

NEWS

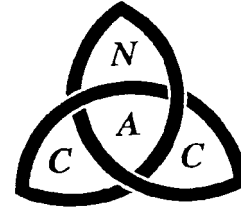
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BRIEFS

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THE 38TH. GENERAL COUNCIL

The 2003 General Council met in Wolfville, NS, August 10-16. The NACC was denied a formal presence on the floor in 2000, so we made no such application this year. However, we were visibly there, thanks to our display table, which was tended by a team from the NACC's Maritime regional association (MACC) - Ivan Macdonald, Wilf and Ethel Logan, Cameron Smith, and Lester and Marion Settle. (Many thanks, friends.) Besides looking after the display, they looked amiable, answered questions, kept the NACC video "Keeping the Dream Alive" running, and handed out materials.

As usual, the General Council's agenda was massive, and to report briefly on what was done in the 7 days is a bit of a challenge. However, I can tell you that, as usual, a lot of time was spent on social and "justice" issues - for instance: a new appeal for the Healing Fund (for residents of native residential schools), the Beads of Hope campaign (for global AIDS/HIV relief), reconciliation with Muslims, and a formal expression of regret to women ministers who had, in earlier years, had to retire at marriage. Also, there were policy statements on issues like genetically modified food, nuclear weapons, peace in Israel and Palestine, Jewish-Christian relations, and use of funds from gambling.

Otherwise,

- The GC heard a major presentation on the M&S Fund, which has been struggling in recent years. The presenters acknowledged that most of M&S funds (75%) goes directly into the denomination's operating fund, rather than to what most people see as "mission". Indeed, only a small - and shrinking - fraction of M&S goes to such activities. GC was also told that presently only about half of the UCC's members and adherents make any contribution at all to M&S.
- By a wide margin, the GC called on the Federal Government to amend the laws of Canada to permit same-sex marriage. However, during the debate the court was reminded any decision actually to perform such a union rests with the local congregation. (As noted earlier in *News Briefs*, any session wishing to make clear its refusal to permit such services can approach the NACC for suggested language.)
- Restructuring of the UCC is apparently still being contemplated, even though Remit 7, the recent church-wide vote on the matter, was defeated. (You will remember that, concerned that the changes proposed by Remit 7 would further limit the autonomy of local pastoral charges, the NACC asked its member congregations to vote against the proposal, and speak against it in their presbyteries.) Despite the rejection, commissioners at this GC were asked to reflect on the reasons for the

defeat, since their advice would "help General Council Executive decide what structural changes, if any, should be considered in the future."

- The Committee on Faith and Theology presented a progress report on the proposed new UCC statement of faith (of which we have also previously spoken here, with some considerable concern). A draft statement is to be presented to the next General Council (2006). The committee reported that by May, 2003, it had received only about 150 responses to "Faith Talk", its principal tool for feedback. In a reply to a concern, the court was told that the new statement, if approved, was not intended to take the place of the Articles of Faith, or the New Creed of 1968. Interestingly, there was apparently no discussion about what the church would do if there were major discrepancies between the three - or which would be given precedence.
- You may remember that, by action of the 2000 General Council, the United Church Women (UCW) became the "Women of the United Church of Canada" (WUCC). This has now been changed *again*, to the "Women's Ministry Network" (WMN).

In addition, and of very considerable importance to the church at large, were two elections: the Rev. Peter Short as Moderator, and the Rev. Dr. Jim Sinclair as General Secretary. The former moves to Church House from pastoral ministry at Wilmot United, Fredericton, NB; the latter has been serving for some months as Acting General Secretary. We hope to be able to tell you more about these appointments in a forthcoming *News Briefs*.

PRAYERS, PLEASE!

Our sister denomination, the Uniting Church in Australia, is presently in great need of our prayers. Founded in 1977 and consciously modelled on the United Church of Canada, the UCA is now following some paths that have deeply wounded us. In particular, it is presently engaged in a major battle over this year's General Assembly decision to authorize the ordination of practicing homosexuals. Our Australian friends are now where we were in 1988.

Evangelical contacts in the UCA tell us that representatives from the United Church have spoken at recent Assemblies, telling them that the homosexual ordination issue has not caused problems for the UCC. This is somewhat startling, given, for instance, what has happened to UCC membership figures since the decision was taken here. Looking at five-year spans, and relying on the UCC's own published figures, consider the following:

- Just for reference: in the five-year span before "the issue" really surfaced for most people (1980-85), membership declined 2.4%, but
- During 1985-90 (General Council approved the ordination of practicing homosexuals in 1988), membership fell 8.27%, and
- As the implications for local congregations sank in and as stories circulated of churches being pressured to accept gay clergy, the rate of decline accelerated, with drops of 9.93% (1990-1995) and 10.59% (1995-2000).

So, pray - **please** - for the Uniting Church in Australia, for those within it who are actively challenging the Assembly's decision, and especially for the vigorous leadership being offered by our friends in EMU ("Evangelical Members of the Uniting Church").

NEW - THE NACC WEB ADDRESS IS NOW PART OF OUR MASTHEAD (SEE PAGE 1)