

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF A REPORT ON DISCERNMENT FOR MINISTRY IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

By the Rev'd Murray Still, Rupert's Land, for Faith, Worship and Ministry

## INTRODUCTION

In our Ministry and Worship Working Group, we have endeavoured to look to *The New Agape* for guidance in shaping our priorities.

In order to assist us in our work on discernment for indigenous ordained ministry, we decided to ask the dioceses of the Anglican Church for assistance. A total of 22 dioceses were identified with an indigenous presence. Of those dioceses, we heard back from nine.

The final report will have three sections. The first will tell us what the dioceses said, the second will publish the voices we heard from indigenous communities, and the last will report on what was heard from indigenous deacons, priests and bishops.

This Executive Summary will lay out the questions that were given to the dioceses and summarize what was said. An attempt will be made to interpret what was heard and some comments given on ways ahead.

## THE QUESTIONS

1. Describe the process in place in the diocese now for assessment for ordination in indigenous communities
2. What are the shared characteristics between indigenous and non indigenous communities? Any particular characteristics?
3. What indigenous centers now exist for theological education and formation?
4. What are the difficulties in a) applicant's process of discernment and b) the church's role in discernment?
5. What are your hopes for the future?

## WHAT WAS HEARD

By way of the process now in place, it seems some dioceses have a formal process already in place, while others are examining ways to streamline their process or develop one.

In dioceses where there is a formal process, much has been done to integrate indigenous values. For example, the community becomes central along with the individual. The elders play a role, and the process may include a formal assessment similar to the existing Assessment Committee on Postulancy for Ordination (A.C.P.O.) at least two dioceses have adapted the A.C.P.O. to make use of indigenous assessors, elders, etc.

In all cases, the formal structure of the church plays a central role. In dioceses that have an existing process for discernment, for example, there is often a Native Archdeacon that works alongside the bishop and the indigenous community. There may also be Examining Chaplains who work with the candidate for ordination. The initial meeting with the indigenous community identifies and affirms the indigenous candidate for ordained ministry. At some point, the candidate will enter a formal spiritual formation process that involves either an existing seminary like the College of Emmanuel and St.

Chad, or a diocese may develop an indigenous spiritual formation program of its own. Some dioceses have indigenous colleges or training centers.

In places where there is less formal programming, clergy encourage the local indigenous community in the process of raising up someone for ordained ministry. One diocese hosts “Postulancy Information Nights” and makes use of an appointed “postulancy advisor” or “diaconal supervisor.”

In the more classical model that operates in one diocese, the role of the bishop is key. The bishop is seen as successor to the Apostles, and the priests share in ministry with the bishop. In this understanding, the diocese provides one priest per parish, who serves as “father” in the local indigenous community. Priests are raised up by the church for the church, rather than by the parish for the parish. Ordination follows a process of consultation and discernment.

Much of the assessment procedure in dioceses with indigenous communities share many of the characteristics of the non indigenous communities. However, in many places there is a deliberate attempt to incorporate indigenous values and culture into the assessment procedure.

As far as spiritual formation goes, most are using some kind of process for education, including a partnership with a local college or seminary such as Emmanuel and St. Chad in Saskatoon, St. John’s College and the Institute for Anglican Ministry in Winnipeg and the Vancouver School of Theology’s Native Ministries program. Others, like the Henry Budd College for Ministry in The Pas and the James Settee College in Prince Albert, and the Caledonia School of Mutual Ministry use a program of Theology by Extension (TEE) and cooperate with the Cook Christian Training school in Tempe, Arizona. Distance Education is also provided through the Francis Sandy Centre in Paris and the Train and Indian Priest (TAIP) program in the diocese of Keewatin. The diocesan program for training in Moosonee is called “Let Us Learn Together.” It is community based, and uses clergy who are trained as mentors.

There is no one simple method used across the board where assessment and training is concerned. However, there are many challenges that have been reported. For example, the discernment process for the individual can be confused with social status in the community. There can be “functional” isolation while studying and often there can be discrepancies between theoretical training and practical application. Training can be paternalistic and inferior in some cases, and there may be an assumption the indigenous candidate will not do well in a seminary environment. Some have reported there is not enough attention paid in training to equipping the indigenous person with pastoral care, youth, parish administration and leadership skills. In some communities, social status is affected. For some, ordained ministry can be seen as a “job” that is taken on for a short time. If there is a low expectation of First Nations, it can lead to small goals and limited access to training in key areas such as basic biblical, historical and liturgical studies. If there is no process for training, it can lead to confusion in indigenous communities.

Despite the challenges, there is much cause for hope. Indigenous people are being raised up and ordained. Many places are developing a core of theological and pastoral competency for indigenous clergy. This is leading to a deliberate attention to the selection process, to the ensuring of basic literacy skills and to the commitment to raising up emotionally stable candidates with basic interpersonal skills. Locally raised ministry is becoming a priority in most dioceses. As a result, the church is examining issues of

authority, structure, role definitions, integration with cultural and social values and the setting of boundaries. A genuine attempt is being made to place indigenous clergy in indigenous parishes and communities, and to raising up new candidates for ordained ministry. A commitment seems to be there to develop indigenous ministries by, for and among First Nations communities. When it comes to education and formation, outside instructors are used as an enhancement. Indigenous people are being raised up as archdeacons, who do a lot of cross ministry fertilization with non indigenous people. It is widely believed that the beauty of the Anglican tradition is in its ability to accommodate wide spread practices and traditions

### INTERPRETATION

In most recent years, the Anglican Church of Canada has made a genuine attempt to assist indigenous communities in the process of raising men and women for indigenous leadership in the community.

Over the past 10 years, a light has been shone on the Anglican indigenous communities as a result of higher profile due to National Native Covenant developed in 1994 and the most recent vision of self determination contained in The New Agape. Other developments such as litigation as a result of the experience of Residential Schools and the effort at healing and reconciliation have added to the profile.

Whatever the cause, dioceses with indigenous people are beginning to seriously examine the discernment process for ordination. There is no one method of discernment, no universal program that applies to every diocese. Along with the attempt to raise solid leadership in the indigenous communities comes the desire to design culturally sensitive and appropriate training programs. This brings with it the challenges expressed in this report.

### THE WAY AHEAD

As mentioned, the Anglican Church of Canada has approved The New Agape, which sets out an agenda of self determination for indigenous Anglican communities. The New Agape bases its vision on the National Native Covenant that was written in 1994. That covenant lays out a hope for self determination in Anglican indigenous communities. The covenant assumes a maturing or growing in the Christian faith.

Self determination involves a local indigenous community deciding for itself how its community life will be ordered, and that includes ordination. Of course, because we are dealing with Christians, and are remaining within the Anglican Church of Canada, the local community will use the existing structures of the church and integrate the cultural components. Many dioceses are already wakened to this reality, and are working with community elders and community members to raise up leaders suitable for ordination. Native archdeacons and Indigenous Councils are playing a central role in assisting the dioceses to incorporate indigenous values, customs and spirituality.

Any effort to raise local leaders for ordination will also need to rely upon a recognized program of spiritual formation that is familiar with indigenous culture. The core of this training must involve biblical, historical, administrative and pastoral training.

What works and is suitable in one Anglican indigenous community may not be appropriate in another, due to the range of understanding from traditional to conservative

ways of being community. The New Agape dictates that a local community will decide for itself what is appropriate after consultation with the bishop.

Part of the understanding of the New Agape and self determination is the re-vamping of the structures of the church. Many dioceses now employ native archdeacons that assist the bishop and the dioceses in examining crucial pieces of self determination. Some of those archdeacons have authority over a geographical territory. Other structural changes, such as ways of being community and decision making, come as a result of conversations with the local community. Of course, the local elders and community members will play an important role in this process. At the most recent leadership conference involving leaders in the indigenous community, it was decided the position of National Indigenous Bishop would be valuable and of use in developing the vision of self determination in indigenous communities.

What might be useful to present to the General Synod is a recommendation to establish a commission or task force that would have as its mandate the developing of universal standards for ordination, whether it involves indigenous or non indigenous. The task force would look specifically at cultural values and the baptismal values we share as Christians.

Once specific standards are agreed upon, individual dioceses could develop a process of spiritual formation that is unique to that diocese. The standards would serve as a guideline.

### CONCLUSION

The rest of this report will take some time to complete. Some of the work has already started, such as the interviewing of indigenous communities as to the local experience of assessment for ordained ministry. The third and final piece of the report will involve the collecting of stories from specific indigenous clergy—deacons, priests and bishops. What is their experience with regard to assessment? What specific challenges and joys have they experienced? The stories collected will assist in the shaping of a direction for discernment and formation of indigenous clergy in the church. Stories will be collected by contacting individuals and arranging for a personal interview. This process could take some time.

The realistic hope of this FWM Committee would be to present our findings, seek input from the dioceses that have not yet responded, and ask the next MW group to continue the task of collecting information that will lead to an overall acceptance of standards that can be used as a guideline for discernment and spiritual formation of indigenous people for ordained ministry.

Respectfully Submitted by The Rev'd Murray Still