



# Consultation on Anglican Theological Education in the First Nations Context

## A Report to the Church

A Consultation on Anglican Theological Education in the First Nations Context was held at Thorneloe University in Sudbury, Ontario, on 20-23 May 2009. The event drew twenty-one participants from each of the six northern Anglican training programmes as well as representatives of national church bodies and seminaries. The purpose of the gathering was to take counsel together on the subject of theological education for First Nations church leaders so that we might begin to fulfil the vision of the Anglican Church's New Agape (2001) for Indigenous self-determination. Central to our discussion were questions regarding curriculum, training standards, modes of delivery and how we can share and develop resources.

### What we did

The group heard four stimulating addresses. The first, given by Andrew Wesley, was on the subject of 'Traditional Spirituality' and drew on his experience of the last eight years working with the Toronto Urban Native Ministry and the Council Fire. He said that many of those he works with have no contact with the church, but follow the path of *midewin* or traditional spirituality. He said that there are important points of difference and contact with the Christian faith, and that church leaders must become educated in this area if they are to have effective ministries.

The gathering received a powerful challenge from Raymond Aldred, a theology professor at Calgary's Ambrose University College, to re-think the way we train pastors and educators from the ground up. Drawing on his background as a Cree who has done doctoral studies in a European system, Professor Aldred identified the ways in which our educational approach has been colonialising in the indigenous context. He said that a truly indigenous approach to education would favour story over propositional truth, appropriate apprenticeship models of learning, and place a greater value on learning-in-community. But this does not mean lowering standards, he cautioned. 'We need to raise up aboriginal scholars,' he said, 'God wants aboriginal people to reach the whole world and not just aboriginal people.'

Bishop Mark MacDonald followed this up with a discussion of 'Training Standards'. He reflected on the church's experience of training aboriginal clergy during the last seventy years and concluded that, apart from a few outstanding examples, we have not been very effective. He pointed out that we have learned some valuable lessons along the way, however, and underlined the need to develop an equivalency-based standards assessment. Illustrating his talk from Luke's Gospel, he suggested that 'ecological' and 'catholic' say more about effective training than the term 'academic'. Well-equipped leaders should be good at balancing, he said, as they find a centre of gravity in their academic learning, the parish, their cultural context and the overriding sweep of God's mission.

Chris Harper wrapped things up for us by talking about 'Developing and Sharing Resources'. Recalling our unity in Christ in the context of a variety of cultural encounters, Chris called us to

find ways to become more integrated. He said that individualistic ideals and politics, and ignorance and prejudice pose significant barriers in our educational mission. He encouraged us to explore new ways of collaborating; to examine spiritual diversity and culture through a Christ-based theology; to incorporate components of learning that would help leaders deal with problems associated with loss of culture and social dysfunction; to look beyond denominational horizons for useful resources; and to integrate lecture and practice-based learning.

The group also had break-out sessions to discuss the training of pastoral counsellors, curriculum, working with bishops, and ministry discernment. One plenary session included a conversation on 'E-learning in Northern Canadian Anglican Communities', following a presentation by David Macdonald, Thorneloe's Distance Education Coordinator.

The entire event was framed by daily Gospel-based Discipleship Bible studies and prayer, and at its conclusion Bishop Mark MacDonald described our gathering as an 'historic event'. Not only is this the first gathering of its kind in the Church, we were able to reach consensus on a number of important matters respecting future direction and what we need to say to the Church.

### What we plan to do

Some of the initiatives being developed as a result of our consultation include the following intentions to:

- Establish a panel for:
  - monitoring and encouraging dialogue and collaboration;
  - advocating on our behalf;
- Gather and disseminate information, making use of appropriate technological resources;
- Consult widely, especially among:
  - our own stakeholders;
  - the Sacred Circle;
  - community elders;
  - the Heads of Anglican Colleges;
- Consult among ourselves when planning and adapting programmes;
- Promote greater inclusion of aboriginal people on educational boards and committees;
- Come up with creative solutions to some of the structures that limit us (e.g., funding, canons);
- Redress clergy inequities;
- Encourage greater self-determination;
- Work together to produce curriculum and modes of delivery that:
  - Respond in practical ways to pastoral realities;
  - Rely less on outsourcing;
  - Involve elders, women;
  - Create a new indigenous theological language that is faithful to the Christian tradition while being sensitive to indigenous culture and spirituality; and
  - Embodies both global and local visions.

### What we need to say

Our message to the Church is that we have recognised that the structures of our seminaries have been colonialising, that we are now taking ownership of theological education in the First Nations context, and that we are filled with hope for the future. As God's redeemed people, we go back to our communities with the reminder that in Christ we are one (John 17.11) and that we have been 'clothed with power from on high' (Luke 24.49). We look to the Church to work

with us in building bridges of understanding and respect as we pursue the New Agape vision for Indigenous self-determination in our educational mandate.

### **An expression of gratitude**

We were assisted in our task by the generous support of Thorneloe University, ten dioceses, the Churches' Council on Theological Education in Canada, and the Anglican Foundation (the Catholic Apostolic Universal Church Trust Fund), as well as the faithful prayers of those who use the Partnerships Department resource, 'Praying with Our Partners'. To these our faithful friends and to the Creator God who sustains us, we give thanks.

### **Participants**

Ray Aldred	Speaker, Ambrose University College
Stephen Andrews	Thorneloe School of Theology
Roger Briggs	Arthur Turner Training School
Lydia Constant-Clark	Henry Budd College for Ministry
Tom Corston	Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples
Cliff Dee	Mahmow Kiskinuhmahsohtaw Program
Grace Delaney	Mahmow Kiskinuhmahsohtaw Program
Walter Deller	formerly of Emmanuel & St Chad and Dr William Winter School for Ministry
Gary Graber	James Settee College for Ministry, Dr William Winter School for Ministry
Chris Harper	Speaker, Priest in the Diocese of Saskatchewan
Marion Jenkins	Henry Budd College for Ministry
Mark MacDonald	Speaker, National Indigenous Anglican Bishop
Gladys Matoush	Thorneloe School of Theology
Paula Sampson	Vancouver School of Theology, Native Ministries Consortium
Wilfred Sanderson	James Settee College for Ministry
Barbara Shoomski	Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee
David Smith	James Settee College for Ministry
George Sumner	Wycliffe College
Lee Titterington	Bishop's School of Yukon Ministries
Andrew Wesley	Speaker, Toronto Urban Native Ministry and the Council Fire
John vanNostrand Wright	Anglican Foundation

We regret that Larry Beardy and Sidney Black were unable to attend at the last minute.