

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

**From: The Rt. Rev. Linda Nicholls  
Bishop of Huron**

### **Experience in working with Indigenous Ministry?**

I know that I am on a lifelong journey of learning in my relationship with the indigenous peoples of our Church and country. I had the privilege of being present as a national staff member at Sacred Circle 2005 as a recorder, and observed the significant decision to request the position of a National Indigenous Anglican Bishop. To this day I remember the power and joy in that moment.

While I was the Area Bishop of Trent-Durham in the Diocese of Toronto (2008-2016) I encouraged and supported an Ambassador for Reconciliation in the Area and encouraged all parishes to engage in learning and reconciliation. The first time I personally shared in a blanket exercise was profoundly moving as knowledge about indigenous history became experiential emotional learning that deepened my understanding of the depth of pain and intergenerational suffering that is faced today.

My most significant engagement with indigenous ministry has been in the last three years as Bishop of Huron. The diocese includes seven indigenous Anglican parishes and one former residential school, the Mohawk Institute. With patience, each of the communities and their leaders are teaching me, through our relationships, more about how we will walk together. I meet regularly with the Lenni-Lenape Algonquian Iroquoian Council (LAIC) of the diocese to share in worship and discerning what is needed to support our indigenous ministry. Self-determination in the use of resources, liturgy and spaces are honoured and encouraged. Our diocese has a Bridge Builders group of indigenous and non-indigenous members who reach out in the diocese to support reconciliation. In November 2018 we shared in a powerful service for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Huron is committed to supporting indigenous ministry in its budget.

Over the past two years I have strongly encouraged every parish or deanery to engage in learning through sponsoring the blanket exercise and in the coming year have asked every parish to view and discuss the new video, *Doctrine of Discovery: Stolen Lands, Strong Hearts*. In May 2019 I appointed an indigenous Animator for Reconciliation and Indigenous Ministry to assist the diocese in deepening our knowledge of the TRC recommendations, confront embedded racism and assist us to build supportive relationships. At a personal level, I am grateful for individual relationships that are honest and forthright

in helping me identify where my place as a privileged, non-indigenous person stops me from hearing and understanding indigenous ways. I continue to read Canadian indigenous authors and teachers and listen to indigenous leaders, seeking to keep my heart and mind open to new learning and ways to support indigenous communities.

### **What does Self-Determination mean?**

Self-determination is the right of an individual or group to freely make their own decisions about their life (UNDRIP Clause 3). It is an expression of our baptismal covenant to respect the dignity of every human being and underlays the principle requiring free, prior, informed consent for decisions that affect indigenous people.

Indigenous and non-indigenous Anglicans are called equally by God to share in the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For many of us that gospel has been received from and clothed in the history of the Anglican Church as it received it from the Church of England. A great gift of the gospel is that it can be expressed in and through every context and culture. The discernment of how that needs to be expressed belongs to the people of that particular context and culture. Self-determination for indigenous peoples in the Anglican Church of Canada will give opportunity for that expression to continue to be explored and established under indigenous leadership. I have supported and delighted to see these expressions in indigenous communities in Huron.

### **Support for the emerging self-determined Indigenous Church within the Anglican Church of Canada**

I am happy to support the self-determining church as it emerges within the Anglican Church of

Canada. At General Synod 2019 the amendments to Canon 22 will be a further step in that emergence as canonical signs through: the role of ACIP as the leadership body; members of ACIP as official representatives within General Synod and the NIAB as a metropolitan among the other metropolitans. The exercise of self-determination in the life of indigenous parishes and communities will emerge from the decisions made by and for their life. If elected as Primate, I would seek to support, as needed, the further development of structures in support of self- determination.

I am aware that this will be a complex journey as indigenous people choosing to share in the self-determining indigenous church may also have concurrent relationships within non- indigenous dioceses. Some may choose a joint oversight with their current bishop and diocese while seeking elements of self-determination within their own context. Working out these relationships will require grace and care in ensuring that relationships are flexible and organic to meet the needs expressed by each indigenous community.

If elected, I will support the right to self-determination and nurture an environment of mutual listening; be committed to dismantling colonial assumptions; and encourage mutual ministry agreements that will support the life of the gospel in each community.

### **ACIP - Council's mandate**

The Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples has been the place where leaders of indigenous Anglican communities from across Canada meet to consider how best to nurture the life of indigenous parishes and advocate within the Anglican Church for renewed relationships and reconciliation. ACIP has been the voice of indigenous concerns to the whole Church and the body that oversees the planning for Sacred Circles. As the self-determining indigenous Church continues to develop, ACIP will be an important place for discussion of its relationship with the wider Church and advocacy for self-determination. It will be a vital place for conversation and, if an invitation is extended, for the Primate to be a bridge builder in the Church as a whole. I would make that conversation a priority.

### **Council of the North**

The Council of the North was established to help the ongoing work of responding to God's mission in the northern regions of Canada where sustaining ministry requires financial assistance from the whole Church. The dioceses involved in the Council of the North include both indigenous and non-indigenous parishes and communities. The emergence of a self-determining indigenous church within the Anglican Church of Canada is in the context of these prior relationships. Council of the North dioceses may be either wholly or partly composed of indigenous communities that participate in ACIP and Sacred Circles, some of all communities may choose to do so. In the spirit of reconciliation and mutual support it will be important for the Council of the North and ACIP to have frank discussions of how we support ministry together across the North. These are not either/or decisions and need to be made with the needs and best interests of all in mind, for the sake of continuing ministry in each community.

### **Working with NIAB**

The role of the Primate is that of a 'first among equals' in the House of Bishops with particular concern for pastoral support of the bishops in their ministry of care for the faith, unity and order of the Church. The Primate will develop and deepen working relationships with all of the bishops in the Church. However a particular relationship with the NIAB and staff will be needed as the ongoing discernment around self-determination continues and develops. Meeting together regularly for prayer, mutual support and discernment will be essential. I am grateful for Bishop Mark Macdonald's commitment as both a tireless advocate for self-determination and a bridge builder with the whole Church.

## **Canon 22: Strengthening?**

I was a member of General Synod in 2010 when Canon 22 was first introduced. I have been present at every General Synod since as the Canon has been amended. The Canon itself, notes that organization of Indigenous ministries will continue to develop over time and that such development can be accommodated by changes to existing constitutional and canonical structures. Resolutions at the upcoming General Synod will propose changes to the Canon, which I would see as strengthening and clarifying the mandate and composition of the structures of the National Indigenous Ministries. I do not believe that it yet describes a truly self-determining Indigenous Church within the Anglican Church of Canada. As the journey of self-determination continues, Canon 22 will continue to need to be amended to reflect the development of this church. So yes I see that it needs strengthening.

## **Concluding statement**

I am aware that the European colonization of the land we call Canada imposed particular ways of expressing the gospel, undergirded by suppressing indigenous language, culture and independence. We now acknowledge the need for indigenous expressions of the gospel and ministry that include worship, governance, language and culture. These will enrich the whole Church. The gift of gospel-based discipleship is already being shared widely. The beginnings of the move to self-determination are evident in the election of new indigenous Bishops across Canada and in new relationships in the Territory of the People and the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh. I continue to be a learner in this journey and am grateful for those who are teaching me and the whole Church.

As a Church I am confident that we will grow into a deeper interdependence in the coming years in which both indigenous and non-indigenous ministry will be strengthened for the good of the whole Anglican Church of Canada.

With thanksgiving for our sharing the gospel together,

The Rt. Rev. Linda Nicholls  
Bishop of Huron