

“The fruit of our elders’ dreams...” lights and sidelights on the geo-story of
Indigenous Episcopacy in Canada

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At the General Synod of 2001 Bishop Gordon Beardy, the Oji-Cree diocesan of Keewatin in North-west Ontario and North-east Manitoba altered the Anglican Church’s discourse between Indigenous and Settler peoples in a most surprising way. At the conclusion of a penitential rite centred on the Church’s legacy of Indian Residential Schools Beardy spoke directly to the Primate, Archbishop Michael Peers saying:

“I accept your apology because you worked so hard to break down barriers. Where things were condemned before, today you receive them with joy. Where once we were outsiders, today we are with you a friend, as leader, as brother, so I extend my hand.”

Beardy had been elected suffragan bishop of Keewatin in 1993 and diocesan in 1996. Gordon has never shied away from action in support of the political, economic and social goals of his people and Anishnabe People. In 1997 he undertook a Sacred Walk from Sachigo Lake First Nation in Ontario to Burritt Manitoba to collect donations for a Healing Fund in support of Residential Schools survivors and other victims of sexual abuse. When controversy arose over the distribution of some of the monies raised before all the arrangements had been made for its management Beardy stated, “This isn’t the first time I have put myself on the line, If you can’t do that you can’t help people...Sometimes people don’t have time to wait....Normally with Native events

there's no follow-up but when the media does other things there is follow-up. I want the same for Native people. We want to help them restore their lives and show them that we care.”¹

Beardy is also deeply committed to the Indigenization of the Church. When Mark MacDonald sought his advice about the possibility of his being nominated to the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska in 1996 Gordon encouraged him and then set out a challenge: “If you were a bishop, you could join me in a church that would believe this is sacred land.” Mark MacDonald accepted the nomination and has reflected on the challenge. He notes that “like many Native elders Beardy’s thoughts and values are thoroughly aboriginal but his theology is normally phrased within the confines of a very orthodox and evangelical Christian faith.” MacDonald locates Beardy’s challenge within a discourse that repudiates the “Doctrine of Discovery” which presumes that Civilization requires the replication of the Western cultural institutions, including the traditional land based definitions of Episcopal authority.

Despite a growing understanding among the majority populations of North America about the threat Western development poses to the environment, MacDonald states that most still don’t accept the validity of aboriginal values:

*Amazingly, the churches of the West remain perplexed that their cultural framework is neither easy nor self-evident for the People of the Land. Much of the Western mission to the People of the Land treats them, as a number of commentators have noticed, as insufficiently developed Euro-American Suburbanites, They must join a church of a European Diaspora in order to achieve spiritual legitimacy.*²

Bishop Beardy had joined Bishop Charles Arthurson, suffragan of Saskatchewan in the house of bishops³. Later in 1996 Bishop Paul Idlout was elected suffragan of The Arctic in a long election where the laity had supported Ben Arreak and the clergy had supported the more senior Idlout. In July 2001 it looked like the Anglican Church was on a track to very very gradually elect an increasing number of indigenous bishops through diocesan synods.⁴ Then, there was another surprise. On August 15, 2001, Gordon Beardy resigned.

There are several ways that we can locate the impetus for the appointment of a national Indigenous bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada. In 1969, Charles Hendry a professor of Social Work at the University of Toronto⁵ produced a report *Beyond Traplines* that set a new course for indigenous settler relations in the Anglican Church. This report was presented to the General Synod meeting in Sudbury as a considered response to the end of the Anglican Church's historic role in the Residential Schools system. It was also part of a wider reassessment of the organization of the Church's mission and educational work.⁶ Hendry posed two basic questions. *What do Native People want? And what information do they have on which to base their choices?* His research showed that "some of them want to salvage remnants of the old cultural remnants that have been carelessly broken" and "some of them want to create new artistic and political forms but much broader in scope".⁷ For Hendry, the key to success was the revival and use of indigenous languages as the first language of instruction in primary education and its steady expansion in daily life. He also saw two options for the Church's ongoing work. The Church could either transform itself into an intermediary between the

two cultures or it could continue in its traditional evangelizing role. Either option allowed the church to make efforts to reduce social tensions.⁸

In order for the Church to continue in an effective role Hendry set out six principles of operations. For Hendry these were not optional if the Church was going to remain relevant in Native Canadian society. The Church must:

1. Listen to Native Peoples
2. Clarify its basic intentions
3. Redefine its role
4. Redeploy resources
5. Vitalize education for ministry
6. Develop strategies looking towards basic innovation using Native languages.⁹

As a consequence, “Obsolescent jurisdictional and administrative patterns and procedures must be changed if functional effectiveness in the ministry of the Church is to be achieved.”¹⁰ The consequence for eventual indigenous episcopacy was Hendry’s insistence on the centrality of the principle of *pluralism* which he defined as the Church and Canadian society as a whole “conceding native peoples the right to be accepted as fellow citizens and fellow humans, and the resources that will allow them to make a genuine choice of the way of life they wish to lead.”¹¹ In 1969 in Canada First Nations people holding treaty status had only had a vote in federal elections for eight years. *Beyond Traplines* posed an enormous challenge to the Church and to Canadian settler society.

The General Synod of 1969 agreed to a major reorganization of its structure and its work. The previously separate organizations for mission, education and social service were dissolved and replaced by a National and World program office and one Program Committee with related sub-committees reporting to a unified National Executive Council. Financial governance for “the missionary dioceses” was lodged in The Council of the North whose membership included all the related bishops and their senior administrators. A nationally funded system of block grants for parish and diocesan program support in the North was designed and implemented. National staffing by a non-indigenous team was provided for a new initiative in support of self-determination, treaty and land rights, and industrial and environmental development. Most importantly, a National consultant on Native Affairs was hired in 1969 and a Native Affairs sub-committee of the reorganized National Program Committee was established in 1973.

“The staff person and sub-committee played an intermediary role in relaying Aboriginal voices and concerns to the church. During this time Indigenous Anglicans were re-embracing their long suppressed heritage, re-vitalizing their identity, language and culture, and developing visions of community health and wholeness. In 1980, General Synod gave the new Council on Native Affairs responsibility for carrying peoples concerns directly to the National Executive Council. This gave Aboriginal Peoples more status and a stronger voice within the decision-making structure of the church.”¹² While these new initiatives all provided possibilities for renewal of relationships and the reorientation of resources they had the major disadvantages of separating both central and

local financial control from program and ministry development aimed at self-determination, social justice and indigenous rights and they contributed to the major “memory loss” of the Church’s role in Indian Residential Schools and its legacy of personal and social pain.

From 1992 to 1994 the Anglican Church of Canada was once again involved in preparations for structural reorganization under the umbrella of “Preparing the Way.” The impetus for this was a significant decline in membership and financial resources. In April 1994, the Council for Native Ministry held an Aboriginal Anglican leaders’ “Preparing the Way” consultation. The product was a statement “Our Journey of Spiritual Renewal” the development of “The Covenant” “which extended the hand of partnership to all those who will help us build a truly Anglican Indigenous Church in Canada.” These statements were presented to and accepted by the 1995 General Synod meeting which for the first time encouraged the exploration of

1. The establishment of the office of a national indigenous Bishop who will work in partnership with the national church and dioceses
2. The development of indigenous forms of church government and decision making
3. Ways for the indigenous congregations to move toward self-sufficiency.

The Anglican indigenous membership was estimated as 4% of the total population primarily affiliated with 225 congregations. In five of thirty dioceses, The Arctic, Caledonia, Keewatin, Moosonee and Saskatchewan they made up more than one third of

the total Anglican membership. In The Arctic diocese approximately 90% of the total Church membership was Anglican mostly Inuit.¹³

It is significant that in the early 1990's the Council for Native Ministries successfully resisted attempts to lead the work of addressing the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. (Residential Schools litigation work and all associated costs were lodged in the General Secretary's and or named Diocesan offices). It also succeeded in a period of significant downward financial pressure in addressing Hendry's call for a reallocation of financial resources. While the first allocation from the General Synod budget of \$250,000 for healing work was entrusted to the Residential Schools Working Group it became part of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples' work after another national reorganization in 1995. CNM argued for and obtained new funding for "Living Waters" a youth initiative. This was short lived as the General Synod withdrew from youth work in a program reorientation returning responsibility for youth ministry and a number of other congregational development and stewardship initiatives to the constituent Dioceses.¹⁴ The Council for Native Ministries and the Residential Schools Working group both adopted a consensus based approach to decision making as an expression of the third priority "indigenous forms of decision-making" and then promoted this move away from parliamentary style procedures to Councils and the General Synod.¹⁵

The three priorities had been reaffirmed in 2001 following a five year period of education and discernment. In 2003 ACIP created the Indigenous Covenant Implementation Commission (ICIC) which brought its report and recommendations to the Fifth Sacred

Circle meetings in Pinawa, Manitoba in August 2005. The ICIC had presented a summary of “canonical” requirements for a national indigenous bishop which conformed both to the rubrics for election of a bishop generally, 30 years of age, in Holy Orders as a priest or a bishop, known to be a person of integrity and having leadership ability and furthermore, based on the precedent from the elections of indigenous suffragan bishops, set out the specific requirement that the person be an Indigenous person (though Indian status was not required) and active in native ministry. Among the duties named were expectations that the bishop would work with ACIP, the Anglican Indigenous Network internationally and more specifically with the Anglican Church in the visible sharing of indigenous “cultures, traditions and values” and working “towards self determination for Indigenous peoples” including participation in national and international Councils of Churches.¹⁶

The framers of the ICIC document and Canadian national Indigenous ministry staff had been active participants in related international initiatives. The Anglican Indigenous Network includes Aotearoa (New Zealand), The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council of Australia,¹⁷ Canada, and The United States of America. They had participated in the development and publication of the *First Peoples Theology Journal* and the meetings of the network from its beginnings in 1991 in Hawai’i. Active participation gave the Canadians experience of the positive example of New Zealand and direct view of the struggles that the Church in Hawai’i had in asserting first its full inclusion in the Episcopal Church’s structures and in pressing issues around self determination in a period of financial upheaval.¹⁸ One particular difference between the

Canadian and American participation in AIN was that the Canadian national staff the Rev. Laverne Jacobs and later Ms. Donna Bomberry were closely connected to the international work. Also, Canadian participation in international work was consistently supported from within the regular national budgets.¹⁹ Also, it appears that although the Canadians actively supported the AIN conferences at Lethbridge in 1997 and Vancouver in 2007 only the Americans had had the resources to support ongoing program work until that was severely curtailed in 2006/7.

The AIN processes resulted in the call for a “borderless” approach to North American Indigenous Episcopacy. In 2005 the ninth gathering of the Anglican Indigenous Network was held on the Pala Indian Mission in Pala, California. Among several resolutions relating to self-determination the meeting affirmed that

We acknowledge that AIN has for several years held intense discussion concerning the concept of a “church without borders” as a means of bringing the message of reconciliation and forgiveness, of unity and hope, and a future for indigenous members of the churches of Canada and the United States of America, we have witnessed recent events in both our churches that call out for this concept to be seriously considered and discussed on greater and deeply levels of our churches for all people and members of our churches;
We call upon the House of Bishops of the Churches in Canada and the United states of American to recognize this concept of a church without borders as a viable means of bringing reconciliation, forgiveness, unity and hope for a future for the indigenous peoples and all members of our churches, and will expand the depth of discussion of this concept at the national and diocesan levels of the churches in Canada and the United States.

Another major influence on Canadian thought around the development of Indigenous Episcopacy was the Three Tikanga system of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.²⁰ In 2007 they reported to AIN on the consensus that had been achieved around a shared Primacy “that honours its three-tikanga (cultural) streams, at the same time emphasizing that such leadership must embody greater unity than has so far been evident.” The Aotearoa report noted that the development of a joint

communication strategy “*Tui Tuia* which means weave together” was an essential element of achieving these new goals.²¹

At Pinawa on August 10th Rev. Marvin Wolfleg spoke to the ICIC report from his personal experience as a Residential School survivor who first embraced traditional ways and then returned to the Church because of a powerful vision from his grandmother saying “When your grandma tells you to go, you go. Alive or not.” Then it was Gordon Beardy who pushed the process forward calling for an Indigenous Bishop within three years. Speaking after an Evening Prayer Service he “challenged the church to take a bold step and create a national native bishop, one who will bring hope and instill pride across the country. ... ‘In order to accomplish the vision, there needs to be trust, which comes by knowing everything is ok. Your life will be a priority with the person, so it must be a person who will build trust between Anishinabe and our white brothers and sisters.’”²²

On August 11th there was a three step process for confirming the call for a National Indigenous Bishop. First, each of the 41 elders in attendance was asked to speak from their own experience. All 41 spoke in agreement. Secondly, in the afternoon anyone in the community could speak directly to the Primate and the other bishops present to signify their personal wishes. Then the Primate and all bishops present gathered and formally accepted the request. The next day ACIP was empowered to work out the details for selection.²³

In addition to the selection process, questions immediately arose about the timing and other required canonical changes. The Primate, Andrew Hutchison, noted that though

canonical changes to enable the Indigenous Bishop to act with “full authority and jurisdiction” would take a longer time, naming a bishop with pastoral oversight could be accomplished.²⁴ The process to choose a bishop was successful and on January 4, 2007 Archbishop Hutchison announced that Bishop Mark MacDonald who had served as Bishop of Alaska since 1997 and had also served as Assisting Bishop of the Navajoland Area Mission would assume the role on March 1. Bishop MacDonald is a “non-status” Indian who was born in the USA and educated in both there and in Canada. The Primate had accepted MacDonald’s name from a selection committee. He made effective use of precedent in the Primatial nomination of the Bishops Ordinary to the Canadian Forces (an experience he had had personally) which overcame a pre-existing jurisdictional problem. Authority for the confirmation of bishops (with the exceptions of the choice of bishops for missions in Japan and China in the 1930s) was the prerogative of Provincial Synods and not the General Synod.²⁵ Although it had been strongly suggested that the office be located in Winnipeg it was also decided that for an unspecified period the Indigenous Bishop would be located at the General Synod offices in Toronto. In addition, MacDonald has retained his American Episcopal Church position as Assisting Bishop of the Navajo Area Mission and membership in their House of Bishops.

In 2007 the Council of the General Synod and then the General Synod itself gave first reading to Resolutions that will amend Section 6 on the Declaration of Principles regarding the Jurisdiction of the General Synod to give the General Synod responsibility for “the appointment, election, confirmation, consecration and resignation of a National Indigenous Anglican Bishop” and that Bishop’s membership in the General Synod and

by extension in the Canadian House of Bishops and related agencies of the Anglican and world-wide Communion.²⁶

The first year of the new Indigenous Episcopacy has seen some significant work. The Indigenous Bishop has initiated conversations with indigenous parishes, regional and diocesan structures on their present problems and visions for the future. He is a member of ACIP and participates in the ongoing staff work of Indigenous Ministries. He attended the synod of the diocese of Keewatin held in March 2008 and was given full membership status and a vote. The Keewatin synod has passed a resolution which will allow for the creation of a self-determining indigenous diocese in North west Ontario and an area ministry to predominantly aboriginal parishes in Northern Manitoba. Both of these areas will have new Episcopal oversight. The Diocese of Brandon will consider the Manitoba proposal at its next synod in October. These proposals require the concurrence of both the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land and the General Synod.²⁷

In January he joined an ecumenical team of Church Leaders in a four city "Remembering the Children" tour to promote the upcoming Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Residential Schools, a five year program that will listen to the stories of residential school survivors and educate the Canadian public about the schools history and legacy.²⁸

Mark MacDonald's point view is significantly different from Charles Hendry's. He has written that

Although all people feel the "fragmentation" of modern life, Indigenous Peoples do not see it as a problem of "pluralism and diversity". It is the larger dominant culture's unforgiving call to "fit

in' to the larger scheme of things. The eagerness of many to appropriate Native symbols does not hide the basic modern hostility towards indigenous peoples. Deeply held prejudice is often betrayed in seemingly innocent contexts. For example, two preliminary section reports here at Lambeth have said that the fragmentation of modern life leads to a "New Tribalism". To Indigenous People "Tribalism" is the opposite – a clan based communal identity is associated with survival, hospitality, and solidarity with all creation and her Creator.²⁹

MacDonald has outlined what he calls seven *Marks of a North American Church*. These include recognition of the ongoing survival of the Peoples of the Land and a related denunciation of the Doctrine of Discovery.

The boundaries of Native church life should reflect and respect the boundaries of the People of The Land. The churches of the West must do more than affirm the authority and validity of the First Nations as it relates other Nations and States. They must recognize it within themselves. ...

In addition, as the pattern of seasons and geography have shaped the experience of prayer, faith and service since the beginning of revelation recorded in Scripture, so must the Land of the Americas shape the pattern of Christian Life in the Americas....

The spiritual and moral authority of the aboriginal nations of the Americas, especially as they relate to their own, must shape the decision-making and actual shape of these factors. This discernment must be both tribal and consensual, not imposed from above, this will demand flexibility and creativity. The shape of the relationship of the People of the Land to the churches of the West must be up to them, but promises a pattern of community that, of necessity, call all to transformation.³⁰

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- ¹ Anglican Bishop's work questioned by some: "this isn't the first time I put myself on the line " Beardy says recovered from Wawatay News Online. <http://www.wawataynews.ca/node10859>
- ² Mark MacDonald, The Gospel Comes to North America, *First Peoples Theology Journal*, xxxx, 95-96
- ³ Both Bishop Arthurson and Bishop Beardy had been elected after 'position descriptions' that provided a preference to aboriginal candidates had been drafted and approved. Arthurson was elected by the Provincial Council of Rupert's Land and Beardy by the diocese of Keewatin synod. Personal Communication with Archbishop M.G. Peers, 25 March, 2008.
- ⁴ In 1969 there had been a debate about electing an aboriginal person to serve as successor to Keewatin's Bishop H.E. Hives. The discussion included a proposal to create a new governance structure for the area of northern Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwest Ontario with a suffragan bishop for the region. See Keewatin: First Indian bishop?, *Canadian Churchman*, vol. 96, no.1, January, 1969, p. 1, 16
- ⁵ Note publications history.
- ⁶ Netten
- ⁷ Chlares Hendry, *Beyond traplines: does the Church really Care? Towards an assessment of the work of the Anglican Church of Canada with Canada's native peoples*, [2nd edition]: Toronto, Anglican Book Centre, 1998, 60
- ⁸ Hendry p. 66
- ⁹ Hendry p. 71
- ¹⁰ Hendry p. 80
- ¹¹ Hendry p. 81
- ¹² *Indigenous Ministries: some background and history of our work...* recovered from <http://www.anglican.ca/im/background.htm> on 2/27/2008
- ¹³ *Some Facts* recovered from <http://www.anglican.ca/im/facts.htm> on 2/27/2008
- ¹⁴ See "Native Peoples and Sovereignty within the Church", in Joyce Carlson, *Dancing the Dream: The First Nations and the Church in Partnership*: Toronto, Anglican Book Centre, 1995 pp.
- ¹⁵ See especially *Residential Schools Working Group, Report to the National Executive Council Appendix*, May 1995.
- ¹⁶ Honoring Our Relations – Keeping the Spirit Alive, Covenant Implementation Discussion, August 8-12, 2005: 2005, *The Fifth Indigenous Sacred Circle*, pp. 6-7.
- ¹⁷ The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council report to AIN Vancouver highlighted a variety of issues that were not directly related to Episcopal governance. In particular, they noted the lack of a General Synod commitment to the work and "the continuing issue of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clergy receiving very low wages. Most of the clergy receive "work for the dole" monies or Community Development and Employment money, Because they are on these programs they receive no superannuation, sickness benefits, Long Service leave or any of the other benefits their fellow clergy receive."
- ¹⁸ The History of the Anglican Indigenous Network, recovered from <http://www.ainnetwork.org/history.htm> 3/11/2008.
- ¹⁹ For an account of the American problems see the "History" above and also *Report of the USA Delegation to AIN Vancouver, 2007*. "It was only recent that the church began to reorganize itself and it was realized that we were not "institutionalized" or formally incorporated into the church structure. We had been loosely in a working relationship with the office of the Native American Missioner, a staff member of the Episcopal Church Centre, It was recommended that we become part of the national governing body, the Executive Council and so now we are known as the Executive Council's Committee on Indigenous Ministry or ECCIM."
- ²⁰ See particularly, *History*, in Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia: Te Hahi Mihinare ki Aoearoa, ki Niu Tieneni, Ki Nga Moutere oTe Moana Nui a Kiwa recovered from <http://www.anglican.org.nz/history.htm> 2/27/2008
- ²¹ *Three Tikanga Primacy*, Pihopatanga O Aotearoa Report prepared for the AIN Conference, Vancouver Canada, 17-2 May, 2007, page 3
- ²² *We Should Have a Deadline*, Anglican Indigenous Sacred Circle: August 10 vol. 1 no.3 recovered from <http://www2.anglican.ca/about/committees/acip/sc2005/2005-08-10.htm> 2/27/2008

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- ²³ *Indigenous Anglicans Take an Historic Step* recovered from <http://www2.anglican.ca/about/committees/acip/sc2005/statement-2005-08-13.htm> 2/27/2008
- ²⁴ Marites N. Sison, National native Bishop named, *Anglican Journal*, Feb.1, 2007, recovered from <http://www.anglicanjournal.com/issues/2007/133/feb/02> 10/17/2007 9:22 AM
- ²⁵ Mr. Justice Brian Borrows who has lengthy experience as Chancellor (legal advisor) to both the Diocese of Edmonton and the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land has assisted ACIP and the Indigenous Ministry staff in developing appropriate canons. Personal Communication with Archbishop M.G. Peers 26 March 2008.
- ²⁶ See *Official Statements of the General Synod: 2007 June 19-25* recovered from www.anglican.ca 2 Feb. 2008
- ²⁷ Keewatin Eyes New Structures, *The Anglican Journal*, vol. 134 no. 4, April 2008 p 1 and 6
- ²⁸ Ali Symons, *Keep up with the Remembering the Children Tour*, see <http://www.rememberingthechildren.ca> recovered 3/6.2008
- ²⁹ Mark MacDonald, A Statement to Lambeth from the Anglican Indigenous Peoples Network, xxxx 1998, p. 45
- ³⁰ Mark MacDonald, The Gospel Comes to North America, *First Peoples Theology Journal*, xxxx, p. 100