

**Planning for National Aboriginal Day of Prayer  
-and other times of prayer for healing and reconciliation between Indigenous and  
Newcomer peoples in Canada.**

From the *Hendry Report* (1969), through the welcome of the *Anglican Indigenous Covenant* (1994) to the endorsement of *A New Agape* by the General Synod in 2001, and the creation of the Anglican Indigenous Covenant Implementation Commission, through the struggles of the residential schools litigation and hearing of the stories of former students, we have been on a learning journey. The church is learning that healing and reconciliation in these relationships are not matters simply to be 'dealt with' either by or for indigenous communities only, but involve *our relationships one to another*, as members of the Body of Christ living in the histories and present realities of this land.

The waters of baptism draw us into Jesus' life and into each others' lives. The waters of our worship life shape us, and like a river, carry us out from font and table into the world. On these same waters we are carried back to where we gather again to celebrate God's saving presence among us. The relationship between our experiences of the ministry of reconciliation and our offering of praise to God for that gift is one that is a *living* one.

For many years now, but especially since the time of the Apology (1993) and the Covenant (1994), the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada has heard requests from a large number and variety of communities for written worship resources that flow from and express the desire for right relationship with Indigenous peoples. Communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have asked for resources that will help them to lift up the gifts of God that come to expression in the self-determination of indigenous communities' cultural and spiritual gifts. Some rightly are asking for assistance in their continued need for appropriate translations of our Church's liturgy into the living languages of these communities. In some contexts, as Donna Bomberry has emphasized time and again, seeing evidence of a particular worship practice honoured in one place (such as the honouring of sweetgrass in Plains traditions, or of the Commemoration of the Dead in Iroquoian tradition) serves as a freeing assurance to other local Indigenous communities that their own discernment of what is 'right' in their context will not come under an undue negative scrutiny by the rest of the church.

Requests also come from non-indigenous communities, and in recent years there have been a growing number of requests for assistance in 'praying through the challenges of these difficult times' or 'praying in partnership'. At best, these are expressions of solidarity and commitment. Guidance is needed, however, for culturally-dominant Christians to avoid repetitions of colonial patterns of appropriation (taking from) the spiritual and cultural gifts of indigenous peoples. The principles of *Covenant* and *New Agape* are gifts that can shape responses to these requests, and, indeed, can help non-indigenous local parishes and dioceses to shape their own liturgical expressions of these gifts of renewal in relationship.

There is more than a little challenge in this, but it is the challenge of learning how to receive a gift that is one of relationship. The communities who have offered resources for

inclusion in this package do so not so that dominant culture parishes can enjoy a taste of something “exotic” by importing a prayer or two in their regular Sunday worship (that otherwise looks everything like every other Sunday’s worship with the regular group of people), but as a sharing of themselves; this gift-sharing needs to be respected and honoured with the seriousness and desire for relationship with which it is given.

Over the past decade or so, Indigenous parish life, diocesan Circles, Indigenous Convocations, National Aboriginal Day of Prayer celebrations and other gatherings have grown a living tradition of Indigenous prayer resources and patterns within our Anglican tradition. Over the years, these expressions have been honed in writing, tested and re-tested, shaped and re-shaped (with the hopes of even further creative re-shaping), shared cross-culturally and adapted, leading to the development of even more resources. Furthermore, most Indigenous cultures in Canada remain predominantly *oral* cultures, shaped by the story-telling and oral teachings that are at the core of honoured traditions. Prayers *from the heart*, extemporaneous, are the ‘way’ for ancient cultures, though the forms of the prayers may follow common patterns. Written text is very much the “European way”. Even the texts contained within this resource are not ‘contained’ but grow and change, as is the way of the one offering the prayer. To write the words of these prayers is not to bring stagnation, but rather much like taking a photo of a living, growing being.

For those of dominant culture in the Anglican tradition, the provision of written text usually presumes an authorization that does not look well or easily upon adaptation, and we have to be careful not to look upon the texts in this book as some kind of ‘canon’. They are what they are: resources for the marking of the National Aboriginal Day of Prayer, to be adapted and developed in ways appropriate to your local gathering.

### **Principles of Worship in the Vision of New Agape: - Unpacking the Diagram (See separate PDF file)**

Take a look at the graphic design that appears as a separate PDF file entitled *New Agape Worship Principles*. What you see is a composite that reflects something of the life of Covenant-and-Partnership that we are seeking to walk out. On the edges you will see the form of the Celtic cross that graces the fronts of the *Book of Alternative Services* and the hymn book *Common Praise*. Inside this cross is a braid of sweetgrass woven into a circle that creates the frame for a medicine wheel. The quadrants of the circle, with their distinctive colours are symbolic of the four teachings common to many Indigenous cultures in North America. At the centre, in the green circle are three ‘centring’ principles.

This design is a graphic depiction of some principles for planning worship “in the vision of New Agape”. They developed over the course of conversations within a joint working group of the Faith, Worship and Ministry committee of General Synod, and the Anglican Council of Indigenous People. Over several deeply cold days in March of 2002, members

of this working group<sup>1</sup> sat in a circle in Winnipeg, in the room in which the Anglican Indigenous Covenant was drafted. We shared stories of worship experiences – specifically cross-cultural worship experiences involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and reflected on what those experiences meant. We aimed to name those principles in terms of affirmations, while our experiences spoke at times of the negatives – when, for example, Indigenous presence in worship leadership had the feeling of tokenism, or when not enough time was given to planning and involving the local community, or when we took ourselves too seriously, or not seriously enough.

As we brainstormed the affirmations that flowed from our story-telling, certain patterns started to emerge, and we plotted these within the teachings of a medicine wheel. What we offer here is not meant to be definitive set of guidelines or rubrics, but some general principles that ought to be kept in mind when planning for worship services in parishes, diocesan gatherings, and any occasions when there is an intentional focus on the worship of God by a gathering that is seeking within the worship experience to give voice to a vision of reconciled communities called by God into that new life. You may notice that the four-part movement echoes the movement of a Eucharistic liturgy, in gathering, listening, encounter (whether sacramental eating, or conversion) and going forth. And so the four sets of ‘principles’ can also be seen as a general template for worship planning.

It is more than a set of principles for planning worship because it seeks to lift up those aspects of our life together as church to which we need to attend in our relationships as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together on a journey. It is about patterns in the life of our community.

### **The Gift of Beginning – Preparation, Gathering**

In the beginning are reminders to be attentive to time, space and people. One of the principles of *A New Agape* is that healing takes place person to person, community to community. Dominant culture people often don’t know their Aboriginal neighbours! To work with the gifts of local communities takes time – time to develop relationships, time to allow for trust to grow and to get to know what gifts there are where you live. Attentiveness to people involves that care in taking time. Similarly, worship planning ought to take the time to foster comfortable, safe, worshipful space.

### **The Gift of Remembering – Story-telling, Listening**

It is in and through stories that we know and are known to each other. Great damage has been done by the suppression of stories of Indigenous peoples’ experiences and of the teachings of the elders. When we take time to truly listen with our hearts, as we are called to do with Scripture, we draw the teller of the story into our hearts. This is risky, but God’s gift of God’s own story gives us the grace to give of ourselves in listening.

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the Joint Working Group of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples and Faith, Worship and Ministry 2001-2004 are: Arthur Anderson, Laverne Jacobs, Andrew Wesley, Helena-Rose Houldcroft, Murray Still, staff support by Eileen Scully

### **The Gift of Quiet – Going within, with Humility, Turning to God**

When we truly listen to another's story - if we allow that person to touch us - something makes a claim on us, and listening moves into reflection. What is there in the way that these stories - the Scriptural story, a person's story - that is speaking a word of grace to me? A word of confrontation with sin in myself and society? of needs in my own life and in the life of the church? The stories of Residential School survivors draw all of us into this reflective mode, in which difficult questions have to be asked of our cultures, our histories, our selves. But in the naming of what is and has been sin, the realities of God's grace and forgiveness are not absent, but perhaps even most palpable. We remember as a church the power of the Apology delivered by Archbishop Michael Peers at Minaki in 1993, and the acceptance by Bishop Gordon Beardy in 2001 with his words, "Your church has become my church, and your people, my people." Space and time needs to be given within worship for the 'quiet' of 'going within.'

### **Commitment – Going Forth**

The cyclical, repeating journeys of reconciliation and healing burst forth from time to time with wisdom, love and hope that are bread for the journeys to come. We need to take the time to celebrate those moments when embrace comes after estrangement, when signs of new life can be seen around us. Every act of worship ends with a heightened sense of new beginning, a knowledge that we will come around again to this table, in this circle, that all is at once done and not done, given and received, and to be received again. We, as a church haven't "*done* reconciliation" in our relationships as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as a packaged product, the completion of which is marked by the production of a document, or a Synod. We need to remember to embrace –not 'package and file - what has been completed, and take flight for new risks. Sometimes these will look like old risks. But that is the nature of this gift and call to healing, toward right relationship and a new life in partnership.