

PREFACE

At our recent Executive Council's Committee on Indigenous Ministries' (ECCIM) meeting at White Earth Nation in Minnesota (May 14-17, 2009) we invited the Rev. Christopher Johnson, staff of the Domestic Poverty Alleviation project of our church, to give us a presentation since the project would emphasize the poverty found on many of the reservations throughout the country and in areas where the church has a unique relationship and history with its indigenous peoples.

Chris presented us with a background on the project beginning with the Presiding Bishop's summit on poverty. That summit was attended by several Native Americans, including ECCIM member Dr. Erma Vizenor, the Tribal chair of White Earth. Pervious to this presentation we had already had a discussion concerning the White Bison Foundation and its healing program, so our dialogue with Chris enlarged upon that discussion.. Many of us expressed the fact that any "war" poverty in the realization of funds, food, jobs and other material help would be greatly appreciated, but these are symptoms of a greater poverty; that of the demise of our faith, traditions, culture, language and recognition as indigenous peoples of our homelands. The analogy was made that in traditional healing we seek to treat the symptoms of illness so we can find the root causes to end the illness, and hence to alleviate poverty we need to look at it in the same way.

This led to a very serious and deep discussion about, what I believe, is the very essence of what indigenous ministry in the Episcopal Church is all about and needs required to address the situation now. Together, and with special thanks to the Rt. Revs. Mark MacDonald and Michael Smith, we were able to put our thoughts down into a statement or a "word" to the church about what we had just talked about. We also talked about what can be done by the church and by you and I so we can move from this point in time, together. Those points are listed after the statement.

All of us who signed on did so understanding the importance of what is being said and we are more than willing to engage with you in discussing it. As chair, I believe this sets forth a clear direction for Indigenous Ministries in our church to embark upon with some very real and tangible goals. Our thanks are also extended to the Rev. Brian Grieves for suggesting and arranging Chris to be with us.

Malcolm Naea Chun, Chair, ECCIM

A Word to The Episcopal Church
Executive Council's Committee on Indigenous Ministry
White Earth Ojibwe Nation, Minnesota
May 16, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We propose that the larger church join us in a spiritual movement to realize the Gospel in the life of our communities. This movement will reflect the Indigenous interdependence of theology, ecology, spirituality and morality. It will focus on the Word becoming living and real in all of our communities.

For centuries, the church's mission to the Indigenous Peoples, the Peoples of the Land and Seas, has been enmeshed in colonialism and has based its mission on its goals. Success for Indigenous Peoples was defined as reproducing or mimicking the institutions of Western culture. The negative cumulative costs of this approach are beyond human calculation. This approach must end.

We urge our churches to examine their participation in the on-going systemic tragedy of Western colonialism. Specifically, we are concerned with the unexplored dimension of the relationship of the Western church to the First Peoples of North America, the People of the Land and Seas. We note that while the churches have encouraged nations to honor the treaties made with Indigenous Peoples, they have not seriously entertained the implications of those treaties to their own institutions. Now is the time to do this.

The discussion of the intergenerational legacy of the government and church operated boarding schools is a place to initiate this discussion. This issue provides, as we see from the example of Canadian schools, an important lens through which the larger consequences and experience of colonialism may be examined. We seek the transformational insight into the past and present that will create the prophetic imagination to build a new future for all. Therefore:

- We call for full partnership in our church as promised in the New Jamestown Covenant that can be fulfilled through the Second Decade of Remembrance, Recognition and Reconciliation (2007-2017).
- We call for a study of the boarding schools and the impact upon Indigenous Peoples.
- We call upon General Convention to endorse the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United States administration.
- We call for full support, participation and commitment for the 2010 Oklahoma Consultation exploring the implications of self-determination and developing the actions needed to be full partners in our church.
- We are encouraged by the church's willingness to focus upon domestic poverty in the lives of Indigenous Peoples and their homelands, and we note the 76th General Convention will be a crossroads in terms of funding and the role of Indigenous Peoples in our church.

Finally, as we gathered and discussed with each other these important and exciting initiatives, it became clear that we are in the midst of a new moment in our trajectory as Indigenous Peoples of Faith. In this light, we believe we are now being called to plan and convene a Sacred Council of our various peoples to fully embrace the future that God has for us.

Mr. Malcolm Naea Chun, Chair (Native Hawaiian);
 The Rt. Rev. Michael G. Smith, Vice Chair (Potawatomi);
 The Rev. Carol Smith, Secretary (Ojibwe);
 The Rev. Canon Ginny Doctor (Mohawk);
 Ms. Cornelia Eaton (Navajo);
 The Rev. Rosella A. Jim (Navajo);
 The Rt. Rev. Mark L. MacDonald (Pastoral Bishop of Navajoland);
 Mrs. Linda A. Sproat (Native Hawaiian);
 Dr. Erma J. Vizenor, Ed.D. (Ojibwe); and
 Mr. Frank Oberly (Osage-Comanche)