

Sacred Assembly ' 95

Principles and Priorities
for a New Relationship

As delegates to Sacred Assembly '95, we have gathered together from the four corners of this land - East, West, North and South - to search for a common spiritual foundation that will enable us to achieve reconciliation, Aboriginal justice, and the fulfillment of political responsibilities by governments and Aboriginal peoples.

We have brought together people of many different backgrounds and many different spiritual traditions: traditional Indian, Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical, Christian native, along with our brothers and sisters from other religious faiths. After walking along our different paths in this common spiritual journey, we have reached the point of proclaiming some truths and commitments.

We have discovered that, in Spite of our differences, we do share a common spiritual foundation. We have been able to dialogue and pray together because we share the common belief that:

- the Creator God reigns supreme over all things;
- the land on which we live was created for the benefit of all;
- as the original inhabitants of this land, Aboriginal peoples have a special right and responsibility to ensure the continuing integrity of the land and the unity and well-being of its inhabitants; and
- non-Aboriginal Canadians also share in these responsibilities.

We have also shared a recognition that:

- reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians must be rooted in a spiritual understanding of land as a gift from the Creator God;
- the sins of injustice which have historically divided Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples remain active in our society today;
- concrete actions must be taken by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples alike to over come these injustices and to bind up the wounds of those who have suffered,

And we have a shared understanding:

- that the starting point for healing and reconciliation lies in personal communion with the Creator God;
- while change must take place at all levels of society, it must be rooted most firmly in the communities; and
- relations based on justice will require a full respect for treaties, a fair settlement of land rights disputes, the implementation of the inherent right of self-government and the creation of economic development opportunities and other institutions to support them.

A Role for Individuals

As individuals, we must learn again to listen to the wisdom of our spiritual leaders and hear the call of the Creator God in our midst. We must pledge ourselves to become more active as agents of healing and reconciliation in our daily lives. Specifically, we must accept personal responsibilities for:

- seeking the personal guidance and counsel of Elders and spiritual leaders in order to walk more closely with the Creator God;
- returning to our communities and develop ways to continue the process of , healing and reconciliation that has begun at Sacred Assembly '95;
- continuing to explore with each other our sacred foundations, in order to bring about spiritual reconciliation, Aboriginal justice and the fulfillment of political responsibilities in this country;
- continuing to respect the differences in our spiritual journeys, even as we seek to discover the common spiritual link between us.

A Role for Churches and Faith Communities

Despite their historic involvement in the cultural and spiritual oppression of Aboriginal peoples, churches have a vital role to play in building a new Canada based on justice and reconciliation. The formal apologies, which most of the churches have made, are hereby acknowledged and appreciated. But statements of apology are not enough. The churches need to not only renew their commitment to the principles outlined in their New Covenant declaration, but to go back into their parishes with a new and concrete program or action for justice and reconciliation. And they must do so in greater collaboration with Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and other religious faiths in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Specifically, the churches must

- continue the process of healing and reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples, by providing the forums and supports needed to heal the wounds created in the past;
- become stronger advocates for justice and reconciliation in current and future public affairs;
- recommit ourselves to a program of education and action on issues relating to land rights, self-government and racism;
- take steps to hold government and other public institutions accountable for their policies and for their efforts to promote reconciliation.

A Role for First Nations and Aboriginal Communities

Healing and reconciliation must, in the end, take place in the hearts and minds of the people themselves in their ordinary lives. It will be the responsibility of First Nations and Aboriginal communities and organizations to:

- work towards healing and reconciliation within our own communities;
- accept the challenge issued by our Youth to ensure that there is an environment in our communities that encourages a healthy view of oneself and respect for others and addresses community conflict which prevents us from finding our path.

A Role for Government

We have taken these responsibilities upon ourselves willingly. *We* are committed to the process of healing and reconciliation based on these beliefs and principles. But our goals will not be realized without the co-operation and involvement of governments, particularly the federal government which has unique constitutional and treaty responsibilities for the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians.

We call upon the federal government to hear the voices coming from this Assembly and to join with us in pursuit of healing and reconciliation.

To contribute positively to the process of healing, the Government of Canada must first accept its responsibilities for injustices done to Aboriginal peoples in this land and take decisive action now to enact the promises it has made to the First Nations. In particular, we call upon the Government to make the non-extinguishment of Aboriginal rights a matter of public policy in Canada and to guarantee that forthcoming constitutional negotiations will not, in any way, infringe on the rights of Aboriginal peoples which are already enshrined in the Constitution.

The government must also take more concerted action to deliver on the promises made in the Red Book including: the provision of adequate tools and resources for self-government; the creation of jobs and the reduction of unemployment in Aboriginal communities; the formation of an Aboriginal development bank and Aboriginal trade Commission; the development of community-based housing and an Aboriginal education institute; and the establishment of an alternative justice system by and for Aboriginal peoples. We further urge the Government to put top priority on the goal of securing an adequate land and resources based for Aboriginal self-government and that the Government removes the requirement of extinguishment, immediately.

Finally, in recognition of the contribution of the First Nations to the development of this country we call on the Government to establish a national holiday as Aboriginal Day in Canada.

Sacred Assembly 9S

We also propose that a Council of Reconciliation be set up as an ongoing vehicle for continuing the work that has already begun here at Sacred Assembly '95. The primary goal of this Council would be to develop education and action programs for the purpose of promoting reconciliation based on justice between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

In Australia, initiatives have already been taken to create a Council of Reconciliation by Aboriginal organizations, churches, and the Australian government, after having gone through a process of healing and reconciliation similar to what we have done here at this Sacred Assembly. We therefore invite our representative Aboriginal organizations, the churches and religious community at large, and the federal government to come together around a proposal to form a Council for Reconciliation here in Canada to carry on the vital work we have started at this Assembly,

Let us go forth from this Sacred Assembly with the commitment to walk side by side with the Creator in a common search for justice and reconciliation. For we firmly believe that the blessings of the Creator will not flow upon this land until the Aboriginal peoples are healed, receive justice, and are able to take their rightful place in this country we now call Canada.