

SYNOD OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF WINNIPEG 2016-2018
DISCIPLES: ESTABLISHED, ANOINTED, AND SENT IN CHRIST.
FOCUS COMMISSION ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

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Acknowledgement: The Archdiocese of Winnipeg acknowledges that it is on Treaty 1, Treaty 2, and Treaty 4 territories, the traditional land of Anishinaabe, Cree, Dene, Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Metis Nation.

Vision Statement:

Indigenous Christians who live and practice, their cultural values, both religious and social, within the Catholic tradition are called to express “a Native Catholic Spirituality and a Native expression of Catholicism,”¹ that leads to a deeper encounter with the Creator, in order to foster a local church with indigenous faces, hearts, minds, thoughts, and spirits,² thus participating in the transformation of the whole Church into an inclusive “missionary Church.”

Teachings:

Pre-Contact with Christianity:

In a message to the indigenous people, Pope John Paul II stated, before the first evangelization of the indigenous peoples of this continent, “no one suspected ... [that] the living and true God was present, enlightening your paths. ... Indeed, ‘the seeds of the Word’ were already present and enlightening the hearts of your ancestors that they might discover the imprint of God the Creator in all his creatures: sun, moon, mother earth, volcanoes and forests, lakes and rivers.”³ In the same spirit, Pope Francis underlines some of the values that are deeply rooted among the indigenous peoples: “They are able to instill a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity, and a deep love for the land”⁴ (SL 179). The land is “a gift from God and from their ancestors..., a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values” (LS 146).

¹ CCCB, *Let Justice Flow like a Mighty River: Brief by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Publications Service CCCB 1995), 24.

² Nicanor Sarmiento Tupayupanqui, “Andean Christian Theologies, Elements of a Rainbow of Theological Voices of the Indigenous Peoples of Abya Yala: A Missiological and Anthropological Study of the Andean Trilogy” (Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2011), 60.

³ John Paul II, “Message to the Indigenous People,” in *Santo Domingo and Beyond: Documents and Commentaries from the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops*, ed. Alfred T. Hennelly, J.S. (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 156.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father, Laudato Si’: Praise Be To You* (Ottawa: CCCB Publications, 2015), 118. Thereafter will be referred as (LS 197).

Mission and Missionaries:

The first missionaries in Western Canada faced great challenges of the unknown frontier with faith and courage, enduring great hardships and overcoming dangers of all kinds.⁵ They were “first and foremost men and women of the Gospel who, within their human limitations tried to act with love and compassion;” however their “missionary endeavor was deeply marked by the prevailing attitude of the superiority of the European culture[s],” as a “symbiotic relationship with [the] forces of nation building and projects of expansion and [systemic] assimilation.”⁶ Where the proclamation of the faith in Jesus Christ was entangled with the process of “civilization” of the indigenous people. “As a result, these missionaries sometimes legitimated forms of cultural and spiritual domination.”⁷

Inculturation:

According to Pope Francis: “Culture is a dynamic reality which a people constantly re-creates; each generation passes on a whole series of ways of approaching different existential situations to the next generations...”⁸ (EG 122). It is undeniable that “the People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture... Grace supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who received it” (EG 115). He further affirms that “Through inculturation, the Church ‘introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community’ ... (EG 116). He goes on to say “Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression ... it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root” (EG 116). In this sense, inculturation is the ongoing dialogue between the Christian message and cultures; it is the coming together of culture and faith where the local people and the Holy Spirit are subjects of any inculturation process, it must be undertaken by people who are both of the culture and the faith because they are the “active collective subjects or agents of evangelization” (EG 122). Therefore, the understanding of evangelization as inculturation is a missionary imperative because “Once the gospel has been inculturated in a people, in the process of transmitting their culture, they also transmit the faith in ever new forms” (EG 122).

The Synod

Our local bishop envisions that the synod will give “new direction, life and energy, ...[and] identify the signs of our times” for our diocesan church.⁹ This renewal process of our local church goes in harmony with the teachings of Pope Francis that each diocese “is called to

⁵ Francois Paradis, *Intrareligious Dialogue: A Matrix for a New Praxis of Evangelizing Mission among today’s Western Canadian Aboriginal Christian Communities*, (Saint Paul University, Ottawa, 2003), 57.

⁶ CCCB, *Let Justice Flow like a Mighty River*, 14-15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Consecrated Persons, and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World* (Ottawa: CCCB Publications, 2013; reprint, 2014), 87. Thereafter will be referred as (EG).

⁹ Archdiocese of Winnipeg, *Disciples: Established, Anointed, and Sent in Christ* (Winnipeg: Archdiocese of Winnipeg, 2016), 3.

missionary conversion,” and “to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform” (EG 30). At this point in our history, our diocesan synod is a moment of *kairos/grace* for the indigenous people. It is taking place right after the settlement agreement between the aboriginal peoples, the Canadian government and the church parties involved in the Indian Residential schools, the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*,¹⁰ brings the beginning of closure of the dark era of a “deeply damaged relationship that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.”¹¹ Therefore, the synod is an opportunity for our diocesan church to engage in an inculturated indigenous pastoral ministry, spirituality, and theology that recognizes, preserves, and promotes “the spiritual, moral, and cultural values found within [the indigenous] traditions” and work together in “a spirit of prudent and charitable dialogue and collaboration.”¹²

Changes in Society: UNDRIP & TRC

Recently, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*¹³ has recognized the cultural and religious concerns of the indigenous peoples throughout the world stating that they have “the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs;” and “the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; ...” (UN-DRIP 11, 12). In the same spirit, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*¹⁴ calls upon the churches to respect “Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination in spiritual matters, ...to practice, develop, and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies,” and the need for “dialogue [among] indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss indigenous spirituality, self-determination, and reconciliation”(Calls to Action 48, ii; 61, iv).

Dialogue and Mission:

In the mission of the Church, dialogue is “the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission whether one speaks of simple presence and witness or direct proclamation ... because Christian mission is participation in the mission of God and God’s being in action is

¹⁰ TRC, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volum One: Summary* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Limited, Publishers, 2015).

¹¹ CCCB, *Rediscovering, Recognizing and Celebrating the Spiritual Heritage of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples: A Pastoral Message to the Native Peoples of Canada* (Ottawa: Office for the Evangelization of Peoples (CCCB), 1999), 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2-3. A quote taken from *Nostra Aetate* 2.

¹³ United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Ottawa: Amnesty International Canada, Assembly of First Nations, et al, 2007).

¹⁴ TRC, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*.

dialogical.”¹⁵ The Church speaks of four types of dialogue: First is dialogue of life where Christians live and rub shoulders with people of others faiths and ideologies: “people get to know each other, respect each other, learn from each other, and reduce tensions that exist among people who may have radically different world views.”¹⁶ Second is dialogue of social action, where women and men of different faith commitments work together for common issues of justice. Third is dialogue of theological exchange where experts and committed members of different faith traditions study and read one another’s sacred documents and cherish their authors. Finally, there is the dialogue of religious experience, where people of different faith traditions live together learning their world views, lifestyles, spirituality, and ways of prayer and worship.

Indigenous peoples’ association to the Church:

Presently, the indigenous theologies movement identifies five types of indigenous people in their association with Christianity: First, there are the “indigenous Christians”, whose instruments of knowledge and methods of explaining God are Christian; they would have nothing to do with their traditional rituals. Second, there are “Indigenous Christians” who found their identity in an indigenous Christianity and are anxious to indigenize their Christian faith. Third, there are those Indigenous Christians who, since recovering their indigenous religious faith, are asking for an explicit dialogue with Christianity in order to demonstrate that their own religious faith is indeed Christian. Fourth, there are the “Indigenous Christians who want to enter into a dialogue with Christianity in order to amplify their own knowledge of God. Finally, there are the Non-Christian or de-Christianized indigenous people who, having decided to retain their own religious autonomy, do not want to enter into any dialogue with Christianity.¹⁷

Propositions:

We invite and challenge our diocesan church to:

Foster a right and respectful relationship between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of the Archdiocese founded on the principles of intercultural dialogue.

Encourage and promote within the indigenous peoples their own native cultural values by means of inculturating their way of life in the church, and their self-determination in society.

Cultivate and encourage the use of the indigenous languages in scripture translations and reading, prayer, hymns, and catechesis.

¹⁵ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004; reprint, Third 2006), 378.

¹⁶ Stephen Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 68-69.

¹⁷ Nicanor Sarmiento Tupayupanqui, "Native Theology in Latin America: a Brief History," *Mission: Journal of Mission Studies* xv, no. 1&2 (2008): 325-327.

Foster an inculturation of the liturgy by appreciating and drawing on the symbols, rituals, and religious expressions of the indigenous people that are compatible with the clear meaning of the Catholic faith.

Accompany the indigenous theological and spiritual reflections by respecting and implementing their cultural formulations and language expression, which help them to provide a reason for their faith and hope.¹⁸

Create a diocesan office of leadership for indigenous pastoral ministry to coordinate and facilitate all the missionary and pastoral activities of the indigenous Christian communities.

Develop a process for a proper formation for all pastoral agents (local and foreign) working in indigenous communities in the areas of missiology, theology, liturgy, indigenous spiritualities, intercultural, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and also sociological and anthropological training.

Develop with the indigenous peoples an evangelization program with a particular attention to the cultural context of the indigenous peoples concerning liturgy, catechetics, youth ministry, RCIA, outreach ministry, and Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

Develop with the indigenous peoples a process of cultural immersion to the multicultural reality of Canada, of the indigenous peoples, and of the missionaries working with the indigenous peoples “cultural competency training”¹⁹ for local clergy, lay ministers, foreign missionaries, diocesan staff, Catholic school staff, hospital and prison chaplains, and all the Christians of the Archdiocese.

Continue with regular visits and meetings of the Archbishop in the rural indigenous communities to witness and listen to their concerns.

Focus Commission: Barbara Sutherland, Nicanor Sarmiento, Jose Cabral, François Paradis, Linda Barker, Reynald Roulette, Conrad Plante, Melba Bouvier.

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¹⁸Alfred T. Hennelly, J.S., *Santo Domingo and Beyond: Documents and Commentaries from the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops*, First ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 140. (Santo Domingo Document 248).

¹⁹TRC, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 168. (Call To Action 27).

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