

# Imagining the Kingdom

General Assembly 2015

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



**GA**  
**BRIEFING** ..... Friday, June 5, 2015

## Opening Worship – Thursday, June 4

On June 4, 2015, the 141st General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada began with worship at Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church. The theme of this year's gathering is "Imagining the Kingdom ... the Kingdom of God is like..." and is being hosted by the Presbytery of Westminster.

Elder Henry Charles of the Musqueam First Nations (People of the River Grass) welcomed the Assembly to the traditional territory on which the Assembly had gathered. Outgoing moderator, the Rev. Dr. Stephen Farris, delivered a sermon, "But we do see Jesus." He shared that Christians are a minority in British Columbia. "We are 'spiritual' but not religious," he said. But he pointed to our need to proclaim Jesus. "The church that doesn't speak about Jesus is like a card player who doesn't remember to play the ace."

The Rev. Karen Horst, in accepting her election and



installation as moderator, thanked the many people who have supported her, beginning with her home congregation in Orillia, Ontario. She then led the Assembly in prayer.

**General Assembly continued Friday, June 5** on the campus of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, with morning worship led by a team from Vancouver Korean Presbyterian Church. The Rev. Cheol Soon Park gave the sermon.

## Panel Presentations

Panel presentations provided an opportunity for commissioners to hear short overviews from different committees and national office departments. This new format allowed commissioners to ask questions and to clarify their understanding of the reports and overtures that would later come before the Assembly. The panels included the Life and Mission Agency, Assembly Council, Committee on History, International Affairs Committee and the Pension and Benefits Board.

## Life and Mission Agency

Wendy Paterson, Convener of the Life and Mission Agency, opened the report with a short uplifting video, “One Mission, Two Funds,” highlighting the work of *Presbyterians Sharing* and Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D). (It is available at <http://presbyterian.ca/sharing>.)

The Rev. Lara Scholey, Convener of the PWS&D Committee, spoke of PWS&D’s “work with partners to help the most vulnerable.” She acknowledged the recent generosity of Canadian Presbyterians for helping bring in over \$480,000 in donation for emergency relief in Nepal.

A number of recommendations from the Justice Ministries report were carried. They included a request to have the moderator write to provinces recommending that payday loan companies be required to publish annualized interest rates as well as write to Credit Union Central of Canada asking for information from its member credit unions across Canada on the availability of small loan services.

The Planned Giving report included a short video, “Growing Generosity,” which introduces concepts of planned giving and explains the benefits of fostering a spirit of generosity. The Rev. Herb Gale recognized the bequests we have been notified about in the past year.

## Committee on Bills and Overtures

Amanda Currie, Convener, presented the recommendations from the Committee on Bills and Overtures. Multiple recommendations regarding sexuality were before the court for referral and further study. A recommendation that gay and lesbian ministry candidates and same-sex marriages be referred to the Committee on Church Doctrine and Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries) was carried, as well as a recommendation affirming that the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994) be referred.

# Truth and Reconciliation

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Farris spoke to the Assembly about the closing ceremonies of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that took place in Ottawa and the national church’s involvement in the healing and reconciliation process. The period of residential schools “is not a good chapter in the life of our country or our denomination,” he said. “It is not a proud moment by any means.”

The journey toward healing has been difficult for the church, however, it has been an opportunity to listen, learn and grow. “It’s not just a question of looking back, painful as that is. Shame is a good thing to face. But shame may not be a good thing to carry forward. Can we move beyond shame to a fairer and more just future?”

Since the PCC began its journey toward reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples, there have been seven different moderators. The PCC has been present at every TRC national event and offered a statement of confession. Many thanks were offered to the moderators who have taken part and the staff who have worked so hard on this process.

Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk, spoke of the need to listen to survivors. “With that approach, the government ended up listening, the churches ended up listening.” From this, hope and healing have emerged.

“The point of hope that I carry now is contained in the calls to action that have been given to the churches,” said Stephen Kendall. “I hope that we will take them very seriously.” Stephen Farris echoed this sentiment. “There are recommendations from the commission and they have been brought to our denomination,” he said. “They are to be carried forward by our children and our children’s children.”



## Introduction to the Facilitation re. Overtures Regarding Sexuality

Given the 23 overtures on the subject of human sexuality, the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries) worked together to determine how best to address these overtures. Assembly agreed to the recommended process to move into a committee of the whole for up to two sessions to discuss the issues addressed in the referred and un-referred overtures. This facilitated process will strive to create a respectful place for listening and discerning our church's response. These sessions will not be live streamed and commissioners were asked not to use social media during the process.

### Interfaith Visitor – Chandima Gangodawila

Chandima Gangodawila, Theravada Buddhist Chaplain at the University of British Columbia, attended the 2015 General Assembly opening worship, his first formal Christian gathering. Mr. Gangodawila introduced commissioners to the Buddhist concept of karma, which is Sanskrit for “action.”



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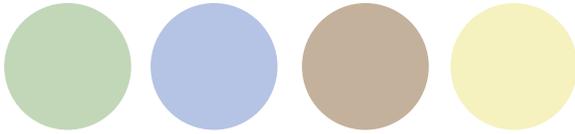
## Additional Notes

- Presbyterian College presented a minute of appreciation for Dr. Shuling Chen, former College Chaplain and Director of Educational Programmes, who died on July 29, 2014, following a long battle with cancer and for the Rev. Dr. Ian Victor, former Acting Director of Pastoral Studies, who died suddenly on Dec. 24, 2014.
- A minute of appreciation was presented for the Rev. Dr. Stephen Farris, who served as Dean of St. Andrew's Hall and Professor of Homiletics since 2003, and who is now retiring.
- Vancouver School of Theology shared their new vision: to educate and form thoughtful, engaged and generous Christian leaders.
- On Nov. 5, 2014, Knox College held an anniversary convocation, 170 years after the first classes were held in 1844.
- The Life and Mission Agency read a minute of appreciation for Kenneth Kim, former director of PWS&D, who is now working for World Renew.
- The Maclean Estate Committee report on Crieff Hills Community noted that it is currently celebrating its 40th anniversary. The committee promotes the idea that “Crieff Hills is a new way of doing church.” Crieff Hills' 250-acre retreat and conference centre provides space for spiritual renewal and leadership development.
- Assembly passed the History Committee's recommendation that congregations be encouraged to celebrate Heritage Sunday as a means of celebrating the unique faith journey and heritage we enjoy as Presbyterians. The recommended Sunday is February 21, 2016.



Great energy and goodwill feeling in the room. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide all proceedings. #pccga2015

— David Moody



## Additional Notes

- The Assembly recognized the 2015 winner of the history prize: The Congregational Category— *A Journey to the Western Sea 100 years of the British Columbia Synodical of the Women’s Missionary Society 1914–2014.*
- A special committee will be established to prepare a statement regarding end of life issues.
- An overture asked that the General Assembly look into the effects of the Supreme Court decision related to public prayer, and to enter into conversation with religious leaders of other religious traditions who share our belief that public prayer adds to civil society and the wellbeing of communities. The motion was carried.

### Pension and Benefits Board

Thomas Fischer, Convener, gave the Pension and Benefits Board report. A special committee to address the ongoing pension solvency funding was established. Their recommendation to equalize pensions generated a great deal of discussion. Some commissioners felt they should have been consulted in advance and some expressed concern that their pension would be negatively affected. Others felt the change would level the playing field in pension payments and accruals. The Young Adult Representatives gave an advisory vote that was split, and the motion was carried with a 129–79 vote.

### History Committee

Marilyn Repchuck, Convener, presented the History Committee report. A recommendation to designate 5% from closing congregations to the museum for the ongoing work of preserving the memory of such congregations generated significant discussion. Commissioners who spoke against the motion acknowledged the value of our history, but felt this wasn’t the right approach. The motion was defeated.

The committee acknowledged PCC retirees by showing a list of all clergy and church workers who retired in 2014.



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