

## **Discernment for Ministry**

Report to the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee

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Task: To design a process for discernment for ministry and theological education with and for aboriginal Anglicans.

This task is something that is difficult for this committee to do, because every Native Anglican community across the country is different from one another and there is no set design or formula that will work for every community. The aboriginal peoples do not work like this, there is not a set formula that can be prescribed for them.

This task is something that needs to be done specifically on the local basis between the diocesan bishop and the local community.

### **Some observations from Indigenous Leaders, Clergy and Lay, from Different and Diverse Communities:**

Here are some basic indigenous truths that dioceses can use when raising up clergy for ordained ministry within a native community.

- a) In most native communities, ordained ministry is best when it comes from a member from that community.
- b) The person must be selected and raised up by the community. This is an honour which is to be bestowed upon the person by the community, not something that is self-sought.
- c) This can be a long, tiresome, process. The community may work slowly at going about this.
- d) There may not be a person suitable at the present time. Timing is everything. There is a proper time and if nobody is found, then it is not the time and the community must wait.
- e) The community must know that they are in control of the process of selecting a person for ordination for their community.

### **Some Suggestions in Implementing These Truths:**

- 1) It is imperative that the bishop really know the community and the people of the parish before entering this process with a native parish.
- 2) Community dynamics, not just between members of the parish, determine what the parish and community is like. Therefore, a person selected must be suitably compatible to that specific parish as well as that specific native community.
- 3) It is important that the parish council take an active role in this process and not just sit back and accept whatever name is given them, as in the past.

- 4) Native parishes should not be rushed into this process, but arrangements for ministry can be made for them or by them, while this process is in progress.
- 5) Native parishes need to focus on the Spirit of God and what kind of person that the spirit is leading them to think about.
- 6) There are obvious leaders in the native church that need to be considered, then there are those who might not seem to fit the role, however there may be something godlike about them and they need to be considered.
- 7) The parish needs to be in complete consensus with the Bishop about the choice they finally make.

**Some More Observations from Native Priests and Laity Regarding Discernment for Ministry and Theological Education for Native People:**

- This task is extremely important and needs not to be taken lightly.
- Most native communities and culture is out of step with mainline culture and therefore this process needs to be culturally appropriate and sensitive.
- A definition of calling to ordained ministry within the native community must be explored.
- There is very little if nothing in theological colleges regarding training for indigenous ministries, except for some programs, i.e. Vancouver School of Theology.
- Keewatin's *Train and Indian Priest* program is a good example of raising up clergy and training them in the context of their communities and is specific to those communities' needs and ministries.
- Some native people have less education and are not able to keep up with rigorous academic work
- Some cannot read well and perhaps a lower reading level of meaningful and instructive material would be more appropriate.
- This may be one reason that some native people in certain communities are not coming forward for ordained ministry.
- A training program for native people must be spiritually and practically based, rather than academic, but not entirely exclusive of academics.
- Perhaps a program should be developed which is based on specific demographics of native communities and cultures.
- In the native communities, perhaps we need to get away from the parochial model and adopt the missionary model.

**Some Reflections on Theological Education for Native People:**

- Theological education may have to be done within the context of a native community.
- It might be more appropriate if it is more hands on. Native people seem to be experiential learners.
- The foundation of this training must be spiritual (as opposed to academic or task oriented).

- Training should be specific to the community a person is serving in or going to serve in.
- Historical, cultural, and traditional information of the specific community must inform the theological education program.
- The dynamics and problems must come into play in the education model.
- Reflection on how Christ can enter into this situation and transform and renew and bring life.

*This report has been based on experience of native ministry within different communities as well as conversation with leaders from native communities as well as reflection on native people and discerning perhaps what they are looking for and what they need in regards to discernment for ministry and theological education with and for Aboriginal Anglicans.*