

## **An Indigenous Spiritual Movement: Becoming What God Intends us to be.**

*Our spirituality is our governance.*

*Creator, we give you thanks for all you are and all you bring to us for our visit within your creation. In Jesus, you place the Gospel in the Centre of this Sacred Circle through which all of creation is related. You show us the way to live a generous and compassionate life. Give us your strength to live together with respect and commitment as we grow in your Spirit, for you are God, now and forever. AMEN.*

### *Full Statement*

#### **Introduction:**

We would like to speak to the whole Church, from the midst of a growing spiritual movement and in a spirit of reconciliation. Our hope is to speak about the meaning and dynamics of Indigenous self-determination in the Anglican Church of Canada. This is done, first, for our own family of Indigenous churches and ministries.

We know, however, that there is a larger audience for our statement. Here we find both challenges and risks. Though many across the Church have been quite supportive of the work of self-determination, some remain unconvinced of its need and others have wondered or worried about negative institutional implications for the larger Church.

Speaking across the many different cultural and theological groups involved in our church is a delicate matter of cross-cultural communication. More than this, it speaks to the pain of colonization and the continuing need for justice and reconciliation. The challenge is to speak to and through these challenges, as briefly, simply, and comprehensively as possible, about the meaning and dynamics of self-determination. This is to encourage Indigenous Peoples in the forward movement of their growing spiritual movement. For the rest of the Church, we hope it will encourage understanding and the deepening of community with Indigenous Peoples. We hope that all will enter this process of communication prayerfully and with good will. It is certainly in this spirit that this work is offered.

### **The Goals of Self-determination**

- 1) To receive, proclaim, and live the Word made flesh in Indigenous communities, families, and lifeways.
- 2) To make disciples; establishing a Sacred Circle of at least two or three gathered together, with the Gospel in the centre, wherever Indigenous People are found across the Land. We believe these Circles will grow into a community where the Holy Eucharist is shared.
- 3) To live in Christian community - a community of disciples - and to serve as a ministry of God's healing and reconciling love to each other, to the communities that we live in, to all of humanity, and to all of Creation.
- 4) To strive together to be a fully Indigenous expression of Christian community. To live our Christian faith with respect for the teaching and practices of the elders of our local communities and to join, across the land, to support one another in our ministry. Through this commitment and God's grace, we trust that we may be a significant part of the healing and restoration of our families, clans, and peoples.

*As we live these goals, we affirm that Self-Determination is:*

- **Indigenous Peoples creating a community of disciples, living the Word of God in their culture and local communities.** In this, they will look to Gospel Based Discipleship, not merely as a method of studying the Scriptures, but as a locally-influenced experience of the active and effective presence of Christ; present in the sacred circle in each of our local communities as teacher, healer, ruler, and relative (Matthew 18:20). Self-determination begins with the Gospel in the centre of the Sacred Circle of our lives.
- **Indigenous communities led by Indigenous People.** This leadership must not only be Indigenous in terms of the personhood and identity of those who lead. It must also be in terms of the way leaders are spiritually formed, identified, and practice leadership in their local communities. Leadership must be offered in a circle of discipleship, every leader living as a disciple in a circle of love and prayer, shaped by Gospel Based Reflection and sensitive to the leadership of our elders.
- **Indigenous communities translating the essence of Christian Faith into their language, lifestyle, and spiritual practice.** This work is called Inculturation, the incarnation of the Word of God and the essence of Christian Faith into the culture and life of the local community. The translation of Scripture into the language of the People, the translation of the liturgy into the ceremony of the People, and the translation of the mutual care and oversight of the community into the lifestyle of the People, are all a part of Inculturation. In this work, which is both an action of God and a faithful expression of discipleship, we are guided by the Gospel, the Scripture, and God's presence in Indigenous cultures in the past and in the present.
- **Indigenous Peoples – Inuit, First Nations, and Metis – forming strong networks, communities, and organizations across the Land.** These will work with, represent, and support Indigenous Peoples in their local and regional communities, upon Reserves, other Indigenous communities, and in urban areas. These communities, networks, and organizations will support local and regional structures of community, ministry, and mutual Indigenous oversight. Today, we recognize Sacred Circle, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, and the Office of the National Indigenous Bishop as the beginning of a truly Indigenous structure to provide support, cooperation, and mutual oversight across the Land. Strong networks, communities, and organizations, now brought together in the Sacred Circle, will establish and organize themselves in a way that is comparable to the provinces of the Anglican Church of Canada: As it appears now, some local and regional communities will belong solely to the jurisdiction and oversight of the National Indigenous Ministry – Sacred Circle, ACIP, and the NIAB. Other local and regional communities will belong both to their local diocese and province, but will remain fully part of the Sacred Circle, ACIP, and will receive pastoral and episcopal ministry from the NIAB.
- **Indigenous communities creating new networks and communities in local and regional areas.** In some cases, Indigenous congregations and relationships, acting together, will create their own networks of cooperation, and support within already established diocesan and provincial structures. In some cases, churches and communities will come together to form their

own community of Indigenous congregations, comparable to a diocese. Others will act to create networks and communities across diocesan and provincial boundaries that will function as an area mission.

- **Indigenous Ministry creating and overseeing, in it's across the land, regional, and local expressions, a strategy and plan for the development of ministry and mission across the Land.** This will include continent-wide strategies for pastoral care, evangelism and growth, the identification and formation of leaders, and the establishment of church communities and congregations across the Land - on Reserves, other Indigenous communities, and urban areas.

### **Some Key Principles and Values that are an important part of Self-Determination**

1) The Living Word of God, who seeks to become flesh throughout Creation and history, wills to become living and real in every people and culture of human kind. We affirm and proclaim that this is also true for Indigenous Peoples in their various communities – Inuit, First Nations, and Metis.

2) We could say, considering this, that self-determination is one way of describing the destiny, plan, and process of God for Indigenous Peoples. Said simply, self-determination is becoming what God intends us to be as the People of the Land and Seas. Therefore, we proclaim that self-determination is a part of the movement of Indigenous Peoples towards God's new creation. For Indigenous churches, the new creation is made living and real in our discipleship and, especially, in our celebration of the Eucharist. We do not and cannot separate our churches growth in Christ from the restoration and renewal of our Indigenous nations and communities. We believe that new creation is also witnessed in the growth of peace, justice, and love among the People of the Land. The health and well-being of families, clans, and nations, and the recovery and strengthening of Indigenous language and culture is an essential part of self-determination.

3) We have said that "Our spirituality is our governance." This speaks to the strong and vital connection between the development of our spiritual community and what we understand to self-determination and governance from an Indigenous perspective. Here we highlight the way that the concepts of self-determination and governance contrast with many of the patterns of leadership and authority in institutions that come out of a Western and European tradition. In those patterns, self-determination and governance are often expressed as matters of jurisdiction, administrative authority, and the identification of the authority and control of leaders. The question of self-determination has often been put to us in these terms: "Who will be in charge?" For Indigenous Peoples self-determination and governance is expressed, as has been the ancient and traditional practice of our elders, in the establishment and maintenance of our spiritual community and discipline. This has often been difficult to communicate to people outside of Indigenous culture. Authority, we expect, will be primarily shown in the way we treat each other. Discipleship will be the way that we re-establish self-determination within and among our communities.

4) Our cooperation and participation in this work and mission of God is particularly urgent, given the crisis of poverty and social despair in so many Indigenous communities - on Reservations, in rural Indigenous villages and towns, and in Urban areas. We note, in this regard, that in many Indigenous communities and for many Indigenous peoples, the churches are the only culturally relevant social services available twenty-four/seven.

5) There is a great need for the identification, spiritual formation, and pastoral practice of Indigenous circles of leadership within our various communities – urban, villages, and Reserves. At the heart of this leadership development is the practice of discipleship. It is from these communities of disciples that circles of leadership will be authorized and empowered. The development of spiritual leadership in Indigenous communities must no longer be patterned and controlled by the practices and values of Western cultures. Indigenous oversight, mutual care, and community must be shaped by Biblical faith lived out in Indigenous life.

6) The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples underlines the right of Indigenous Peoples to organize among themselves in accordance with their own cultural and political identity. This includes the right to come together and act across the established borders of colonial regimes, systems, and institutions, including the Church.

7) The spiritual development of Indigenous communities and the formation of sacred circles of discipleship is critical item for the agenda of the whole church. It requires that development of congregations, in sharp contrast to the past, must be sustainable, replicable, and culturally relevant. Indigenous stewardship is, as it has been and will be, the primary way of support for Indigenous Ministry. At the same time, it must be noted that justice and reparations are an essential part of the process of reconciliation. This demands that the larger Church carefully and fearlessly offer a fair share of the wealth it has received from its participation in the colonial expansion across the Land.

8) Indigenous self-determination gives priority to the local level. Each congregation and every community will operate in their own way and in their own timing. They will be consulted on those matters that affect them and they will decide for themselves how they will be involved in future actions and organizations of self-determination. No single model is considered the way for all; self-determination is a local expression. We seek unity, not uniformity.

9) All Indigenous communities express at least one dimension of self-determination, as it is described above. Overall, these affirmations work together and touch Indigenous communities and ministries in various ways. As Indigenous communities work together, inspired by the presence of the Holy Spirit, they will grow in grace, understanding, and effectiveness. The structures for self-determination will grow out of the ministry and reclaiming of Indigenous humanity by the people themselves. All these things, already emerging, are alive with the Spirit of God and the visions of our elders. We can be a healthy, growing, and effective community of Indigenous Christians across the Land.

10) The way to Self-determination invites the whole Church to healing. For Indigenous Peoples, it is a reclaiming of humanity; for non-Indigenous peoples, it is a recovery of the humanity lost in the moral wound of colonization. This wound is often difficult for non-Indigenous peoples to

recognize. Many would deny that such a condition exists. It must be said that, despite these obstacles, Self-determination will proceed - it must in the grace and power of God, and it will put forces in motion that will lead to healing for all. We believe that Self-determination has the potential to deepen the unity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christians.

11) Self-determination will lead to the development of ways of church life that will differ from the way things are often done in the present-day Anglican Church. There will be many different attempts at local, regional, and across-the-land non-Western expressions of governance, liturgy, and pastoral practice. This work will require respect, generosity, and freedom across the various organizational structures of the Church. The validity and necessity of Indigenous cultural ways, though adapted and influenced by Indigenous Christian discipleship, must be given priority and authority in Indigenous churches and ministries. At the least, this is required by the general right to Indigenous Self-determination, as embodied in treaties, basic human rights, and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The full humanity of Indigenous Peoples cannot be respected, inside or outside of the Church, unless the full authority of their right to exist as self-determining peoples is affirmed.

12) One of the most critical principles for our way forward is found in the promise of Jesus to be present wherever two or three are gathered together in his name (Matthew 18:20; Matthew 28:20). It is this miraculous presence - healing, teaching, sending - which gives authority to our gatherings as followers of Jesus. We have great respect and confidence in the core teachings of our faith. We are committed to show our faithfulness and fruitfulness in these teachings. It is vital that we do so in a living hope, sustained and alive in the presence of the living Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this presence that inspires us to know the Truth and live the faith that we have received. We are powerful in that God works in us and through us by the presence of Jesus in our midst. As we look at the many challenges ahead of us we are confident about our future, not because we believe that we are up to the task but because we know that God is up to the task.

*The following have been at the heart of our experience and practice of Gospel Based Discipleship for many years. They are essential to Self-determination.*

### **The Guiding Principles of Gospel Based Discipleship**

*As Gospel Based Disciples we commit:*

1. To regularly engage the Gospel
2. To take seriously our own spiritual formation
3. To nurture and foster the spiritual formation of others
4. To live the Baptismal Covenant
5. To live as a community of disciples
6. To foster reconciliation, healing, and vision
7. To pray and worship regularly
8. To respect the spiritual traditions, values, and customs of our many peoples
9. To take full responsibility for our local ministries

### **The Rule of Life**

Creator God, we acknowledge and give thanks that:

In Jesus we know we belong to a Sacred Circle with

the Gospel and Baptismal Covenant in the Centre

In this Sacred Circle:

We are all related;

We live a compassionate and generous life;

We respect all life, traditions, and resources;

We commit ourselves to spiritual growth,

discipleship and consensus.