

The View from on top of the Mountain

By Malcolm Nāea Chun

The white men had many things that we wanted, but we could see that they did not have the one thing we liked best – freedom. I would rather live in a tipi and go without meat when game is scarce than give up my privileges as a free Indian, even though I could have all that white have.[. . .] – Lakota Holy man Sitting Bull

In the alphabet soup of the Episcopal Church ECCIM means the Executive Council's Committee on Indigenous Ministry and AIN is the Anglican Indigenous Network. ECCIM is the highest level body of people involved with indigenous ministry in the church. AIN is the officially recognized body of indigenous minorities in the Anglican Communion. I was not part of the founding group of either one, but I ended up having served as the head of each one, so I have been asked to reflect on them. I served on ECCIM, and its predecessor ECIM, for nine years and I participated in AIN from 1992 and will end my tenure as Secretary-General in 2011. I have been a witness and active participant at meetings and great events, and to support that personal experience next to me, as I write this article, are the minutes, history, documents, and photographs.

ECCIM was earlier known as ECIM, the Episcopal Council of Indian Ministry and I believe Dr. Owanah Anderson has written on its growth during the tenure of Presiding Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Edmond (Ed) Browning. It was

Established by Executive Council in 1969, the National Committee on Indian Work and its successor body, ECIM, have served the Episcopal Church's ministry to, for and with the indigenous peoples of its dioceses for thirty-three years [as of 2002 when this was written].¹

The formation and establishment of the Anglican Indigenous Network also occurred during his tenure as Presiding Bishop. Its origins

¹ Resolution adopted by Executive Council, during the February 22-25, 2002 meeting at San Antonio, Texas and reported by the Rev. Rosemari G. Sullivan on March 5, 2002.

were influenced by a new interest in developing “native ministries” instead of missions to native peoples.

During the 1991 General Convention of the Episcopal Church in Phoenix, Arizona the first step was taken toward forming a network of indigenous Anglicans. It was here that the Anglican observer to the United Nations, the Rt. Rev. Sir Paul Reeves, convened a meeting of indigenous Anglicans and/or their representatives: Dr. Owanah Anderson, the Rev. Dr. Martin Brokenleg, Bishop Steven Charleston and Dr. Carol Hampton of the Episcopal Council of Indian Ministries; Bishop Wakahuihui and Doris Vercoe from Aotearoa; the Rev. Charles G. K. Hopkins from Hawai‘i; Archbishop Michael Peers representing native Canadians. The idea of an indigenous network to coincide with the United Nation's International Year of the World's Indigenous People was presented and the countries represented at the meeting agreed to participate in it. It was further decided that one person from each country meet as a steering committee with Sir Paul Reeves to develop a plan for networking among American Indians and Alaska Natives, Canadian Natives, Native Hawaiians and Maori. Father Hopkins' offer of his Mission, St. John's By-the-Sea in Kahalu‘u, Hawai‘i, as the site and host of the meeting was accepted with appreciation.²

That steering committee meet later that year in Hawai‘i. They worked on several issues of mutual concern and agreement. In the spring of the following year at the consecration of several Māori bishops in Aotearoa (New Zealand) a follow up meeting with indigenous Anglicans from the United States, Canada and Hawai‘i in attendance. It was decided to establish a network represented by delegations of those groups later in 1992 back in Hawai‘i. It was at that fall meeting that I was invited to join as one of the Native Hawaiian delegates. We adopted the following mission statement:

We are indigenous minority peoples living in our own lands. We are committed to the Anglican tradition while affirming our traditional spirituality. We have discovered that we have many things in common: a common spirituality, common concerns, common gifts, and common hopes. We believe that God is leading the Church to a turning point in its history and that the full partnership of indigenous peoples is essential. Therefore we pledge to work together to exercise our

² It is thought that the Rev. Laverne Jacobs of Canada was also in attendance.

leadership in contributing our vision and gifts to transform the life of the Christian community.³

We continued the discussion on mutual issues of concern looking at several topics such as self determination, indigenous ministry, liturgy and worship, and development of resources. The next gathering was in 1994 at Aotearoa. Being located so close to Australia, a delegation of Aborigine and Torres Strait Islands attended. There was a shift in the AIN's goals from formulating a sense of identity to building a viable interacting network as participants sensed a partnership and relationship not known before among indigenous members of the Communion. ECIM and the Diocese of Alaska hosted the next AIN gathering in Alaska the following year, in 1995. That sense of not being alone anymore as the indigenous minority in our own homelands was reported back from Canada and Australia.

The First Nation peoples of Canada returned home from Rotorua and took bold steps toward self-determination in April by calling for a new relationship with the Anglican Church in Canada, resulting in a public apology from Archbishop Peers for the past behavior of the Church, and the beginning of a process towards a real partnership.

Australian Bishop Malcolm said that ideas from AIN had been put to use by Anglican Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders through the National Aboriginal Anglican Council (NAAC) [. . .] they were looking forward with optimism to a synod after returning home from Alaska that could well provide an additional Aboriginal bishop in North Queensland, a new Native bishop for the Torres Strait Islands and the possibility of an all-indigenous theological college.

It was at this gathering that the idea of creating an international indigenous theological journal was put forth, and even with national financial and internal governance problems, the idea was followed up the Native American delegation of ECIM. The next gathering in 1997 was set up to follow a rotation of hosting that would help share cost by allowing each delegation. Visiting delegations would be solely responsible for their

³ This is an extreme condensation of the history of AIN, which was compiled and written by the late Rev. Charles Kamohoali'i Hopkins and myself. It can be seen in its entirety, online, at the website of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC).

travel expenses while the host delegation would cover the meeting expenses. AIN was too young and inexperienced to have even thought of having an operating budget or an administration.

In Canada (1997) the focus turned to the issues of self-determination and “native spirituality.” Delegations were asked to present materials on their understanding of native spirituality at the next AIN gathering in Hawai‘i, and those papers were delivered at the Hawaii gathering in 1999 and became the basis of one of the indigenous theological journals published by the Indigenous Theological Training Institute.⁴ Recognition by ACC becoming a reality, and it was becoming evident that we needed an organizing body to continue these gatherings as more issues, ideas and the thought of expanding the membership came up. The next gathering would be hosted by the Australians in September of 2001 in Cairns. But now I need to return back to what was happening in our own church during this time, and my involvement with ECIM.

The 1990s was a heady time for the evolving Native American ministry at the national level. There were two major events: The signing of the New Jamestown Covenant re-established and renewed our church’s relationship with its indigenous members (Native American, Native Alaskan and Native Hawaiians, as stated in the document) from a mission directed thinking towards partnership. This was also an important event for AIN for it was through the mission established more than 400 years ago in Jamestown, Virginia that Matoaka (also known as Pocahontas) was baptized, the first indigenous person to join the Church of England and perhaps the first communicate of the Anglican Communion. The second was the 500th anniversary of Columbus finding the islands in the Caribbean and the “discovery of a new world” which cumulated, at least for us, with an immense liturgical service at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

The mission driven relationship with indigenous peoples of the “new world,” that began with those historical events of “discovery” set the course for thinking and policy towards native peoples until now. The Rt.

⁴ ITTI which was founded by Native American Episcopalians as a non-profit, affiliated theological educational body

Rev. Mark MacDonald's article on the "doctrine of discovery" describes that policy and its prevailing outcomes. It should also be evident from Dr. Anderson's article that indigenous ministries (also termed native ministries) is a relatively recent phenomenon in church history. In the history of the Episcopal Church, the establishment of ECIM and the creation of a national officer and office devoted to native (indigenous) ministry reflect a change in that type of thinking.

Although, national church restructuring almost eliminated ECIM in 1995, once restored ECIM sought to fulfill Bishop Browning's desire to have Native Hawaiians participate at the national level of the church. It was finally done in 2000. The chair of our diocese's Commission on Native Hawaiian Ministry (CONHM), the late Rev. Charles (Charlie) Hopkins asked me to serve as the first Native Hawaiian to that council since I had several years experience with Native American ministry in Province VIII.

ECIM had met on January 16, 2000 in Oklahoma City and it was noted in the minutes

Native Hawaiians: the process discussed in the old meeting is not quite the process we need to follow (John) the process is for John to go to Sony [Sonia] Francis (memo) this memo was sent to John by Sony Francis. By January this will go into effect. A position would be appointed not a person possible Malcolm Chung [Chun]. At Wintertalk this person should be invited and maybe a formal recognition of this event. Wintertalk Committee should work on this.

My first meeting was on April 8, 2000 in Reno, Nevada where it was moved to change the name of the Episcopal Council of Indigenous Ministries "to reflect the inclusion of Native Hawaiians" to the Episcopal Council of Indigenous Ministries.

Then, came September 11, 2001 and that traumatic event prevented the delegation of Native Americans of ECIM from attending the AIN 2001 gathering in Cairns. Those of us in Hawai'i were lucky to have gotten one of the first flights out the islands to anywhere. At the gathering a new format was adopted to change the make-up of the delegations, would reflect the areas of mutual concern: elders, youth, theological education, clergy (development), and women. The reality that AIN needed

an organizational administration was finally realized. A secretariat was created and I was volunteered and then asked to serve as its first secretary-general. All of this was motivated by the plea from late the Bishop of Aotearoa, the Rt. Rev. Whakahuihui Vercoe.

Where are we going with our theological education centres? We need to pull together what those programmes really mean to us. We are caught up with the agenda of the national churches and we need to get away from that. The form and order that we talk of and use is way too dependent upon dominant culture and church. The process we use for work and ministry among youth is a process of the church that is still living in the past. We must enable and empower our laity to be an equal part of the leadership of the church, not just priests and bishops. They are the ones who elect or should elect their bishops.

In hindsight ECIM was facing that dilemma, too. With the departure of Bishop Browning and the retirement of Dr. Anderson, the question of what to do with this native group cropped up again. What appeared as the highest level of indigenous leadership in the church, in reality had no structural status with the departure of Browning and his administration. Was it an advisory group to the Native Ministry officer or to the church's governing body, Executive Council, or was it, as some thought, **the** governing body of indigenous ministry in the church?

Unfortunately like so many governing bodies in today's dominant society, we had problems with hierarchy, personalities and personnel, power and money. It was a struggle. Some might say that was to be expected, like being on a reservation, but we had to contend with non-indigenous people too, and in the end the trust factor was getting very thin.

We would spend a lot of time and effort until 2003 when we finally came terms with those questions. We would see three able persons come and go as native missionaries, and their departures were in frustration. We would have to take over the day to day business of the missionary's office when the position was vacant, and we had to be granted an extraordinary exemption by Executive Council so that scholarships to students and grants for new programs across the country could be given out. We had to plan, administrate and carry out the annual Wintertalks that everyone looked forward to going to. We discovered that we did not want

to be an advisory group to the missionary or to be his or her staff. We also forgot when to stop doing the missionary's work when we had a missionary, too.

We discovered how many times people in the church and at the national level of governance and administration would have liked to see us get eliminated and just go away. We learnt how to survive through all of the politics, from non-natives to even our own people, so that there would remain a voice and presence of indigenous signatories of the New Jamestown Covenant somewhere in the church.

During those years in the wilderness we took consolation at AIN in hearing the continual pain of our Canadian relations as they told their story of the trauma of government sanctioned and church run boarding schools, and of the destruction it did upon tribes, individuals and families in the name of civilization and the church. We heard similar stories from down under of a whole generation of indigenous children taken away from their people and families to be adopted outside in a move to destroy indigenous peoples, language and culture, in doing so to remove them from their land and resources. We could never be alone again in our own suffering.

Critics and nay sayers of both ECCIM and AIN were too focused upon budgets and politics to see what those rare opportunities of networking were doing. They were chances for each member to share their stories and to compare their ideas with the potential to discover hope and direction where there seemed to be none. Delegations were invited, with very limited funds, to go to each others gatherings, meetings and events so to expand and share our faith and culture, face to face, especially with those who only would hear of other indigenous minorities in the Communion. Remember when Archbishop Michael Peers apologized to for what had been done through the boarding schools? This was the same man who was at the conception of AIN in Arizona, and at that gathering when the apology was made the Bishop of Aotearoa and his wife were there, too. The Canadian members were introducing the history and strategies of the development of the Māori bishopric to their people, who had never heard of it.

Similar results are beginning to come to pass in Australia as the church recognizes that it must work as a partner with its indigenous

peoples and the model of mission governance has changed. More and more dioceses and members of dioceses are accepting and “signing on” to their covenant of faith. Through the exchange of ideas and challenges they have looked at the governance of AIN members to discover better ways to revitalize their own national body and indigenous presence in the church. I know this because they asked me, as the Secretary-General of AIN, to help draft their covenant.

But, ECCIM did not forget our responsibilities to seek out the national opportunities that would sustain and inspire indigenous ministry going across the country. Wintertalks were now more accessible to regional attendance as we decided it needed to venture out across the country than held only in one venue. We wanted to lift the criticism that this was an elitist event, and in fact just this year, the first regional Wintertalk was held and sponsored by Province VIII in Seattle, Washington State, particularly for those who could not attend the national gathering. Four issues of the indigenous theological journal have been published and another issue honoring the late Lakota theologian Vine DeLoria Jr. is being ready for publication. ECCIM and the Native Missioner sponsored an event to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown colony and we continued to go over grant applications and to recommend awards for new ministry opportunities, although ECCIM no longer awards scholarships having given that function over to the board of ITTI.

We finally ended the institutional question of what we are and where do we belong in the church. In 2001 we had revised our by-laws so that the membership would be inclusive of the remaining mission aided diocese of North and South Dakota, Alaska, and Navajoland and nine members would be from across the country with two of them from Alaska and Hawai‘i. The following year (March 5, 2002) a resolution was adopted by Executive Council in San Antonio, of those by-laws. During that same year, after looking at all the many options we believed that the best place that we could be heard from and also removed from petty internal politics was to become an advisory committee to Executive Council. As I understood it, we would advise the Council of developments with recommendations for action between General Conventions, and if approved those recommendation would be turned over to the Presiding Bishop for implementation through the Church Center, mostly likely led

by the Indigenous Missioner. The Missioner would attend ECCIM meetings as the Presiding Bishop's staff and liaison so that good communication, collaboration and cooperation would result. I was able to attend this year's Wintertalk on the Poarch Creek Reservation in Alabama, and so far it looks like everyone has made the right choices, and perhaps those years of struggle may be only a valuable history lesson.

I was elected by the ECCIM members in 2003, at our first meeting as a committee, to be chairman. I saw my task to guide this new committee through the maze of how the national church operates and how we would fit in the system. My last meeting was held at the White Earth Reservation in western Minnesota. As a member of ECIM and ECCIM I was tired of meeting in hotels and nunneries, so I begged and plotted to see if we could have our meetings at four aided dioceses where we could see indigenous ministry at work and hear their praises and complains, and they could see this elitist group in person, too. I also advocated that our budget should be spent whenever and where ever there was a tribal run facility that could house us and feed us, and most times that means a tribal casino, so the money might go back to the people. So, we had the meeting at White Earth. It was not planned on the agenda but as we discussed domestic poverty, self governance, and the state of indigenous ministry in the country we developed the following statement or declaration. It is strong worded because it takes to heart the essence of Christian formation: to invite, inspire and to transform.

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.

Now that I have put these years into some perspective I am truly stunned at how much effort and time was spent in such an exhaustive and Orwellian pursuit to fit an inherited oddity into a pre-configured institutional framework. It is still a journey in the wilderness not unlike indigenous Australians and indigenous Canadians in our Communion. As they hopefully reach the end of that part of the journey I like to think they

have stepped upon the road to Emmaus and have seen a liberating revelation, too.

For indigenous Australians one of the great insights they have found on their journey is that they are not hapless victims of colonial depreciation. The aha-hah moment towards Emmaus occurred when many of them questioned the section of the draft covenant that requested financial support from the church for their ministry at the rate of 10% of the national church's budget. Who were they to ask so much? In the economical hard times how could they even dare to even bring up the issue and as one member pointed out it would never happen anyway. The question the stranger in their midst asked was how much was their culture, language, families, people, land and seas worth to them? Australia and the church were built on their lands with their resources at the cost of their language, culture and children, so how much was that worth? 10% percent they realized was insulting. Never again would they see themselves as what they were taught to be again as part of the flora and fauna of the land.

In the painful journey of indigenous Canadians racked by abuses of all sorts in an educational system created for their own good to make them civilized, that moment towards Emmaus was the realization that to move forward both victim and perpetrator were now partners on a very clear mission of healing a nation. They had gone through the accusations, apologies, court hearings and there were no more blows to be struck, but a lot of people, indigenous and non-indigenous, are crying for someone to help. The Canadian church has chosen a clear vision and mission to exemplify Isaiah's wounded healer and to end that history of pain and abuse in partnership and trust, the way it should have been done from the start.

I believe we, in this country, are on our road to Emmaus, too. The shift from the wilderness or that aha-hah moment, at least for me, was at White Earth. It comes from the realization and recognition that we, as a church, will not be able to be in the presence of the divine if we keep denying that there is a stranger amongst, someone who will never be like us and should not be. It is from that otherness that we might experience the divine in ways that we did not know possible, but instead we continually want the other to be like us. Some people know that as

assimilation, and it permeates American thought and action, whether one is politically conservative or liberal. Indigenous peoples and our cultures are not ethnic minorities or immigrants who have a former homeland. We have no other place to go or return to and our culture and language are who we are; not something to be acquired. The Lakota holy man Sitting Bull sums up this insight better than I can when he was interviewed.

This land belongs to us, for the Great Spirit gave it to us when he put us here. We were free to come and go, and to live in our own way. But white men, who belong to another land, have come upon us, and are forcing us to live according to their ideas. That is an injustice, we have never dreamed of making white men live as we live.

. . . I have seen nothing that a white man has, houses or railways or clothing or food, that is as good as the right to move in the open country, and live in our own fashion. [. . .] There! Your soldiers made a mark like that in our country [a square], and said that we must live there. They fed us well, and sent their doctors to heal our sick. They said that we should live without having to work. But they told us that we must go only so far in this direction, and only so far in that direction. [. . .] The white men had many things that we wanted, but we could see that they did not have the one thing we liked best – freedom. I would rather live in a tipi and go without meat when game is scarce than give up my privileges as a free Indian, even though I could have all that white have.[. . .]⁵

We have been pegged as a round peg in a square hole, but the White Earth Declaration says what is deep in our hearts. When we, the church, can see the stranger in our midst as that stranger is and not what we want it to be, then perhaps God will be revealed and we shall see. As Stilling Bull ended his interview so I end my reflection . . . I have spoken.

⁵ *Native Universe, Voices of Indian America*, Ed. By Gerald McMaster and Clifford E. Trafzer, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, National Geographic, 2004, Washington, D.C.