

# OUR WAY OF LIFE

## AN OVERVIEW

*Our Way of Life* is a document outlining the fundamentals of the Indigenous Anglican church. We have always been spiritual, living under a Creator, and we continue to live into how we walk with Christ through expression in this document, *Our Way of Life*. It summarizes our holy journey to re-experience Christ as our ancestors did in the early days of Christianity in North America when our traditional beliefs, culture and spirituality and economic systems were strong and many of our ancestors initially welcomed Christ into their lives in that context. This document is a manifestation of our own journey to decolonize euro-centric Anglicanism so that we can live out our beliefs on our own cultural and linguistic terms and move forward more confidently on our journey of healing, reconciliation and justice.

*Our Way of Life* outlines how we as Indigenous Anglicans choose to encounter the living Christ today. It outlines our relationships with each other and with the Creator, combining the real and symbolic ways of our ancestors – through the circle of life where all creation is related and living a ‘good life’ means keeping human existence and all of Creation in balance with the natural and spiritual world – and combining the traditional teachings of our Ancestors with earlier, more accessible principles of Anglicanism.

While we have encountered challenges in the drafting of this document due differences in our own cultures and meaning of words in our own languages, we have strived for a level of consensus and commonality applicable to all Indigenous Anglicans. It must be understood that we initially experienced God through our own languages, cultures and worldview. For example, in Cree, God the Creator means ‘*The One Who Made Everything*’; there is no word for ‘reconciliation’ in Inuktitut as behaviours/relationships dwelt only in the realms of partnership, friendship and inclusion; important ceremony included traditional regalia; kinship meant all of Our Relatives including animals, birds, creatures of the waters and spirits; in Cree the concept of ‘authority’ does not imply hierarchy but rather means only that it is conferred by others, often just for a period of time.

*Our Way of Life* is not about going back to an idealized time in our history. Rather, we are reclaiming what was dispossessed from us and what the Creator called us to be. We are coming home. We have tried to

identify what we as Indigenous Peoples remember and recall through our Elders and stories. We all agree that, by and large, there is a strong correspondence between our traditional spiritualities and biblical theology, with our Creator being the God and Living Christ of the Bible. The Christian teachings and values resonated strongly with us. While we have different cultural ways and languages across the Lands and Waters, we all share a traditional belief that we must live in harmony. Living together in harmony means living out the Sacred Teachings that we have in common:

- Trusting, respectful relationships that recognize that conflict is a natural, normal fact of life as we strive to rebalance harmony (we used such ways as talking circles; loving shaming; 'giveaways' of gifts to others; Elder listening to both sides and offering wisdom to make peace; processes of making 'treaties' either as individuals or nations; adoption of Relatives, etc.). But ultimately forgiveness was necessary for harmony to prevail within communities. The making of Relatives with each other was essential despite our conflicts.
- The wisdom of leadership that is vested in our wise Elders.
- Taking responsibility for each other.
- Living out our Indigenous humanity.
- Using honourably the gifts that were conveyed to each of us by the Creator.
- Walking in each other's shoes instead of judging.
- Consensus in decision-making.
- Living in balance with the *whole* of creation.
- And finally, placing the Gospel is the centre of our Circle.

We are blessed that the concept of the circle of life has survived and continues to resonate strongly for us as a way of coming together in full relationship and Communion with each other. It is both symbolic and real for us. We believe fully that the power of our faith is expressed when we gather, as two or three with Christ, in Sacred Circle.

Ultimately, colonization was a painful, destructive experience for us. The Christian God initially welcomed by some, rejected by others or imposed through indoctrination as wards of the Crown, seemed to turn against us. We witnessed and endured abuse and were confused that the actions of God's people did not correspond to our reading and the teachings of the Gospel. But the light of Christ ultimately shone through for us, and we are living proof today of our adherence to a faith that has sustained us throughout the process of colonization. That is why we always place the Gospel at the centre of our circle to begin our gatherings within the Sacred Circle. It is about our commitment, responsibility and hope that we can

help each other and other Indigenous Peoples to encounter the Living Christ in the spirit of Grace that we were denied for so long.

*Our Way of Life* is a living document. We recognize that it represents only the journey of decolonization of those of us gathered in Circle in recent years. While we have tried to garner the stories and insights of our Elders in producing this document, we recognize that it represents only the personal journeys of today's Sacred Circle members – our children and subsequent generations will continue the healing and reconciliation journey that we have begun, and this document will evolve through them.

We welcome the Anglican Church of Canada's support for our journey to help us to heal and to reconcile by embracing our traditional practices and spirituality as an integral part of Canadian Anglicanism. This document represents our determination to move forward with the blessing of and solidarity with the broader Anglican church. But self-determination is a journey, a process, and we seek patience and understanding from our non-Indigenous Relatives that this will take time. It is vitally important to understand that we as Indigenous Anglicans are still seeking to reveal our own spirituality and relationships in governing ourselves first before considering welcoming non-Indigenous people into Sacred Circle or our ceremonial gatherings.

We do welcome the opportunity to share many of our Indigenous traditions with the broader church and believe that we can advance reconciliation by sharing our philosophy of life, spiritual practices and stories with the rest of the church. We intend to develop tools to do that in due course. But we are fewer and look forward to welcoming non-Indigenous bridge-builders and all our Anglican 'Relatives' to help and support our journey in Indigenous ministry.