

Imagining the Kingdom

General Assembly 2015

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



GA

BRIEFING

..... Saturday, June 6, 2015

The 141st General Assembly continued on Saturday morning with worship led by a musical team of young adult representatives and youth from camps. The Rev. Rebecca Simpson from St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Mission, BC, and Camp Douglas Director, gave the sermon.

E.H. Johnson Award

The Canadian Council for Refugees was the recipient of this year's E.H. Johnson Award. Loly Rico, President, and Janet Dench, Executive Director, spoke to the commissioners gathered for the E.H. Johnson Award Luncheon about the protection of refugees and other vulnerable migrants.

"We are currently living in very difficult times for refugees and immigrants in Canada," said Loly who, along with her family, came to Canada from El Salvador as a refugee over 25 years ago. "Just a week ago the government implemented changes to the Citizenship Act that make it easier to lose citizenship. So now, even when we finally manage to become citizens, we get the message that our status here is insecure... No matter what status you have, if you are not born in Canada you are considered the 'other.'"

"As Canadians, we are lucky to have strong traditions of



welcoming newcomers," said Janet. "Most people who came were encouraged to stay and become citizens. But in the past few years, we have seen a rise in precarious status, with 'temporary' replacing 'permanent.'"

The speakers talked of the struggles for family reunification, discrimination of Muslim refugees, barriers faced by Syrian refugees and difficulties in resettlement and lack of access to protection and healthcare. Janet challenged churches not to step back from their leadership role, "We believe that faith leaders have a particular responsibility to take strong action to speak out and to create a welcoming spirit for all, including Muslims," she said.

Panel Presentations Continued

The panel discussions continued with presentations from the Church Doctrine Committee, Clerks of Assembly, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, and the Special Committee re. the Optional Elimination of Synods.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

Carol Wood gave the report of the committee and presented a recommendation that the committee's terms of reference be changed to integrate wording from the mandate approved by the General Assembly in 2007. After significant discussion the following was added to the terms of reference: "to encourage Presbyterians to acknowledge, understand and appreciate the strengths of other faith traditions, and to help Presbyterians to live in good relationship with persons who belong to other religions."

Ecumenical Visitor – Dr. George Sabra

The Rev. Dr. Glynis Williams, Associate Secretary for International Ministries, presented Dr. George Sabra, Professor of Systematic Theology and President of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut, Lebanon.

Dr. Sabra appreciated the long history between the PCC and NEST, particularly needed in light of



today's challenges. "The Middle East is being emptied of Christian presence," he said.

"The Christians in that region of the world, which gave the world the Bible, in which Christ was born and lived, died and rose again are in danger of becoming extinct... what is at stake is not just the fate of human beings, not just religious tolerance, not just human rights, but a witness to the truth."

Dr. Sabra appealed to General Assembly to "stay related to us; stay aware of what is happening to us; encourage us and support us morally, spiritually and materially; and above all, keep us in your prayers to God almighty."



Ecumenical Visitor – Rev. Fr. Keghart Garabedian

Archpriest Rev. Father Keghart Garabedian, pastor of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church of Vancouver, BC, painted the reality of present day Armenia. For over 4000 years, Armenia has been the crossroads of empire wars and national occupations. Thousands of churches, chapels, monasteries and monuments have been obliterated. "We pray that God may give endurance and help to all who are in pain, suffering and experiencing injustice."

Facilitation re. Overtures Regarding Human Sexuality

The Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency worked together on the process to address the many overtures regarding human sexuality that are before the court this year. It was agreed to move into a committee of the whole to discuss these issues.

Commissioners broke into small table groups to create a more intimate space for listening and sharing. A shell was held by an individual at each table, allowing them the opportunity to speak, and was passed around. It was followed by periods of silence and prayer. Commissioners were asked to practice open listening and to keep what was said in confidence. "What happens at the tables, stays at the tables," Karen explained.

Commissioners were to consider four questions:

1. When you consider the issues around human sexuality and sexual orientation in the PCC, what do you most hope for?
2. When you consider the issues around human sexuality and sexual orientation in the PCC, what are your greatest fears?
3. What, for you, are the greatest issues/concerns around human sexuality and sexual orientation? How have these issues impacted or affected your own life and relationships, or conversations you have had? What feelings do you have about these impacts?
4. What qualities and values of the gospel should we try to express in considering the issues of human sexuality and sexual orientation in the PCC?

Ecumenical Visitor – Rev. Patrick Thegu Mutahi

The Rev. Mutahi is Deputy Secretary General, Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). He expressed gratitude for the long-term partnership between the PCC and PCEA, and for years of work with Rick Allen in community health in demystifying HIV and AIDS.

“We still believe there is much to be done and we look forward to our partnership with the PCC in the days ahead,” he said. “We need your prayers; we need your support. We look forward to many more opportunities for partnering in the future.”



Assembly Council

Heather Crisp, Convener, presented the report. The resignation of Stephen Roche as Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, effective January 31, 2017, was accepted with thanks. Assembly Council will seek nominations with a view to proposing a replacement at the 2016 General Assembly.

An additional motion was made that the Assembly Council develop a plan to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission throughout the PCC and to report to the 142nd General Assembly on the progress made. The YARs supported the motion and the recommendation carried.

The General Assembly debated the guarantee of stipend terms. An overture drew attention to the fact that when a minister is called to a pastoral charge, sometimes their stipend and allowance, which may be above minimum, is not adjusted over time, and while it may remain above minimum, its purchasing power is eroded. An additional motion was made to send A-29, an appendix in the Book of Forms regarding the guarantee of stipend terms, to presbyteries and sessions for study and report. It was recommended to add the phrase “and agree to adjust the stipend and allowances annually in view of any changes in the cost of living and the needs of our minister.” The motion carried.

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Additional Notes

- The Presbytery of East Toronto will host the 2016 General Assembly.
- The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee expressed appreciation to the churches, presbyteries and committees that studied and responded to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*. These documents be recommended for ongoing study and use.
- The International Affairs Committee recommendation that the moderator and members of the church write to the Government of Canada urging that the number of government-sponsored refugees be increased to, at a minimum, match the number of privately sponsored refugees was passed. The YARs gave an advisory vote in favour of this motion.
- Members for the Special Committee on End of Life Issues were approved and will include Rev. Douglas Kendall (Ottawa, ON), the Rev. Jennifer Cameron (Kingston, ON), and Pamela Stewart (PEI).
- The Rev. Tony Plomp, a long-serving Deputy Clerk, addressed the Assembly by a pre-taped message. Diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, he thanked everyone for the many prayers. “I face the future with both curiosity and confidence,” he said. “I do not enter the mystery alone but with all who have loved and served the Lord in their time and generation.” The moderator thanked for Tony for his leadership and prayed that he would know the fellowship of this community.
- A recommendation passed that the moderator extend greetings of the 2015 General Assembly to the United Church of Canada on the occasion of their 90th anniversary. Commissioners recorded a short video to convey their congratulations.



Humbled and honoured to hear Dr. George Sabra witness to truth. #ga141

— Blair Bertrand

Heritage Green Church Re-Plant – Rev. David Moody

Heritage Green Community Church (found online at <http://www.heritagegreen.cc>) is located in Stoney Creek, Ontario. The Rev. David Moody is part of a team bringing new life to a church that was struggling to survive despite a thriving community around it. An ambitious vision was brought forward for a dynamic family-focused ministry that required significant change and upheaval in order to bring new life. From having only 12–15 people worshipping in 2013, just one year later the church has 60–70 people on a typical Sunday morning, one-third of which are children, and 20–25 of those participants were previously un-churched, some had never attended church before.

“We couldn’t have done this without the partnership of the presbytery and Canadian Ministries. Without that support, it couldn’t have happened.”



Special Committee on the Optional Elimination of Synods

George Malcolm, Convener, gave the committee’s report. A recommendation was made that the optional dissolution of synods be permitted subject to approval of needed legislative changes to the Book of Forms. The YARs voted against the recommendation but the motion was carried. As required by the Barrier Act, the proposed changes to the Book of Forms will be voted on by presbyteries (approve or disapprove) and the final decision will be made at the 2016 General Assembly.

Its work now finished, the special committee was dissolved with thanks.

Additional Notes

- The Committee on Church Doctrine passed a recommendation that sessions, presbyteries and other interested groups study the document *Living in God’s Mission Today* and report comments to the committee through the Clerks of Assembly by May 31, 2016, and that the results of these comments be reported to the General Assembly in 2017.
- A recommendation passed that the Rev. Ian A.R. McDonald be appointed General Secretary of the Life and Mission Agency effective Sept 1, 2015.
- A minute of appreciation was held for Dr. Richard Allen, PCC mission staff, who has served 35 years overseas with the PCC. He has been serving as Community Health Advisor to the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) based in Kikuyu, Kenya. “I wish to thank the church, both here in Canada and overseas, for this great opportunity to serve in Christian ministry,” Rick said.

Canada Youth

Jo Morris shared the significant impact of Canada Youth, the PCC’s biennial youth event. Worship and music reflect the creativity, authentic, vibrant and true nature of this life-changing experience for youth. Jo invited past planning committee members, curriculum developers, entertainers, workshop leaders, adult advisors, youth leaders, preachers, parents, participants and people who have seen the impact of CY on youth to stand. It was an emotional moment as more and more people stood in the Assembly room. “You, the CY champions, know the deep impact of the potential and promise of CY Ministry,” said Jo. The next CY will take place July 5–10, 2016.



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