

GENERAL SYNOD 2007 AND A NATIONAL INDIGENOUS ANGLICAN BISHOP

by

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The introduction of a National Indigenous Anglican Bishop at General Synod will be a new idea to some. But, even those who have long anticipated such an appointment should find this moment a new place, a new perspective. The particular person, even the position itself, is not all that important to this new perspective. What really matters is what this moment could mean – if we find the courage to see, believe, and obey the dreams and visions found in the hearts of all of the People of God.

This moment is significant as a step in the unfolding of years of prayer and conversation, especially among Aboriginal elders. Over the years, this has taken shape in the specific request that the Anglican Church, repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery, should give full recognition to the authority and identity of Aboriginal Peoples. This recognition applies not just to content of the Church's advocacy in public life but equally in its own communal life. This includes giving voice to the Aboriginal Anglicans and a place for their Ways in the protocols of the churches. It also means giving voice to the Land and the Creatures that have long been the care, concern, and life of the Aboriginal Peoples.

The elders have asked, with great love and respect for those who have brought the Gospel, that this all be done within the Canons and protocols of the Anglican Church. Further, they have said clearly that unfolding of effective aboriginal ministry, pastoral care, and community should shape the structures of Aboriginal church life, rather than the other way around. The organizational appointment of a bishop can never be a substitute for true communion with God and each other. Ideology and politics should not be the determining factors, but the living reality of God's love emerging from the union of God and humanity, Gospel and Aboriginal Tradition. The National Indigenous Anglican Bishop must be a servant of this living reality.

This moment is but one small step on the way to making both manifest and real an ancient truth, obscured for many by the idolatries of colonialism and its consequence. The truth we speak of is the presence of God manifested in Aboriginal authority and identity. This truth, as with all nations, tribes, and peoples, must find its true fulfillment in the Good News of God's Salvation in Jesus. That the relationship of Aboriginal Peoples to this truth was marred by the actions of human beings cannot be ignored. That God's relentless, living, and loving Word is, even now, making this truth known is a witness to the compelling and transforming power of the One who is above all and in all.

I close with a personal note. It is a great honour to be called to this ministry. It is also a great challenge. This is why I am greatly encouraged by the generous and prayerful welcome my family and I have received by the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, the Primate, and the whole Church. I will never forget it. Beyond this, however, I am deeply moved by the opportunity to share in a moment so blessed by the faithfulness of the past, so full of the presence of the Word and the Spirit, so challenged by God's horizon and future for our Church.