

## NATIONAL INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES COUNCIL

To the Venerable, the 149th General Assembly:

### **WHO IS THE NATIONAL INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES COUNCIL?**

The National Indigenous Ministries Council (NIMC) standing committee serves within The Presbyterian Church in Canada providing specialized and trauma informed Indigenous ministries across Turtle Island. The council recognizes the significant growth and foundational work undertaken collectively to address long held oppressive systems. The NIMC values The Presbyterian Church in Canada's recommitment to Indigenous Ministries and solidarity advancing Indigenous rights, human rights and ministry support. The NIMC also values relationships with congregations and opportunities to engage, inform, educate and strengthen partnerships.

The Indigenous ministries are deeply concerned with the ongoing and increasing crises rooted in intergenerational trauma, as a result of colonial systems. The NIMC recognizes the need to engage Indigenous individuals to become involved with the ministries and sought innovative ministry pathways. It has increased the number of council members since 2021. It relies upon knowledge-keepers for informed guidance implementing Indigenous spirituality and promoting worldview and cultural teachings. The specialized ministries offer relationship, support, guidance and the prophetic and Indigenous voice as the church navigates issues of decolonization and justice. It also encourages the church to support current and future Indigenous-led ministries by direct funding opportunities and foundational support.

The NIMC is comprised of eight Indigenous ministries and two members at large appointed by the General Assembly. The council may also engage other resource people to assist with its work. The eight ministries are situated on the following traditional territories: Cedar Tree Ministries, the traditional lands of the Cowichan; Hummingbird Ministries, the unceded traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations; Edmonton Urban Native Ministry, Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry and Mistawasis Memorial Church, the traditional lands of Treaty 6, Cree, Anishinaabe, Nakota, Assiniboine, Dene and Cree Nations; Place of Hope Indigenous Church and Winnipeg Inner City Missions, the ancestral lands of Treaty 1 and homelands of the Dakota, Cree, Anishinaabeg and Dene Nations; and Kenora Fellowship Centre, Treaty 3 Anishinaabe Nation homeland. As voices of Indigenous communities viewed through Christian discipleship, the NIMC has served as a beacon of hope and seeks to further reconciliation through innovative support.

As the Spirit has led The Presbyterian Church in Canada toward a reconciled future, the council focuses on outreach and support to Indigenous peoples, welcoming relationships between Indigenous people and the church, promoting Indigenous ministries' success and challenges and echoing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action as well as the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 231 Calls to Justice. As a standing committee, the council is working with the church to create foundational steps to self-determination grounded in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The learning journey of decolonization is difficult. We endeavour to walk together as the church and we engage in prayer and truth sharing.

### **COUNCIL WORK SINCE THE 2023 GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

The council met three times between June 2023 and March 2024; of those meetings, two were virtual and one was in person at a retreat centre in Edmonton. Among the themes the council discussed at its meetings were:

#### **Greater Presence and Voice for Indigenous People in the Structures of the Church**

Reflecting on the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which the church has committed to along with the TRC's Calls to Action as the framework for reconciliation, the council is exploring what self-determination looks like in the context of The Presbyterian Church in Canada today. One important piece of self-determination is increased agency and voice.

One of the major themes the council spoke about this year is the need for there to be greater opportunity for (more) Indigenous involvement in the life and structures of the church, whether that be in the role of church elder, through ordained ministry or through the presbytery or the General Assembly involvement. Broader opportunities for more Indigenous people to become active in the church is important for the life of the church. It will promote reconciliation. Finding ways to increase the ability and visibility of Indigenous people to join such structures and to remove both

social and structural barriers that make it difficult for Indigenous people to engage in the life and decision making of the church, is an important part of dismantling harmful colonial structures.

The council will explore aspects of inclusion, its own capacities, decision making practices and Indigenous governance structures as it seeks to offer support and teaching as well as greater Indigenous engagement in the life and decision making of the church and will work with relevant bodies of the church to offer a proposal to the next General Assembly for consideration.

### **Paths to Ministry Ordination for Indigenous Candidates**

One important way to empower greater Indigenous engagement in the church is to encourage more Indigenous people to seek ordination. The council discussed the need for innovative ordination paths including honouring and taking into account lived experiences, cultural teachings, trauma informed approaches and the specialized skills Indigenous ministry has required.

The council met with NAIITS Director of graduate studies Chris Hoklotubbe, who shared their unique and widely successful educational pathway for Indigenous candidates for ministry that is now available through the North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies (NAIITS – naiits.com), which offers trauma informed asset-based graduate and post-graduate degree programs to prepare Indigenous ministry candidates for ministry and service in their own communities and contexts. The council also met with Tim Purvis, Associate Secretary of Ministry and Church Vocation, at its November meeting and heard about current means for Indigenous candidates to pursue ministry. It discussed the hopes for greater Indigenous inclusion with VST ISP and its original vision as a model for Indigenous worldview learning and ordination pathways.

The council also heard about the possibility of an alternate path available to Indigenous candidates for ordained ministry, through Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (SSSC – sandsaulteaux.ca) near Beausejour, Manitoba. The council was encouraged by the work and consultation Ministry and Church Vocations has undertaken in the last year. It supports the three recommendations put forward in the Ministry and Church Vocations section in the Life and Mission Agency report regarding Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre as an institution which would prepare presbytery-certified Indigenous ministry candidates for ordination as ministers of Word and Sacrament in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. (see the Life and Mission Agency Committee, Ministry and Church Vocations report p. 30–34)

### **Acknowledging the 231 Calls to Justice in *Reclaiming Power and Place***

The NIMC acknowledges the 231 Calls to Justice in *Reclaiming Power and Place*, (the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) and the four foundational rights that report outlines: the right to culture, the right to health, the right to security and the right to justice.

The council is grateful for the Moderator, the Rev. Mary Fontaine's September 5 attendance and solidarity with three other national church leaders in support of the Mercedes Myran, Morgan Harris, Rebecca Contois and Mashkode Bizhiki'ikwe, (Buffalo Woman) families and supports the search of the landfill in Winnipeg.

Dehumanizing Indigenous women and girls is a grievous contradiction that strikes at the heart of our communities and traditions. As disciples of Christ Jesus, we look to biblical examples that depict women as exemplifiers of divine strength and purpose. We challenge the historic and systemic injustices that led to MMIWG2S by asserting Indigenous women's inherent dignity and worth. Indigenous women's innate value, strength and leadership can be seen in figures such as Mary the mother of Jesus (John 19:25–27) and Mary Magdalene. Historically and theologically, Mary Magdalene was considered by the church, as the only one who knew the resurrection story and could proclaim it (John 20). This understanding is essential as we seek healing and advocate for justice and change. By drawing upon our faith and traditions, we honor those we have lost while working to ensure a safe future for all peoples. We seek to uplift and empower women in our communities and throughout the nation. Through this, we proclaim a Christian message that every woman, regardless of background, deserves respect, protection and a life free from fear and violence.

The council continues to be very concerned about the MMIWG2S crisis situation and its impact on families and communities. The council met with, and extended support to, ARISE Ministry's executive director Katherine McCloskey whose mandate includes working with people vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. She discussed how ARISE offers a service called "Freedom Signal" to connect with people in the sex trade and/or who might be trafficked to promote safety. The council acknowledged this communication tool to interrupt human trafficking/exploitation in areas and support efforts to create further awareness.

## **GRANT APPLICATIONS**

The council discussed two grant applications referred from Canadian Ministries, which were seeking funding for ministry with Indigenous people. The council met with one of the candidates, Church on the Road ministry and recommended engagement with Indigenous elders as well as awareness of history and community traditional protocols. See the Life and Mission Agency Committee, Canadian Ministries report for more information (p. 8–9).

## **ONGOING WORK OF PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING TRUTH, HEALING AND RECONCILIATION IN THE CHURCH**

The council heard updates on information related to the Honouring the Children Fund and work that had been done in response to questions sent by the federally appointed Special Interlocutor, Kimberly Murray, who was appointed as Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with residential schools. For more information, see the Life and Mission Agency Committee, Justice Ministries report (p. 23–26).

In 2023, the NIMC brought a recommendation to the General Assembly: “that The Presbyterian Church in Canada develop a renewed apology for its role in colonization and in the operation of residential schools, to be presented to the 2024 General Assembly”. The General Assembly approved the NIMC recommendation to develop an apology to Indigenous people and communities who have been directly and greatly impacted for the church’s role in residential schools and colonization. The council maintains that the 1994 Confession wording did not include the word “apology” nor offer an actual apology. The council appointed members to the Special Committee re The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s Apology to Indigenous People for the impacts residential schools have had on generations and the church’s role in colonialism and residential schools. The council agreed to recommend that the group be co-convened by an Indigenous member and a non-Indigenous member and named Dylon Nippi as the member the council put forward to be the Indigenous co-convenor. It also named Yvonne Bearbull, Stewart Folster and John Carr to sit on the committee. That committee reports directly to the General Assembly.

### **Recommendation NIM-001**      adopted/defeated/amended

That, as a step towards decolonization, grants committees in all church courts be urged to take into account and reflect upon The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s commitments to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action and the church’s repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery in their grant deliberations, review of current criteria and applications.

Resources, including an example of such criteria, are available on the Indigenous Justice page of the Social Action Hub under “educational resources”. See [presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/indigenous-justice](http://presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/indigenous-justice).

### **Recommendation NIM-002**      adopted/defeated/amended

That presbyteries be encouraged to consider commissioning an Indigenous person from presbytery to attend the General Assembly as a commissioner every year.

Mary Fontaine  
Convener