

MISSION DIRECTORATE

POSITION STATEMENT

INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction

The motivation for this communication is to build upon a history of support and commitment to Indigenous peoples. Moreover, it is hoped that with some wider understanding of our directions, the outcomes in respect of recent restructuring to the Mission Team and its associated personnel changes might be better understood. In this light and as this communication begins, Province appreciation is extended to a number of people who have served to build our cultural awareness and assist in our mutually transforming outreach. In particular, the contributions of Julieanne Manson and Donella Brown are acknowledged along with the often unrecognised support by Brothers ministering in prophetic ways under challenging circumstances.

Partnerships as Fundamental

National bodies such as Reconciliation Australia and government policy of every persuasion now adopt the primacy of local relationships within indigenous partnerships. Government policy expects “funded organisations ... to work closely with Indigenous communities in the design and delivery of projects”. They emphasise flexible program structures for local and regional solutions. Even the inclusion of Indigenous affairs in the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet is premised upon moving to a regional model so that senior decision makers are located closer to the people and communities they are working with, and hence develop and implement local solutions based on understanding and action through relationship.

Our Research Experience

As part of its 2008-2014 agenda the Oceania Leadership Team explored the most effective means of extending and deepening the level of relationship the Oceania Province and its associated ministries have with the Indigenous peoples in Australia. In 2013, in the process of considering the establishment of an Indigenous Advisory Forum, the OLT sought input from a number of key sources including:

- ❖ The Indigenous Animator and Advisor – Oceania Ministries
- ❖ The Senior Advisory Group of the Mission Directorate
- ❖ Respected Leaders within Aboriginal Education and Community Development
- ❖ Partners within the joint Congregations NATSIC Project.

Accepting that some conclusions may be generalized or narrow in scope, the key messages from this consultation confirmed the wider directions nominated earlier and outlined the fundamentals for the future:

1. The most effective and lasting form of Indigenous support is achieved through direct engagement at a grass roots level. That is, by being active in a community and actually doing work (ministry) in an area for which the organisation is well known and respected.

2. Mutual relationships arising from trust and respect are strongest when organisations forge partnerships with established local Indigenous networks.
3. Organisational emphasis on structures, or an over reliance on individuals to represent the wider group, serves to shift the agenda away from a shared responsibility to address immediate needs.
4. Working relationships with indigenous people should primarily establish and promote dialogue with, and listening to, a multiplicity of indigenous voices.
5. Indigenous people respectfully refrain from speaking or making decisions on behalf of others without consulted assent or affirmation, thus making any expectations associated with 'representative' type roles problematic.
6. Single unit work settings for Indigenous people, especially within predominantly non-indigenous environments, can be disempowering. The most creative and energized outcomes are achieved when working with other Indigenous people in using individual talents, setting collaborative strategies and developing collective action plans.
7. Indigenous people are most energized in a work setting when the employment role offers them the capacity to re-connect on a regular basis with country as a place of spiritual renewal.

Our Pastoral Experience

While conscious of the wider context in which Indigenous outreach is supported, the endeavour of the Province to examine its particular experience revealed both similar and additional insights.

These are summarised as:

1. The roles of *Indigenous Animator and Advisor – Oceania Ministries (IAAOM)* and Indigenous Animator and Resource Facilitator (WA/SA) evolved as responses to changing Province structures and shifting relationships with school entities. In light of the integration of former Directorates it has become clear that a single Oceania coordination role and specific State based coordination is inconsistent with the best practice described earlier.
2. Unlike the experiences within the former regional Provinces where similar roles served to bring an advisory indigenous voice or conscience into the discernment of respective local Province Leadership Teams, the roles of *Indigenous Animator and Advisor – Oceania Ministries (IAAOM)* and Indigenous Animator and Resource Facilitator (WA/SA) were more aligned to regional responses and hence limited in their capacity to implement the Province wide agenda
3. While there has been limited growth in direct community engagement within Indigenous Ministries in Australia over the life of the Province, there has been impressive, effective and sustainable work achieved at the regional levels via local community engagement and formation opportunities (eg 'Lets Talk').
4. The Oceania Leadership Team, through its inter-congregational partnership programs, is looking to draw upon and engage with a wider spectrum of Indigenous voices. A Province Indigenous Advisory Group has been proposed with clear terms of responsibility and lines of accountability to be established.

5. Anecdotal evidence suggests there has been limited Edmund Rice Network (Province wide) engagement with the campaign to support Indigenous recognition within the Australian Constitution as promoted by Edmund Rice Justice Centre Homebush.
6. The Province engagement with Indigenous people continues to be a priority. The nature and expression of this relationship will need to be mindful of the above pastoral experience and the strategic directions extracted from Province research.

Discernment Outcomes

Analysis of the wider and local indigenous services confirmed that Indigenous engagement, both in terms of direct ministry activity and in the seeking of advice, guidance and information, is most effectively provided and sourced via local services and communities.

The three immediate and foundational challenges which underpin the discernment are:

- A. Our decisions about 'Indigenous ministries' have to be shared with Indigenous people themselves
- B. Partnerships need to incorporate the development of opportunities and processes that enable and facilitate ongoing community development
- C. That the spiritual and religious character of our mission needs to be retained.

It is in light of these conclusions that the following directions are adopted.

1. Reposition resources from national to local levels to initiate new relationships with existing local Indigenous groups.
2. Build partnerships with local team based Indigenous groups and maximise use of scarce and valued resources.
3. Where we do anything regarding Indigenous Australians, we do it in partnership with Indigenous people at a local and regional level.
4. The roles of National Indigenous Advisor and Animator – Oceania Ministries and Indigenous Animator and Resource Facilitator (WA/SA) will not continue beyond the point of contract closures in 2014.
5. Changes in respect to personnel within indigenous Ministry need to reflect cultural, mission, pastoral, industrial and legal parameters.

Conclusion

Province partnerships with Indigenous people are foundational to the expression of the charism within the Australian context. Central to this expression are relationships which support mutual transformation. Recognition and appreciation is extended to the many people who have served to inspire and act in ways that are authentic to this mission. This legacy serves as a basis for continuity and a reminder of the spirit that motivates and accompanies continuous renewal.

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