

GA BRIEFING

139th GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 2013

Live streaming for General Assembly is available at www.presbyterian.ca/ga139

ASSEMBLY COUNCIL • LIFE & MISSION • E.H. JOHNSON AWARD • ECUMENICAL VISITORS



Day 2 of the 139th General Assembly began with stirring worship led by Vaughan Community Church. The Rev. Peter Han reflected on the history of Canadian missionaries to Korea. “My fellow Presbyterians, we have this legacy because men and

women went as people, sent by Lord Jesus, to make disciples in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... We are still called by the incredible, powerful, loving God to bring renewal to our community here in Canada.”

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ASSEMBLY COUNCIL REPORT

Assembly Council meets twice a year between General Assemblies. Recent meetings have focused on financial issues, including the 2014 budget and adjustments to the pension plan.

Presbyterians Sharing Formula Adjustment

The proposed changes to the *Presbyterians Sharing* formula brought several people to the microphone, including a Young Adult Representative who supported the recommendation. While an amendment to the recommendation was put forward, the original proposal that the expected allocation for *Presbyterians Sharing* be 10% of a congregation's dollar base (noting that congregations able to give at higher than 10% of dollar base are encouraged to continue to do so) was carried. The change to the *Presbyterian Sharing* formula will begin in 2014.

Biennial Assemblies

There was lengthy discussion regarding a recommendation that a proposal regarding biennial Assemblies be approved in principle and circulated to the committees and courts of the church for study and report by January 31, 2014. Several spoke against the motion, while others acknowledged that the time has come to make changes for the benefit of our congregations and to be good stewards.

"Financial constraints are not a sufficient reason to make this change," said one commissioner. "I speak against this motion."

"We need more opportunities for people to be excited about what we're doing, not less," said another.

"I think it's a question of priorities," said one commissioner. "We all love Assemblies. We're glad to be



here and we respect the church. . . [But] do we want our staff to be spending time on mission or putting together Assemblies?"

It was clear by the discussion that many people appreciate and enjoy their experiences at General Assembly, however, some commissioners spoke to the realities of financial and resource constraints, and environmental concerns.

An amendment was made that revised the original recommendation to say that the proposal regarding biennial Assemblies be circulated to the committees and courts of the church for study and report by January 31, 2014. This was adopted.

2015 General Assembly

The Assembly adopted the recommendation that the 2015 General Assembly be held within the bounds of the Presbytery of Vancouver Island. This will be the first time the Assembly has met on Vancouver Island.

"Biennial assemblies - 3 years ago it was impossible. Today it is presented as almost inevitable. what has changed? #ga139." Tweet from Scott McAndless

MODERATOR OF THE 138TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Reflecting on his time as Moderator over the past year, The Rev. Dr. John Vissers spoke passionately of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission national events in Saskatoon and Montreal, where he presented gestures of reconciliation. “This is important work for us to continue if we are truly going to be a church that bears witness to Christ in the 21st century,” he said.

Dr. Vissers noted Canada Youth 2012 “was a wonderful moment, a wonderful week” and he challenged the church that every congregation should either send or support a youth to CY 2014. Learn more about CY at <http://presbyterian.ca/cy>

Of his visits to Ghana and Malawi, he said, “It was an inspiring time. One cannot help but be impressed by the vibrancy of our partner churches.” He called for us to learn from them.

As we look to our church’s future, Dr. Vissers pointed out that churches of all denominations in our society are struggling. “I learned that, despite our struggles, God is still at work among us as Canadian Presbyterians. I visited congregations, large and small,

that are thriving. Congregations characterized by a culture of discipleship. Congregations engaged in mission. Congregations connected to their communities. Such congregations, as I learned, have many things in common, but one of them is surely this: they know it’s not about them. It’s not about institutional survival. It is about bearing witness to Jesus Christ.”



LIFE AND MISSION AGENCY

Justice Ministries

The Healing and Reconciliation Program section of the Justice Ministries report describes local initiatives and national Native Ministries projects, presentations, and workshops, and summarizes participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The report noted that 2014 marks the 20th anniversary of the churches’ Confession to God and Aboriginal people for its role in the residential schools system. Two recommendations passed that encourage Presbyterians to commemorate the anniversary of the PCC’s confession in worship, events and activities over the next year, and that time be set aside at the 140th General Assembly to commemorate the Confession.

David Phillips, animator for the Healing and Reconciliation program, highlighted the 20th anniversary of the 1994 Confession. “Today we are not looking back but rather to the future . . . Life is needed in any confession, if not, it is just to become another piece of paper,” stated Mr. Phillips. In this spirit, commissioners were to join in table groups to discuss what actions Presbyterians might take to give life to the Confession. These ideas were recorded and will be made available on the church’s website.

Two recommendations were also passed that request the Moderator of the 139th General Assembly to write to the Minister of Health asking for information on details of current federal oversight of labs which

provide “direct-to-consumer” genetic tests, as well as write to the ministers of Justice and Health inquiring how Canada’s laws ensure the genetic privacy of Canadians and whether additional legal safeguards are being considered.

Planned Giving

The Rev. Dr. Herb Gale, Associate Secretary of Planned Giving, highlighted the powerful contributions of Presbyterians who have left legacies through planned gifts. He highlighted the contributions of people such as Dr. James Naismith, a graduate of Presbyterian College in Montreal and the inventor of basketball, as well as Isabella Walton, a woman who started a Sunday School in her farmhouse kitchen for her church in Scarborough that quickly grew and helped form Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Additional stories can be found at
<http://presbyterian.ca/stories-of-giving>

Presbyterian World Service & Development

Dr. Marilyn Scott, PWS&D committee convener, gave the report and showed a short video on PWS&D’s work around the world. In 2012, Presbyterians donated \$2.6 million dollars that supported 74 projects in 26 countries. Dr. Scott noted that the PWS&D report includes stories from partners about the transformative impact these projects have on the communities they serve.

A question about the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funding was brought forward and Dr. Scott explained that, despite the changes with the agency, current CIDA-funded programs will be maintained or respected.

PWS&D director Ken Kim spoke to the dire situation in Syria and the need for humanitarian assistance. He spoke to PWS&D’s response in the region and asked for prayerful and financial support from commissioners.



Stewardship

Helen Smith, convener of the Life and Mission Agency, noted that a Stewards by Design conference recently finished. “Stewards by Design is a great way to equip congregations,” said Ms. Smith who recommended that congregations who haven’t been before apply to the next one. She highlighted the mission opportunities for youth, congregations and individuals through the PCC mission trips and Youth in Mission. This department is also always busy promoting *Presbyterians Sharing* and Ms. Smith encouraged commissioners to let their congregations know “that this is good, solid ministry with The Presbyterian Church in Canada.”

Planned Giving: Outlive yourself. I like it! #ga139
Tweet from John A. Giurin

ECUMENICAL VISITOR



Rev. Christopher Williams from the Guyana Presbyterian Church, accompanied by his wife Saveta, presented to the Assembly. Rev. Williams highlighted how financial and personnel support from the PCC has helped the Presbyterian Church of Guyana develop and train leaders for congregational ministry and support the construction of a camp site to allow youth to attend camp. Rev. Williams mentioned that they are blessed with many children and youth in their churches, however resources to help them mature in their faith are an ongoing need.

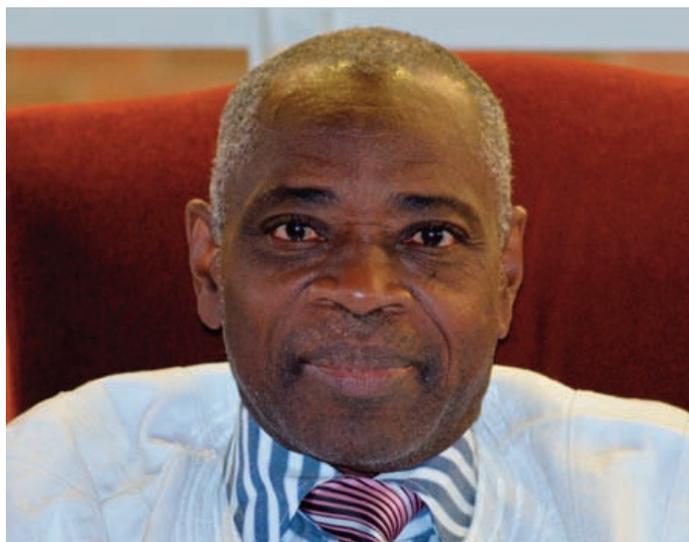
“I thank you for this privilege of addressing the General Assembly and for the long years of our partnership in the gospel.”

E.H. JOHNSON AWARD LUNCHEON

The Rev. Duncan Jeffrey, convener of the Dr. E. H. Johnson Memorial Fund Committee, gave the opening welcome and informed attendees that The Rev. Dr. Abraham Berinyuu, receiver of this year’s award, was unable to remain in Canada due to medical reasons and had returned home to his family in Tamale, Ghana.

The Rev. Dr. Rick Fee, who gave an overview of Dr. Berinyuu’s life and work, described Dr. Berinyuu as having exuberance for life and an ability to overcome obstacles. After contracting polio as a young man, Dr. Berinyuu rose above the challenges before him and became one of the founders of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network of the World Council of Churches and the founder of the Centre for Peace and Sustainable Democratic Culture in Tamale, Ghana.

While Dr. Berinyuu was in Canada, he met with the Consul General of the Republic of Ghana, Mr. Kodjo Mawutor. Mr. Mawutor, a member of the Ghanaian Presbyterian Church in Toronto, read Dr. Berinyuu’s keynote address for the luncheon. Dr. Berinyuu’s



prepared speech spoke of stigma and myth around polio and issues of disability in his hometown. He spoke of work to address ethnic and religious divisions in northern Ghana.

“Only when there is full disclosure to self and others, and full acceptance of self and other, as the creatures of God’s making, can true reconciliation begin.”

The Rev. Bob Farris gave some concluding words of appreciation. “We pray for God’s continued grace and mercy for Abraham.”

Read more about Dr. Berinyuu at
<http://presbyterian.ca/ehjohnson/>

INTERFAITH VISITOR

Pandit Roopnauth Sharma, the founder and spiritual leader of Ram Mandir Hindu temple in Mississauga, spoke to the Assembly of his work with projects that deal with family issues, poverty, youth violence and low-income housing. His philosophy is “service to others first, then the self.” As the temple’s spiritual leader, Mr. Sharma cares for 500 families. He noted the temple serves as a community hub and is open seven days per week, 15 hours per day.

Mr. Sharma is the first Hindu to make a presentation to the General Assembly. He spoke of maintaining his culture within a Canadian context and outlined some of the key principals of the Hindu lifestyle such as self-discipline, non-violence, integrity in out God’s message, acknowledging the presence of God in the world, and prayer. He reflected on the diversity of religions, culture and histories of Canadians. He spoke about the joys and challenges of adapting to Canadian life, including the need to counter misinformation and a need for greater cultural sensitivity.



COMMITTEE ON HISTORY

The Rev. Thomas Hamilton, convener, spoke briefly about the recommendations that were passed by consent. These included recognizing the 2013 winners of the history prizes, that the courts of the church actively promote the Sola Gratia Reformation Anniversary Project for November 3, that presbyteries and sessions be invited to submit suggestions to assist the sub-committee in its study of a symbol and motto for the denomination, and that congregations be encouraged to celebrate Heritage Sunday on February 16, 2014.

Recently retired clergy and church workers were formally acknowledged to the Assembly by reading out their names.

In recognition of the value of the National Presbyterian Museum and to help secure its ongoing existence as a

unique institution within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, permission was granted for the Museum Advisory Committee to circulate a request in the fall of 2013 asking each church to consider including a \$50 donation to the museum as part of their 2014 budget.



View more photos from GA 139 on the Presbyterian Record website
presbyterianrecord.com

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

The International Affairs Committee report generated much discussion and debate. The Assembly first examined a response to an overture regarding economic advocacy and the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The Rev. Dawn Griffiths, committee convener, began by affirming the church's unequivocal position supporting Israel's right to exist as well as an independent Palestinian state, and the church's opposition to a general boycott or sanctions against Israel. She stated that the context of the report was a consideration of the Jewish settlements in Palestinian Territories, which are illegal under international law.

Some commissioners expressed concern that the report and its recommendations would be considered anti-

Semitic. Other commissioners spoke about a need for justice for Palestinians living under very difficult conditions. One commissioner spoke about the church's mission to “promote peace with justice wherever we are in the world, and that's messy business,” acknowledging the complex nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

All recommendations were adopted, including an additional motion to have the International Affairs Committee compile a summary of previous Assembly decisions regarding the right of Israel to exist within secure borders—and of actions implementing those decisions—and report to the 140th General Assembly, and publish this information in church publications, as appropriate.

“Church discussions on Israel/Palestine again. Prayer for sensible thinking. #ga139” Tweet from Mark Godin



