

140th Synod Meeting Highlights

Commissioners from the five presbyteries within the bounds of the Synod of Quebec and Eastern Ontario (le Synode du Québec et de l'Est de l'Ontario) gathered on Friday, October 17th and Saturday, October 18th, 2014 at Gloucester Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, Ontario for the 140th Synod meeting. The Moderator of the 139th Synod, the Rev. Harold Kouwenberg and the Rev. Denise Allan Macartney, host minister, opened the meeting with worship at 2:00 p.m. Friday afternoon, including the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Following opening worship and the constitution of the court, the election of the moderator of the 140th synod meeting was held. Mr. Gordon Walford from the Presbytery of Ottawa was elected and installed.

The business of the court continued with the consideration of various reports. The Committee on Business presented several recommendations, with the remaining held for consideration at a later sederunt. The court agreed to defer the receipt of the commission report re the corrective case from the Presbytery of Ottawa until the 141st synod meeting to allow additional time for the commission to complete its work.

The Treasurer presented the 2013 Financial Report, the reviewer's report, a 2014 year to date financial statement as well as a projection until the end of the year. The 2015 budget of synod expenses, 2015 presbytery assessments, the budget allocation for Regional Staff transition, and a five year forecast, were then presented for consideration. The thanks of the synod were extended to David Morris, past Finance Committee convener, who prepared the budget documents and Ruth Davidson for presenting them to the court for consideration. Discussion on the Finance documents resumed on Saturday.

The next report considered was from the Regional Resourcing Committee. At the emergent synod meeting held on June 26, 2014, a recommendation was referred back to the committee as follows: *That recommendation No. 4 be referred back to the Regional Resourcing Committee and that the committee consult with the presbyteries and camps within the synod, that they consider other options for regional resourcing, and that they report to the Synod meeting in October 2014.*

The committee brought forward the following recommendation to the synod: *That the model proposed in its report at the June Synod meeting be adopted. Should this model be approved at this Synod meeting, the Regional Resourcing committee would be responsible for receiving applications and approving requests for funds, which would be available from October 1, 2015.* The recommendation was referred as follows:

That the recommendation from the Regional Resourcing Committee be referred to the synod council with power to issue with respect to the use of the grant money, with the understanding that the synod council is prepared to say that it is our intent to call for any further proposals to be in the clerk's hand by January 31, 2015 and the council direct the Regional Resourcing Committee to review the proposals and bring a recommendation to synod council in April 2015.

Business continued with reports from the Synod Webservant and the Synod Historian. The Rev. Katherine Burgess, convener of the Synod Committee re: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment, was introduced to the court.

Following a break for dinner the synod reconvened. The WMS Synodical report was presented followed by the Synod Youth Working Group. The synod then heard from four young people from Manotick and Kanata who shared their transformative experience at Canada Youth 2014. The Regional Staffing Committee report was presented, followed by the Mission Committee/Robert Fund Committee report. The report from the Presbytery of Ottawa on the oversight of the Gracefield Christian Camp and Retreat Centre was presented. The Executive Directors, Brian and Janet Ham, were introduced to the court. The report from the camp located within the Presbytery of Québec, Camp d'action biblique, was presented.

At the emergent meeting of June 26, the synod resolved that notice would be given to the Synod Regional Staff that their positions would be terminated on October 1, 2014. The past Synod Moderator read to the court a Minute of Appreciation for Christine Ball and then for Anita Mack. Both were adopted and followed by a round of applause in recognition for the 13 years of faithful and dedicated service to the synod.

On Saturday morning guest speaker, the Rev. Dr. Roland De Vries, addressed the synod with a presentation entitled "Thresholds of Encounter". A 'threshold place' is a place of open, honest and transparent encounter. Congregations that seek to be missional need to establish threshold places that link the church with the world around them, providing encounters in the community that are meaningful and engaging. Such engagement means that the church will not be 'in control' nor the 'host', but in which it may nevertheless live graciously and confidently in Christ, serving his kingdom. Dr. De Vries spoke about the story of Paul and Lydia outside of Philippi. Lydia was free to listen, or not. In that public place she was free to stay or to walk away. Paul simply spoke of his faith in Christ and, in that 'threshold place' let her freely respond. In her case the response was one of faith, and insistent hospitality. Dr. De Vries also spoke on the topic of Christian hospitality, sharing insights from the French feminist Luce Irigaray.

Following a break the synod welcomed the Rev. Dr. Ian Victor who presented information on the new strategic plan currently being implemented by The Presbyterian College. A leadership centre, new initiatives in congregational revitalization and new church development, are also being implemented.

The referral from the 139th General Assembly on the optional elimination of synods was considered next. A position paper written by a commissioner was shared with the court for discussion. A statement on the referral topic was introduced and debated. It was agreed that the statement would be submitted as our response to the referral, noting that there were divergent views on the matter within the synod.

After the lunch break the remainder of the Committee on Business recommendations were considered and adopted. In addition consideration of the various financial documents resumed. Amendments were considered and the financial documents, as amended, were adopted.

The synod adjourned at 2:50 pm and will meet again as a commissioned court within the bounds of the Presbytery of Québec in Granby, on October 16th and 17th, 2015.

Many heartfelt thanks are extended to the congregation of Gloucester Presbyterian Church, Ottawa for their gracious hospitality.