

# *Creating Pathways*

**for the**

## **Transformational Change of the General Synod**

AN OFFERING FROM THE PRIMATE'S COMMISSION ON PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL IN  
THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>This Report at a Glance</b> .....	3
<b>Guiding Theological Reflection</b> .....	5
<b>Defining General Synod</b> .....	6
<b>Initiating the Task of the Primate’s Commission</b> .....	6
Understanding the Task .....	7
Current Context .....	8
Guiding Lenses and Principles .....	11
Enabling Conversation through Seven Hypotheses .....	12
<b>Core Areas of Work of the General Synod</b> .....	14
Communicating.....	14
Connecting.....	14
Convening .....	15
Six Pathways for Transformational Change.....	15
<b>1. Organizational Structure Pathway</b> .....	16
Where We are Now.....	16
Where We Want to be Next .....	17
Steps Along the Way.....	17
<b>2. Management Overview &amp; Restructuring Pathway</b> .....	20
Where We are Now.....	20
Where We Want to be Next .....	21
Steps Along the Way.....	22
<b>3. Inclusion &amp; Diversity in Decision-Making Pathway</b> .....	24
Where We are Now.....	24
Where We Want to be Next .....	24
Steps Along the Way.....	25
<b>4. Communications Pathway</b> .....	28
Where We are Now.....	28
Where We Want to be Next .....	28
Steps Along the Way.....	29
<b>5. Walking Together in Partnership: Indigenous Church with the Historic</b>	
<b>Settler Church Pathway</b> .....	32
Where We are Now.....	32
Where We Want to be Next .....	33
Steps Along the Way.....	33

<b>6. Ministry in Remote Northern Communities Pathway .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Where We are Now.....	35
Where We Want to be Next .....	36
Steps Along the Way.....	37
<b>Conclusions and Recommendations for Next Steps .....</b>	<b>38</b>
 <b>Appendix 1 – Members of the Commission.....</b>	 <b>41</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Evolution of General Synod .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix 3 – Behind the Hypotheses .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix 4 – Highlights from the Engagement Process .....</b>	<b>43</b>

## THIS REPORT AT A GLANCE

The Primate's Commission ('Commission'), having consulted with Anglicans from coast to coast to coast, have developed 6 pathways that the Commission trusts have the potential to strengthen the ministry of inviting and deepening life in Christ through the Anglican Church of Canada's General Synod and make a positive impact on Ecclesiastical Provinces, Dioceses and Territories, Parishes and Congregations.

The Commission looks specifically at the work of 'General Synod' that is defined for the purpose of this report as: *The national organizational entity, instituted by dioceses, that has continued to evolve since its inception in 1893 to take on specific responsibilities to hold Anglicans across the country in relationship with one another and with Anglicans across the Communion.*

Commissioned by the Most Reverend Linda Nicholls near the end of her term as Primate, the Commission, "Reimagining the Church: Proclaiming the Gospel in the 21st Century," was mandated to think creatively and reimagine what changes need to be made so that the gospel could continue to be at the centre our church's life. Restricted to a two-year time frame that began in July 2023, the Primate's Commission understood its tasks to be:

- to ask the question of what is needed now at the national level—in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—to effectively proclaim the gospel in sustainable and life-giving ways;
- to chart a path for transformation of General Synod structures and resources to assist churches and communities of the Anglican Church of Canada to proclaim the Gospel, and;
- to honour the ongoing journey with the Sacred Circle as described in *The Covenant and Our Way of Life*.

**The report seeks to communicate a sense of prophetic imagination, urgency, a refusal to ignore difficult conversations, and an invitation to embrace provocative risk-taking ideas. It is not limited by the 'way things have always been done' but rather embraces our current context and the hope-filled mission to walk on the road with Jesus alongside us as the Gospel is proclaimed.**

This work emerges from a current context that invites adaptation for the future. It is in large part a response to the precipitous decline in participation in parishes and congregations across Canada. Data about this time of transition from Anglican statistician the Rev. Dr. Neil Elliot is outlined.

In the report, the Commission's process of listening to clergy, laity, and bishops from across Canada, using provocative hypotheses is described. Through its consultative

process the Commission learned about hopes for the ways in which the General Synod could be of benefit to the Anglicans across Canada as well as confusion about what General Synod currently seeks to achieve on behalf of the Church. Additionally, many voices shared a dissatisfaction with the legislative processes and concern about underrepresented and marginalized communities.

The report outlines three core areas of work foundational to the ministry of the General Synod in its efforts to support dioceses and communities across the country. These three core areas are a commitment to **communicate, connect, and convene** so that all Anglicans in Canada (individuals, parishes, and dioceses) are assisted in their ability to proclaim the Gospel.

Six Pathways are outlined with recommendations for next steps. The pathways are:

1. Organizational Structure
2. Management Overview & Restructuring
3. Inclusion & Diversity in Decision-Making
4. Communications
5. Walking Together in Partnership: Indigenous Church (Sacred Circle) with the Historic Settler Church (General Synod, Provinces, Dioceses and Territories)
6. Ministry in Remote Northern Communities

Most of the recommendations contained in this Report are process oriented. We propose that the General Synod empower General Synod's Officers to claim a convening and coordinating role and take responsibility for directing the next steps of this work. This will include directing some of the work to other committees, leaders and teams (such as the Transformational Commitments Implementation Group) but may also include maintaining a responsibility of some aspects that sit within the realm of the oversight work of the Officers of General Synod as a group.

Commission members, through our consultations, conversations and discernment see very clear intersections between various pathways. These intersections revolve around three key areas of implementation: structural change across all levels of church governance (national, provincial, diocesan) (Pathways 1 & 3); the relationship between Sacred Circle, Council of the North and the General Synod (Pathways 5 & 6); and management of the Office of General Synod (Pathways 2 & 4).

## GUIDING THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

*They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ~ Luke 24:32*

It was the very day of the resurrection but, for the disciples walking along the road to Emmaus, it was a day of confusion and worry. They had given up many things to follow Jesus and his crucifixion was not what they had expected. Their friends' strange story of angels and a missing body did nothing to ease their anxiety and so they had left Jerusalem with its danger and its sorrows.

But then, even as they were walking away, Jesus, unrecognized by them, came alongside them. He reminded them of the promise of the Scriptures, showing them that all they had endured was a necessary part of the path for all who would follow the Messiah. He reminded them that this path was created by God and had been travelled by many who had gone before them and would continue to welcome the generations yet to come.

The disciples reached their destination and urged this wise stranger to stay with them. So, Jesus went in and blessed and broke bread, and gave it to them, feeding them as he had done many times before. Their eyes were opened and they knew Jesus had been with them on the road. They knew, even though he had disappeared from sight, that Jesus was alive and with them still. They knew their journey was not over.

They returned to Jerusalem to share the good news. What had seemed like the end, was revealed to be a beginning.

The story of the road to Emmaus was the guiding scriptural narrative for the creation of the Transformational Commitments and it continues to guide this report. It is a story of Jesus' power to bring clarity to confusion, courage to fearfulness, and hope to anxiety. It is a call to trust in Scripture, in the Sacraments, and in one another's experiences of the Risen Christ. It is also a strong reminder that while the landscape may change and the path may appear to wander, we are called to continue our journey in faith, proclaiming the gospel that burns in our hearts, trusting that what might seem like an ending is always the revelation of a new beginning.

## DEFINING “GENERAL SYNOD”

The Primate’s Commission (‘Commission’) looks specifically at the work of ‘General Synod’. For the purpose of this report ‘General Synod’ is defined in the following way:

*The national organizational entity, instituted by dioceses, that has continued to evolve since inception in 1893<sup>1</sup> to take on specific responsibilities to hold Anglicans across the country in relationship with one another and with Anglicans across the Communion.*

**Please Note:** When ‘General Synod’ is referred to in this document it is referring to the organizational entity and not the ‘Meeting of the General Synod’ event that is also commonly referred to as General Synod. Nor is it referring to the ‘Office of General Synod’ (commonly known as Church House). For the purpose of this report the ‘Meeting of General Synod’ and the ‘Office of General Synod’ will be used, when necessary, in an attempt for clarity.

## INITIATING THE TASK OF THE PRIMATE’S COMMISSION

In light of emerging new opportunities and challenges facing the Anglican Church of Canada, in 2023, Archbishop Linda Nicholls initiated a Primate's Commission entitled "Reimagining the Church: Proclaiming the Gospel in the 21st Century." The Primate asked the Commission (see full list of members in Appendix 1) to think creatively about our church’s life, and to ‘reimagine’ what changes need to be made so that the gospel could continue to be at the centre of who we are.

Archbishop Nicholls provided the following as the basis of her thoughtful and wise implementation of this work:

*A core task of the church is to proclaim the gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ - wherever we may be, always aware of the context we address. So much has changed around us in recent decades through technology in addition to rapid social shifts. In the midst of changing patterns, uncertainties and possibilities we are called to proclaim the*

---

<sup>1</sup> For a history of the evolution of General Synod please see:  
<https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Evolution-of-General-Synod.pdf>

*gospel with joy in the context of Canadian urban, rural, Indigenous and isolated communities. To do that effectively we need support structures that are appropriate to our time and needs. We have inherited much that is good and helpful but can always be improved and may need to be transformed.*

*What is needed now at the national level – in the 21st century – to effectively proclaim the gospel in sustainable and life-giving ways? Are changes needed? If major changes are needed – how do we implement them with care and attention to their impacts? If we need to improve current patterns – how do we celebrate and support the gifts we have and use them well now and into the future? How will the structure of the General Synod need to shift or improve to be most effective? If we were to create the General Synod today, what would we create?*

The Commission was invited to explore these questions and offer a report to General Synod 2025 with recommendations for next steps.

## Understanding of the Task

The scope of the work outlined in this report is focused on the role of the organizational entity of General Synod, and how it might be reshaped to better facilitate the proclamation of the Gospel for decades to come.

The work of transformation of the structures and resources of the General Synod will not be done overnight. Existing structures and required timelines that are part of the current decision-making processes of the General Synod will result in many of the tasks outlined in this report taking significant time. Thoughtful discernment with stakeholders and a commitment to communicate with Anglicans across the country will also require space for meaningful engagement.

**The Primate's Commission considers the phase outlined in this document to be the exploratory phase of a multi-year process of transformation.**

Within the two-year biennium cycle that began in July 2023, the Primate's Commission understood its tasks to be as follows:

1. *To chart a path for future transformations of General Synod structures and resources to assist Anglican churches and communities across the country as they proclaim the Gospel.*
2. *To honour that the work of this report walks alongside the ongoing evolution of The Sacred Circle as found in The Covenant and Our Way of Life<sup>2</sup> that is being led by Indigenous Anglicans throughout the country. With deepest respect this report recognizes that there are many ways in which the Anglican Church of Canada continues to be on an ongoing journey with the Sacred Circle and that the work of developing and defining that partnership is evolving.*

## Current Context

**The report seeks to communicate a sense of prophetic imagination, urgency, a refusal to ignore difficult conversations, and provocative risk-taking ideas. It is not limited by the 'way things have always been done' but rather embraces our current context and the hope-filled mission to walk on the road with Jesus alongside us as the Gospel is proclaimed.**

The God of creation has called the Anglican Church of Canada to become a diverse grouping of followers of Christ spanning the width of a continent and stretching from the most northern communities of the Arctic to the southern tip of Ontario, worshiping in the Anglican tradition. These lands are stewarded by the Indigenous peoples of Canada, as they have been since time immemorial. Today they are also shared with peoples from diverse nationalities and origins. The face of Canada as we know it is changing, as is the face of Anglicanism. The religious institution many of us have long known and loved does not look now as it did even twenty years ago, and it will not look the same twenty years from now.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Covenant and Our Way of Life. Sacred Circle, found at:  
[https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/SC-covenant-owol\\_single.pdf](https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/SC-covenant-owol_single.pdf)

According to Dr. Neil Elliot in work directed by the General Synod<sup>3</sup>, membership and participation in Anglican parishes in 2023 was approximately one quarter of what it was in 1967. There are about half as many paid priests. The number of bishops has increased and average Sunday attendance is seventy-eight percent lower than in 1967. The following table provides a demonstration of this significant change on the road upon which we travel.

	1967	2023	
<b>Active Bishops</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>39</b>	+8%
<b>Paid Priests</b>	<b>1943</b>	<b>1084</b>	-44%
<b># Parishes</b>	<b>1849</b>	<b>1474</b>	-20%
<b>Total # on Parish Rolls</b>	<b>1,218,666</b>	<b>294,382</b>	-76%
<b>Average Sunday Attendance</b>	<b>272,400</b>	<b>58,871</b>	-78%

For many, the significant transitions demonstrated in the numbers above evoke grief, fear and longing. Memories of filled-to-the-brim Cathedrals along with church expansions to accommodate ever-increasing Sunday Schools and church functions lead to commiseration when contrasted against today's landscape. While the authors of this report honour the memories and the lamentation of the early 20th-century Anglican church, this nostalgia cannot be a barrier to a spirit-inspired, hope-filled excitement for the future work of Anglicanism in Canada as the people of God continue to deepen and invite life in Christ in new and diverse ways.

**This report does not seek to reverse current trends, but to respond to them to empower a much smaller church to thrive as it proclaims the gospel today and in the future.**

This is a report that seeks to embrace a time in church history that is filled with many opportunities to walk alongside Jesus in new and different ways. A time in which we are inspired by what has gone before and emboldened by where Jesus is calling us in the future. The members of the Primate's Commission are not grieved by this paradigm shift but rather embrace these opportunities for new beginnings with a burning in our hearts.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://numbersmatters.ca/2024/03/15/dioceses-of-the-acc-by-numbers/> and <https://www.anglican.ca/ask/faq/number-of-anglicans/statistical-archive/>

It is an invitation to all Anglicans in Canada to consider what structures and resources are needed by the General Synod today so that it can most effectively assist Anglicans across the country to deepen and invite life in Christ now and in generations to come.

*The church is changing and the Anglican Church of Canada of 2050 will not be the same as the Anglican Church of Canada of 1960 or 2016. But that change is not the same as the end of the church. That change may be uncomfortable, but being uncomfortable is not the same as the end of the church.*<sup>4</sup>

~ The Rev. Dr. Neil Elliot

Some caveats to consider regarding the scope of this work:

- While there are likely many ways that this work can provide witness to others, we do not hold the mandate of addressing needs at every level of the Church or any of the work led by Sacred Circle, even if all areas of the Anglican Church in Canada and the Sacred Circle are relevant to the work to which we have been called.
- This is not a proposal about revitalizing the spiritual life of individual churches (although we hope it might help), or recruiting more young people, or increasing attendance in general, even if these are all goods in and of themselves. Instead, this is a proposal for a significant review of the General Synod and the unique and valuable role it has to play for the benefit of all Anglicans in our country.
- The members of the Primate's Commission recognize that there is a variety of influences, constraints and challenges impacting the Anglican Church across Canada and the work of the General Synod. These include financial constraints, ongoing institutional decline (as discussed above) and wider social changes.

---

<sup>4</sup> Please see: How Grow's the Vineyard brochure at numbersmatter.ca:  
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/4jkzucd7qcsgwl3l6t2yd/How-grows-the-vineyard.pdf?rlkey=r45yq9v8rl0sxn0x77wt46la&e=1&dl=0>

## Guiding Lenses and Principles

The foundational principles the Commission took as its starting point were threefold. On an individual level, the commitments of the **Baptismal Vows**<sup>5</sup> as they're found in the Book of Alternative Services were considered. These vows constitute the heart of who Anglicans are as a people called to walk together in the journey of faith.

On an institutional level, the work was rooted in the **Mission Statement of the Anglican Church of Canada**<sup>6</sup> (1989) that states:

*As a partner in the worldwide Anglican Communion and in the universal Church, we proclaim and celebrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in worship and action. We value our heritage of biblical faith, reason, liturgy, tradition, bishops and synods, and the rich variety of our life in community. We acknowledge that God is calling us to greater diversity of membership, wider participation in ministry and leadership, better stewardship in God's creation and a stronger resolve in challenging attitudes and structures that cause injustice. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to respond to this call in love and service and so more fully live the life of Christ.*

Additionally, the Commission considered the **Five Transformational Commitments**<sup>7</sup> of the Anglican Church of Canada, adopted in 2023:

1. Invite and deepen life in Christ.
2. Champion the dignity of every human being; work to dismantle racism and colonialism.
3. Embrace mutual interdependence with the Indigenous church (Sacred Circle).

---

<sup>5</sup> Anglican Church of Canada, ed., *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada*, 8. pr (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1993), 158-159. <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/BAS.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.anglican.ca/about/mission-statement/#:~:text=As%20a%20partner%20in%20the,of%20our%20life%20in%20community.>

<sup>7</sup> <https://changingchurch.anglican.ca>

4. Nurture right relationship among people of faith in local, national and global communities and networks.
5. Steward and renew God's creation: protect and sustain the earth; pursue justice for all.

From these three foundational lenses the Commission sought to identify areas within the structures and work of the General Synod that could be deemed priorities for exploration, transformation and adaptation for the future.

## Enabling Conversation through Seven Hypotheses

*Hypothesis: supposition made on limited evidence  
as a starting point for further investigation.*

~ Oxford Dictionary

The Primate's Commission was committed to a listening approach based on models of appreciative inquiry; to ask questions that would elicit conversation and enable hopes and goals (as well as challenges and differing opinion) to emerge.

To enable wide engagement in a conversation about how structures can best enable the proclamation of the Gospel, the Primate's Commission posited seven hypotheses. Each was crafted to be deliberately provocative in the hope of stimulating authentic and vulnerable dialogue, even if it evoked difficult conversations. An initial Hypotheses document outlining these seven possibilities for structural change (see Appendix 3) was created alongside a historical review of the Evolution of General Synod (see Appendix 2).

The topics found within the seven hypotheses were not new. They have been discussed informally (and sometimes formally) for years. The intent was for the hypotheses to be used as starting points for conversation in a consultation process that was held in-person, via Zoom, and through an online survey tool between May and November 2024.

Using the Seven Hypotheses document, the Primate's Commission sought to engage Anglicans across the country in conversations about key areas of structure and work of the General Synod. Eighteen conversations were conducted online and in person, facilitated by at least one member of the Commission:

- Presentations and engagements at House of Bishops (2) and Council of General Synod (2)
- Presentations and engagements with all Provincial Synods (4)
- Online opportunities open to members of the Meeting of General Synod and Partners (4)
- Meetings/engagements with Senior Management Staff (2)
- Meeting/engagement with the Office of General Synod Staff (non-Management) (2)
- In-Person engagement with Council of the North (1)
- Online engagement with ACIP (1)
- Presentation and engagement with the Diocese of Niagara Synod (1)
- Presentation and engagement with seminary students at Vancouver School of Theology and seminary students from the Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI at Atlantic School of Theology (2)

After each conversation, participants were sent a survey to complete. The survey was also available on the Anglican Church of Canada website for all interested individuals. The online survey garnered 85 responses from participants in engagement activities and 212 participants who were drawn to the survey through word of mouth, media or other means.

The Commission analyzed notes from the conversations and the survey data (highlights from the responses can be found in Appendix 4) to assist in identifying **Three Core Areas of Work of the General Synod** as well as determining **Six Pathways for Transformational Change**.

## CORE AREAS OF WORK OF THE GENERAL SYNOD

The Primate's Commission has identified three core areas of work as foundational to the ministry of the General Synod as it seeks to support dioceses and communities across the country. These three core areas are a commitment to **communicate, connect, and convene** so that all Anglicans in Canada (individuals, parishes, and dioceses) are assisted in their ability to proclaim the Gospel.

### Communicating

- Disseminating information about the life of Canadian Anglicans and the work of General Synod throughout the church as well as to the wider world
- Creating and providing communication materials in support of the work of the General Synod
- In partnership with the Sacred Circle, creating and providing communication materials for the purposes of disseminating information about the Self-Determining Indigenous Church
- Developing and sharing common materials, including liturgical resources to be used at the discretion of Bishops and Dioceses

### Connecting

- Facilitating networks of relationships, resource sharing, and collaboration among various facets of the Anglican Church throughout Canada
- Facilitating connections between Anglicans in Canada and across the Communion
- Facilitating connections between Canadian Anglicans and partners in other denominations, other faiths, and civil society
- Lending expertise to the task of referring work to other bodies, as appropriate
- Enabling a just, equitable, and robust relationship between the General Synod and the Sacred Circle and amongst Anglicans throughout Canada.

## Convening

- Calling people together, either in-person or online, for the purposes of deliberation, decision-making, and building up of our common life
- Maintaining and developing the national archive of the Anglican Church of Canada

## Six Pathways for Transformational Change

The Primate's Commission has identified, with help from Anglicans from across the country, six pathways for transformational change that are recommended for exploration and further development and implementation.

The six pathways, while linked to the original seven hypotheses, are not a direct carrying forward of the statements contained in the initial Hypotheses document with one dropped. Rather, having the input from well over 200 Anglicans across the country and feedback from 297 online surveys, the pathways are aimed to encompass broader ideals as identified over the course of our engagement.

**It is important to reiterate that these pathways do not suggest any directives to the work of the Sacred Circle. The work of this report walks alongside the ongoing evolution of the Sacred Circle as found in The Covenant and Our Way of Life<sup>8</sup> that is being led by Indigenous Anglicans throughout the country. With deepest respect, this report seeks to recognize that there are many ways in which the Anglican Church of Canada continues to be on an ongoing journey with the Sacred Circle and that the work of developing and defining that partnership is evolving.**

---

<sup>8</sup> The Covenant and Our Way of Life. Sacred Circle, found at:  
[https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/SC-covenant-owol\\_single.pdf](https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/SC-covenant-owol_single.pdf)

# 1. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE PATHWAY

## Where we are now

In 2023, the Anglican Church of Canada was less than one-quarter of the size it was in 1967 in terms of the number of people attending on Sunday and the number on parish rolls. Despite this drastic and ongoing decline in participation and membership, the governance structures of the church remain largely the same in size; albeit with various attempts at reductions and adaptations of Standing Committees, Working Groups, Coordinating Committees, etc. Although strategic plans and governance reviews have reduced the size of diocesan delegations to the Meeting of General Synod, national committees, and even the Council of General Synod, the overarching structures of thirty dioceses, four provinces, and two national bodies (General Synod and Sacred Circle) have been sustained with a drastically decreased base of support.

While the number of staff employed by the General Synod has been reduced over the past 40 years, from 94 in 1987 to 39 currently, the structure of the Anglican Church of Canada, in its Provinces and Dioceses, has continued. Indeed, as Dr. Neil Elliot's statistics demonstrate, the number of bishops has increased.

It is our view that current institutional structures are larger than necessary at every level (especially ecclesiastical provinces, and the number of dioceses). This top-heavy structure focuses human and financial resources on maintaining outsized institutions rather than proclaiming the gospel in local communities.

Current institutional structures are more complex than necessary in terms of how decisions are made, implemented, and evaluated. These decision-making structures impede making decisions quickly and transparently and limit access to the knowledge and power to make decisions to a small established group.

In addition to practical challenges, the large and complex nature of these structures contributes to an institutional culture characterized by shared anxiety about institutional survival, deep discouragement about the

possibility of change, and mistrust among groups and individuals, all of which are counter to proclaiming the gospel of the risen Christ.

### Where we want to be next

To thrive in the future, the Anglican Church of Canada needs smaller and simpler governance structures at every level so that the gospel can be proclaimed more effectively in local communities.

**In a church one-quarter the size and shrinking, this pathway describes how the convening power of the institution of General Synod can initiate a process to address the question:**

***How can the size of church governance structures in the Anglican Church of Canada be reduced by 75%?<sup>9</sup>***

Canada is geographically large and regionally diverse, making it necessary to hold in tension two structural priorities:

1. Focusing resources on proclaiming the gospel in local communities through a shift to smaller national, provincial, and diocesan structures; and,
2. Establishing a strong centre focused on a shared commitment to proclaiming the gospel to foster relationships and collaboration across expansive diversity.

Building relationships and trust across distance and differences requires decision-making processes that are accessible, transparent, and accountable.

### Steps along the way

The questions of organizational structure outlined here have implications for every level of governance: national (General Synod and Sacred Circle), provincial, and diocesan. Therefore, the institution of General Synod has a crucial convening role in initiating a conversation that involves the people and groups required to design and implement a new organizational structure for the Anglican Church of Canada.

---

<sup>9</sup> This number is intended to be provocative and invite deep and urgent conversation about significant change.

We propose that the Officers of General Synod (Primate, General Secretary, Treasurer, Prolocutor, and Deputy Prolocutor, two Officers at Large, Chancellor, and Vice Chancellor) are given the mandate and resources to propose a major revision to organizational structures that would be proposed for implementation at the Meeting of General Synod in 2028. To achieve this goal, we recommend that the Officers:

**1. Create a working group to develop a proposal for a new organizational structure.**

This working group will address church structure at all levels: the General Synod, ecclesiastical provinces, and dioceses. This group of nine to eleven people would have a joyful vision for a smaller church structure that faithfully enables the gospel to be proclaimed. Members would include: specialists in organizational structure, newcomers to the Anglican tradition, Indigenous Anglicans, younger Anglicans, governance/canon lawyers, representatives of each ecclesiastical province, and laity, clergy, and bishops.

**2. Task the working group with answering the following questions:**

- a. How can national and provincial structures be drastically reduced in size? What is essential at the provincial level, if anything? What is essential at the national level, if anything? How can levels of governance be streamlined, combined, eliminated, or re-created to better align with the Transformational Commitments and the current context of the Anglican Church in Canada? How will/should structures interact with those of the Sacred Circle?
- b. What is the role of the primate in a new organizational structure? What can we learn from other parts of the Communion about alternative ways to structure this role, including the primate being a diocesan bishop?
- c. How can the number of dioceses be reduced? How can dioceses be encouraged to work together as steps toward amalgamation? How can natural moments of transition, such as the retirements of bishops or financial shifts, be opportunities to assess options? What can we learn ecumenically from the structure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and The Episcopal Church?

- d. How can processes of accountability, transparency, evaluation and adaptation be further instilled in the operational structure of the General Synod?
- e. How does the General Synod interact with its key partners; namely Anglican Foundation, Alongside Hope and the Anglican Church of Canada Pension Fund?
- f. What alternatives to the current structures, procedures and practices used for the creation and operation of General Synod Working Groups, Coordinating Committees, councils, other committees, etc. might better serve decision-making, especially in terms of being accessible to a broader range of people (who are predominantly volunteers) and increased nimbleness in facilitating change? (This is informed by a commitment to upholding the dignity of every human being that is highlighted in the “Inclusion and Diversity in Decision Making” pathway outlined below.). Additionally, what processes and procedures of the Meeting of the General Synod should also be adapted?

### **3. Convene a Constitutional Convention**

Convene a Constitution Convention involving all parties required to make a concrete proposal regarding a new organizational structure on a timeline that would facilitate the presentation of the new structure at the 2028 Meeting of the General Synod and the provincial synods that precede it. Full-communion partners and broader Anglican networks could also be represented.

We acknowledge substantial revisions to the canons, and potentially to federal and provincial legislation, will be required to implement changes to organizational structures at this level.

We recognize that the process itself as well as the results of the process are part of living into a new structure. The work of designing and implementing a new church structure must therefore be characterized by building trust and relationship, as well as an urgent and hopeful vision for change, anchored in a shared commitment to inviting and deepening life in the risen Christ.

## 2. MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW & RESTRUCTURING PATHWAY

### Where we are now

The Office of General Synod<sup>10</sup> is the main operational arm of the Anglican Church of Canada. Over the past few decades various restructuring efforts have had an impact both internally and externally, among the staff and amongst the wider church. At the same time, a shifting culture around employment has brought external influences—such as remote work, contract work, new information technologies, and artificial intelligence—to bear on the Office of General Synod.

The most recent intentional review and adaptation of governance and staff structures of the General Synod was done through the Preparing the Way planning process that began in 1992. While there has been a variety of adaptations since that time, many of the restructuring principles that occurred through that process continue to be the foundation of the ways in which the Office of General Synod operates, over thirty years later.

Today, there are nine different departments of the General Synod (Office of the Primate, Communications and Information Resources, Faith, Worship and Ministry, Financial Management, Global Relations, Indigenous Ministries, Office of the General Secretary, Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice, and Resources for Mission) that are tasked with implementing policies set by Anglicans through various committees and councils<sup>11</sup>.

Gathered data from both the Primate's Commission engagements and the Transformational Commitments process (2019-2023) continually identified the reality of significant confusion throughout the country around what the Office of General Synod does, can do, and should do. This confusion contributes to a lack of 'value' attributed to the Office of General Synod and

---

<sup>10</sup> For more information on the structures and roles of General Synod see:

<http://www.anglican.ca/about/handbook/>

<sup>11</sup> For a full description of the various Committees, Councils and Corporations of General Synod see:

[www.anglican.ca/about/ccc/](http://www.anglican.ca/about/ccc/)

the General Synod as a whole (which in turn negatively impacts the commitment to cost sharing by dioceses for the operational expenses of General Synod). Deep frustrations exist among members of the wider church who are asked to share their own declining financial resources with the Office of General Synod without a clear understanding of what takes place there or where accountability lies.

The Primate's Commission also recognizes that staff in the Office of General Synod have, for decades, had ever increasing responsibilities assigned to them with little sense of projects ever coming to completion. There appears to be a lack of clarity around the accountability structures governing the General Synod as it relates to the staff of the Office of General Synod and its interconnections with the various committees and councils (that are primarily comprised of volunteers from across the country). Staff receive directions from the Meeting of General Synod, from the Council of General Synod, from departmental heads, from upper management, and sometimes individual Anglicans who misunderstand the roles of General Synod staff. This lack of clarity leads to significant frustration around decision making and role clarity and negatively impacts effectiveness, job satisfaction and the well-being of employees. Furthermore, the lack of clarity becomes a barrier to the ways in which dedicated staff are able to assist in the proclamation of the Gospel through efforts of the Office of the General Synod.

### Where we want to be next

How can the structures of the General Synod support clear, transparent, and manageable expectations for the people who have been tasked with managing the national supportive structures that bind Anglicans together across the country? How can the work of General Synod, and the staff and volunteers doing the work, be valued and treated with dignity and respect? What supports, structures and environments are needed for this important work to be accomplished?

*“The church structures need to exist to enable ministry and pastoral care and to the extent to which we don’t do that well we need to improve them.”<sup>12</sup>”*

**~ The Venerable Alan Perry**

General Secretary of the Anglican Church of Canada

The overarching question that needs to be asked is whether the operating and management structure that has governed the Office of General Synod for the past generations is ideally suited to the needs of the Anglican Church of Canada that are fulfilled by General Synod in the 21st century.

Departments must be reviewed to ensure that work areas align with the current needs of the Anglican Church of Canada and the policies emerging from its various committees and councils<sup>13</sup> and that work that is no longer in alignment can effectively conclude. Additionally, structures must aim towards creating efficient, transparent, manageable and accountable work environments that clearly articulate roles and responsibilities, job descriptions, priority setting, and job scope.

Consideration should also be given to the review of existing policies and further adoption of appropriate best practices around the evolving employment landscape by drafting consistent policies on remote work, AI usage, contract work, and new information technologies.

The way forward involves the engagement and consultation of staff at every level of the Office of General Synod. It is important to ensure that staff are able to give feedback and to have their voices heard.

## Steps along the way

Guided by the hope of the General Synod to support the proclamation of the gospel in the 21st century, and the core work of connecting, convening, and communicating, this Report recommends a management review and restructuring process be carried out with recommendations presented and an implementation process instigated by 2028. This process must be led by

---

<sup>12</sup> See The Ministries of the General Synod video series:

[www.anglican.ca/about/departments/gso/](http://www.anglican.ca/about/departments/gso/)

<sup>13</sup> For a full description of the various Committees, Councils and Corporations of General Synod see:

<https://www.anglican.ca/about/ccc/>

an unbiased team that might most appropriately be a third-party outside consultant.

This process would offer increased clarity internally about task prioritization and evaluation and accountability structures, as well as increased clarity externally about the capacity, role, functions, and scope of the Office of General Synod staff work and the relation to committees, dioceses and others. In dialogue with Pathway #1, adaptations to the role of the Primate will also be considered.

This review would be intended to recognize, communicate, and value the contributions of Office of General Synod staff and bring awareness to the rest of the church of what they do. In that vein it would clarify job descriptions and mitigate overlapping responsibilities or gaps. It would provide assessment tools and metrics that would enable staff to determine what lies inside and outside the scope of their work.

Furthermore, it could provide a review and adaptation of management tools for clear evaluation and assessment processes that would further enable the growth and personal development of the Office of General Synod staff. It would aim to strengthen and foster a supportive environment that would enable staff to understand, accomplish, and celebrate their important work. It would also provide clear processes for re-prioritizing, adopting new activities, and bringing other work to a close. It would nurture right relationships and champion the dignity of every human being.

### 3. INCLUSION & DIVERSITY IN DECISION-MAKING

#### Where we are now

According to Statistics Canada data from 2023, Anglicanism continues to be the third largest Christian denomination<sup>14</sup> in Canada. An additional statistic indicates that one in five Christians in Canada are immigrants<sup>15</sup>. While there is an increase in diversity in many of our Anglican communities across Canada, there continues to be a lack of diversity represented in the work of the General Synod and barriers to the inclusion of diverse cultures, socio-economic realities, backgrounds, identities, and abilities.

Despite the many changes in the cultural landscape of Anglicanism across Canada, and various efforts to increase representation in all aspects of its work, the General Synod continues to attract and privilege older, affluent, white and able-bodied individuals in the Meetings of General Synod and its committees and councils.

Additionally, the General Synod's canonically oriented governance processes, including committee appointment and legislative procedures, is a system that privileges debate towards decision making as its default community discernment processes. Yet there are other community discernment processes that are less oriented towards debating points and more oriented towards deep listening and engagement.

Overall, inadequate procedures on the Meeting of General Synod floor and processes of the Meeting were repeatedly identified through the Commission's consultation process. It was felt that barriers are created and decision-making processes do not effectively enable participation by all. Some perceive that the governance system creates a bullying environment in which many voices are silenced.

#### Where we want to be next

To increase the effectiveness of the General Synod to be an instrument that enables Anglicans to proclaim the Gospel in an increasingly diverse country,

---

<sup>14</sup> See: [www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/3392-happy-easter](https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/3392-happy-easter)

<sup>15</sup> See: [numbersmatters.ca/2024/05/24/immigration-and-religion-in-canada/](https://numbersmatters.ca/2024/05/24/immigration-and-religion-in-canada/)

decisions of national importance need to be made by legislative bodies more widely representative of the Canadian population.

Voices heard within the Commission's consultations expressed a desire to re-visit and adapt General Synod structures to enable a wider participation in all aspects of the work of the General Synod. This wider participation includes not just people who identify as Indigenous and BIPOC but also people of different abilities and socio-economic realities (and other diversities).

A desire exists to change governance structures so that barriers and power differentials, including perceived procedural barriers at Meetings of General Synod, can be eliminated or radically reduced. Many sought to discuss ways in which the Meeting of General Synod, and all other meetings and activities convened by the General Synod on behalf of Anglicans across the country, could be places of relationship building, dialogue and discernment across vast diversity.

The 135-year-old structure for the Meeting of General Synod is no longer effective for the diverse body of Anglicans from across the country that it seeks to include. Current mechanisms inflate geographical and theological division rather than unity across difference. As the church moves into the next decades, new issues and priorities are emerging that are in urgent need of addressing—particularly around how to proclaim the Gospel in the post-modern realities of a digital age.

### Steps along the way

This Diversity & Inclusion Pathway is one that seeks to inform the efforts of all other Pathways contained within this Report. The principles of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are paramount to be attended to at all levels of church governance. The six guiding principles of diversity, equity and inclusion—bias, transparency, accountability, empathy, accessibility, and intersectionality—should be considered in all future transformations, adaptations, and processes of the General Synod<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>16</sup> 15five, a consulting firm with expertise in DEI, elaborates on these guiding principles. See: [www.15five.com/blog/6-guiding-principles-of-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/](http://www.15five.com/blog/6-guiding-principles-of-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/)

1. Steps ahead should include a review and adaptation of canons and regulations to ensure wider participation in the work of the church nationally. This will include communicating these expectations to dioceses as they prepare to elect and recommend participants in various General Synod activities. This work could be led by the Transformational Commitments Implementation Group and the National Advisory Council on Dismantling Racism along with the Governance Working Group and the Officers of the General Synod.
2. We propose that the Council of General Synod, upon the nomination of the Officers, appoint a national DEI team so that principles of diversity, equity and inclusion be enfolded within the life of the Anglican Church of Canada's General Synod, Ecclesiastical Provinces, Dioceses and Territories, Parishes and Congregations. This work may be done in partnership with, and with advice from, the National Advisory Council on Dismantling Racism. Work may begin after the first COGS meeting of the 2025-2028 triennium. Specifically, this team is to look at how Anglican Church of Canada processes and structures could facilitate greater inclusion of language and cultural differences, including, but not limited to<sup>17</sup>:
  - Age
  - Family composition
  - Cultural diversity
  - Gender Diversity
  - Linguistic diversity (i.e., church members for whom English is a second language)
  - Racial diversity
  - Regional differences in legal structures
3. The Office of General Synod can witness to (and share resources with) the rest of the Anglican Church in Canada by including anti-bias training as a mandatory requirement to all paid and volunteer leadership roles. To respect and build consistency with the Sacred Circle, resources available in the Our Way of Life document should

---

<sup>17</sup> "Equal treatment as defined by the Human Rights Code should be a guarantee for all paid and volunteer participants in the work of General Synod"

also be made a mandatory requirement of participation in all work of the General Synod<sup>18</sup>.

4. The 2028 (Meeting of) General Synod Planning Committee should be invited to establish ways in which the following objectives can be incorporated in the design and implementation of the next and future Meetings of General Synod:
  - Community building opportunities — enabling participants at the Meeting of General Synod to meet each other and learn more about the contexts of local ministries.
  - Smaller group sessions with mixed groups (as opposed to set table-groups or diocesan delegations) to build consensus.
  - Creative meeting management structures: re-imagining the way information is shared, processed and decisions are made to enable a productive and consultative meeting that minimizes reliance on historic structures of debate and decision making.
  - Incorporation of changes, as early as possible, to any decision-making canons that may emerge out of the Organizational Structure Pathway outlined above.

---

<sup>18</sup> See: [www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/SC-covenant-owol\\_single.pdf](http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/SC-covenant-owol_single.pdf)

## 4. COMMUNICATIONS PATHWAY

### Where we are now

Communications is deemed critically important and highly valued for the well-being of the Anglican Church of Canada at all levels, from the national church to local parishes. There is a strong desire for the General Synod to be responsible for effectively sharing information across the country so that Anglicans can learn and care about each other and witness to how the Gospel is being proclaimed in different ways in different places.

The Office of General Synod currently operates two modes of communication: an ‘independent’ journalistic mode through the Anglican Journal (both in print and online) and a corporate communications mode through the Communications Department and its work on [anglican.ca](http://anglican.ca), social media, Anglican Video, supporting of committee work, etc. Oversight of both modes is within the mandate of the Communications Committee.

The Commission heard that, for some Anglicans, the Anglican Journal is perceived as having an important truth-telling role and a responsibility to hold General Synod and/or church leaders to account. For others, this role was seen as divisive and counter to the objectives of General Synod. Whether for good or ill, journalism was perceived to be outside of the control of General Synod. However, this independence was called into question due to the journalism being funded by General Synod.

The Commission also heard that, for many Anglicans, the Anglican Journal is the only meaningful source of communication from the General Synod or across the national church and they deeply value learning about what is happening at other levels and in other places. Given this, decreasing circulation is a concern, as is the disparity of internet access and usage due to geography, age, ability, and economics.

### Where we want to be next

Communication is one of the core areas of work for the General Synod. Anglicans need to share stories about their ministries and the ways in which they are seeking to live into the transformational commitments and proclaim the Gospel. Anglicans need to be able to hear from and speak back to church

leaders at the national level. They need to be able to tell the story of the Gospel and participate in national and international conversations. Anglicans need communication methods to be accessible across the country, across generations, and across economic circumstances. Finally, Anglicans need to know that all of this communication is contributing to a culture of honesty, transparency and accountability.

The work of communications—sharing stories, building relationships, and increasing capacity—across the Anglican Church of Canada is a multifaceted responsibility that requires multifaceted tools and resources. Opportunities to utilize online, web-based communications and community building technologies must be explored while also recognizing the value of other modes of communication such as print. The efforts of the Communications Department must respond to the needs of Anglicans across the country to learn from each other and share resources, information, and lessons learned. Communications must not just be about journalism, and a robust Communications Department must identify new ways to provide value to Anglicans across the country.

Journalism funded by the organization itself, such as the Anglican Journal, is not a sufficient tool to ensure accountability and transparency across the Anglican Church in Canada. As such the need for the development of an appropriate tool or set of tools for ensuring accountability and transparency that includes all aspects of General Synod's work has been recommended in the Operational Pathway outlined above.

### Steps along the way

It is evident that communicating on behalf of the Anglican Church in Canada is an integral and important role of the General Synod. A clear and public mandate should be established as soon as possible. Within the 2025-2028 triennium, the Communications Committee and Director of Communications should be tasked with examining the current mandate, format, and funding model of the Communications Department for approval by the Council of General Synod within the 2025 - 2028 triennium.

The creation of this mandate should explore the purpose of the Anglican Journal, which is currently defined in the Anglican Church of Canada Handbook as (in part):<sup>19</sup>

*The Anglican Journal (whether in print and/or digital formats) is a journalistic enterprise, and as such is expected to adhere to the highest standards of journalistic responsibility, accuracy, fairness, accountability and transparency. Its journalism is fact-based, fact-checked and in-depth, tackling important issues, asking and answering difficult questions.*

*The Anglican Journal is committed to representing the widest possible diversity of information and opinion across the Anglican Church of Canada. It promotes informed engagement by Anglicans in the life of their church, and nurtures healthy self-reflection, respectful dialogue and constructive debate.*

This review should include voices from across the country and attempt to gather input on whether the Anglican Journal is valued as a ‘journalistic enterprise’ or if its most important role is that of a communications tool that connects Anglicans across the country. Questions should clearly articulate that an exploration of the Anglican Journal does not mean that all print communications would be cancelled but rather that the current context invites a conversation around the development and implementation of effective and cost-efficient communication tools that are needed by Anglicans across the country.

Alongside the development of an updated mandate of the Communications role of the General Synod, the Communications Committee, in partnership with the Director of Communications, should be tasked with developing a Strategic Communications Plan that will address the following goals:

- The development of an efficient, nimble, and cost-effective Communications Plan that is responsive to the current context of the General Synod and has been developed with the engagement of Anglicans across the country to determine communications needs

---

<sup>19</sup> Handbook of the General Synod, Appendix C: The Anglican Journal at <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/303-2019-app-c.pdf>

and creative opportunities to support those needs (when the needs fall within the mandate of the Communications Department of the General Synod).

- Ensuring that the Communications tasks and products of the General Synod support and strengthen the Five Transformational Commitments of the Anglican Church of Canada.
- Providing a way for people to hear about the work of the General Synod and other stories across the Anglican Church in Canada.
- Providing a way for people to communicate back to General Synod and national church leadership.
- Exploring diverse and creative tools that can enable the connection of individuals and communities from across the country for the purpose of story sharing and capacity building. This may include enabling the sharing of resources across the country on pertinent ministry areas such as changing parish structures, amalgamation of parishes, lessons learned around parish development, and/or parish closure processes.
- Utilizing diverse modes of communication such as print, electronic and social media tools that maintain access to information for people in varying circumstances.

## **5. WALKING TOGETHER IN PARTNERSHIP: INDIGENOUS CHURCH (SACRED CIRCLE) WITH THE HISTORIC SETTLER CHURCH (GENERAL SYNOD, PROVINCES, DIOCESES AND TERRITORIES)**

### **Where we are now**

After years of dialogue, discernment and development, there exists much hope of finding a good way forward between the General Synod and the Self-Determining Indigenous Church (Sacred Circle). There is a high level of commitment amongst Anglicans throughout Canada towards ongoing partnership and relationship in the future.

While there is hope and desire to move forward together, there are feelings of unease around how to effectively do so. There is confusion about the nature of the desired relationship between Sacred Circle and General Synod and the role each plays in the life (and decision-making) of each. Differing governance and decision-making processes are a barrier to effective conversation and collaboration. Furthermore, there is confusion about how the Sacred Circle and the Council of the North function together (or separately) to serve Indigenous Anglicans in Canada in the future.

Amongst Indigenous Anglicans there is distrust towards the Anglican Church of Canada; specifically with Council of General Synod, Senior Representatives of the Office of General Synod; and processes at the Meeting of General Synod. With regards to the Meeting of General Synod a sense of hurt seems evident as well.

Amongst non-Indigenous Anglicans there remains explicit and implicit adherence to historic colonial structures along with a lack of knowledge about the 'Our Way of Life' Covenant. Non-Indigenous Anglicans are hesitant to engage in dialogue and discussion for fear of being considered offensive and/or racist.

## Where we want to be next

A strong desire and commitment exists around the development of an effective church-to-church partnership between the General Synod and the Indigenous Church (Sacred Circle) that is committed (structurally and financially) to the Truth and Reconciliation efforts of the Anglican Church of Canada. There is deep hope for a new way to be established that will be based on a trusted relationship between the Sacred Circle and the General Synod and will enable the entire Anglican Church in Canada to walk together to proclaim the Gospel and deepen and invite life in Christ.

The development of partnership processes that enable open communication and dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Anglicans engaged in the work of General Synod and the work of Sacred Circle will assist in continuing the mutual hope to walk together in the future. Methods of decision-making that include a commitment to creating safe space for mutual understanding, education and listening, as well as conflict resolution, will further enable success.

It should be noted that the work of the Organizational Pathway (as described above) should consider the aim of a church-to-church pathway as structures are reviewed and transformed.

## Steps along the way

The Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada and the Presiding Elder of Sacred Circle are invited to consider instigating the following tasks with an aim to bring recommendations to the Meeting of General Synod in 2028:

1. The development of a definition, clearly communicated to Anglicans across the country, of what is understood as a church-to-church partnership between the General Synod and Sacred Circle along with a clear articulation of what it means that both are independent and yet connected as the Anglican Church of Canada.
2. The creation of effective governance processes (i.e. canons) to support and clearly articulate the relationship between the Sacred Circle and General Synod.

3. The development of a Working Group, comprising Indigenous and non-Indigenous Anglicans, that will look specifically at ways to walk together in partnership from where we are now to where we want to be. This Working Group could be tasked with the following:
  - a. The creation and/or an adoption of a new model of committee processes and decision-making (some of which will unfold through the work of Pathway #1, #2, and #3).
  - b. The development of a new structure of conversation and decision-making for the Meeting of General Synod that enables the full participation of Indigenous members and open and honest conversation amongst all participants. (This should be done within the tasks outlined in Pathway #3).
  - c. Support for the Sacred Circle to create an in-depth communication strategy across dioceses to increase awareness and understanding of the 'Our Way of Life' Covenant and the work of Sacred Circle. (This is connected to the Communications Pathway).
  - d. If deemed necessary, the development of a mediation strategy to discuss past challenges between the members of ACIP, General Synod Senior Staff and Directors to create a good path forward for future work.
4. The development of a sustainable financial and organizational relationship between General Synod and the Sacred Circle.
5. An in-depth conversation between General Synod, Sacred Circle and the Council of the North to determine how the three groups can move forward in a good way. This conversation should also inform and/or be done in partnership with the proposed work identified with Pathway #6.

## 6. MINISTRY IN REMOTE NORTHERN COMMUNITIES PATHWAY

### Where we are now

Currently, the General Synod provides significant financial support for remote communities (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) through the Council of the North ministry. This support is provided on behalf of all dioceses across Canada who provide funding by way of their annual apportionment commitments. The Council of the North was established in 1976 as a result of a 1970 working group established to consider the challenges and opportunities for ministry in the northern parts of Canada.

*“Our purpose is to respond to God’s Call to mission and ministry in the northern regions of Canada.”*

~ from the Council of the North Policy Handbook

Through the Primate’s Commission engagement process, it is clear that the Council of the North continues to be considered an integral ministry of the General Synod. However, a variety of questions emerged that brought to light some of the existing concerns regarding the ways in which the General Synod can (or cannot) provide grant funds to support vulnerable communities in the future. These questions include:

1. How does the Council of the North interact with the Sacred Circle?  
Are both a ministry to Indigenous Anglicans in Canada?
2. What about the increasing reality of vulnerable communities in all areas of the country? Immigration patterns, introduction of new cultures in established or “traditional” communities, and the recognition of long-standing issues such as poverty and racism are also presenting an emerging need for the Gospel to be proclaimed for peoples who find themselves alienated even within a crowd.
3. As the Anglican Church of Canada faces decline across all metrics, resources are increasingly strained across the board. This means support for remote communities has been diminished and will likely continue to diminish in the future. How can the Ministry of the Council of the North develop other successful stewardship methods to sustain ministry in the future? When the General Synod has to

decrease grant funding, how will it work with diocesan and local leaders to assist these communities to build capacity for their local stewardship?

Historically, Anglican churches in remote Northern communities have provided a spiritual home for residents. In some cases, these Anglican churches have become community hubs, and in other places they are the only institutions that have remained to serve people who are left behind as their communities continue to erode. Bishops and clergy within the Council of the North work within this landscape with the challenge of low stipendiary compensation (or none at all), inadequate housing and impossible geographical challenges that impact the ability to travel and attend to the needs of the various communities throughout a diocese. These challenges leave little time for the ongoing need to update policies, review structures and seek new opportunities for sustainability.

### Where we want to be next

The development of the Council of the North in 1976 was an effective response of the Anglican Church of Canada as it sought to strengthen ministry in remote communities in the North. Over the last fifty-five years, support to the North provided by Anglicans throughout Canada via the General Synod has become an integral lifeline for parishes in Northern communities to invite and deepen life in Christ.

It is clear from the work of the Primate's Commission that there is deep concern amongst Anglicans across Canada regarding ministry in these remote communities of the North as well as for vulnerable communities throughout neighbourhoods in all areas of the country.

That said, it is clear that the context of 1976 is quite different from the realities of 2025. As was articulated earlier in this report, demographic and financial realities must be faced by the General Synod (and its supporting dioceses) to determine what capacity it has to support this ministry in the future.

Additionally, while the Council of the North was at one time the only way in which the General Synod supported Indigenous Anglicans in Canada, that is

no longer the case. Today, the emergence of the self-determining Indigenous Church is also an important ministry priority of the General Synod. Clarifying the ways in which these two ministries overlap (or do not overlap) will be necessary for a successful way forward.

### Steps along the way

Anglicans across Canada hunger for a clear and transparent understanding of who the Council of the North is and the reasons why the Council of the North is the only block grant funding of the General Synod. Furthermore, the need to understand the delineation between the Council of the North and Sacred Circle is becoming increasingly important.

As noted in Pathway #5, an in-depth conversation between General Synod, Sacred Circle and the Council of the North will be an integral first step in determining how the three groups can move forward in a good way. The outcomes of this conversation and any ensuing work that emerges from it should be clearly communicated to Anglicans across Canada.

The General Synod must be clear and transparent about its inability to fully fund vital ministry in remote areas. However, it is recommended that the General Synod, through the Resources for Mission department, strengthen its offering of stewardship support and training for remote communities, with the aim to help them build capacity toward self-sufficiency. This may include local stewardship and fundraising, but also the exploration of other external sources of funding. (It should be noted that Sacred Circle may also seek similar support as its development continues). Additionally, the Council of the North may benefit from shared resources from other areas of the country regarding changing parish structures, amalgamation of parishes, and/or parish closures as outlined in Pathway #4 as a potential communications role for the General Synod.

The Council of the North is invited to examine the ways in which its context has changed (particularly in some of the cities and communities within the Council of the North boundaries that may actually be less vulnerable than they once were in terms of demographics and socio-economic realities). This examination should include a review of the structures outlined in the 2008 Handbook of the Council of the North (and subsequent edits) and the

development of new procedures and self-understanding to guide the Council in the future, particularly as it relates to the Sacred Circle. The Commission recognizes and respects that the Council of the North has its own approaches to updating its procedures and processes. However, it is noted that there may be creative opportunities to solicit support for this work from the Office of General Synod and amongst the many Anglicans in Canada who feel a strong connection to this Ministry.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

The exploratory phase of the Primate's Commission was initiated by Archbishop Linda Nicholls at General Synod 2023. The first (and only) in-person meeting of the Primate's Commission met over three days in the Diocese of Montreal in late January 2024. Over an intense twelve months the members of the Commission attempted to respond to the question; "If we were to create the General Synod today, what would we create?"

Of course, the Commission was well aware that starting from a blank slate is neither possible nor desirable. Anglicans throughout Canada and the General Synod have been on a journey with Jesus in this country for generations and the road has included a multitude of ways in which Jesus has been revealed, bringing hope and causing hearts to burn. Increasingly, the General Synod walks alongside Indigenous Anglicans in Canada, grappling with ongoing revelations of harms that have been done on the road along the way and the desire for better paths forward, rooted in the commitment for reconciliation.

In 2023, the Meeting of General Synod adopted the Five Transformational Commitments that served as a key lens to this Report. As the Transformational Commitments continue to be implemented in the processes and governance of the General Synod, there is a natural alignment between much of the work proposed in this Report and the Transformational Commitments Implementation Group.

In the changing context of the Anglican Church in Canada there is much to be hopeful for. Dioceses and Parishes continue to proclaim the gospel and deepen and invite life in Christ. The Sacred Circle is continuing to emerge

with a commitment to walk alongside the Anglican Church of Canada. Individuals of diverse ages and backgrounds dedicate themselves to the mission of Christ throughout our various landscapes.

The General Synod continues to serve Anglicans in Canada. For years individuals have committed themselves to the ongoing adaptation and transformation of its structures and resources to respond to current contexts. The work of the Primate's Commission is but one part of this ongoing journey.

Most of the recommendations contained in this Report are process oriented. We propose that the General Synod empower General Synod's Officers to claim a convening and coordinating role and take responsibility for directing the next steps of this work. This will include directing some of the work to other committees, leaders and teams (such as the Transformational Commitments Working Group) but may also include maintaining a responsibility of some aspects within the realm of the work of the Officers of General Synod as a group.

Commission members, through our consultations, conversations and discernment, see very clear intersections between various pathways. These intersections revolve around three key areas of implementation: structural change across all levels of church governance (national, provincial, diocesan) (Pathways 1 & 3); relationship between Sacred Circle, Council of the North and the General Synod (Pathways 5 & 6); and Management of the Office of General Synod (Pathways 2 & 4).

**The next phase of this work must be embraced by the people of God within the Anglican Church of Canada. Those who seek to embrace a prophetic imagination. Those who understand the need for urgency. Those who refuse to ignore difficult conversations. Those who are provocative risk-takers that will not be limited by the 'way things have always been done'.**

The Primate's Commission encourages the Council of General Synod, the 2025 Meeting of the General Synod and the newly elected Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada to embrace this report and commend it to the Officers of General Synod (as elected at the 2025 Meeting of General Synod)

to provide oversight on all next steps, direct specific tasks to appropriate individuals and/or groups, and take responsibility for ensuring that the work continues for the purpose of informing and enabling transformational change.

Embracing this report acknowledges and emboldens a prophetic hope emerging from the people of God in this place and this time. This does not suggest that all of the ideas in this Report will journey in exactly the way that has been written but that the movement forward, with Jesus alongside us, will lead us to future revelations, and continue to inspire the Anglican Church of Canada, and all of its many facets, to proclaim the Gospel and invite and deepen life in Christ.

*And they worshipped him,  
and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.*

**Luke 24:52**

## APPENDIX 1 – COMMISSION MEMBERS

### Commission Members:

- The Rev. Dr. Kyle Wagner, NS & PEI
- The Ven. Rhonda Waters, Ottawa
- Mr. Dion Lewis, Montreal
- The Very Rev. Peter Elliott, New Westminster
- The Ven. Monique Stone (Chair), Ottawa
- The Ven. Nick Pang, New Westminster (Kootenay when appointed)
- The Rev. Cole Hartin, currently serving in the Episcopal Church of the United States
- The Rev. Jasmine Chandra, Fredericton
- Dr. Sarah Kathleen Johnson, Director of Anglican Studies, St. Paul University
- The Rt. Rev. Rachael Parker, Brandon
- The Rev. Rod Brant Francis, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, Ontario
- The Rev. Vincent Solomon, Diocese of Rupert's Land

## **APPENDIX 2 – EVOLUTION OF GENERAL SYNOD**

The full document can be found here: <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Evolution-of-General-Synod.pdf>

## **APPENDIX 3 – BEHIND THE HYPOTHESES**

The full document can be found here: <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Behind-the-Hypotheses.pdf>

## APPENDIX 4 – HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

When the Primate's Commission's work was launched in November of 2023, the team sought to be intentionally provocative in an attempt to generate interest and elicit engagement around some of the issues that have been discussed over many years across the National Church. The Commission was not surprised when the Seven Hypotheses brought out a wide variety of reactions, including negative ones. Many are well aware that this is a time in church history when the current context and the need for change are causing fear, anxiety and worry. Additionally, it is evident that there is a faith-filled hope amongst committed Anglicans who have contributed to this process and are eager to be engaged in the future.

A pleasant surprise was how many people wanted to get involved and provide comment. Over three hundred people took the time to complete the online survey, with each providing significant input. Whether people agreed or vehemently disagreed, it was clear that people feel that the time is now to have open and vulnerable conversations about the future of the General Synod and the ways in which it can continue to support Anglicans across the country.

A number of comments stretched beyond the scope of the Primate's Commission as participants used the Commission work to comment on other issues going on with General Synod at this time (i.e., the financial crisis, the plan for decreased funding to the Council of the North, unknowns about the development of Sacred Circle). These responses were valuable as they demonstrated the areas that people are concerned about.

The Commission believes that the work created by its membership, in conjunction with the heart-felt input of well over 350 Anglicans from across our country, will guide the mandates of our future Primate, Council of General Synod, and the Officers and Senior Management of General Synod.

**Here are some overall highlights of the feedback received:**

- There were several comments and questions about the General Synod: Why does it exist? What does it do? Who makes the decisions and how do they happen? Is there still value in it?
- There was a sense that the General Synod was in need of more transparency, communication, and adaptability in order to foster trust and move forward more effectively.
- While there is an awareness that money is a key contributor to current challenges, it was reiterated several times that any proposed changes should not be motivated just by finances.
- Some commented that our Commission is not going to make a difference and expressed a feeling that apathy and protectionism continually halt the courage to change.

**Hypotheses Highlights:***Hypothesis #1 (Sacred Circle/Council of the North/General Synod Conversation)*

Out of 255 responses, 53% of respondents agreed with this hypothesis and 48% marked it as urgent. Twenty-two percent disagreed with some element of the hypothesis and 21% thought that this was not an urgent issue.

- There was a clear and direct message from many corners that the Commission needs to have a voice from the Council of the North and Indigenous Anglicans. (This helped the Commission recruit 3 new members: two Indigenous members and one bishop of a Council of the North diocese).
- There was confusion over how the Council of the North operates and many saw it as synonymous with the Indigenous Church. This led to questions about how vulnerable churches are supported, how they are defined and specifically how the Council of the North is involved in these churches and communities.
- Overall, it was expressed that there needs to be a deep and difficult conversation about how to create a church-to-church relationship with the Sacred Circle and what the future looks like between Sacred Circle, Council of the North and the General Synod.

- It was also acknowledged that finances would have to be part of this discussion but that there also needed to be an acknowledgement about the relational nature of this ministry.

*Hypothesis #2 (Diversity of Participation in Governance):*

Out of 255 responses, 61% of respondents agreed with this hypothesis and 57% marked it as urgent. Eighteen percent disagreed with some element of the hypothesis and 21% thought that this was not an urgent issue.

- We heard about a number of barriers to inclusion, encompassing factors such as race, income levels, structural processes, and intimidation.
- There was a clear need to understand what General Synod is; some people were thinking of the whole National church, others were thinking of Church House, while others thought of the triennial meeting.
- There was a clear lack of trust in a number of the responses. A particular concern was who gets to make decisions and how these decisions are made.

*Hypothesis #3 (Levels of Governance):*

Out of 255 responses, 50% of respondents agreed with this hypothesis and 44% marked it as urgent. Seventeen percent disagreed with some element of the hypothesis and 22% thought that this was not an urgent issue.

- While there was a lot of agreement that some sort of restructuring is needed, there were many different opinions on what that looked like.
- Benefits and risks of eliminating different levels of governance were noted.
- It was made clear that what the General Synod does and hopes to do needs to be looked at before any changes take place.

*Hypothesis #4 (Role of the Primate):*

Out of 255 responses, 45% of respondents agreed with this hypothesis and 49% marked it as urgent. Twenty-five percent disagreed with some element of the hypothesis and 18% thought that this was not an urgent issue.

- This hypothesis generated a lot of interest in exploring the idea. There were concerns that it would lead to burnout and doubts that it would actually save any costs. There was also a question of whether it might lead to preferential treatment for whatever diocese the Primate resides in.

- It was pointed out that there is a sacramental nature to reintegrating the Primate's office into a local Diocese. This led to questions of re-examining the episcopate as a whole—how does the role of the Primate fit with the episcopacy?
- This led to more questions about the nature of the ACC. Are we a joint collaboration of Dioceses or one entity that everything flows out of?

#### *Hypothesis #5 (Reduction of Travel):*

Out of 255 responses, 64% of respondents agreed with this hypothesis and 53% marked it as urgent. Nine percent disagreed with some element of the hypothesis and 12% thought that this was not an urgent issue.

- The main comment around remote work was that it should be balanced with in-person gatherings. The value of being together in person was highlighted and there was concern over what would happen if this was taken out entirely.
- The inconsistency in reliable internet service in different parts of the country was also mentioned as a key barrier.

#### *Hypothesis #6 (Church House)*

Out of 255 responses, 56% of respondents agreed with this hypothesis and 48% marked it as urgent. Fourteen percent disagreed with some element of the hypothesis and 21% thought that this was not an urgent issue.

- There were quite a few people who were confused over how and when the decision came for the new office space. People were wondering why we were posing this hypothesis when the decision to move has already been made. This tied in with questions about structures of management and how decisions in general were made.
- For the most part, people agreed that Church House is in need of re-visioning. There were some who did not know what Church House does or is. Many felt that a review and restructuring of the priorities and programs that staff should be focused on must come before questions of where they work are tackled.
- There was strong support to embrace remote staffing while also noting the value of face-to-face interaction.

- There were responses from staff who were indicating confusion over what to do as tasks keep being added without any work being concluded or ending.
- The question was asked if the central office should be in a less expensive/more central location?

*Hypothesis #7 (Independent Journalism):*

Out of 255 responses, 38% of respondents agreed with this hypothesis and 34% marked it as urgent. Thirty-one percent disagreed with some element of the hypothesis and 32% thought that this was not an urgent issue.

- The primary value of the Anglican Journal was that it helps people stay connected across the country. The concern was about ensuring everyone has access to story sharing and connecting (with many concerned that this was an attempt to turn everything into digital media when not everyone has access to the internet).
- Although the quantitative responses indicated that most people are in agreement with the hypothesis, the written responses revealed more ambiguity and a general lack of consensus about what the hypothesis was suggesting. Many responses did not explicitly declare themselves pro or con but rather turned to various kinds of problem-solving or critiquing the status quo. Particularly in the public survey, many people expressed the need to have more information in order to form an opinion.
- For some, the Anglican Journal plays an accountability role for the Anglican Church of Canada. Several noted that there is a need for an independent watcher to hold us and our leadership accountable, and that this is why the Anglican Journal and journalists are needed. This raised the question of whether or not we should be funding our own accountability or if accountability and transparency should be embedded more effectively in our systems and processes.
- Some raised the concern that the Anglican Journal is not part of the communication strategy and there is a need for a way to communicate in an organized way and explore communications more holistically.