

Cairns Australia 2001

Under duress and the difficulty of international travel after the tragic events of 11 September in the United States of America, delegations from Canada, Aotearoa (New Zealand, Hawai'i and Australia (including representative of the Torres Strait Islands) met in Cairns, Australia for gathering of the Anglican Indigenous Network (AIN). The delegation from Hawai'i was delayed for four days before they reached Cairns and the Canadian delegation comprised of two members, Donna Bomberry, staff officer and Todd Russell, Vice- Chair of the Indigenous Council. Greatly missed was the entire American delegation, although they were represented by proxy through Episcopal Council on Indigenous Ministry member, Malcolm Naea Chun, head of the Hawaiian delegation.

Before the meetings began, members who arrived early were able to witness the consecration of the new Aboriginal Bishop the Rt. Rev. James Leftwich at St. Albans in the Aboriginal community of Yarrabah, and the retirement of Bishop Arthur Malcolm. With the arrival of the Hawaiian delegation, the meeting began on Wednesday 19 September with cultural activities and fellowship that helped the delegations to recognize and appreciate the diversity of the Aboriginal tribes and the uniqueness of the Torres Strait Islanders.

With the arrivals of the delegation from Aotearoa (Maori) and Donna Bomberry of Canada their status reports since the 1999 AIN meeting in Hawai'i were given. The Maori delegation reported on education and mission and Canadian focused upon the present situation regarding the Church/Crown litigation, impending bankruptcy of the National Church, a new document entitled 'A New Agape': a plan for justice, healing and reconciliation of our relationships. Also noted was the resignation of Bishop Beardy's resignation as diocesan bishop, and a presentation of the video of Sacred Circle 2000 'Walking a New Vision' which attended by Bishop Arthur Malcolm. This was all followed by discussion, questions and answers. Each delegation will be forwarded a copy of the video from Canada.

Official business was commenced on Thursday, 20 September at St. Alban's Church in Yarrabah, the home community of Bishop Arthur Malcolm, retiring Aboriginal Bishop.

The original agenda hoped to focus upon particular issues such as youth, women's concerns, and land; however without full delegations to provide information and discussion, the venue was changed to an open plenary on the future of AIN.

Bishops Arthur Malcolm and Hui Vercoe, Bishop of Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Malcolm Naea Chun each brought out the concerns for the continuation of AIN, its past history and accomplishments and challenges for AIN to be effective and viable in the near future. In particular the discussion focused upon reviewing AIN's mission statement and the need for budget and financing.

Bishop Malcolm in his welcome to the delegations introduced the delegations to the Aboriginal spiritual concept of the dreamtime, "to be one with creation, the land and the people" so that all could bring the creativity to vision for the future of AIN and to help the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to become full partners in their own homelands and among the indigenous peoples of the world.

Bishop Vercoe set forth the new agenda calling for this AIN meeting to consider "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."

Aboriginal delegate, the Rev. Di Langham emphasized the need for constant and reciprocal communication among the members of AIN. This was supported by Hawaiian delegate Malcolm Naea Chun who called for better communication remembering that there are still places that have no access to electronic communication and hence the continued need and responsibility for "regional, local and person to person communication; in whatever form is necessary and appropriate be it a web site, emails, faxes, printed and recorded materials, and by voice."

Canadian First Nations delegate Donna Bomberry reiterated the need for AIN as it had given tremendous support and inspiration for the indigenous peoples of Canada when they were in need for new thinking in the church. "AIN has supported for Canadian church. Maintaining who we are is terribly important for the indigenous people in Canada. We need the lifelines and linkages and communication with others sharing our common issues. This relationship has been very valuable to us and will remain high in our agenda."

There were several other resolutions and actions taken to ensure the work of AIN by formalizing its operations.

Be it resolved that

- AIN reaffirms its commitment to the mutual concerns of the indigenous peoples within the Anglican Communion for self-determination. AIN encourages the establishment of national indigenous bishops for

indigenous ministry. AIN will support these efforts through advocacy, education, development of strategies and other means of support.

- AIN strongly supports the Gwich'in Nation of Alaska in their opposition to the exploration and drilling for natural resources in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge of Northeastern Alaska. The threat and potential destruction of their lifeline - the Porcupine Caribou - means the destruction of the life of Gwich'in traditions and their fundamental human rights. It is inexcusable to extinguish the livelihood of a people.
- We call upon our brother and sisters of the indigenous peoples of the world to formally voice their opposition to the US Senate and the President of the USA , to the Canadian government and other effected nations.
- AIN pledges its support in mutually sharing forms of indigenous ministries as expressed in liturgical worship and liturgy, training, theological education and social justice issues.
- AIN resolves to establish the Office of General Secretary to the AIN.
- It is further resolved to establish a Sub-Committee of the AIN chaired by Mr. Malcolm Naea Chun and consisting of at least one person from each member nation to be selected by end before the end of 2001. This Sub-Committee will be authorised by the AIN to establish the office of the General Secretary including the establishment of terms of reference, functions, staffing, budgeting and established protocol.
- The Interim Secretariat will help to organize a gathering of the leadership of the theological educators to held be held in the next six to twelve months in the United States of America (Hawai'i) for the purpose of introduction of programmes for leadership and ordination, the sharing of curriculum and resources, the exchange of faculty and students and other issues of concern. The next AIN meeting is scheduled for late autumn (March-April, 2003) and to held in Rotorua, Aotearoa (New Zealand)