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Note from Nora - August 1, 2018



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
L'ÉGLISE UNIE DU CANADA

August 1, 2018

The 43rd General Council is over and I have been catching up on laundry, sleep, and family since arriving home on Saturday. I imagine that most of those who attended are feeling much the same way after a very full time together.

It is always good to be together with such a great variety of people who love God and love the United Church.



Youth Forum members at the Festival of Faith

This meeting had a new format, with a combination of the [Festival of Faith](#) (music, workshops, and a lot of faith-related fun) alongside a new business process that had Commissioners assigned to discussion groups, where many more voices were heard on the business of the General Council. The wisdom from those discussion groups was reflected in the reports back to plenary from the Facilitation Group, and there was huge

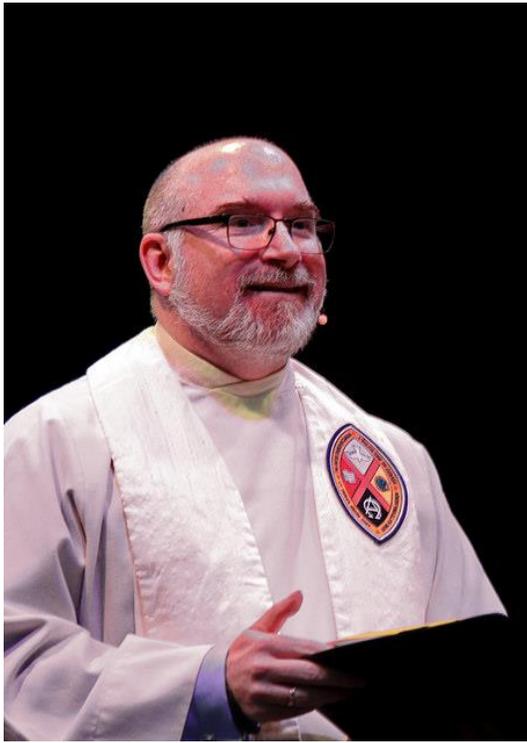
endorsement for how well that wise little team heard the tenor of the discussions. Both these changes originated from proposals offered by young commissioners at the end of the last General Council, and were broadly seen as great improvements for this meeting.

The big decisions about church structure that were approved at the 42nd General Council, and then again across the country through the remit process, were enacted through the final stage of decision making at General Council. Now all the planning and preparation that people in all parts of the church have been doing moves out of the “provisional” stage and into full gear.



L-R: Nelson Hart, Bernice Saulteaux, Lorna Standingready, Lawrence Moore

The [Calls to the Church](#) from Caretakers of the Indigenous Circle were received and endorsed too, reflecting a church-wide commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and support for the creation of a new national Indigenous body within the United Church. The shape and functions of this new national body will be determined through consultations within the Indigenous part of the church in preparation for the National Spiritual Gathering planned for next August.



The Right Rev. Richard Bott

And of course – we have a new Moderator! [The Right Rev. Richard Bott](#) was chosen from among the 10 excellent people who had been nominated by their presbyteries. It is always hard to say farewell to the departing Moderator after having worked so closely together for three years. At the same time, I am already looking forward to getting to know our new Moderator better, and to supporting his leadership as he seeks to “quicken the hearts” of our church through this time of change. Last year, at the beginning of my sabbatical time, Richard and I were the only two United Church people taking a course on small group ministries, little knowing that the conversations begun then would be the beginning of the working relationship has now been launched!

There was so much positive that happened in the week we were together at General Council that I cannot begin to describe it all here.

I think that even [the painful time that came](#), unexpectedly, in the final hours of the meeting, should also be seen as a precious gift for us all. Part way through the afternoon we had heard challenging words from Intercultural Observer Paul Douglas Walfall about racism that he and racialized people have experienced within our church and communities.

It was a strong and good message that gave us lots to think about. Then we returned to the business at hand, trying to work through as many of the outstanding proposals as possible before the end of the meeting. Just a few minutes from the end of the time scheduled for the day's business, two brave young Commissioners went to the "Point of Order" mic to question that process, reminding us that we had not taken enough time to acknowledge the pain of racialized persons in our midst and to seek forgiveness.

Strictly speaking, it wasn't a point of order, but Moderator Jordan Cantwell was wise enough to recognize that it wasn't a moment for formal procedures, it was a moment to hear things that were weighing heavy on many hearts. What followed was a difficult and important time of hearing story after story about painful incidents that members of our church have experienced, stories of prejudice and discrimination, some overtly and shockingly racist and some well meant but hurtful just the same. As a White person, and someone who carries responsibility within our church, I found it very hard to hear these things.



Dr. Colin Phillips

The last speaker of the evening (by then we had gone well beyond the supper hour) was Colin Phillips, one of the nominees for Moderator. Colin has a PhD and is a lecturer at Ryerson University as well as being a former member of General Council Executive and of my Supervisory

Committee. He is also a person who lives with cerebral palsy and talks through a communication board because he is unable to form words with his voice. I could not hold back the tears as I heard him describe the pain he felt when people did not approach him for conversation, or to share a meal time table with him. I understand that people tend to avoid situations when they are not sure what to do... no doubt I am one of those people at times. What a loss for those who have missed out on a conversation with this brilliant and funny man, and what excruciating isolation he described.

I am still thinking about the many things that were said on Friday. The more I think about that time of listening, the more I am grateful for it. I am grateful that our General Council meeting felt safe enough for so many people to come forward and say things that they knew would be hard for others to hear, but that we all needed to understand. In his address earlier, Rev. Walfall had used the phrase "Acknowledge, Commit, Transform." Without the gift of these things that were courageously shared, how could we enter into this process? We can't acknowledge unless we are willing to know, and we can't know without the painful stories being told. I pray that this will be a moment that helps us build towards transformation.

The Holy Spirit comes to us in comforting ways. The Holy Spirit comes to us in unsettling ways. Thanks be to God.

Nora

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