

Origin of the Working Group

Act C-13 of the 48th Session of the Synod of the Province of Rupert's land directed the Executive Committee to "form a committee to consult with the Anglican Council of Indigenous People to determine what practical actions can work to address areas of education, spirituality and building relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people, and commend these actions to the dioceses of the province, and back to Synod in 2018."

After some discussion by the Executive Committee, the Metropolitan appointed a working group in October 2016 to address this mandate. The group consisted of Mary Ann Assailly, Kathy Calkins, Bishop Adam Halkett, Iain Luke (chair), Vincent Solomon, and Amos Winter. As chair, I want to express my gratitude to the other members for their breadth of experience and willingness to share it, as well as for their time and thoughtfulness contributed to the group.

The first thing to say is that the group's mandate was to a large extent overtaken by events. The last session of synod met just after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its 94 Calls to Action. We did not know, at that time, what kind of impact the Calls to Action would have on Canadian society. The integrity and significance of the TRC process meant that the working group did not want to do anything that would distract from or dilute the impact of the Calls to Action. They require attention from all of us, and the answer to "What practical actions can work" begins with them.

Elsewhere in the church, other actions and events reframed the question posed at the last synod. The Road to Warm Springs consultation, last September, marked a new phase in discerning a new relationship between indigenous and settler communities in the Anglican Church of Canada. Prior to that, the Primate's Commission on the Doctrine of Discovery Reconciliation and Justice reported to General Synod in 2016. One of its areas of focus was, "Reconciliation: what does it look and feel like?" Arising out of that report, General Synod appointed a Reconciliation Animator to assist the further development of the church's response, not only on a national scope but in particular local settings.

In the light of all these developments, the working group struggled with a sense that most of what Synod 2015 asked for has been delivered elsewhere. We want to recommend to the church in our province the material that already exists, in the TRC Report, the Primate's Commission Report, and resources relating to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Duplication of those efforts would have been an unwise use of resources, and it was a challenge to discern what else we might offer, to inspire and guide Rupert's Land Anglicans in their pursuit of reconciliation.

Reflections on reconciliation in our province

Nevertheless, over the course of some conference calls and email correspondence, leading to that outcome, the working group also identified a number of principles, challenges, and questions. We commend them to your attention, and to the attention of those pursuing reconciliation in the larger framework of our church and nation. These ideas emerged because of the distinctive make-up and history of our region, and the reflection of that distinctiveness in the church in our province.

Even within our small group of six, we recognized a number of very different experiences and perspectives on the work of reconciliation. Our province includes many of the biggest urban indigenous communities in Canada, often in large cities in which indigenous people remain a minority. In some of our cities and towns, though, the relative sizes of cultural communities make relating to one another

(positively, negatively, or neutrally) a daily experience for most residents. This makes the active and practical nature of reconciliation especially pointed. At the other extreme, colonial history created some monocultural communities, in isolated reserves, and in farming areas in the south whose original people were killed, removed or excluded. In these places, there are profound questions about how to reconcile with a neighbour who is no longer there.

Across this range of situations, the group offered some principles which may have a shared application:

Don't do reconciliation in a colonialist way

This is a caution to the non-indigenous majority. The desire to take action for reconciliation is a good one, but it must be tempered by a recognition of the harm already embedded in the history between our cultural communities. Decisions about what to do, and how to do it, need to be taken in ways which respect the experience, wisdom, practices and priorities of indigenous partners. The goal of reconciliation is not simply to feel better, but to change how we relate. This is a difficult work, the greater burden of which must not be allowed to fall on those who already suffered historic wrongs.

Respect for partners includes understanding when indigenous communities need their own space for healing, or when they cannot respond to every request to enter into partnership. It also includes learning about and respecting the living tradition of protocol, which marks "the space between us", where two groups can interact without imposing on each other. Only with this mutual respect can we truly experience how Christ is, as our theology teaches us, the one in whom we find our unity. Our group acknowledged the role of elders in sustaining the space between us, the historic meeting places scattered across our province where people encountered each other before and during the time of settlement, and the living tradition of the powwow which opens a space for all people to come together.

Honour education, but aspire to more

Information has had an enormous impact in the national conversation about reconciliation. As we learn the truth about the past, as we examine present injustices, and as we recognize the obligations and rights embodied in treaties, we learn why reconciliation needs to happen. Many churches would do well to begin with self-education, in order to learn more of the story, and dismantle colonial assumptions we take for granted. But information is a map, and reconciliation is a journey: knowing where we need to go is not the same as getting there.

If your first instinct is to look for a program of education about reconciliation, you might also want to ask where your heart is. Within and amongst ourselves, we can acknowledge different degrees of embrace, and resistance, to the change of heart which reconciliation demands. So our parishes and congregations will need to ask how they support this spiritual journey, alongside any educational work.

Process is more important than program

The group felt reluctant to propose particular program resources, or examples of successful events and activities, since we were aware of a tendency to think that what works in one place, will work in another. The call to reconciliation is so inherently local, that it cannot be addressed in its full depth by any imported resources. Instead, the real work begins when we discover the particular ways in which relationships have been broken in our own environment, and the unique way they need to be restored.

A recommended parish goal for reconciliation, then, might not be to complete a relevant program, but to establish or strengthen a relationship, within which the local meaning of reconciliation can emerge and develop. Examples drawn from elsewhere may provide inspiration, and guidance in forming healthier relationships, but ideally they will remind you of the importance of paying attention to your own context, and what it requires of you. An illustration of this is the *Circles for Reconciliation* movement, based in Winnipeg, which focuses on bringing people together in honest encounters, out of which stronger connections and practical actions can emerge.

Learnings and new questions

Some reflection on how the group came into being may be helpful for future work. It is the chair's personal recommendation that further work of this kind begin with careful thought about leadership: this could include having co-chairs from both cultural backgrounds, as well as the leadership of an elder. In addition, any structure for oversight should recognize that reconciliation involves work to be done within indigenous and non-indigenous communities separately, as well as in our meeting together.

There is a need to think about financial resources, to enable meetings which do not leave some people out. In our province, this applies in part to travel costs, given how many indigenous communities rely on air travel. It also applies to translation, as it is important for indigenous Anglicans to speak about these matters in their own language, and to be heard when they do. The working group did not include membership from the Arctic, and so we encourage future opportunities for the church to hear the voice of that region and its peoples, regarding reconciliation.

Other specific ideas emerged during our discussion, which could be passed on to others with specific responsibilities in our province. They include:

- Finding ways to draw clergy more actively into the work of reconciliation, as community leaders and teachers. This could be taken up by continuing education groups within dioceses, by training institutions, and by ACPO.
- Examining title and control of land, and the possibilities of returning church lands to indigenous people. This is especially important in relation to residential schools gravesites. Where access to traditional lands is limited, churches could focus on setting aside land for healing and ceremony.

During and after the meetings of the working group, Canadian society continued to raise new questions about the work of reconciliation. The trials in North Battleford and Winnipeg, dealing with the deaths of Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine, raised concerns not just about shared understanding of justice, but about divisions in our communities, and hidden or overt racism. Other new voices have asked whether even the word "*re*-conciliation" is appropriate, since it implies there was an original right relationship, which we can restore. (Conciliation, or honouring the treaties, are possible alternatives.)

While these reflections may not address directly the questions posed by the 48th Synod (for the reasons explained), I hope that they will encourage people in the dioceses and parishes of our Province, to remain attentive to the work of reconciliation as it unfolds, and to undertake it in the spirit of building right relationship, changing hearts, repenting from past wrongs, and finding together the wholeness the Creator calls us to. The resources which your community needs to do this are not to be found in these pages, or in the work of other groups: they are your hearts, and your neighbours.

Respectfully submitted,
Iain Luke, Chair

Links:

http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

<https://www.anglican.ca/.../018-Primates-Commission-Report-to-General-Synod.pdf>

<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1370373165583/1370373202340> [Treaty texts]

<https://www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/indigenous-rights/undrip>

<http://circlesforreconciliation.ca/>