

Where We Are Today: Twenty Years after the Covenant¹, an Indigenous Call to the Wider Church – September 2014

Jesus often described the ministry of God in Creation as a feast. As we gathered to discuss the drafting of this statement, we read Luke 14:15-24, the Gospel appointed for the day, about the invitation to the feast. It seems to us that Indigenous ministries and the Anglican Church of Canada are being invited to a feast of God's justice, freedom, and hope. In this statement, we pray that God will give us help to present the invitation with clear speech, strong hearts, and eternal hope. We also pray that our whole Church will join us in answering the invitation.

Summary Statement

This statement was requested by the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples and prepared by the Indigenous House of Bishops' Leadership Circle. We believe that God has timed this to coincide with the Primate's Commission on the Doctrine of Discovery, Reconciliation and Justice.

We wish to be responsive and faithful, first and foremost, to the Living Word of God – spoken through the Scriptures, written as a natural law in this Land, and made alive by the Spirit in the healing and saving Good News. This Good News offers us health, help, and freedom, as individuals, but it also gives us a good way of life, as families, communities, and nations.

Our elders and the promise of the Gospel tell us there is more. The urgent needs of our families and communities call us to action. We will walk in the freedom and authority that God has given us in this Land and in the Gospel. With this freedom and authority comes the responsibility to make plans for loving and effective ministries among our peoples.

There has been great progress towards Indigenous self-determination in the past few years. Indigenous realities show us that there is more to do. With the Gospel's hope, we begin to outline, in the statement below, the next steps towards this self-determination: Indigenous people making plans for the ministries across Turtle Island (as North America is known among many of the First Nations) and the Circumpolar Land of the Arctic (the Land of the Inuit) – two realities and two

¹ You will find a copy of this Covenant Annexed to this Declaration.

ecologies that are a connected part of an Indigenous whole. These steps include the evaluation of the historical and present resources used for Indigenous ministries, a strategy for the just and sustainable use of these resources, and a plan for walking together, in ministry, fellowship, and advocacy.

Background – Why we must move forward

Since the Mississauga Declaration in 2011, we have prayerfully and deliberately worked for the full implementation of our Covenant², now in its 20th year. The opening statement of the Declaration still speaks to our focus and its urgency:

Gathered in a sacred circle of love, prayer, and hope, we placed the Gospel in the Centre and listened to hear God’s voice. Seventeen years after The Covenant, our communities are still in crisis and we are convinced that we must act in defense of the people and the Land. Though gathered as a consultation on governance, we have realized that our task is more urgent and more extensive. We affirm that God has a plan for us in the Gospel and that we must claim the freedom to become what God has called us to be. We believe that we must act now to reaffirm our sovereign identity as the people of the Land and to revive, renew and reclaim the ministries in our communities. Empowered in faith, we will live and work to overcome the crisis that brings overwhelming death to the peoples of this land.

The family of Indigenous ministries within the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) welcomes the creation of the Primate’s Commission on Discovery, Reconciliation, and Justice and the unique contribution it can make to Indigenous ministry throughout the Church. Similarly, we recognize a rising level of cooperation and partnership with the House of Bishops and the Council of General Synod. With these things in mind, we make this statement in a spirit of reconciliation and with a hope-filled desire to make these relationships both deeper and more effective: deeper, in terms of the bonds of affection we share as Christian communities; and more effective, in terms of our work on the urgent needs of Indigenous peoples and all the peoples of Turtle Island and the Circumpolar Land of the Arctic.

As we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Covenant in the Anglican Church of Canada, it is important for the network of Indigenous communities to evaluate where we stand relative to its implementation. The network, represented by the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples

² See Annexed full text of the Covenant.

(ACIP) and the Indigenous Bishops Leadership Circle (IHOBLC),³ and the Office of the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop (NIAB),⁴ wishes to make this statement to invite reflection, discussion, and further action, both within the network and throughout the ACC. This statement has been developed in consultation with our Indigenous relatives, our partners in the ACC and beyond.

Over the past few years there has been special progress made in a number of contexts across the Land. Many bishops and quite a few diocesan, provincial, and national structures have adapted and are acting in a more circular manner, consulting with Indigenous people and leaders. There are Indigenous bishops serving in a number of contexts, with some serving in traditional leadership roles in the larger church. We are very pleased to see these developments and encourage them to continue and increase. We are striving to adapt and transform our Indigenous ministries so that our leadership and organizational structures are reflective of an Indigenous way of life. This will take some time and effort.

We hope and strive for a relationship that is reflective of traditional Indigenous life and, we believe even more deeply, that aligns with the way that Christians understand their unity in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some of you have worked among us for many years, hoping to work yourself out of a job. This is a good approach; we believe that many of you will find that you have also worked yourselves into being a part of our family. We hope to live this way, act this way, and work this way. This is the change we seek, as part of the communion of the Anglican Church of Canada.

We pray that God will give us the grace and courage to make every moment of our work a part of the presentation of the Gospel to all of Creation. We will, in the Spirit and courage of Jesus, work and struggle until that is a reality in every Indigenous community and, indeed, for all of Canada. The lens of Truth and True Freedom that we receive in the Gospel is both our foundation and our way forward. We have found new life in the death and resurrection of Jesus and we believe that the Gospel propels us towards a destiny of great significance that, at a minimum, includes a life of justice and hope for our elders and children.

³ This Group includes the Indigenous Bishops over Indigenous Ministries (Bishops Lydia Mamakwa and Adam Halkett), the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop (Bp. Mark MacDonald), the Coordinator for Indigenous Ministries (the Rev. Ginny Doctor), a representative from the Arctic (the Very Rev. Jonas Alloo), an elder from the Elders and Youth Council (the Rev. Canon Laverne Jacobs), a youth from the Elders and Youth Council (Dixie Bird), and the co-chairs of ACIP, the Ven. Sidney Black and the Rev. Norm Casey, and Donna Bomberry, former Coordinator for Indigenous Ministries and and Elder.

⁴ The Office of the NIAB includes the Coordinator of Indigenous Ministries.

Progress and Challenge

There has been significant progress for the communities of Indigenous Ministries in the past twenty years: the development of ACIP, Inuit leadership in the Arctic, the creation of the NIAB position, the establishment of an Indigenous area in Saskatchewan, and the inauguration of the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh (ISMM). With these, we note the continuation of critical ministries through the Council of the North (CON) and other ministry initiatives, remembering especially the compassionate work of local congregations and the many on-going ministries of the Provincial Synods and General Synods that touch the lives of Indigenous Peoples. **Today, it seems that there is a much more positive conversation about Indigenous Ministries at every level of church life.**

For Indigenous People, the discrimination that created our present problems is clear, unmistakable and persistent. We know that others, in the broader society, have widely different perceptions of these things. Our diverging experience is due, in part, to the contrast between the benefits of colonial occupation and the very real and concrete difficulties and pain that those benefits created for others. Though Indigenous People recognize that Canadian society can be accepting and understanding of cultural differences, they are painfully aware that there remains a need to find workable understandings and solutions to the on-going problems resulting from colonialism.

The Primate's Commission will specifically address the Doctrine of Discovery. By ignoring our rights to Land and oppressing our peoples, this doctrine rendered the recognition of our common humanity and reality almost impossible. That these issues exist, that they are tangible, and vigorously present for Indigenous Peoples is not well understood by many non-Indigenous people. This is a primary and determining factor in the lives of Indigenous Peoples in church as well as society.

Though we celebrate the positive recognition of the work of the new Indigenous ministries, we note that the full flowering of the Covenant faces many issues and challenges. In spite of and perhaps because of our progress, many of our deepest unanswered concerns remain hidden to most non-Indigenous Anglicans. **The exploration this statement initiates is directed towards mutual insight and progress in the full life of our whole Church. We hope that the larger church will prayerfully join us in what we firmly believe could be a source of renewal for all.**

The Vision of our Elders

By the middle of the 19th Century, it was clear to our elders that the fellowship and work of the Indigenous Church should be directed by Indigenous people themselves. In this sense, the Covenant of twenty years ago did not represent something new, though it was perceived as such

by many outside of the Indigenous churches. The timing of the Covenant was the product of a crisis among Indigenous churches, not only because of the Indian Residential Schools issue, but because of the many festering problems created by Indigenous disempowerment and dispossession in Canadian life and institutions, including and especially the Church.

There were many practical concerns about self-determination, issues of governance and freedom, but the most critical element was hope. **Elders began to yearn for a truly Indigenous expression of Christian faith: The Living Word of God, revealed through the reality of Indigenous families and communities.** It had long been recognized that Indigenous People organize culture differently. The elders imagined that they could see the life of God, as we know it in Jesus, revealed in their communities, cultures and spiritual traditions.

The Covenant was a statement of both frustration and hope. There was frustration with the continuing lack of progress in the creation of Indigenous leadership and a decline in the presence of ministry in their communities, at a time when it was so necessary. There was also hope that came from a growing awareness that Indigenous leadership, guided by the grace and direction of God, could make a great difference in the well-being of our families and communities.

Even before the Indian Residential School crisis, it was becoming clear that non-Indigenous Canadian church institutions were in a period of decline relative to the larger Canadian culture. Despite the on-going crisis in Indigenous communities, they demonstrated strong potential for church growth. However, the larger Church had a decreased capacity for charity, and was distracted by controversies and concerns for its own institutional survival. As a result, support for Indigenous ministries has been severely restricted. This has created many problems for Indigenous ministries, as the great cultural limitation of non-Indigenous leadership in an Indigenous context further hinders their well-being.

Both through the Covenant and independent of it, a voice arose among our elders. **People began to speak about the needs and possibilities of Indigenous churches. There was a miraculous unity of concern across the Land.** Other communities, not directly linked to its process or aware of the message of the Covenant, began to say things that were in astonishing agreement.

The vision is stated clearly enough in the Covenant that it doesn't need to be repeated here. Most directly to our situation, we can say that it involved the passing of the whole of the strategy, oversight, and vision to Indigenous people themselves. From the very beginning, our most respected elders had said this was necessary. The on-going impediments to this vision can no longer be tolerated.

The Next Steps toward Self-determination

As we have lived into the emergence of real self-determination in the Church, certain key principles contrast with non-indigenous models. We hope to explain these as we outline our principles. Our objective is to provide a context within which to better understand and develop our relationship with the communion of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Our Principles

I. **Our original community structures, at their best, spread authority out among the people and generations, on a level ground or, as it is said, moving towards the circle.**

This is in contrast to top down models often used in Canada, which are in many ways, disruptive to our natural way of doing things. Because of this model, the structure of the Church often is contrary to the way our societies are structured. Because of the breakdown of our families and communities through the colonial era, we feel a sense of urgency to address this community structure. As we live as nations, our goal is to live as relatives, with our Peoples, our Land, and Creation. This is the Sacred Circle that is the goal of our way of life. We recognize that others may feel this way too.

II. **As we become self-determining, the natural shape of our cultures and societies becomes clearer, especially in terms of our borders.** The borders of colonial occupation have almost always been contrary to Indigenous borders. The organization of our church life along these Indigenous borders is termed “non-geographical.” To us, this feels painful, misleading, and false. Rather, our borders are most often natural boundaries, determined by the Land itself.

III. **We work to develop Indigenous community and communion across Turtle Island and the Circumpolar Land of the Arctic.** We work in a manner that may be termed “ecumenical,” meaning that we wish to be good relatives to our people and to our Land. The whole of the community and the Land is the scope of our ministry, extending beyond the institutional considerations of our churches: their members, their buildings, and their management. We see this as essential for the development of an Indigenous Christian discipleship.

IV. **The goal of our ministry is the Word of God, alive in our families and expressed in our communities and our own languages.** We are often asked to imitate other cultures and styles, and often in a way that hurts our own well-being. We believe that the Living Word of God, fully alive in our families and communities, is a path towards healing. We believe that this Word should be expressed in the cultural ways of our peoples. All cultures are challenged by God’s Word and we believe that they all find their fulfillment in the destiny of God’s life in the Land. For us, placing the Gospel in the Centre of the Sacred Circle of our life here on Turtle Island and the Circumpolar Land of the Arctic is the heart of our renewal and hope.

Towards the Implementation of the Vision

Compelled by these principles, the urgency of our time, and the wisdom of our elders we are committed to the next level of our self-determination. This will require five key elements:

I. **Together, the communities of the Anglican Indigenous Ministries and the Anglican Church of Canada will make a plan to walk together.** This plan will not only include the ways we will maintain the bonds of affection and cooperation, it will also include partnership for advocacy, peacemaking, common ministry and discipleship.

II. **The Indigenous House of Bishops' Leadership Circle will immediately begin a process of consultation that will develop a plan for Indigenous ministry across the whole church.** While this will include careful consultation with everyone involved, including our many partners and the leadership of the ACC, it will focus on all parts of our church and every place where Indigenous People live. This plan will include: pastoral care for our people; participation in and support for our larger Indigenous community; education and formation for ministry and life; and long-lasting ways of maintaining and growing church communities that can be shared with many others. While we maintain, as always, a great deal of respect for the ways that the ACC has organized itself, we will also show respect for and value Indigenous borders and patterns of relationships.

III. **The plan to walk together will include new forms of governance and relationships that reflect Indigenous cultural understandings and practices in a Biblical and Christian framework.** Despite impressive strides forward, most of our financial structures and decisions are constructed by non-Indigenous leadership and models. The primary institutions of direct oversight of Indigenous ministries, like the Council of the North and a variety of educational institutions, are divided in their vision and are lead, for the most part, by non-Indigenous leaders and governance models. These have shown many difficulties in meeting the needs and ways of Indigenous leadership. Those structures that have been developed to express Indigenous points of view and sensitivities are almost all subject to the oversight of a very different leadership. It is now time to allow the Spirit to move in Indigenous patterns of culture and leadership.

IV. **Together, the communities of the Anglican Indigenous Ministries and the Anglican Church of Canada must make a careful evaluation of the ways that money is being spent in the name of Indigenous ministry.** Much has been raised in the name of serving Indigenous Peoples. It is our desire to see these resources used in the very best, just, and appropriate way in the service of Indigenous ministries. In so doing we wish to reflect that Indigenous Peoples, and their ministries, have always been and continue to be a central part of the Anglican Church of Canada. We will ask the ACC to make a careful investigation of the ways that funds were received, have been used, how decisions have been made regarding their use, and who made these decisions. We believe that the story that will be told by this evaluation

will help all of us in the ACC move towards collaboration and reconciliation in the way that God's Spirit leads us.

V. **The NIAB along with the communities of the Anglican Indigenous Ministries will develop a plan for an effective, just, and sustainable sharing of resources.** It is now time for Indigenous people to be given the leadership over the planning, use, and accountability of their own resources. Though financial resources are important, our circumstances highlight how essential human resources are – intellectual, spiritual, physical, social, and cultural – and how central they are to the stewardship and well-being of all churches.

A Covenant and our Journey of Spiritual Renewal (1994)

We, the indigenous partners in Canada of the Anglican communion respectfully affirm our place in God's Creation and in God's Love, manifest through the Grace of Jesus Christ. In specific, we address the Anglican Canadians with whom we are in direct communion.

We have shared a journey of close to three centuries in which we have been:

- denied our place in God's Creation
- denied our rights as Children of God
- treated as less than equal, and
- subjected to abuse, culturally, physically, emotionally, sexually and spiritually.

The result, in our communities, homes and daily lives, has been and continues to be:

- broken homes and lives;
- sexual and family violence;
- high recidivism and incarceration rates;
- high chemical abuse;
- loss of spiritual fulfillment;
- loss of cultures, languages and traditions; and
- poor stewardship of Mother Earth.

Because the National church's canons, structure and policies have not always responded to our needs nor heard our voice, we now claim our place and responsibility as equal partners in a new shared journey of healing, moving towards wholeness and justice.

We acknowledge that God is calling us to a prayerful dialogue towards self-determination for us, the Indigenous People, within the Anglican Communion in Canada. Through this new relationship we can better respond to the challenges facing us in a relevant and meaningful way.

As faithful people of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, we invite you, the Anglican Communion of Canada to covenant with us, the Indigenous Anglicans of Canada, in our vision of a new and enriched journey.

A Covenant

We, representatives of the Indigenous people of the Anglican Church of Canada, meeting in Winnipeg from the 23 to 26 of April, 1994, pledge ourselves to this covenant for the sake of our people and in trust of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ:

Under the guidance of God's spirit we agree to do all we can to call our people into unity in a new, self-determining community within The Anglican Church of Canada.

To this end, we extend the hand of partnership to all those who will help us build a truly Anglican Indigenous Church in Canada.

May God bless this new vision and give us grace to accomplish it. Amen.