area. Nor are there any clues to date on the rationale for the numbers of commissioners from each denomination, nor from each Conference.

The four women trailblazers designated as commissioners were: Mrs. W.T. McGorman, of Port Arthur, Ontario; Mrs. Louise C. McKinney, of Claresholm, Alberta; Miss Effie A. Jamieson of Toronto; and Mrs. C. R. Crowe, of Guelph, Ontario.

McKinney is better known as one of the "Famous Five" who succeeded in having women declared as persons by the British Privy Council. Little is known of McGorman or Crowe and Reed has written to local congregations for more information.

At the start of the 39th General Council, Moderator the Rt. Rev. Dr. Peter Short told this Council's commissioners that "history was in the making." Perhaps 81 years from now, one of Reed's successors will be keen on tracking down details on lives of those gathered in Thunder Bay.

There will be at least one link to Newton Reed. His son, Paul, has been serving as a commissioner from Bay of Quinte Conference.

To assist Reed with background information on any 1925 commissioners, please contact him in care of: Newton.reed@sympatico.ca. He expects to publish his book in early 2007.



CLOSING WORSHIP

Joy and Tears as Moderator Installed

by Jeff Cook

Joy and tears were present both in words and actions during the closing worship service of the United Church's 39th General Council in Thunder Bay, Ontario, on August 19.

During the service the Rev. David Giuliano was installed as Moderator, receiving the symbols of office: a stole, gavel, staff, and talking stick. Giuliano added his signature to a Bible that has been signed by every previous Moderator.

The congregation of approximately 750 people also covenanted with Nora Sanders as General Secretary-Designate. Sanders will be formally installed by the General Council Executive at a later date.

"It's good to be here, right here where I am," Giuliano said. He said he was thinking of his son, Jeremiah, who was celebrating his 19th birthday that day. "He's at home. We're here. I hope it goes okay," Giuliano said with a smile.

He said he remembered the first day his son went to school and "how afraid he was beginning

this new frightening adventure." Giuliano found a really beautiful stone and told his son to put the stone in his pocket, and to reach for it whenever he felt worried.

"When you feel that stone it will remind you that God is with you, and that we love you," he recalled.

Giuliano said he felt that he needed a stone like the ones the Israelites carried across the river into the Promised Land, stones that reminded them of God's presence and their own identity.

Giuliano said he would be taking two "stones" away from the 39th General Council. One stone would represent the joy and energy of the youth. He said the coffee house hosted by Youth Forum during the Council provided "glimpses of what future models of the church might look like." He said that future church would be "committed to be joyful and committed to justice and transformation in the world."

When he met with Youth Forum, some of the members shared a vision of living in common houses together, Giuliano said. "We've built senior housing units," he said. "I wonder if we could build housing young people could live in."

He praised the young people "who are ready to live out that radical faith."

The second stone is harder to carry, Giuliano said. "It brings tears of sorrow."

On the 20th anniversary of the United Church's apology to First Nations peoples, the second stone would remind the church that "we're far, far from the reconciliation we hope could be," Giuliano said.

He referred to the gospel story of Thomas who refused to believe in the resurrection until he could touch Jesus' wounds. "What Thomas has a hard time believing," Giuliano said, "is that the wounds are part of the resurrected body of Christ.

"The path between hurt and reconciliation is a long one," he said. He recalled that on his drive to Thunder Bay he saw an eagle and a vulture flying in the sky together. He said the sight reminded him of the "high place of beauty and joy" in life, and of "that deeper place of struggle and hardship."

Everything in between that height and depth "makes us whole," he said.

Giuliano asked commissioners to think about the stones they carry and to remember that when

all else is silent, the “stones will shout, ‘Praise God!’”

The Children and Young Teens at Council had led the gathering in a Call to Worship based on Luke 19:39-40, the passage in which Jesus tells the Pharisees that the stones will cry out even if his disciples are silenced. The call included clapping and singing “Jesus, Jesus, Rocks Us!” The children and young teens participated throughout the service, offering readings and prayers.

Youth Forum sang as an anthem a song written especially for the 39th General Council by one of the Youth Forum leaders, Christopher Giffen, who is a youth minister for Red Deer Presbytery.

Throughout the service, musical leadership was provided by the More Voices Team and Friends. Their singing was accompanied by a variety of musical instruments, including drums, guitars, accordion, and djembe drums.

Some of the congregation formed a conga line, dancing down the centre aisle during the closing hymn, “Go Make a Difference.”

Giuliano was joined on stage for the commissioning by his wife, Pearl, and several members of the St. John’s Pastoral Charge in Marathon, Ontario, where he has served since his ordination in 1987. He asked the congregation to help them in singing a refrain used in weekly worship at St. John’s.

“It’s going to be hard for us to be apart,” he said. With hands joined, they led the congregation in singing of God’s promise that they were “standing on the threshold of a brand new day.”



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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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