

Letter in response to the questions posed to the Primatial candidates from the chairs of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples

**From: The Right Reverend Dr. Jane Alexander
Bishop of Edmonton**

Firstly let me apologise for the late response – I was on holiday when your letter arrived. I offer you greetings from the Diocese of Edmonton where we respectfully acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 and 8 Territory. In the spirit of peace, friendship and understanding we walk alongside our Indigenous brothers and sisters on the traditional meeting ground and home of Indigenous Peoples, including Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Métis and Nakota Sioux Peoples. We give thanks for their hospitality and the opportunity to share common ground.

What is your experience in working with Indigenous Ministry?

In this Diocese over the last eleven years we have worked hard as a community to rebuild relationships with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. This began with talking circles and an attitude of listening and then we asked a group of local elders for permission to walk together because we all understood that there was a need to form relationships. We have worked to be active members of the TRC gatherings here, of the Remembering the Children work and of living more fully into UNDRIP. We have been blessed to have had Bishop Mark visit us in the Diocese and are thankful for his recent feedback on our Indigenous Doula program.

We have built an Indigenous Ministry Initiative here known locally as IMI. The IMI team has grown over time and consists of Archdeacon Travis Enright, local elders, clergy and laity Cree, Metis and Mohawk, and settlers including myself. This ministry initiative is a recognition of our call to serve and walk with our brothers and sisters; whether in the downtown core, or in one of the Treaty Six or Eight First Nations communities in the Diocese of Edmonton. The funding for this ministry began with the proceeds from the now wound up Provincial Missions Trust which provided \$68,163 and is now supported in the Diocesan Budget and through the REACH program of the Diocese. The IMI seeks to define and strengthen a focus on First Nations ministry, and to commit ourselves to listening and walking alongside.

The diocese celebrated its centennial in 2014 and our celebration honoured the request of the elders that we plant chokecherry trees in front of all our churches as a sign of new relations.

We have continued to look at the calls to action from the TRC final report and also explored what it means to live a Reconciled Life as Christian brothers and sisters. Through the work of many individuals the IMI is moving more firmly into acts of reconciliation. This has involved a great deal of work on the centrality of Ceremony and on the importance of personal relationships. We have seen this blossoming across the diocese but especially in Maskwacis, Alexis First Nation, and in urban Edmonton.

Across the diocese we have seen Blanket exercises, TRC exhibits, art installations, Medicine Stories, Common Ground gatherings and of course the 22 Days awareness and prayer services for MMWG. If we continue in these ways I hope we will see more *Kisewâtisiwin* – compassion, loving kindness, more *Okihtowihewewin* – generosity, and more of a sense of *Wâhkôhtowin* – kinship with one another.

We have been working closely with Michael Lapsley of the Institute for the Healing of Memories to help us be better listeners one to another. Through the sharing of stories, attendance at educational events, powwows, round dances, Common Ground gatherings and Pipe ceremonies I am continuing to learn and grow and be blessed by my new relations. All clergy have now participated in Blanket Exercises and received training on ceremony. We have had educational series such as “Land, Language and Lodge”- a four part education series, that was intended for the growth of reconciliation in the Diocese, An opportunity for Indigenous Elders to speak about culture and faith in modern context. Many of us are trying to learn Cree – but I have to admit I am not doing very well as yet.

Our IMI team regularly teach at local colleges and universities. My work with End Poverty Edmonton has been shaped by our Indigenous Roundtable. We work with the Red Road Healing Society. Across the diocese we have tried to make much more welcoming space for wakes and celebrations.

In new work we have had some arts based ministries that have extended the circle of those involved and the ages quite widely. During the time that the IMI has been in place we have learned a great deal about our approach to reconciliation and healing and what respect and trust look like. We have come to understand that in order that we do not replicate colonial works and attitudes we must adopt a “Fresh Expressions’ approach such as the one taken in *Maskihkîy âcimowin* that works toward renewal and reconciliation. This approach has been seen in exhibits, school projects with the Cathedral and the “We See” art project on missing and murdered Aboriginal women. This pieces of work have centred on the use of story to bring people to the thin places where God’s presence is felt, and where renewal and reconciliation are then possible. We have seen this in Messy church events teaching about Treaty to children and their families.

We have new leaders being raised up and are currently revising our formation guidelines to make them process more culturally appropriate for our new candidates. We have seen reconciliations teams forming in many of our rural parishes.

All of this is to say that I am so very excited by the IMI work. I can’t talk about it in I statements because this is such a team effort where decisions are made very differently

and success is seen in the deep conversations and relationships that are growing. Even as I write this we have been invited to go and meet with the Chief and Band Council of Frog Lake to see if we can walk together in a new way – please pray for us.

What does Self-Determination mean to you?

This is a hard question. Let me start quite personally, self-determination is something coming from the UK in 1990 that I thought everyone had. The ability and freedom to shape one's own future and make one's own decisions. I did not know that this was a not a right for everyone. So when I think of self-determination in terms of the church, especially the indigenous church, I see it as a way of people being honoured and respected for who they are as children of God. It's an acknowledgement that God has been speaking over many generations to the peoples of this land and that the church told them they had not been hearing properly unless it was in a colonial westernized way. Self-determination is a spiritual movement, it is a way of putting things in right relations. To be a self-determining church means that ways of making decisions, ordinations, leadership, liturgies are, or will be, developed in a way that is decided by the people themselves led by the gospel at the centre and taking full respect and the fullness of traditional spirituality. It is to have a church that is truly of the people. It's a joyful road but it will challenge those who are settlers like myself. Challenge because we will be frightened of messing it up or causing offence by saying the wrong things, or asking stupid questions. It will challenge us to listen more and speak less. It's a good challenge!

I remember reading in England about what some 17th Century Quakers at Bailby in Doncaster wrote to encourage those who would follow:

We do not want you to copy or imitate us
We want to be like a ship that has crossed the ocean
Leaving a wake of foam which soon fades away
We want you to follow the Spirit which we have sought to follow
But which must be sought anew in every generation.

I think this says it best for me – a self-determining church is one which has followed the Spirit and found Him anew in this generation.

Will you support the emerging self-determined Indigenous Church with the Anglican Church of Canada? Tell us how.

In a word yes I will support it with all my heart in whatever capacity I am called upon to serve the church. Sometimes support will look like securing funding and sharing resources of the church in new ways as the shape of ministry changes. I see that already in our own Diocese here in Edmonton. There will need to be new conversations and a different view of diocesan boundaries and authority of leaders that is more flexible and consultative. This is a different way of being church and we are going to have to spend a lot of time talking together and being patient with one another. We are going to make mistakes – probably

from both sides – but that is the way of seeing something new come into being. I want to be a support and not a hinderance and so in order to be an advocate and ally I would need to be present and listen. I would support the increased knowledge of and living into the calls to action to the church of the TRC which when taken together really call for self-determination. I am not dodging any part of this question but I must add that my own experiences in Edmonton have also led me to realise that I need to ask what people would hope I do rather than tell them what I have already decided. I believe that the work done so far with the Vision Keepers, the Leadership Circle, Sacred Circle, the Jubilee Commission and the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery has laid the foundations for our walk together and now it is time to move forward. It is my deepest hope that General Synod 2019 will be an historic event in seeing a self-determining Indigenous church come into being.

The Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples has been in existence for a number of years. What is your understanding of the Council's mandate? Will you join the Council at their meetings?

Let me answer the second part first, I would join the council at their meetings is invited to do so. I think that in many ways I have viewed ACIP as an equivalent in many ways of the Council of General Synod, in that it has cast visions, brought about change in the church and developed structures for the Indigenous Church, and representation from Indigenous communities all across Canada. The Council has been bold in calling for different ways of being and ministering. The council called for the establishment of the NIAB, was instrumental in the continuing development of Sacred Circles. My first awareness of ACIP was the publication of A New Agape and of the reports to COGs after I became bishop in 2008. Since then I have been particularly aware of their call of self determination yes, but also of gospel based discipleship ideas and resources across the marks of mission.

Some of the Indigenous Ministry is located in the Council of the North? What is your understanding of the Council of the north and how it is related to the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples?

I apologise in advance if I am a little ignorant in this area. My feeling, and it is only that, is that ACIP and CON have been two related but rather parallel structures. I think that Council of the North was more a response to far flung parts of the country without a necessarily indigenous focus in terms of particularity of worship or structure. So in many ways I suspect that with the changes coming to the Anglican church of Canada the Council of the North may be a structure whose time has come in its present form. My understanding is that it is the Council of the North diocese where there are the majority of existing indigenous churches and so obviously there is a new conversation that will have to happen here coming out of General Synod 2019. There is now increased Indigenous episcopal leadership in the Council of the North dioceses and so I would welcome hearing from the Indigenous House of Bishops leadership circle on this topic.

How will you support the Office of the National Indigenous Anglican bishop?

I would support through pastoral fellowship and prayer and hopefully time spent in retreat together. I would view the NIAB as a mentor and friend and an equal partner in the ministry entrusted to Christ's body, the church. In terms of practical support I think there would have to be secure financing for staff support at the national office – or quite frankly wherever the 'national' office would make sense for the NIAB to be located which may well not be seen as Toronto – that is the choice of the NIAB. I would also fully support the expansion of the support roles of the Elders and Youth Advisory circles. These next few years will be a time to invest in this birthing church. I remember that Senator Murray Sinclair one of the TRC commissioners said that "reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relations. There are no shortcuts." I think the same is true of the office of the NIAB.

What do you know about Canon 22, The National Indigenous ministry? Is there a need for it to be strengthened?

Canon 22 was developed in order to set the foundations for a self-determining Indigenous ministry within the Anglican church of Canada and contains guidelines for the NIAB, ACIP, and Sacred Circle. I don't know that there is a need for the canon to be strengthened but I suspect that a fully self-determining church needs a different canon that outlines the relationship of the two bodies and underlines more autonomy for the national indigenous ministry. I believe that the existing canon 22 was a step on the journey but is not the final destination.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions

+Jane