



38th General Council

NEWS

Wolfville, Nova Scotia

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ISSUES BEFORE COUNCIL

Faith, leadership, and Aboriginal issues part of the agenda

BY JIM CAIRNEY

Commissioners to the United Church's 38th General Council meeting Aug. 10-16 in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, will tackle important decisions around leadership, governance, and Aboriginal relations, and discuss an interim report on the development of a new state-

ment of faith. But there is always the possibility that some emerging issue will take on a life of its own.

The Rev. Kent Ward, chair of the Business Committee, says a petition from Saskatchewan Conference calling on the federal government's Department of Jus-

tice to recognize same-sex unions in the marriage legislation may draw some attention "based on where the nation has been the last month or so. In one form or another, that issue may be before Council," says Ward.

"The Council will decide what's a sleeper or not. And it's my job to set the table."

Ward says the Council will spend some time considering what to do next after a remit failed to pass that would have ushered in a new structure impacting presbyteries and Conferences across the church.

Previous councils have traditionally seen more business, says Ward. However, the reorganization of the church's General Council offices and the scheduling of some larger reports to the next General Council have reduced the work coming before this Council.

Key to the life of the church over the next few years will be the election of a new Moderator and the appointment of a new General Secretary, the most senior staff position, both of which will take place during the Council.

"The election of the Moderator is always an interesting moment, and

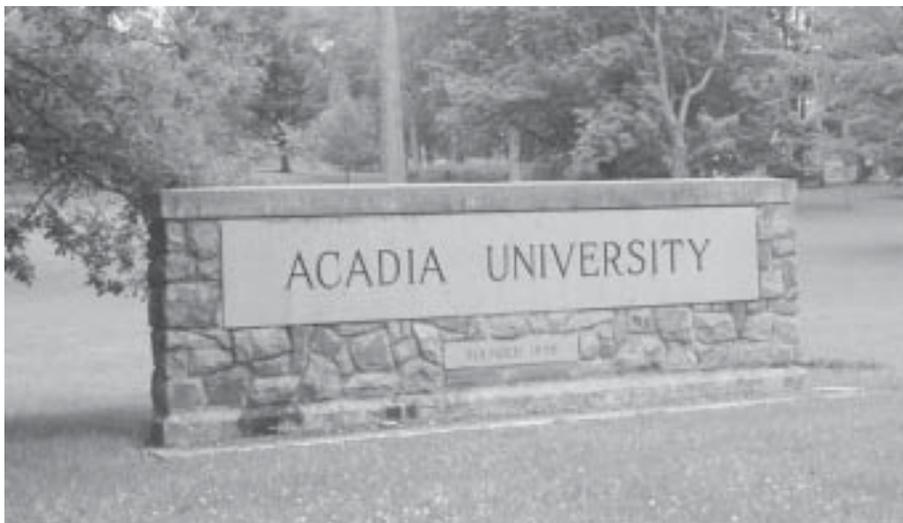


Photo: Ian Fraser

Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, is the site of the United Church's 38th General Council meeting Aug. 10-16.

trying to predict that is a fool's game," says Ward.

Other items before Council include:

- a statement on the relationship between Islam and the United Church
- a report on the state of United Church-Jewish relations
- a new educational process for the restoration of right relationships between the church and Aboriginal peoples.

The presentation on Aboriginal issues will include a keynote address by George Erasmus, a former president of the Dene Nation, who was co-chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Erasmus is now the president of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

A significant amount of time will be focused on issues related to the church's mission and funding. The 400 commissioners also face decisions on a myriad of issues ranging from manse heating, to suggested principles for genetically modified foods, to the consumption of alcohol at church gatherings.



Getting Ready for General Council

BY JEFF COOK

Even Maritime humidity won't dampen the spirits of commissioners to the United Church's 38th General Council meeting in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, says the Rev. David Hewitt, chair of the Local Arrangements Committee.

About 400 commissioners will meet at Acadia University from August 10-16. The combination of a hockey arena meeting space and high humidity caused by a week of rain and overcast weather created some last-minute challenges, says Hewitt.

On August 6, following two weeks of hockey camps, the Acadia staff covered the arena ice surface in preparation for General Council. Due to the humidity, water began "soaking up through the flooring," causing condensation and puddles to form, says Hewitt.

Acadia decided to remove the ice and university staff worked all night to remove the ice and water.

"They were out there with hand chippers to chip off the ice," says Hewitt.

The cold concrete flooring still presented a condensation problem, says Hewitt. Since the ice needs to be back in place for an elite hockey camp on August 18, Acadia decided to cover the concrete pad with insulation before placing floor boards over it.

"The Acadia staff have been great," says Hewitt.

He also praises the volunteers that are a major part of General Council. There are about 25 people on the Local Arrangements Committee, who all have numerous people working with them.

Area residents have been willing to volunteer, says Hewitt. "They are excited about the presence of the United Church in our little community," he adds.

Hewitt says two semi-retired carpenters from the Cornwallis Pastoral Charge volunteered for a day to build the steps and railing needed for the main platform. Other people created a barbeque from a hot water tank to cater a Youth Forum hot dog supper.

Harry Crawford, the Transportation Coordinator, has worked with three transport companies and numerous volunteers to shuttle arriving delegates from Halifax airport, which is about an hour's drive from Wolfville.

The biggest challenge of organizing volunteers is to ensure there is always work for them, says Hewitt. Incidents such as the ice removal create last-minute changes to the work schedules.

"I have worked hard and encouraged people not to have volunteers standing around," says Hewitt. "We want people to leave knowing they had a good experience and their efforts have been appreciated."

Although there will inevitably be some complaints about some aspects of the arrangements, Hewitt says he thinks the complainants will represent a "small percentage of the total group."

Hewitt says he loves church events and has enjoyed chairing the Local Arrangements Committee.

"I'm thrilled to be part of it," he says. "I think it will be a hoot to be gathered together with the (church) family for a week in Wolfville."



Three Commissions Act As Council

BY JOHN ASLING

Commissioners to the United Church's 38th General Council meeting in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, will be divided into three separate commissions, each having the full authority to act as General Council, for a significant amount of the work at the week-long meeting.

Previous General Council meetings, particularly in 1994 and 1997, have proved frustrating as commissioners attempted to get through mountains of reports, resolutions, and petitions. Much of the unfinished business fell to General Council Executive, which normally only meets two times a year.

The last Council three years ago experimented with commissions with such success that planners for this General Council have brought them back.

The approximately 400 commissioners will still meet in plenary to make decisions about and study what are being called "denomination shaping issues" and "denomination faith issues." These are issues that would have a significant impact on:

- the denomination as a whole
- the church's financial resources and polity
- the church's theological or missiological directions

For example, the vote for the next Moderator and the next General Secretary, the church's most senior staff position, will be dealt with by the full court.

The Rev. Kent Ward, minister at St. Paul's in Brampton, Ontario, and chair of the Business Committee, says the commissions offer "the best mechanism for getting the work done in the amount of

time we have." He says after the system of commissions was tested at the 37th General Council there was very little work left undone and commissioners were happy with the results.

Commissioners will have an opportunity to vote on whether or not to adopt the three-commission system early in the meeting, but Ward says he is not expecting opposition. "People were happy with it at the 37th General Council meeting in Toronto," he says.

Commissioners will also have an opportunity to pull business items out of a commission's agenda and place them on to the plenary agenda, but Ward says there is then no guarantee that General Council will get to them—or something else could get dropped.

"If business items are left in a commission they have a better chance of being dealt with," Ward says.

There is also a system to let commissioners on one commission speak to the issues on the other two by filling out comment forms that will be considered by the commission. "Just because you're not able to vote doesn't mean you don't have a voice," Ward says.

The results of each commission's votes will be reported to the plenary for information only.

The Business Committee is also recommending using an omnibus motion, which would include more business items than previous General Council meetings. The omnibus motion will deal with a number of issues at once, and will include housekeeping items, motions where there is no policy change, and reports where no decision is required.

Asked about how he thinks the whole system will work this time, Ward says, "I'm optimistic."



Council's Theme Full of Hope

BY DEREK CARLISLE

The search went out for hopeful people.

That was the criteria Janice Maclean and Eric Tusz-King used to look for members for the Theme Committee of the United Church's 38th General Council meeting in Wolfville, N.S.

Maclean and Tusz-King, both staff members at the church's Maritime Conference, quickly found four enthusiastic participants (the Rev. Elizabeth Stevenson, the Rev. Stewart Clarke, Shirley Cleave, and Bernadette deMone) who have met over the past 18 months both in person and virtually.

"We have people from a variety of walks of life—a nurse, a retired minister, a professor of kinesiology, a pastoral minister," says Tusz-King. Mardi Tindal is also a committee member. Tindal is the Theological Reflector at this Council and is known to United Church television audiences as a former co-host of *Spirit Connection* on Vision TV.

The theme slogan "There is Hope / Tout espoir est permis" was chosen based on idea of the Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Marion Parady. The Agenda and Planning Committee, in turn, contacted Tusz-King and Maclean to get the input of Theme Committee members.

"At our first session, it was very personal. We talked about our own definitions of hope, where we saw hope, and we named people who were hopeful," says Maclean.

The logo for Council is the result of a collaborative process. The inspiration for the use of Japanese characters came from retired minister the Rev. Hiraku Iwai of Saskatoon. Following a career spilt equally between being a minister in Japan and Canada, Iwai assisted with the Theme Committee at the last General Council meeting in Toronto. Once the Moderator established the theme of hope for this Council, Iwai thought of making a link to the Japanese word equivalent.

“The character of the Japanese word ‘hope’ has three components,” Iwai explains. “One is to stretch your whole body so that you can see things from a higher point. Number two is the moon. The new moon to the full moon indicates something expected to grow. Also, the shining light reflects God’s light. The last part is a sound. Like the prophet Elijah listening to the voice of God, we are to listen to God’s voice.”

Using these three components, Kentville, Nova Scotia, artist Paula Williams (who also serves as church secretary at St. Andrew’s

United) designed the logo, incorporating a blue border to represent the Atlantic Ocean. Williams also chose to depict a traditional Atlantic dory boat. “One doesn’t have to look far to find fisherpeople in this area,” notes Williams. The dory imagery also alludes to confidently sailing through the waves, under the direction of the fresh breeze of the Spirit. To round out the collaborative process, the General Council Office added the theme slogan written in 12 languages around the border.

Five theme presentations will take place over the course of Council, which is meeting at Acadia University Aug. 10-16. Commissioners will be treated to a mix of Bible study, drama, storytelling, reflection, panel discussions, and even local history. A two-hour videotape montage will be prepared from the sessions and distributed to all commissioners shortly after Council ends.

Theme Committee members have been enriched in their own personal spiritual journeys over the last 18 months.

“At our last meeting someone

summed it up by saying ‘we just can’t use the word hope like we used to,’” says Maclean. “Every time we do, you’re conscious of it. [It’s] like saying ‘I hope it doesn’t rain.’” After the depth that we’ve plumbed, you can’t use it. Even if you hope it doesn’t rain, you say it with a different conscience.”



Welcome To *General Council News*

General Council News is being sent by fax, e-mail, or mail to congregations and news media that requested it, and is being distributed to General Council commissioners. It may be reproduced freely. *General Council News* reporters will be covering the highlights and significant happenings of the 38th General Council, rather than recording everything that occurs.

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Did you know...

Of the approximately 400 commissioners attending the United Church’s 38th General Council meeting in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Aug. 10-16

- 229 commissioners arrived by air, three by bus, 97 by car, and 10 by train
- 98 commissioners flew on Air Canada, 33 on Canjet, 18 on Tango, 54 on Westjet (and 38 didn’t tell us)
- Ontario had the greatest number of driving commissioners (44), while only one person drove from each of Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan
- 25 commissioners listed their dietary preference as vegetarian, one as vegan, 16 as semi-vegetarian, and eight as ovo/lacto vegetarian
- 35 commissioners plan to leave on August 16, 304 on Aug 17, 11 on August 18, and 22 wouldn’t say when (or if) they are leaving