

ASSEMBLY COUNCIL

Interim Report No. 2, August 2020

Since the first interim report, prepared in June 2020, the Assembly Council met on July 2, July 28 and August 25 by video conference. These shorter, more frequent meetings, have allowed the Council to move forward with the business previously planned for the March 2020 in person meeting (that was cancelled due to COVID-19), to respond to emerging items, and monitor regularly the response of the church to these extraordinary times. This second interim report presents the decisions arrived at in our most recent three meetings. Additional interim reports will come as the Assembly Council continues to meet in the coming months.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

2021 BUDGET

As reported in the first interim report, given the uncertain financial situation due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the Assembly Council provisionally approved the 2021 budget and asked the Finance Committee to monitor the situation and bring a revised budget to the November 2020 meeting of the Assembly Council. The finances of the church are being carefully monitored by both the Management Team and the Finance Committee. Work is underway on revisions to the 2021 budget.

Funding request for Rainbow Communion follow up (Listening Committee)

Following the visit of the co-conveners of the Rainbow Communion to the November 2019 meeting of the Assembly Council, the Council asked the Management Team and the Finance Committee to make a proposal regarding possible funding in anticipation of recommendations they may bring to the 2020 Assembly, with financial implications.

At the November meeting, the co-conveners suggested that up to \$200,000 per year would be required for five years to facilitate their hope that staff, program and counselling be available to assist in redressing harms done in the past.

The Assembly Council, in August 2020, approved a fund transfer of between \$50,000 and \$70,000 per year (reviewed each year) for up to four years starting in 2021 from undesignated bequests and the Presbyterians Sharing Legacy Fund, as required. This funding, in addition to anticipating work related to the final report of the committee, will also enable the Life and Mission Agency to begin work on some of the recommendations from the Rainbow Communion that have already been approved by the Assembly. For example, the church has been asked to learn more about homophobia and transphobia. This will enable educational materials to be prepared and resourcing to be offered to interested congregations. In addition to this, the residual undesignated bequests for 2018 of about \$40,000 were designated to this work.

Program and Staffing

The Life and Mission Agency was pleased to announce that Ms. Carragh Erhardt was engaged as the Program Coordinator, Sexuality and Inclusion on a contract to follow up on the work. Ongoing needs will be assessed at the conclusion of this contract.

In addition to the need for staffing and program support, the Rainbow Communion expects there will be a need for counselling for those who have experienced harm through and by the church. While the exact amount needed cannot be known, the Rainbow Communion estimates the need to be as high as \$100,000 per year for five years.

Currently the benevolence funds of the church have balances that could facilitate up to this amount and the Assembly Council, in consultation with the Benevolence Committee, has authorized the use of available benevolent funds for this use, again, with an annual review in place.

OVERTURES AND OTHER REFERRALS TO ASSEMBLY COUNCIL

Power to issue regarding applications through the Committee on Education and Reception

One of the consequences of cancellation of the 2020 General Assembly is that recommendations related to candidates entering the ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada from other denominations were not able to be considered. To enable both congregations and candidates to move forward in the process, the Assembly Council authorized the

Life and Mission Agency Committee to approve the necessary and time sensitive recommendations of the Committee on Education and Reception, with any actions to be homologated by the next General Assembly.

ADDITIONAL MOTION (A&P 2019, p. 53) AND OVERTURE NO. 2, 2020 (see Unreferred Overtures – 2020, p. 1)
Re: General Assembly worship guidelines

Worship at the General Assembly is a shared responsibility between the General Assembly Office, local presbytery members and, since 2016, a General Assembly Design Team appointed by the Assembly Council. Members of the Design Team are appointed from across the country and represent a variety of experiences, approaches to worship and theological perspectives. Working cooperatively with the General Assembly office staff, they seek to provide exactly the kind of worship requested in the overture.

Upon receipt of the Additional Motion and the Overture, the Assembly Council asked the Design Team to prepare a response for consideration and also lead a review by the Assembly Council of worship at the General Assembly.

In preparing this response, the Design Team carefully reviewed the feedback forms from the General Assembly and, in particular, the sections dealing with worship. While a strong majority of commissioners indicated appreciation for the worship at the General Assembly, there were some who felt that the worship was somehow slanted toward encouraging 'inclusion' in a year when the Assembly was seeking carefully to discern a direction on that very subject. The Design Team did not plan worship in a way that was intended to show any bias related to controversial topics being discussed at the Assembly but understands that the concerns were real.

During the three-year cycle of holding the Assembly in one location, the Design Team used the three points of the strategic plan for arranging worship and developing the theme. Each theological thematic was associated with one of the members of the Trinity in each year so that the theme and the worship that grew from the theme lifted up the Trinity during the 3-year cycle:

- 2018: Relational Experiences – (Jesus) With Glad and Generous Hearts, based upon Acts 2:46
- 2019: Empowering Others – (Holy Spirit) Receive the Holy Spirit, based upon John 20:22
- 2020: Visionary Leadership – (God) Do not fear, I am with you, based upon Isaiah 43:5 (In view of the cancelling of the 2020 General Assembly, this will now be the theme for 2021.)

In planning for the past two Assemblies, the General Assembly Design Team worked to create worship which would glorify God through all its elements. The Design Team used several guiding principles in their planning of worship. The team made a decision to begin and end each sederunt with worship, so that the business of the General Assembly was "bracketed" by the praise of the Lord. An effort was made to have worship leaders who would represent some of the diversity across the denomination. In a similar manner to the practice of local arrangements committees in the past, the team brainstormed potential preachers, starting with an initial long list of strong preachers who represent the breadth of the church that was then narrowed down to a short list. The team invited the preachers many months before the General Assembly and provided them with the scripture text and theme for worship. The team made no suggestions regarding the content of the sermon and nor gave any direction about addressing topics before the Assembly. At the Assembly, a variety of commissioners were asked to participate in reading the liturgy during worship. (One challenge that the Design Team faced was that one of the preachers had to decline for personal reasons shortly before the General Assembly.) Preparing for worship, the musicians carefully chose a variety of music, traditional and new, with the goals that commissioners might both sing some old favourites and learn some new songs they might share with their congregations when they returned home.

At the November Assembly Council meeting, members were invited to discuss the General Assembly worship and provided feedback to the team.

The Design Team opted to shift the approach for worship at the 2020 General Assembly, seeking, as in past years, to create worship that would lead the Assembly in praise, prayer, word and song that would glorify God.

Seeking to draw from the rich and creative resources of the Reformed Tradition, the team invited the Rev. Dr. Richard Topping, Principal of Vancouver School of Theology and Professor of Studies in the Reformed Tradition, to be the Assembly preacher throughout the week. This gives the opportunity for the Assembly and Richard to engage deeply in scripture as the worship unfolds through the week. The team was also pleased that the Rev. Glen Soderholm, minister of Two Rivers in Guelph and the Rev. Janet Ryu-Chan, minister of Morningside High Park, Toronto, accepted the invitation to be Assembly music leader and liturgist respectively. Along with two members of the Design Team,

this worship group will work together, enlisting the help of others, to provide what we believe will be thoughtful and meaningful worship, lifting up God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

With the cancellation of the 2020 General Assembly each of the worship leaders was contacted about their willingness to postpone their participation to the next Assembly, and all agreed. The Design Team will revisit the plan for the next General Assembly in order to make sure that these worship principles are used in whatever circumstances the Assembly is able to meet. Since the timing for lifting the pandemic restrictions on meetings is not currently known, the Design Team will also be meeting to assist the Assembly Council with plans for the next Assembly, whatever form it needs to take.

The Assembly Council, through its General Assembly Design Team, will continue to take commissioner feedback seriously each year as it shapes the Assembly worship in the future.

Recommendation No. 7 (will be presented in final report to the General Assembly)

OTHER ASSEMBLY COUNCIL MATTERS

National Indigenous Ministries Council – Terms of Reference to become a Standing Committee

The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1994 offered Our Confession to God and to Indigenous Peoples regarding the legacy of Residential Schools. In 2019, on the 25th anniversary, this Confession was reaffirmed and the Doctrine of Discovery, along with colonial attitudes that to this day lead to injustices for Indigenous Peoples, was repudiated.

The establishment of this Council as a standing committee of the General Assembly is one way that The Presbyterian Church in Canada seeks to continue to live out Our Confession. In doing so, we will listen to the voices of Indigenous Peoples in our church and take steps toward self-determination related to Indigenous ministries.

The church is reminded that it still has much to do on the journey of healing and reconciliation. May the Creator bless us as we continue this ministry together.

The church further acknowledges that the ministries of our church take place on the traditional territories of many Indigenous Peoples, who have been, and continue to be, stewards of Turtle Island. We are all treaty people and pray that the land and the treaties will be honoured in spirit and in law, and that the rights of Indigenous Peoples will be upheld.

Accountability

Grounded in self-determination and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the National Indigenous Ministries Council focuses on Indigenous Peoples, strengthening relationships with the church, promoting Indigenous ministries and Indigenous justice. As a Council, this body is accountable to Indigenous Peoples within the church and shall be guided by the wisdom of their elders, and as a standing committee, this body is accountable to the General Assembly and will report to it annually.

Responsibilities

1. To speak prophetically by bringing issues of importance related to Indigenous Peoples and ministries to the church's attention.
2. To identify, enable and support Indigenous individuals for ministry within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.
3. To direct funds for ministries with Indigenous Peoples generated by:
 1. grants from Canadian Ministries: the Council will make recommendations through the Associate Secretary, Canadian Ministries,
 2. \$200,000 annual amount from the General Assembly operating budget (A&P 2019, p. 34) see below the funding policy on their use as determined by the National Indigenous Ministries Council (June 2019),
 3. amounts generated from the Indigenous Ministries Fund (determined solely by the Council).

4. To encourage the church to support Indigenous ministries by:
 - working in cooperation with the presbyteries, encouraging them to actively support local Indigenous ministries.
 - working with other General Assembly committees, colleges and the courts of the church to continue developing relationships with Indigenous People.
 - challenging/encouraging Presbyterians (individuals, congregations and church courts) to take initiative to support Indigenous ministries.
5. To guide the various Indigenous ministries within the church by:
 - supporting current ministries,
 - planning for new initiatives/ministries,
 - ensuring staff in each ministry are educated, oriented and sensitive to Indigenous cultures, spiritualities and languages, and are aware of the effects of inter-generational trauma and colonialism,
 - encouraging each ministry to have at least one Indigenous staff member.
6. To work with the church to promote respect and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples.
7. To assist, encourage and challenge the church to live out healing and reconciliation through such means as responding to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the Calls for Justice from the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
8. To encourage Presbyterians to acknowledge, understand and appreciate Indigenous spirituality.

Membership

Members will be Indigenous People when possible. The membership will consist of:

- One representative from each of the Indigenous ministries and Directors or Ministers from each of the Indigenous ministries.
- Two representatives from the church at large who have a working knowledge of Indigenous culture, rights and spiritualities and with a preference for Indigenous People, appointed through the Committee to Nominate Standing Committees for up to two three-year terms.

The Council may appoint resource people to assist with its work.

Decision making

In order to respect Indigenous tradition, all decisions made by the Council will normally be by consensus.

Executive Committee

The Council may elect an Executive from among its membership consisting of four Indigenous members who may each serve two three-year terms and (serving as support) the Associate Secretary for Justice Ministries. The convener will be named by the Executive.

Funding Policy

1. The Council will meet at least once per year with the Associate Secretary for Canadian Ministries in order to discuss and make recommendations regarding Life and Mission Agency grants related to Indigenous Ministries.
2. The guidelines for the disbursement of \$200,000 from the General Assembly operating budget, as agreed by the National Indigenous Ministries Council prior to the establishment as a standing committee:

The grant will be divided equally among the Indigenous ministries (of which there are currently eight with Place of Hope and Winnipeg Inner City Mission counting as one)

- each ministry will decide how to use their allocated amount
- each ministry will report to the National Indigenous Ministries Council on how the funds are used; the National Indigenous Ministries Council shall in turn report to General Assembly

- National Indigenous Ministries Council will share the stories of the ministries with the wider church.
3. Funds generated and amount generated from the Indigenous Ministries Fund are similarly apportioned as above in point 2.
 4. Funds from both the General Assembly operation budget and the Indigenous Ministries Fund may be apportioned from time to time as decided by the National Indigenous Ministries Council.

Working Group

The members of the working group were: Ms. Yvonne Bearbull (representative of the NIMC), the Rev. Mary Fontaine, the Rev. Germaine Lovelace, the Rev. Margaret Mullin, the Rev. Linda Patton Cowie and Ms. Carol Stymiest (convener) and staff support of Dr. Allyson Carr, Ms. Terrie-Lee Hamilton and the Rev. Stephen Kendall.

National Office Property Committee

Terms of reference for a National Office Property Committee were approved that establishes a skills-based group to assist the Management Team and the Assembly Council deal both with the possible sale or lease of the current 50 Wynford national office site and a possible move of the national office to 300 Bloor Street West. Regarding the latter, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was approved that commits the Assembly Council to work toward the terms of a lease but does not bind the church until a lease is confirmed. In advance of approving the MOU, both the committee and the Assembly Council considered the implications of COVID-19 on office space and office needs into the future. The 300 Bloor Street West development, which is led by Bloor Street United Church, is on the site of what was a Presbyterian Church in Canada property prior to union in 1925. The current vision is that the national offices of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Anglican Church in Canada and the United Church in Canada would share the office property and various services while maintaining independent spaces, work and identities. In addition to anticipating considerable financial benefit, being able to work in certain areas more closely with ecumenical colleagues would be advantageous. The project is scheduled for completion not before 2024.

The National Office Property Committee is currently made up of Mr. Len Chapman, Mr. Thomas Guillot, Mr. Peter Kinch, the Rev. Bethany McCaffrey, the Rev. Dr. Bob Smith, Ms. Cindy Stephenson (convener), with the support of the Management Team.

Minimum Stipend for 2021 – 0% increase

In 2005, the General Assembly agreed that the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) would be applied to the entire grid of minimum stipends and increments and not simply to the level of the fourth increment, as had been the practice prior to 2006. In 2007, a recommendation was adopted by the Assembly as follows: “that the twelve-month average CPI as determined by Statistics Canada be used to determine COLA each year; the period to be used will be the 12 month average running from June to May”. (A&P 2007, p. 213, 18) In view of the financial stress being felt both by congregations and the denomination, the Assembly Council approved a 0% increase in the minimum stipend grid for 2021. This will apply also to all staff at the national office. Congregations and presbyteries are free to consider adjustments to the stipends and allowances.

Sandra Cameron Evans
Convener

Stephen Kendall
Secretary