

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

**From: The Right Reverend Michael D. Oulton  
Bishop of Ontario**

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your letter which poignantly articulates that the journey toward reconciliation has literally spanned generations. The hope of creating the self-determining Indigenous Church within the Anglican Church of Canada roots us in the spirit of the Primate's Apology, the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These three documents provide strong guiding principles to assist in renewing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Anglicans and breathing life into our hopes.

The bedrock upon which we stand as disciples of Jesus Christ roots us in the tradition of Scripture, especially the story of the birth of the Church depicted in the account of Pentecost. The Spirit blew strong, refreshing and renewing winds, the very breath of God, over the first believers. The flames of Spirit forged a new reality, a new people and new identity which St. Paul lovingly describes in Galatians as "children of God through faith". We have been called to stand on the high ground of our shared identity as children of God through successive generations.

The challenge the Church has faced ever since Pentecost, is living with the tension between our shared identity as children of God in the one body over against the reality that our unity in Christ is lived out within the context of culture, heritage and tradition expressed in the lived story of many nations. The TRC Calls to Action and UNDRIP were forged out of the sad history of dominance and domination by one culture, heritage and tradition over another, creating a false sense of unity. We are called to live on the high ground of shared identity and unity as Christians, but our history finds us continually failing to reach and stand upon that high ground.

The proposal to create the self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church within the Anglican Church of Canada has the wonderful potential to pull us ever closer to that high ground of unity. It is precisely through acknowledging that our Christian identity is lived out within the context of culture, heritage and tradition that our true unity is enhanced. Some may believe this to be an insurmountable paradox, but I consider such a critique as expressing a preference for uniformity over unity.

Let me evoke St. Paul once more where, in 2 Corinthians 6, he describes the wondrous paradox of being a Christian. Among other things, he says that we are: “known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” Celebrating the beautiful mosaic of the differing cultures, heritage and traditions that make up the united Body of Christ, places us squarely in the heart of this passage. Unity within the context of such diversity is certainly far preferable to an enforced uniformity, normally imposed by dominant cultures who arise from time to time.

My work with Indigenous peoples as a bishop has been primarily with the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte in the Parish of Tyendinaga within the diocese and through my support and encouragement of Bishop Mark MacDonald. Bishop Mark is the face and voice of Indigenous leadership within the Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Communion and ecumenically, here at home and throughout the world. That is no small feat since his installation in 2007. He has visited our diocese many times over the years and has helped us understand the challenges facing our church as we continue to walk the journey of reconciliation together.

You have asked a series of very practical questions which are important for the next Primate to grasp in carrying forward the legacy of Archbishop Hiltz and his passion for the self-determining Indigenous Church, the Calls to Action, the Apology, UNDRIP and the Marks of Mission. With regard to your specific questions related to; strengthening Canon 22, resourcing the office of the National Indigenous Bishop, and issues related to the Council of the North, my view is that it would be presumptuous of me to hazard specific answers to those questions. This is due to my lack of direct involvement with these important aspects of our Canadian Anglican identity and the intimate familiarity that comes through such engagement.

I have always sought to exercise the ministry of leadership entrusted to me from my strong view that authentic leadership is exercised among and not over the people committed to my care. I endeavour to call people together, solicit and encourage dialogue, listen to the voices of those who have lived and walked upon paths of which I might only have a passing familiarity. Decisions are best taken together, tested together, refined together and celebrated together. The strength of the ministry of the Primate in the Canadian context is that, in the face of little juridical authority, the voice of the Primate to articulate, promote and encourage becomes the authentic authority of the office.

The commitment I will make to you regarding the practical questions you asked is this: If I am given the privilege of serving our Church as Primate on July 13th, I will meet with the Indigenous Anglican leadership of our Church before the end of July to pray, listen, learn and begin to walk the path of building a new relationship with you. I will need you to educate me so that I can speak into your hopes with my considered views. Then together, we can speak to the Church of which we are all a part. I believe that in this way, we will honour the new relationship I pray will be birthed at General Synod in Vancouver through the creation of the self-determining Indigenous Church within the Anglican Church of Canada.

Let me conclude this response to your letter by sharing with you something that is very important to me. Our call as disciples within the Body of Christ is to faithfully build up our common life together but that is just the beginning of living the mission of God. The heart of responding to Christ's call to mission is found when we turn our face outward toward the world that God loves and for whom Christ lived, died and rose again.

I believe that our commitment to unity in diversity within the Body of Christ is a precious gift we can offer to the world. This is especially true in light of the increasingly loud and discordant voices seeking to divide people one from another. I deeply value the partnerships we can forge among the private and public institutions of our society. Governments, along with public and private agencies, are also called to engage in the work of reconciliation. We must seek to have our voice heard in those arenas in a manner that is inviting, confident of our place in the national dialogue, willing to listen to many voices and propose achievable solutions. We must confidently speak truth to power, doing so in a way that invites further partnership for the common good.

Let me provide an example from our experience in Ontario. The previous government introduced changes to Child and Family Services legislation that were rooted in responding to the Calls of Action and UNDRIP. The legislation noted, among other things, that: "For these reasons, the Government of Ontario is committed, in the spirit of reconciliation, to working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to help ensure that wherever possible, they care for their children in accordance with their distinct cultures, heritages and traditions." It is incumbent upon us as a legitimate partner in society to ensure that this guiding principle of legislation is respected and safeguarded. This is where our voice joined together with other partners has great power and authority.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which I might begin to walk with you should the General Synod ask me to serve as our fourteenth Primate. Please be assured of my continued prayers of thanksgiving and intercession for what you seek to accomplish for the good of the mission of Christ and the people committed to your care as indigenous leaders within the Anglican Church of Canada.

Blessings to you all. Miigwetch.

The Rt. Rev. Michael Oulton