

## **NATIONAL INDIGENOUS BISHOP**

### **A STEP TO A NEW ERA**

The 2005 Anglican Indigenous Sacred Circle approved a proposal for the appointment of a National Indigenous Bishop.

The decision, supported by all the bishops at the Sacred Circle, including Archbishop Andrew Hutchison, the Primate, was a turning point in a long road that began 39 years ago.

This is the first in a series of resources to provide you with information about the national bishop as we prepare for an announcement in June, 2006.

THE ANGLICAN COUNCIL OF  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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of The Anglican Church of Canada**

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## **BACKGROUND AND HISTORY**

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The 2005 Sacred Circle in Pinawa, Man., approved a proposal for the appointment of a National Indigenous Bishop. The decision, which drew the support of all Anglican bishops at the Sacred Circle, was a turning point in a long road that really began in 1967 when the Anglican General Synod commissioned a sociologist, Charles Hendry, to examine the relationship between the Anglican Church of Canada and Aboriginal peoples. Two years later, his report *Beyond Traplines* was tabled.

Hendry gave first-hand accounts by former residential school students and his words stung non-Aboriginal members of the church with shame and confusion. He called on the church to develop a new partnership with Aboriginal peoples based on solidarity, equality and mutual respect. The church's response focused on attempts to put the past behind and concentrate on the future. The 1969 General Synod approved several resolutions taking the church in new directions. It recognized Aboriginal peoples' contributions to the life of all Canadians and established a fund for the implementation of the Hendry Report on issues of justice through recognition of treaty, Aboriginal and other rights. It drew the line, however, at the creation of a staff liaison position funded by the church but accountable to Aboriginal people and organizations.

The Anglican Church of Canada began to engage in solidarity work with Aboriginal

peoples in three areas: self-determination, treaty and land rights, and industrial and environmental development.

As this work progressed, Indigenous Anglicans began to recognize the need for a parallel response within church structures that would provide forums for addressing issues such as native needs, concerns and the accommodation of appropriate spiritual and cultural expressions of Aboriginal Anglicans. Although progress was slow, some concrete signs of the church's intentions included hiring a national consultant on native affairs in 1969, and establishing a sub-committee on native affairs in 1973. The staff person and sub-committee played an intermediary role in relaying Aboriginal voices and concerns to the church. During this time Indigenous Anglicans were re-embracing their long suppressed heritage, re-vitalizing their identity, language and culture and developing visions of community health and wholeness.

In 1980, General Synod gave the new Council on Native Affairs responsibility for carrying people's concerns directly to the National Executive Council (now called the Council of General Synod). This gave Aboriginal peoples more status and a stronger voice within the decision-making structure of the church.

In the late 1980s the Council for Native Ministry became increasingly aware that a process of recovery must begin within the church and focus on social justice issues within its life and

structure. The council took the initiative and organized an historic event – the first national native convocation, held in Fort Qu'Appelle, Sask., in September, 1988. Five such national convocations, now known as the Anglican Indigenous Sacred Circle, have taken place since.

The second Sacred Circle gathered in Minaki, Ont., in August 1993. The Primate, Archbishop Michael Peers, made an apology to Indian Residential School survivors on behalf of the Anglican Church of Canada. The apology acknowledged wrongs committed against Aboriginal peoples by the church through the maintenance and operation of residential schools.

In April 1994, the Council for Native Ministry held an Aboriginal Anglican leaders consultation on *Preparing the Way*, the church's proposed strategic plan, to give input and direction, on the national church's restructuring and its work in preparation for the next century. The outcome was a statement entitled *Our Journey of Spiritual Renewal and The Covenant*.

In 1995, at the General Synod held in Ottawa, a resolution was passed changing the name of the Council for Native Ministry to Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples. This synod also received, accepted and affirmed *Our Journey of Spiritual Renewal and The Covenant* "which extended the hand of partnership to all those who will help us build a truly Anglican Indigenous Church in Canada."

Another resolution stated:

*“That this General Synod support and encourage the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples as it works at redefining the role of Indigenous Anglicans in the Church, and specifically encourages the exploration of:*

- 1. The establishment of the office of a national indigenous Bishop who will work in partnership with the national church and dioceses;*
- 2. The development of indigenous forms of church government and decision making;*
- 3. Ways for the indigenous congregations to move toward self-sufficiency.”*

In October 2003, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) convened a Leadership Conference and established the Indigenous Covenant Implementation Commission (ICIC) to develop a plan and a model for the implementation of The Covenant.

ICIC prepared an eight-page document used to facilitate discussion in the 12 talking circles meeting daily for the week-long Anglican Indigenous Sacred Circle in Pinawa, Man., in August 2005. On the fourth day of the Sacred Circle 41 Elders, guided by the Holy Spirit, called on the Primate and the Anglican Church of Canada “to provide a national aboriginal bishop within one year. This bishop will have episcopal and pastoral responsibilities as well as full authority and jurisdiction for aboriginal communities across the country. This bishop will be fully recognized by the Anglican Church and be welcoming of aboriginal teachings, traditions, and ceremonies. The bishop will have spiritual

support from the whole church and will be monetarily supported so the Indigenous Anglican Church stands strong and independent of any subordination. The provision of this bishop is a first step in a new era for the Indigenous Anglican Church.”

The following day, those who gathered as the Sacred Circle 2005 unanimously agreed and authorized and commissioned the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP), to nominate to the Primate, a fit and qualified person to be appointed as the first National Indigenous Bishop. They also authorized the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples to move the appropriate councils of the Anglican Church of Canada to:

1. Adopt a process for the election of subsequent National Indigenous bishops by a Sacred Circle representative of all Canadian Indigenous Anglicans, and
2. Empower the National Indigenous Bishop with episcopal and pastoral responsibilities as well as full authority and jurisdiction for aboriginal communities across Canada.

The Primate and bishops gathered at the Sacred Circle 2005 accepted the request and pledged to see the appointment of a National Indigenous Bishop within a year. The Primate explained that appointing a bishop with full authority and jurisdiction would take longer than a year because church canons would have to be changed. However, he said he saw no reason why a bishop with pastoral oversight could not be appointed within this time.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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### **1. All the bishops I know have dioceses.**

#### **What is a national bishop?**

As envisioned in the Elder's request, "one who is fully recognized by the Anglican Church of Canada, has episcopal and pastoral responsibilities as well as full authority and jurisdiction for aboriginal communities across the country."

The Primate, Archbishop Andrew Hutchison, told the Sacred Circle that to amend the national church canons to provide full authority and jurisdiction would take three General Synods. Much work is also required at the Provincial levels. ACIP continues to work with Justice Brian Burrows, the Primate's liaison, who will help to identify the canonical changes required. ACIP will continue to work with the first National Bishop as the role and position evolve from advocacy and pastoral roles to an episcopacy with jurisdiction and authority.

### **2. Do all indigenous Anglicans want this?**

We hope to discern this as ACIP members and delegates who attended Sacred Circle 2005 communicate and convey to their dioceses what transpired at the Sacred Circle. This process will take time and require travel and consultations in order to inform and educate members of the Anglican church. The expectation of the consultation process would be for ACIP members and

the National Bishop to be invited by diocesan bishops and diocesan Native Ministry groups to further engage in consultation.

### **3. What would happen with indigenous people who like things the way they are?**

Through consultations we will learn about people's concerns and hopes for ministry within their own parishes and dioceses. ACIP will respect and honour people's vision of how they are church, support their continued relationship with their bishop and continue to maintain the diocesan relationship that they enjoy. It is the Indigenous people's choice and decision that we will honour.

### **4. How will an indigenous bishop be selected?**

In 2006 the Primate will appoint an Indigenous Bishop who has been recommended by ACIP. This individual will be an Indigenous person who is currently a bishop. This person will be identified through a selection process to be finalized by ACIP. Subsequent bishop(s) will be elected by Indigenous church members (lay and ordained) attending the Sacred Circle gathering.

### **5. Where would she or he be based and what kind of a staff would a National Indigenous Bishop need?**

This will be determined by ACIP in consultation with the national bishop.

**6. How much will this cost and who will pay for it?**

We are reallocating the current General Synod budget set up for the Indigenous Ministries' programs and staffing. Approximately \$345,000 has been identified to establish the office of the National Bishop and a secretariat of two people. This will enable ACIP to continue in its advisory role. Elders' Advisory and Youth Advisory circles will be established for the National Bishop. Financial support from General Synod is required for the years of transition, development and fundraising. Continued support will be required for participation in the Indigenous Anglican Networks established through the Anglican Consultative Council and the World Council of Churches.

**7. Does this bring native and non-native people closer together or does it drive them farther apart?**

Church structures and Canadian geography have made it challenging for Indigenous people to experience a full relationship in the church. Our participation in church governance at the national level has seen a maximum of 25 Indigenous diocesan delegates from 10 dioceses be part of the 465 delegates from 30 dioceses that make up General Synod. We are seeking to bring approximately 225 Indigenous church communities, urban and remote, into a communion where they can bring their voice and the diversity of their communities to

become stronger, healthier, and more spiritual. Building a Sacred Circle where Indigenous ministries is focused upon will give priority to ethical issues confronting them and a place for them to be dealt with.

**8. How would it work in parts of the country where there is a large number of Indigenous people and a non-Indigenous minority?**

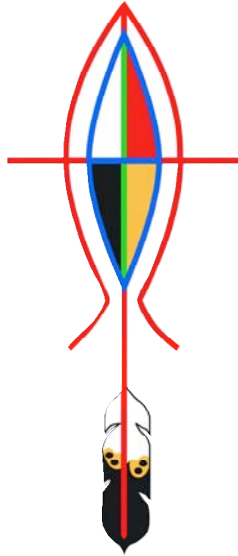
We envision no diocesan boundaries as we know them. Indigenous people co-exist with the land and it is the artificial diocesan boundaries that cross over Indigenous people's territories. We envision that Indigenous cultural and linguistic regions will be established with appropriate leadership enabling people and church communities to participate.

**9. Isn't expecting one bishop to be responsible for Indigenous people right across the country an awful lot to ask?**

Yes. We'll ask local people for assistance and invite their involvement in the governance of our Indigenous Church.

**10. Has this idea been tried anywhere else?**

We look to the Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, where the Maori church communities reside in five bishoprics. These meet as a self-governing part of the whole Anglican Church in New Zealand, which also includes Polynesian and Europeans communities as self-governing parts of the church.



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