

Imagining the Kingdom

General Assembly 2015

*... the Kingdom
of God
is like...*



GA
BRIEFING June 7&8, 2015

The 141st General Assembly continued on Sunday morning with worship by A Balm in Gilead Band from Victoria, BC, led by Steve Sturgess of Knox, Victoria. The Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls, from Vancouver School of Theology, reflected the question Israel faced when they returned from exile, "How then shall we live?"

On Monday, the Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart, from Vancouver School of Theology, helped lead worship with representatives from the worship band from Coquitlam Presbyterian Church. The Rev. Martin Baxter, minister at St. Andrew's and St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church in North Vancouver, shared a sermon looking at, "Where we go from here?"

On Sunday, worship continued as commissioners gathered in prayer circles as a way of continuing to listen to and discern with one another. One-sentence prayers

summarizing the conversations were posted around the room and then the tables wrote prayers to be shared with the Assembly. The prayers were gathered and the Assembly prayed collectively for more than 25 minutes.

The morning session closed with a benediction.



Committee to Nominate Standing Committees

The Committee to Nominate Standing Committees presented the slate of nominations. Two replacement names were brought forward. These were initially approved, however, after a number of dissents were recorded, a motion to reconsider that decision was adopted. That finally resulted in one name being replaced and the slate approved. An additional motion on Monday encouraged the Committee on Church Doctrine to add the name of the Rev. Dr. Jinsook Khang, a voice from the Han-Ca presbyteries, at the first available opportunity. This motion was approved and the convenor of the committee said they would also consider drawing upon her skills and knowledge as the opportunity arises.

Young Adult Representatives Presentation

The YARs gave a presentation that had commissioners laughing and smiling. They presented a skit to music (including a ukulele) that included plenty of humour, poking fun at the proceedings of Assembly and demonstrating some YAR conversation on Facebook. A short video highlighted some of the messages the YARs wanted commissioners to hear from them. Commissioners were encouraged to go back to their churches and encourage the youth to get more involved.

“We appreciate the opportunity to express our opinions in such a formal setting,” said one YAR.

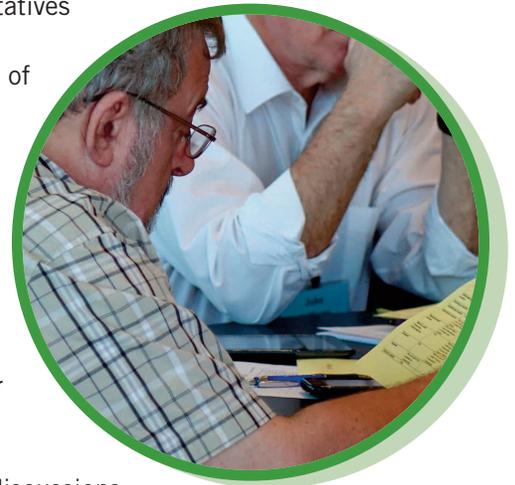
“The Presbyterian Church in Canada is definitely a team,” said Daniel MacLeod. “It’s really cool that we can make decisions together as a church.”

From the YARs, a final message: “You’ve been advised. Keep listening.”

Student Representatives

Student representatives Janet Taylor, Vancouver School of Theology, Corrie Stewart, Knox College, and David Sturtevant, Presbyterian College, each addressed the Assembly on their experience in Vancouver.

“In our many discussions, there have been expressions of concern and fear—both for moving away from our traditional understanding and of not changing,” said Corrie. “I have experienced these in an atmosphere of love, respect and peace. It is my hope and prayer that our discussions continue as we imagine the Kingdom of God and how God would have us live together.”

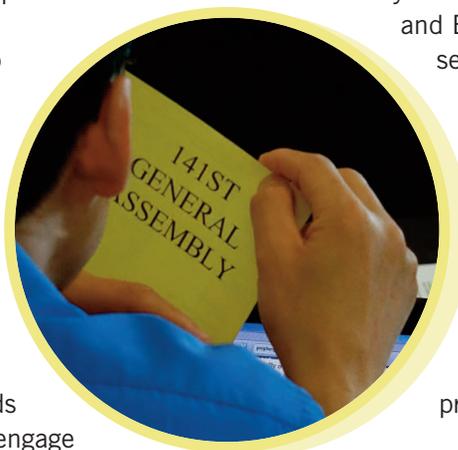


Facilitation re Overtures Regarding Human Sexuality

The Assembly continued to plan the way to respond to the overtures regarding human sexuality by discussing recommendations on the process to follow this Assembly. It was agreed that the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries) would confer together as each works on responding to the overtures and that the notes of the conversations that occurred during the facilitated process at Assembly be submitted to them as they prepare their responses.

Congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and standing committees were encouraged to engage

in a year of prayerful conversation, discernment and Bible study on the topics of human sexuality, sexual orientation and other related matters raised in the overtures. A joint study guide on these topics will be posted on the church’s website by the end of October, 2015, and congregations, sessions, presbyteries and synods are invited to share the results of their conversations with the committees prior to March 31, 2015.





Additional Notes

- A minute of appreciation was for the Rev. Dr. Richard Fee was presented, expressing deep thanks and appreciation for the 39 years of service to the PCC. Rick reminded the Assembly that national office staff is there to serve the church. "I love my work, and I love this church. And above all, with you, I love Jesus Christ."
- A commissioner's additional motion was passed that urges individuals, congregations and presbyteries to respond to the pressing need of Syrian refugees through sponsorship.
- Commissioners were encouraged to view the resources available on the national church website with regard to the discussion on human sexuality. (<http://presbyterian.ca/sexuality>)

Life and Mission Agency: Ministry and Church Vocations

The Assembly considered the response to an overture that asked whether it is time to include community college diplomas as a prerequisite for theological education in the PCC. The response explained that educational requirements are the result of accreditation standards, leaving the PCC unable to make a unilateral change. The Assembly accepted the response.

A recommendation on transition allowances in certain circumstances for assistant and stated supply ministers was passed. Responses to overtures regarding long-term vacancies and interim moderators and ministry contract templates were also approved.

A motion to provide a transition allowance when the terms of a minister's call are changed in such a way that the percentage of the minister's service is reduced was defeated.





Special Committee Re. Overture Regarding End of Life Issues

“It has been 18 years since the church’s latest statement on euthanasia and physician-assisted death,” explained committee member Pamela Stewart. “Our world has continued to change on this issue. This is a challenging issue, as many who have sat at the bedside of a loved one and watched their quality of life slip away well know.”

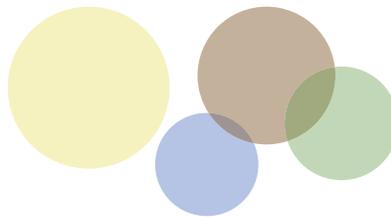
A summary of the church’s historical statements and position on euthanasia and physician-assisted death was adopted. The committee passed a recommendation that the Committee on Church Doctrine undertake a study of the issue of physician-assisted death and report to a future assembly.

The moderator was directed to write a letter of pastoral concern regarding the complexity of end-of-life issues.

Courtesies and Loyal Addresses

Gratitude was expressed to all those who helped with General Assembly 2015, including the many staff, volunteers, local hosts, organizers, resource people and commissioners. Courtesies were sent to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Honourable Christy Clarke, Premier of BC, and Mr. Henry Charles of the Musqueam First Nation.

Terrie-Lee Hamilton, Senior Administrator with the General Assembly Office, was thanked for 25 years of organizing and preparing General Assemblies.



Photos courtesy of the Presbyterian Record

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