

# Residential Schools Update—March 23, 2000

Archdeacon Jim Boyles, General Secretary

## The General Synod Healing and Reconciliation Fund

This Fund was established in 1991, and has made grants totaling over \$500,000. General Synod contributes \$100,000 per year, part of this being raised through Anglican Appeal. Other donations have been received.

Here is a sample of the 20 projects assisted by the Fund in 1999. Applications are received from aboriginal groups who are working on "empowering their communities to move out of a dependency relationship with the church or other structure." The Fund is an attempt to "respond to the residential schools issues in an ongoing, sensitive and just manner, to the end that Christ's healing and reconciliation is realized."

- **Fire Keepers: A Wellness Conference for Women and Their Communities**

*Thompson, MB*

Fire Keepers in honour of the important role that women play in keeping their families nurtured and strong. It is believed that as women heal, they will be able to use their strength to heal those around them. Workshops will focus on Spiritual Health, History, Culture, Racism and Healing, Parenting in Separation and Divorce, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Suicide.

- **Nurturing Through Trauma Art Therapy Group**

*Six Nations, Ohsweken, ON*

An art therapy group to enable First Nations people seeking healing from past traumas to vent, explore and grieve. The project will encourage and teach healthier coping mechanisms that enhance self acceptance, self control and on-going resolution.

- **Bridging Wisdom of the Elders and Vision of the Youth**

*Split Lake Cree First Nation, MB*

This gathering attempts to bridge the gap between elders and youth for healing of self, families and community through the catechist school, workshops, counseling sessions and gospel music jamboree.

You or your parish community may contribute to this work by making a donation to the Healing and Reconciliation Fund, 80 Hayden Street, Toronto ON M4Y 3G2. Individual donations of \$10 or greater will receive a tax creditable receipt.

## The Sacred Circle, 2000

Formerly known as the national Native Convocation, this Circle is a gathering of Anglican indigenous people from across the country. All 225 native congregations are invited to send representatives to the Circle, to be held in Port Elgin, Ontario, August 18-25, 2000. The Council of General Synod has been invited to name ten non-native observer/participants. The theme of the Circle is Walking a New Vision

## **Former Staff and Workers at the Anglican Residential Schools**

The Primate has asked Bishop Gordon Beardy and Archdeacon David Ashdown of the Diocese of Keewatin to develop a project to engage former staff of the schools in telling their stories and sharing their concerns. This may be a series of regional workshops, or perhaps a national gathering. If you have worked in a residential school, or know others who have done so and might be interested, please send names and addresses to the General Secretary, 80 Hayden Street, Toronto, M4Y 3G2.

## **Residential Schools Steering Committee**

The Council of General Synod called for the appointment of a small steering committee to assist in reviewing issues in the areas of litigation, ADR, media and political strategies and other concerns that arise from time to time. The membership of the committee has now been completed, and the first meeting was held by teleconference in February. The Committee will meet in person in late April. The members are:

Archbishop David Crawley, Kootenay; The Rev. Neil Gordon, Edmonton; Ms. Lorraine Kenny, Keewatin; Mr. Hugh MacKenzie, Algoma; Ms. Sheila McKeand, Nova Scotia; Dean Nick Parker, Cariboo

## **Litigation**

Statements of claim continue to be served on General Synod. There are now over 350 lawsuits involving over 1200 claimants. Recently a class action claim has been filed on behalf of all the students who attended St. Michael's Residential School, Alert Bay, BC, Diocese of British Columbia.

The federal government is continuing to issue cross claims against the General Synod and relevant dioceses even in cases where the claimant has not named the Church. These cross claims are adding to both our legal and administrative costs on a weekly basis.

A trial date has been set for late March for a further eight plaintiffs who attended the Lytton School in BC. A trial for the first case involving the Gordon's School in southern Saskatchewan may be held in early fall. In both Alberta and Saskatchewan the courts are taking a "case management" approach to the numerous lawsuits. In Saskatchewan, for example, the court has proposed that a series of precedent-setting cases be taken first, so that settlements in similar cases may flow from these.

The appeal of the decision involving the Lytton school is proceeding, and documents are now being prepared. It is expected that the appeal will be heard in the fall.

Legal counsel for General Synod and for the dioceses meet by teleconference once a month. We are appreciative of the high quality of work and dedication to the Church's welfare of our legal team.

## **Alternative Dispute Resolution**

The Diocese of Qu'Appelle and the General Synod are exploring a pilot project with the Kwakatoose Band in southern Saskatchewan, whose children attended either the Gordon's school or the Lebret Roman Catholic school. The Oblates who ran this school are also participating in preliminary meetings with representatives from the former students of this reserve. The process is slow, but we support it as way to explore possibilities for restorative justice processes that do not revictimize the claimants.

## **Continuing consultations**

Leaders from the four churches involved, Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and United meet on a monthly basis to share information and consider strategy. The same group consults monthly with representatives of the Departments of Justice and Indian Affairs, primarily around ADR progress and issues.

We are beginning to work with Members of Parliament and Senators and other leaders in Ottawa to inform them of our situation and enlist their support. David MacDonald, former cabinet member, has been employed by the United Church and is working in Ottawa with ecumenical representatives in this regard. The General Synod is moving ahead to hire a consultant for government relations, as suggested by the national Financial Management and Development Committee last fall.

## **Research and Polling Results**

We have conducted some research both with active Anglicans and with the Canadian public at large.

A series of "focus groups" with Anglican members has helped us understand the range of awareness and opinion in our church. There is very broad awareness, although details are not well known. Some question whether all the abuse claims are valid, but proven cases of physical and sexual abuse are taken very seriously. There is a strong desire for the church to be part of genuine healing efforts, and a willingness to support these. Members see the church's responsibility for healing and reconciliation as a spiritual imperative. Legal implications and consequences are less important than faithfulness to the gospel. There is a concern to ensure the church accepts its responsibilities and, along with this, a belief the government should do more to accept its own responsibility.

A national poll conducted by the Angus Reid group again found very broad awareness of the residential schools issues among the Canadian public. Eighty percent said they are aware of the issue. Sixty percent believe all Canadians share responsibility for helping Aboriginal Canadians who suffered abuse as children in the residential schools.

## **Review of Assets and Corporate Structure**

Jim Cullen, Treasurer of General Synod, is working with our auditors to prepare a paper outlining our corporate structure and an analysis of General Synod's assets that would be available for legal costs and settlements. This paper will be presented to the Financial

Management and Development Committee in late April, and subsequently will form the basis for negotiation with government to ensure the continuing viability of the General Synod. The Treasurer and the General Secretary are also working with the insurance company with which General Synod had policies during the 1950's and 60's.

### **"Planning for the Future"**

The Planning and Agenda Team (a sub-unit of the Council of General Synod) has prepared a paper for submission to the Council in May, entitled, "Planning for the Future". This paper is presently being considered by General Synod committees, and will form the basis for consultations with dioceses in the fall. It develops options for the General Synod in the light of the continuing claims filed against it.

Distributed to members of:

- Council of General Synod House of Bishops Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples  
Financial Management and Development Committee
- General Synod Staff