

## Residential Schools Update 2006

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**"The United Church of Canada** is committed to working to create a new relationship with Aboriginal peoples that starts in confession for past wrongs and, it is the church's hope, ends in the shared joy of walking together in a healed and renewed creation."

-- from The United Church of Canada Brief to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Nov. 1993

### Residential Schools Steering Committee Update (January 2006)

#### Agreement in Principle Reached in Iacobucci Resolution Process

Under the Political Accord of May 30, 2005, between the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Hon. Frank Iacobucci was appointed as federal negotiator and asked to recommend to the federal Cabinet a "fair and lasting" resolution package to the tragic legacy of Indian Residential Schools.

On November 20, an Agreement in Principle (AIP) was signed. Participating in negotiations were the federal government; the AFN and other Aboriginal organizations; the Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United Church entities; and legal counsel for former students. The AIP was approved by the federal Cabinet and announced on November 23, 2005.

The agreement is comprehensive. It includes a Common Experience Payment for all former students, a compensation process for individual claims for physical and sexual abuse, resources for community healing programs, a truth and reconciliation process, and funds for commemoration initiatives.

The United Church has long supported a holistic and comprehensive resolution to the harm created by the residential school system. We have sought a resolution that would include both financial compensation and healing programs for former students, as well as educational strategies for non-Aboriginal Canadians. This agreement reflects that approach. We anticipate that a formal apology from the Prime Minister might yet be added to the agreement.

The United Church has agreed to a financial contribution based on a proportional formula worked out with all the church entities. Most of our commitment has already been paid out in settlements. The United Church will also participate in the truth and reconciliation process, nationally and locally, and continue to support community-based healing and commemoration initiatives.

Our representatives are currently engaged in the negotiations on the full and final agreement. The deadline is January 31, 2006. Once the final agreement has been signed by all the parties and approved by the federal Cabinet, approval will also be sought from the courts in the seven jurisdictions where class actions have been filed.

Following court approval, the class action lawsuits will be set aside. An opt-out period of six months will follow. If no more than 5,000 former students opt out of the agreement, it is anticipated that it will come into force at the end of 2006.

#### Supreme Court Says United Church Shares Liability

On October 21, 2005, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the federal government and The United Church of Canada share vicarious liability for the physical and sexual abuse experienced by former

## Residential Schools Update 2006

students of the Alberni Indian Residential School. Vicarious liability relates to who had ultimate responsibility for the employees of the school arising out of control over policy and funding.

In 1996, former students launched a lawsuit against Canada and the United Church seeking compensation and damages for physical and sexual abuses committed at the Alberni school (closed in 1973) by a dormitory supervisor. In 2001, Justice Donald Brenner found both the government and the church to be vicariously liable and ruled that the apportionment of compensation was to be shared 75 percent by Canada and 25 percent by the United Church. On appeal, the British Columbia Court of Appeal determined that the United Church bore no legal responsibility for the claims of the plaintiffs. The case was then appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court ruling reinstates the original decision of the trial judge, restoring the division of vicarious liability to 75 percent for Canada and 25 percent for the United Church.

The decision of the court means that The United Church of Canada will continue to do what it has been doing for the past several years-settling claims as quickly and fairly as possible, and paying its share of settlements. In order to ensure that claimants received 100 percent of their awards, the United Church continued to pay its portion of all settlements while the legal questions were being sorted out. The church is satisfied that the courts have now resolved the question of vicarious liability. For more information, see: Implications of the Supreme Court Decision in the Barney (Blackwater) Decision ([www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/051027](http://www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/051027))

24 Hour National Survivors Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419, Sponsored by National Residential School Survivors' Society

### 20th Anniversary-1986 Apology

Watch for a special mailing coming to your congregation in late February to help us mark the 20th anniversary of the 1986 apology to Native peoples in the United Church. In it you will find resources to assist us to continue to live out our repentance, especially during Lent:

- *A Healing Journey for Us All*: a resource for the period encompassing Victoria Day, the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation, and National Aboriginal Day to help congregations examine the effects of colonization and empire
- new Healing Fund materials
- the apology, printed in English and French, suitable for giving and framing

### Update on the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Process

In 2003, the federal government created the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process as an alternative to lawsuits. The ADR employs a less formal hearing before an adjudicator to more quickly resolve claims of former residential students regarding physical and sexual abuse, or wrongful confinement. By December 2005, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (IRSRC) had screened in nearly 3,000 applications to the ADR process-some 700 in the last three months. Almost 13 percent of applications are from former students of United Church-associated residential schools. Most of the hearings were in Manitoba in the last quarter.

Number of ADR applications forwarded to the United Church to date:	235
Number of hearings completed or scheduled:	125
Number of hearings attended by United Church representative*:	70

\*United Church attends all hearings except when requested not to by the claimant

## Residential Schools Update 2006

Feedback from former students, their lawyers, and the adjudicators has indicated that the presence and words of the representatives of the church at the hearings has been very meaningful for the claimants.

### **If a Truth-Telling Inquiry Came to Your Town...**

The United Church Western Women's Conference was held in October 2005 at Naramata Centre. The theme was "Healing into Wholeness." One of the guest speakers was Maggie Hodgson, from Edmonton, currently an Aboriginal Advisor to the federal department Indian Residential Schools Resolutions Canada. She explored the question "Whose truth about residential school?" She maintained that there are many perspectives about the schools' history and each perspective has validity.

Maggie had participated in the negotiations to reach the Agreement in Principle, and sought the response of the 340 women present to the idea of a nationally conducted, community-based Truth and Reconciliation process. She asked the following two questions and responses were gathered from table groups:

1. If a truth-telling inquiry came to town, how would you/your community (church) participate?
2. What truths would you hope to hear at the inquiry?

These are good questions to pose in a congregation or study group to prepare the church and our communities to become engaged in the Truth and Reconciliation process, sometime in 2007. More details about this specific aspect of the Agreement in Principle may be found in Schedule E at: Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (IRSRC) website.

### **How Are the "People of the Boat" Living Out the Apology?**

Nelson Hart, Chair of the ANCC Council on Healing and Respect, once said that in his Cree dialect, the word for those who came to this land means "people of the boat." It makes no mention of skin colour. It is the "people of the boat" of the United Church who made the apology to Native peoples and must act upon it. If there are boat people who are taking steps to help, inspire, and encourage others to work toward right relations, national staff would like to hear about it and share it. We are here to consult with you, too. Please contact Cecile Fausak (RSSC) or Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations (JGER) staff for respective Conferences: Jim Marshall (AB&NW, Maritime, Manitou, London, Hamilton), Choice Okoro (SK, M&O, TO), Heather McDonald (BC, MB&NWO, NFLD&LAB), or Richard Chambers (ANCC and BQ).

### **Planning for Your 2006 Conference Meeting with 1986 in Mind**

How will your Conference recognize the 20th anniversary of the apology to Native peoples in the church? Will you spend time asking where you are on the journey of healing and right relations? Will Aboriginal peoples share their stories? (There is no ANCC Grand Council in 2006.)

Conferences with All Native Circle Conference congregations within their bounds may wish to invite those representatives to your Conference meetings. Saskatchewan Conference has regularly invited two people from Plains Presbytery to be full participants. Last year, at Alberta and Northwest Conference, Floyd Steinhauer, co-chair of All Tribes Presbytery, walked with the president in the grand entry, conducted a smudge, gave a teaching on the Sacred Fire, and led a "peace workout."

Saskatchewan Conference also prepared a brochure on Healing Fund projects that have been funded in that region. You can find a listing of all the proposals that have received grants at: Projects Supported by the Healing Fund ([www.united-church.ca/funding/healing/grants](http://www.united-church.ca/funding/healing/grants)).

## Residential Schools Update 2006

See Also:

- Justice and Reconciliation Fund ([www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/relationships/fund](http://www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/relationships/fund))

Since many of you might actually be meeting on May 26, the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation, why not plan a liturgy around this theme, and tell stories of reconciliation? You could show the video from Spirit Connection (broadcast Nov. 27, 2005) on the National Aboriginal Consultation in Sudbury, July 2005.

Consider asking the residential school staff or members of the Residential Schools Steering Committee to speak at your gathering.

It's up to each of us to break down the invisible walls of distrust, racism, and misunderstanding.

### **News from the Healing Fund**

Lorna Pawis, Healing Fund Coordinator, attended the St. Michael's Residential School Gathering this past August in Namgis House, Alert Bay, B.C. Students who attended the school gathered to cry, feel pain, and share painful memories. They also rekindled friend-ships, and were healed through ceremonies and loving hands. Chief Bobby Joseph, one of the Residential School Survivors Council Planning Committee members, gave a traditional welcome with hand drums and song as students walked off the ferry. Students attending St. Michael's School are members of the United Church in their home communities or of the Roman Catholic faith.

This gathering was supported by the United Church Healing Fund. Although St. Michael's was an Anglican-run school, the Healing Fund supports healing initiatives from First Nations communities across Canada. At the fall meeting of the Healing Fund Council, approximately \$145,000.00 was approved for 13 projects such as language immersion projects, cultural camps, women's healing circles, men's gatherings, youth empowerment, and self-esteem conferences. The loss of language and culture affects Aboriginal communities on a daily basis; therefore the Healing Fund places priority on restoration and revitalization of language and culture projects.

Deadlines for 2006 applications are March 15 and September 15. For further information, to make contributions, or to obtain an application form, phone Lorna Pawis at 416-231-5931 or see: The Healing Fund ([www.united-church.ca/funding/healing](http://www.united-church.ca/funding/healing)).

### **Where Are the Children?**

"Where Are the Children? Healing the Legacy of Residential Schools" is both a travelling exhibit and a virtual online exhibition of photographs and stories representative of life in the over 150 Indian Residential Schools that operated from the mid-19th century to the late 20th century. To see the online gallery and obtain more information, go to [www.wherethechildren.ca](http://www.wherethechildren.ca) or call toll-free 1-888-725-8886.

### **RSSC to Meet in Alberni**

In June 1998, the General Council Executive established the Residential Schools Steering Committee (RSSC) with the following mandate: "Co-ordinate all aspects of the issues related to residential schools, including the legal, pastoral, communications, alternate resolution possibilities and healing initiatives, and financial planning"

## **Residential Schools Update 2006**

Over the years, the emphasis has shifted from legal issues and finances to alternative dispute resolution, pastoral issues, communications, and healing.

The RSSC meets three times per year. At least one of the meetings is in the community, often at a former residential school site. In February 2005, the committee visited the former Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School. In 1981, the building was transferred to Long Plain First Nation and is now a college. A project is underway to create a national residential school museum on the site.

The next meeting will be February 5-8, 2006, in Alberni, B.C.

### ***To Contact Us***

With questions, concerns, or comments

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#### ***Cecile Fausak***

*Liaison Minister: Residential Schools*

#### ***David MacDonald***

*Special Advisor: Residential Schools*

## Residential Schools Steering Committee Update (April 2006)

### **Iacobucci Settlement Agreement Still to Be Finalized**

Negotiations continue on finalizing the details of the multi-party Settlement Agreement on Indian Residential Schools led by Justice Iacobucci.

When the Agreement in Principle (AIP) was signed on November 20, 2005, the goal for the final resolution package was January 31, 2006. However, to allow time for the new government to review the agreement, the deadline has been delayed until April. Unfortunately, the early Common Experience Payments eagerly anticipated by former students, age 65 and older, to be available in early 2006 are also awaiting government budgetary approval.

If approved by Cabinet, the certification of the agreement will be sought from the seven jurisdictions where class actions have been filed. Following certification, there will be a five-month period when former students can choose to “opt out” of the agreement. If it passes all these approval stages, the agreement would be implemented early in 2007.

The United Church continues to be involved in the negotiations of the overall agreement as well as in the details of our specific obligations. A background paper outlining the Settlement Agreement has been distributed to the members of the General Council Executive in advance of their April meeting. Meanwhile, we continue to actively pursue the resolution of abuse claims through out-of-court settlements and the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) hearings.

### **Update on the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Process**

The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process uses an informal hearing before an adjudicator to resolve claims of physical and sexual abuse, or wrongful confinement.

By March 2006, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (IRSRC) had screened in nearly 3,800 applications to the ADR process-800 in the last three months. About 12 percent of claims are from former students of United Church-associated residential schools. Nearly all of the hearings were in Manitoba in the last quarter.

Number of ADR applications forwarded to the United Church to date:	290
Number of hearings completed or scheduled:	155
Number of hearings attended by United Church representative*:	80

\*United Church attends all hearings except when requested not to by the claimant

Response from claimants, their lawyers, and the adjudicators to the presence and words of the church representatives at the hearings continues to suggest that they nurture glimpses of grace, healing, understanding, and reconciliation.

### **RSSC in Port Alberni**

*Submitted by Alvin Dixon, Chair of RSSC, and former student at Alberni IRS*

The Residential Schools Steering Committee (RSSC) met in Port Alberni February 6-8, 2006. The committee tries to meet at least once a year in a community where they can experience the conditions and local realities of Indigenous peoples. Our experience in Port Alberni certainly provided the exposure we were looking for, and more. Port Alberni was the site of the former Alberni Indian

## Residential Schools Update 2006

Residential School (AIRS), and we had an opportunity to tour the site, which is now the offices for the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council and other Aboriginal organizations.

This was the school where Henry Arthur Plint inflicted his many heinous and perverted acts upon many innocent young children who were entrusted to his care. Plint was charged and convicted in court in 1995. His acts, and those of many others-in other schools, in other denominations-spawned the Residential Schools Steering Committee. Our committee and our church are trying to deal with the fallout of acts such as Plint's, and the impacts of Indian Residential Schools in general.

While we were in Port Alberni, we gathered in a circle with eight former students of AIRS, as well as with members of the Alberni Valley United Church and three members of the Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery. The meeting with the survivors of the school provided significant insights into the many negative impacts of the schools and separation from family and community, such as family and community dysfunction; loss of sense of home and teachings of grandparents; personal hurts and pains, including alcoholism and spousal and child abuses; disconnects with language and culture. "We lost a ton in that system," said one. We heard many stories of various losses from survivors during our post-dinner session in the local church. It was this sharing circle that emphasized for me the importance of having the committee meet in local communities and engaging those communities in full, open, and meaningful dialogue.

This was accentuated, too, by our earlier, informative session with some of the members of the former St. Andrew's United Church who were significant players in that congregation's apology to the local First Nations community in May 1997. Having members of the presbytery from outside the community helped immensely in that they were able to hear again first-hand from survivors, and members of the congregation, not just of the evils of some people who worked in the schools, but also of the disconnect that some church members choose to maintain relative to First Nations and residential school issues, in the face of sincere, committed attempts by other members of the church to engage the First Nations community through apology and continued meaningful relationships.

### **What's in the Archives?**

*Submitted by Sharon Larade, Chief Archivist*

What is The United Church of Canada Archives Network? Central Archives in Toronto preserves the records of the General Council Office, as well as the records of five of the Conferences located in Ontario (Bay of Quinte, Toronto, Hamilton, London, and Manitou). Some Conferences have established their own archives (Maritime, Newfoundland and Labrador); other Conferences partner with other organizations (Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, British Columbia, Montreal and Ottawa, Alberta and Northwest). Each archives within our network operates independently and has unique holdings and finding aids.

Detailed information about students attending residential schools is limited in church archives. Archives have many photographs, but often we do not have enough information to identify all individuals in the photographs. Archivists are familiar with many sources of information in their own collections and in other research centres and online tools. You can learn more about the Conference Archives and our new resource *Archives & Recordkeeping: A How-to Guide for Congregations and Conferences* (2005) on the Archives website.

Our archivists have extensive experience doing research about the 13 United Church-related residential schools. Archivists work closely with colleagues in other denominations; professional staff preserve

## Residential Schools Update 2006

historical records and prepare finding aids to guide researchers. Conference Archives have limited resources with part-time staff who balance their time processing new records and answering inquiries. Archivists are familiar with inquiries for genealogy, local church history, academic and legal research for claimants, Aboriginal communities, and legal researchers.

Archives have a co-operative working relationship with the Steering Committee through the Chief Archivist's participation as a staff resource. Publications such as *The Observer* have made use of the archival photographs in our collections when writing about residential schools. Clear communication about the timing of litigation ensures that research demands can be accommodated within the network.

Library and Archives of Canada also holds information about residential schools in government records. Access may be restricted by the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act. You can learn more about this from their online guide *Aboriginal Peoples – Guide to the Records of the Government of Canada* ([www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/0201200109\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/0201200109_e.html)).

If you have questions, contact the Central Archives in Toronto and we will refer you to the appropriate archives in the network, as well as search our own holdings.

### **Where Are the Children?**

Some of the United Church archival records are seen in the online exhibit *Where Are the Children?* ([www.wherearethechildren.ca](http://www.wherearethechildren.ca))

There is also a travelling exhibit which will visit the Children of the Shingwauk reunion, Algoma University College in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, from June to August 2006, and the Campbell River Museum in Campbell River, B.C., from September to December 2006.

### **Aboriginal Solidarity Sharing Circle**

The Aboriginal Solidarity Sharing Circle of Toronto Conference came into being in 2003, inspired by a Vision Keeper, to assist the Conference and its presbyteries and pastoral charges to

- understand the history of colonization by European settlers in the land Aboriginals know as Turtle Island
- acknowledge and redress the legacy of Indian Residential Schools in both church and society
- address the issue of racism against Aboriginal peoples in both church and society

The Circle also supports efforts toward dialogue and face-to-face encounters between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in various settings within the bounds of Conference. The Circle helps to develop and maintain networks, fosters and encourages the use of worship, education, and worship resources, and connects to other bodies and initiatives related to furthering justice, reconciliation, dialogue and understanding.

A survey was sent to congregations in January seeking feedback as to what steps they have taken to “live out the apologies.”

Jemelda Johnston of Cape Croker is currently working one day a week as the Conference Aboriginal Relations Vision Keeper, following Sandi Hill in that role. Linda Parsons is facilitator of the Circle.

## Residential Schools Update 2006

Regular sharing circles are held with up to 12-15 participants, including representatives from the Aboriginal congregations of Georgina and Christian Island within Toronto Conference, and the Toronto Urban Native Ministry.

The Aboriginal Solidarity Sharing Circle is hoping to organize an event for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth (Grade 7 and 8) at the Conference's annual meeting.

One of Johnston's volunteer activities is running a radio program called "Seventh Generation Initiative." It is based on the need to look backwards-How far back do you have stories?-and forwards-How far ahead can you see? She wonders what quality of life First Nations people will have seven generations from now.

Thanks to Linda Parsons and Vivian Harrower, "Insight" editor, for submitting material for this story.

### **Hearing the Story in Yellowhead**

*Submitted by Bruce Jackson, Co-Chair, Yellowhead Presbytery, Church in the World Committee*

In Josephburg, Alberta (near Edmonton), on February 21, 2006, Yellowhead Presbytery's Church in the World Committee hosted its second Building Right Relationship event with help from the Justice and Reconciliation Fund. Peggy Lafleur, Jordan and Susan Head, Maggie Hodgson, George Brereton, and Peggy Cardinal, associated with the Nechi Institute, were our guests. They described the development and activities of this internationally known addictions counselling training and healing centre.

Nechi and Poundmaker's Lodge operate on the site of the former United Church Edmonton Residential School (ERS). There have been four gatherings of former ERS students and Elders for spiritual ceremonies at this site.

After supper, we gathered in a circle of about 30 people to hear the experiences of former students from various schools and their healing journeys. For many, it was hard to listen, and the pain and tears flowed freely among many gathered there. Brereton, an Elder from Saddle Lake, went to ERS from 1947 to 1958 and spoke openly of his painful memories: "I'll always hurt." Although he remembered one teacher with gratitude, he reminded us how "a few good things are overwhelmed by the bad." Cecile Fausak, United Church of Canada Residential Schools Liaison Minister, offered an apology to George, accepting responsibility on behalf of the United Church for the hurts he bears from his school experience.

It was only after personally hearing the stories of former students face-to-face that one presbyter, who had previously heard about residential schools during many presbytery meetings, Sunday worship, and from the media, remarked that he was beginning to comprehend the complexity and the tragedy of the impact of the schools on First Nations communities. This was only one response of many from participants. Their hearts were touched, and they would not see the issue in the same way ever again.

Fausak also led worship the next morning on the theme of healing the "paralyzed" (both the church and First Nations) and giving thanks for the persistent friends who help us to take steps on the transforming journey of reconciliation.

### **National Day of Healing & Reconciliation**

Go to [www.ndhr.ca](http://www.ndhr.ca) \* for the March 2006 newsletter, and a listing of events to mark this day-May 26.

## Residential Schools Update 2006

### **To Contact Us**

With questions, concerns, or comments

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***David MacDonald***

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## **Residential Schools Steering Committee Update (July 2006)**

### **United Church Signs Settlement Agreement**

Negotiations toward a comprehensive resolution package for former students of residential schools, which began in June 2005 under the leadership of the Hon. Frank Iacobucci and resulted in an Agreement in Principle on November 23, 2006, were concluded in April 2006. The federal government, the Assembly of First Nations, the four churches, and counsel for the plaintiffs finalized the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. It provides for a Common Experience Payment, a revised process for resolving abuse claims, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and funds for healing programs and commemoration.

At its spring meeting, April 28-May 1, 2006, the General Council Executive supported the recommendation brought by the Residential Schools Steering Committee and unanimously agreed that The United Church of Canada would become a signatory to the agreement.

The federal Cabinet approved the agreement on May 10. The next approval stage will involve a court review of the agreement in the nine jurisdictions where class actions have been filed between the end of August and mid-October. A national notification program was launched on June 22 to inform former students of the agreement and the court review.

If the courts approve the agreement, there will follow a five-month “opt out” period in which former students may opt out of the agreement.

Although the agreement has yet to clear these last two approval hurdles, the government has launched the advance payment program for eligible former students who are 65 years of age or older. These students can apply for an advance payment of \$8,000. The first cheques under this provision have already been issued.

More information on the agreement is available at the Assembly of First Nations website or the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada website.

### **Roundtable Identifies Future Role**

On June 1, the organizations (Aboriginal, church, and government) that have been part of the United Church-initiated Roundtable process met to discuss the future. The Roundtable originally came together to explore how to ensure implementation of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples’ recommendation that there be a public inquiry into the legacy of Indian Residential Schools.

Meetings of the Roundtable were suspended during the negotiations of the Comprehensive Settlement Agreement. Those talks included discussions of a national Truth and Reconciliation process. Once the Settlement Agreement was finalized, including a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was uncertain whether the Roundtable had any further role.

The Roundtable decided, however, that there remain important tasks to undertake as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is set up. These include participation in the recruitment and selection of suitable commissioners and staff for the commission, the development of a detailed process model, the promotion of the Truth and Reconciliation process among our own constituencies, and support of those who participate. The Roundtable agreed to hire a part-time staff person to coordinate its role.

## Residential Schools Update 2006

### Update on the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Process

The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process, set up in 2003, deals with claims of physical and sexual abuse or wrongful confinement by former residential students. By June 2006, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (IRSRC) had screened in nearly 4,800 applications to the ADR process—some 500 in the last three months. Of these applications, 10.4% are from former students of United Church-associated residential schools.

Number of ADR applications forwarded to the United Church to date:	350
Number of hearings completed or scheduled:	195
Number of hearings attended by United Church representative*:	98

\*United Church attends all hearings except when requested not to by the claimant

Of the 37 hearings scheduled in the last three months, 22 were held in Manitoba, 14 in B.C., and one in Alberta. We attended 20 of them. The representatives continue to say they are grateful for the opportunity to be present at such an important occasion for a former student and to offer a personal apology on behalf of the church.

### Preparing New Church ADR Representatives & Adjudicators

Thank you to the people who undertook a one-day training session to prepare them to attend ADR hearings on behalf of the United Church. In February, the following lay and ordered persons from Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference became familiar with the history of the United Church-run schools, the ADR hearing process, and the role of church representatives at the hearings:

- John Badertscher
- Eileen Clarke
- Bruce Faurschou
- Leslie Elizabeth King
- Sandra Hayes-Gardiner
- Wayne Larstone
- Cliff & Eleanor McMillan
- Irene Rainey

Bill Gillis, Pat Wotton, Glenn Morison, and Bill Hickerson had already been attending hearings.

In June, additional people from B.C. Conference also formally became part of this ministry of reconciliation. In addition to the current representatives (Doug Goodwin, Bob Smith, Marion Best, Brian Thorpe, John Burton, and Terry Anderson), the following people were trained:

- Janice Young
- John Cashore
- Jim and Eva Manly
- Fraser Simmons
- Jane Miller
- Lorraine Powell

Please keep all these representatives in your prayers as they continue to carry out this important and challenging ministry on our behalf.

## Residential Schools Update 2006

While the United Church trains its own representatives, the Adjudication Secretariat is preparing additional adjudicators to conduct ADR hearings. Twenty-five new adjudicators were trained at a three-day event in Saskatoon in June.

James Scott, of the United Church, was invited to attend representing all the Protestant churches to orient the new adjudicators to the history of the churches in the residential school system, and more particularly, to the role of the churches in the Alternative Dispute Resolution hearings.

### Healing Our Spirit Worldwide

This Fifth Gathering of Indigenous Peoples from around the world in Edmonton, August 6-11, will be a celebration of health and healing. For more information, go to the Healing Our Spirit Worldwide website.

### Around the Conference Meetings

A number of Conference annual meetings paid attention to the 20th anniversary of the 1986 Apology to First Nations peoples and distributed copies of "A Collective Step Forward" ([www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/statements/060502](http://www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/statements/060502)) on the Residential School Settlement Agreement. These included Newfoundland and Labrador, Maritimes, Bay of Quinte, Saskatchewan, London, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, B.C., and Alberta and Northwest.

Dave Iverson gave a presentation at Bay of Quinte, where Brian Thorpe was guest speaker. David MacDonald spoke at Maritime Conference and met with the Aboriginal Task Group and with Russell Day, who wrote "Political Forgiveness: Lessons from South Africa." James Scott spoke at Montreal & Ottawa Conference. Jim Sinclair referred to the Settlement Agreement at London Conference. Cecile Fausak briefly spoke along with the Justice and Reconciliation Committee at Alberta and Northwest and led a workshop, "A Time for a Leader to Repent and Apologize." Toronto and Hamilton Conferences held worship services acknowledging the apology.

### St. Paul Presbytery Visits Saddle Lake

On National Aboriginal Day, June 21, Elder Floyd Steinhauer, board chairperson Leslie Steinhauer, and the Rev. Robert Wright welcomed members of St. Paul Presbytery to the Marlene Steinhauer Memorial United Church, part of All Tribes Presbytery, on the Saddle Lake Reserve in northeastern Alberta.

Although Floyd is battling cancer, he graciously shared his struggle over the years in walking the two paths of Christianity and traditional Aboriginal spirituality. His ancestor was Henry Bird Steinhauer, who was the first Methodist missionary in the area, and his family has mixed feelings about the 1986 apology. The first time he visited a St. Paul Presbytery meeting as a young man, he had not been allowed to ask a question. This incident and many others have underscored the appropriateness of apology. St. Paul Presbytery Division of Church in Society chairperson Rev. David Crombie read the apology, and presented Floyd and Leslie each with a framed copy. The standing ovation lasting several minutes that Floyd received was a living testimony to how things have changed in St. Paul Presbytery and elsewhere in the United Church.

Florence Large, the local elementary school counsellor, told her own story and outlined the many issues that grade one children face as they try to learn. Tragically, the number of group homes is increasing on the reserve. Leslie, a housing inspector, said there is an average of 10.2 persons per home, compared to the national average of 2.2. Florence has successfully written and produced a play with junior high students about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. There is so much accumulated grief

## Residential Schools Update 2006

and loss, and it is difficult to carry on if one is not able to draw strength from spiritual practices. Florence sees the underlying cause of the violence and addiction on the reserve as “spiritual confusion.” This is a legacy of residential schools.

Cecile Fausak made a presentation on the Settlement Agreement, and on the role of representatives at ADR hearings.

As St. Paul Presbytery moved to write letters to the nine reserves and Métis settlements within its bounds, expressing the hope of walking together for health, peace, and prosperity, there was recognition of the need to live out the apology and that words are not enough.

### **Alberta and Northwest Conference UCW “Overlapping Circles”**

Sixty-six UCW delegates gathered at Strathmore United Church on April 7-8 under the theme “Overlapping Circles-Strengthening the Spirit.” Speakers were Maggie Hodgson of Edmonton and Cecile Fausak of Athabasca.

Cecile began an interactive workshop with the question “Which First Peoples lived in this local area and which treaty do you belong to?” as part of raising awareness of Native issues.

Participants discussed the question “Why did the United Church apologize in 1986?” Aware of the reality of different world views, they saw that the European view had dominated. Cecile outlined the church’s attempts to live out the apology, including signing the Settlement Agreement.

Using the new United Church resource *A Healing Journey for Us All: Uncovering the Wounds of Empire*, the group considered the opening poem “Reconciliation” by Rebecca Tabobodung. Focusing on the lines “We will cry and cry... and we will see ourselves in this huge mess / and we will gently whisper the circle back / and it will be old and it will be new,” the women asked two questions: “What are you crying about in relation to First Nations?” “Where have you seen or felt the circle being whispered back?”

The worship focused on the need to make the “heart connection” required for the healing journey of reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples. If we listen with and speak from our hearts, we can uncover the entrenched cultural bias of our colonial legacy of racism and how we have all been damaged by racist attitudes and policies adopted by government and are in need of healing.

Dr. Maggie Hodgson of the Carrier Nation told of her family, residential school, and professional experiences. As an Aboriginal Advisor to the government department Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, she has a strong desire to see the true history of this country taught in our schools. She will be a guest at General Council 39 in Thunder Bay.

### **About RSSC Members**

#### ***Ann Thomas Callahan***

On June 28, Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre honoured Ann Thomas Callahan, a remarkable woman who has dedicated her life to healing and wellness, through a ceremony naming the new critical services redevelopment project building the Ann Thomas Building.

## **Residential Schools Update 2006**

Ann is on the Steering Committee from the All Native Circle Conference. She attended both the Presbyterian-run Birtle school and the United Church-run File Hills Residential School. Ann has been instrumental in healing work with former students of File Hills.

### ***Geraldine Robertson***

The committee's newest member, Geraldine Robertson, comes from the St. Clair Pastoral Charge in Sarnia, Lambton Presbytery, London Conference. This congregation is one of the dozen or so Ontario Native congregations that chose not to join the All Native Circle Conference. These congregations appointed Geraldine to join Murray Whetung on the Steering Committee as their representatives. The committee was delighted to welcome her.

Geraldine attended the Mount Elgin (Muncey) Residential School until it closed in 1946, and then was sent to the infamous Mohawk Institute. The video "Validating the Legacy," available from the Grand River AVEL outlet, shows something of the ministry with former residential school students in which she has been involved.

### ***To Contact Us***

With questions, concerns, or comments

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*Liaison Minister: Residential Schools*

#### ***David MacDonald***

*Special Advisor: Residential Schools*

## **Residential Schools Steering Committee Update (October 2006)**

### **Judges Reserving Decisions on Settlement Agreement**

Although all parties signed the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) this past spring, it must pass two more approval stages (the courts and the “opt-out” period) before it can be implemented.

This fall, the courts in nine jurisdictions where class action lawsuits have been filed on behalf of former students of residential schools are considering the IRSSA. The courts must be satisfied that it is a fair remedy for the members of the class if it is to replace the lawsuits.

In each jurisdiction, the judge has heard submissions on the IRSSA from the parties and from former students. While acknowledging that the IRSSA is not ideal, many survivors support it as a necessary step toward healing.

The most common objections to the agreement are that the compensation payments are not adequate and that the cut-off date for eligibility (May 30, 2005) excludes payment to families for survivors who died before that date.

To date, the judges are reserving their decisions until after the hearings are completed in mid-October. If the courts approve the agreement, there will be a five-month opt-out period in which former students can opt out of the IRSSA.

### **Where Are the Student Records?**

In anticipation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the federal government has made available to former students 65 years of age and older an advance payment of \$8,000.

A number of former students (about 5%-8%) who applied for the advance payment have been denied on the basis that there is no record of their attendance at the schools. Since the government admits that it does not have complete records, this response creates hurt among former students, undermines the good faith of the IRSSA, and results in survivors approaching the churches for their records.

Unfortunately, the United Church was never in possession of the attendance records for most students at most of its schools. As a result, the United Church is currently joining with survivor groups to call on the government to accept other ways of verifying attendance at the schools.

### **Call for a National Apology**

In a letter to Minister of Indian Affairs Jim Prentice from former Moderator Peter Short this past August, the United Church has called on the federal government to offer a full national apology to former students of residential schools at the time of the implementation of the IRSSA.

### **Roundtable Meets with Survivor Groups**

As we reported in the last Update, the Roundtable, initiated by the United Church in 2004 to explore the viability of a public inquiry on the Indian Residential School system, has decided to continue to meet while the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (under the Settlement Agreement) is set up.

The Roundtable held its most recent meeting in Regina on September 22. At that time, we were able to meet together with representatives of a number of survivor groups from across the country. Under the

## Residential Schools Update 2006

umbrella of the National Residential Schools Survivors' Society, these regional groups from every region except Quebec and the Yukon came together for the first time. They developed a common vision, identified strategies and means to communicate accurate information effectively to survivors across Canada, and began to think about how to address any negative impacts of compensation on survivors and their families and communities.

This historic meeting of survivor groups was made possible through funding support from the Anglican, Presbyterian, and United churches.

### **Increasing Numbers in the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Process**

The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process set up in 2003 deals with claims by former residential students of physical and sexual abuse, or wrongful confinement. By September 2006, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (IRSRC) had screened in nearly 5,450 applications to the ADR process—some 650 in the last three months, 150 more than in the previous quarter. About 10.5% of applications are from former students of United Church-associated residential schools.

Number of ADR applications forwarded to the United Church as of Sept. 30:	406
Number of hearings completed or scheduled:	229
Number of hearings attended by United Church representative*:	113

\*United Church attends all hearings except when requested not to by the claimant

Of the 56 applications that the United Church received in the last quarter, 10 were from claimants who switched from a court claim to the ADR process. Thirteen applicants (23.2%) chose to represent themselves without a lawyer.

Thirty-five of these applications related to Manitoba schools (Brandon, Portage la Prairie, Norway House), while B.C. schools (Alberni and Coqualeetza) were named in 21 applications, and the Edmonton residential school in five. Of the 30 (down from 37 in the previous quarter) hearings scheduled in the last three months, United Church representatives attended 14.

The deadline for applications under the ADR process is December 1, 2006, in preparation for the change to the Independent Assessment Process when the IRSSA is implemented.

It remains urgent to process ADR cases as quickly as possible, since many applicants are elderly or in failing health. Sadly, some die before their hearing, leaving “unfinished business” in their healing journey.

### **Flora Merrick Honoured**

Tribute was paid to Flora Merrick at an AFN-sponsored Front Line Workers Conference in Vancouver in September. Flora attended Portage la Prairie IRS. She died in August.

Flora came to national attention when the federal government sought a review of her \$1,500 ADR award. She had not been allowed to attend her mother's funeral, and was locked in a dark room for about two weeks. The United Church did not join in this review and presented Flora with a cheque for its portion and a blanket.

Her case spawned much criticism of the ADR process, and Flora gave testimony before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in 2005.

## Residential Schools Update 2006

### Healing Our Spirit Worldwide

The fifth Healing Our Spirit Worldwide (HOSW) gathering was held in Edmonton, August 6-11. Two thousand Indigenous people from around the world celebrated health, healing, and hope. The atmosphere breathed spirituality, humour, Indigenous pride, strength, and gratitude. Alvin Dixon, James Scott, and Cecile Fausak attended on behalf of the Residential Schools Steering Committee.

The first gathering was held in Edmonton in 1992 and was the vision of Maggie Hodgson, then Director of the Nechi Institute. It focused primarily on healing from addictions.

Held every four years, the conference has grown to include healing from colonization, abuse, and other health issues (thus a vast array of workshops dealing with the impact of residential schools, diabetes, bridging cultural differences, HIV/AIDS, lateral violence, and suicide). The feature film *Muffins for Granny* was premiered by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Also applauded were a documentary on lateral violence by Bears paw Media entitled *We Do It to Ourselves* and a production of the play *The Rez Sisters* that had rehearsed at Trinity United Church in Edmonton. The sixth gathering of HOSW will be held in Hawaii in 2010.

### Front Runners

One of the highlights of the General Council 39 meeting in Thunder Bay in August was the performance of a dramatic reading called *Front Runners*. It tells of the experience of several former students of residential schools who excelled at running, a skill they learned while breaking trail for dogsleds before they were sent away to residential school.

Their notoriety on the school track team brought them to the attention of the organizers of the 1967 Pam Am Games in Winnipeg. The runners were invited to carry the torch from Minnesota to Winnipeg. Once they successfully reached the gates of the stadium, however, the torch was given to a White runner to carry inside.

The performance at General Council was powerful not only due to the stories of residential school and the 1967 Pam Am run, but also because two original front runners were present.

The church is hoping to find ways to be supportive of further live performances of *Front Runners* in communities across the country. In addition, the Residential Schools Steering Committee recently agreed to contribute financially to a film production of *Front Runners* in the New Year as well as to the development of a study guide.

### Brian Thorpe Awarded McGeachy Scholarship

The McGeachy Senior Scholarship seeks to develop leaders who will provide the United Church with discernment and direction to inspire the church toward creative and faithful mission. The 2007 scholarship has been awarded to Brian Thorpe for a project entitled "Living with Our History: The United Church of Canada and Residential Schools."

Brian Thorpe, a former Senior Advisor to the Residential School Steering Committee, is a well-respected theologian, minister, and administrator. His General Council work over the last decade dealing with complex and highly charged issues related to the residential school settlements earned him respect from the First Nations communities, government, and the church. He has been awarded two honorary doctorates for his contribution to this work.

## Residential Schools Update 2006

Thorpe's McGeachy project will address two areas of concern: "The first is the need to create a narrative history of the past three decades in which the church has been called to address its role in the colonization of Aboriginal peoples in this land. The second area of concern is the way in which our current understanding of the theology and mission of The United Church of Canada has been shaped by our response to the legacy of residential schools and by our often uncritical allegiance with power in the process of colonization." (Excerpts from July 2006 FFE Announcement)

### Women's History Month-October 2006

#### Theme: Aboriginal Women: The Journey Forward

This year's Women's History Month aims to make Canadians aware of Aboriginal women's contributions to Canada, to their communities, and to their families. It also promotes understanding of the realities and unique challenges of Aboriginal women's lives.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 10th anniversary of the release of the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: "People to People, Nation to Nation."

For posters, brochures, and an activity organizer's tool kit, go to the Status of Women in Canada website ([www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/dates/whm/index\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/dates/whm/index_e.html)).

#### Resource Suggestions:

- Borrow from AVEL the *Spirit Connection* video *Topahdewin: The Gladys Cook Story: Parts 1 and 2*. It profiles a highly respected and courageous healer and residential school survivor in the Anglican Church.
- Find biographies of female Aboriginal leaders such as Dr. Jessie Saulteaux in the Conference or National Archives.
- Read Sky Dancer Louise Halfe's books of poetry *Bear Bones and Feathers* or *Blue Marrow*. This Saskatchewan poet was raised on Saddle Lake First Nation and attended Blue Quills residential school in Alberta.

### RSSC Meets

The Residential Schools Steering Committee met in Toronto on Sept. 27-29, and welcomed new Moderator David Giuliano, Racial and Gender Justice Minister Kim Uyede-Kai, and alternate member Elizabeth Pike from Toronto Urban Native Ministries. One of the Moderator's priorities is to visit Native congregations and communities. The committee urged him to deliver the 1986 and 1998 apologies during those visits, personally and publicly.

In this "in between" time awaiting final approval of the Settlement Agreement, the committee took time to identify actions that might shift the focus of our future work from litigation to healing, pastoral care, and education.

In response to a proposal from General Council for mandatory racial justice training for all ministry personnel, Kim asked the RSSC to reflect on what that would mean in the context of the legacy of residential schools.

## **Residential Schools Update 2006**

Our next meeting is Feb. 21-23, 2007, in St. Albert, Alberta, the site of the former Edmonton residential school, now a healing centre (Nechi Institute and Poundmaker's Lodge). We hope to meet with former students and with members of Edmonton and Yellowhead presbyteries.

### **Workshop at General Council**

At General Council in August, three former IRS students in three different denominations helped some 20 commissioners reflect on the IRS Settlement Agreement in a workshop facilitated by Jamie Scott and David MacDonald.

### **To Contact Us**

With questions, concerns, or comments

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*Liaison Minister: Residential Schools*

#### ***David MacDonald***

*Special Advisor: Residential Schools*

## **Residential Schools Steering Committee Update (December 2006)**

### **Chief Fontaine Addresses General Council Executive**

The National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) accepted an invitation from the Residential Schools Steering Committee to speak to the General Council Executive at its first meeting in the new triennium on November 17. The large audience included GCE members and many General Council Office staff.

Phil Fontaine, who was re-elected for a third term as National Chief of the AFN this past July, focused his remarks on his personal journey of healing as a former student of two residential schools in Manitoba, the significance of the recent residential school Settlement Agreement, and the AFN campaign “Make Poverty History.”

The following are excerpts from his address:

- “We want people to know why this was done, and never forget the harm that was inflicted on our people. Someone decided that the way we were was not good enough, that we had to become something that we were not.”
- “The agreement is an incredible achievement—it is good for survivors and for the country... It is fair, it is just, and it is comprehensive. With this agreement, we will be able to turn the page on this sad, terrible, tragic chapter in our history. B.C. Regional Chief Atleo said, ‘It’s a very heavy page and we will need thousands of people to help turn it.’”
- “Knowing, speaking, sharing the truth is so important and that will be possible in the Truth and Reconciliation process. The United Church was actively engaged in ensuring that the Settlement Agreement included this element. I thank you and congratulate you for your foresight.”
- “There is absolutely no good reason why there is such poverty that plagues Aboriginal communities in a country that ranks sixth in living standards in the world. If you look at Aboriginal communities separately, the ranking is 63rd—third-world ranking.”
- “We see you playing an important role in fixing what’s wrong in our country today. We see you as allies in our struggle to do right by our people, to make absolutely certain that every First Nations child can expect a bright and hopeful future. So I ask you for your support, help, and of course, your prayers.”

### **Court Decisions on Settlement Agreement**

This fall, hearings were completed in the courts of nine jurisdictions on the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). The courts were asked to approve the IRSSA as a reasonable and fair replacement for the class action lawsuits filed in those jurisdictions on behalf of former residential school students. The courts released decisions on December 15.

Seven courts indicated approval of the IRSSA, but five of those (Ont., Que., Sask., Alta., and B.C.) identified four administrative conditions that must be resolved before final approval will be given. Courts in NWT and Nunavut will render their decisions in the New Year.

While the decision of the courts is very positive, it will affect the timeline for implementation of the agreement as time will be required for the parties to address the conditions. Once the IRSSA is fully approved, the five-month opt-out period will begin. While the timetable remains uncertain, it is unlikely that the implementation of the IRSSA will take place before the fall of 2007.

## Residential Schools Update 2006

### United Church Protests Language Funding Cuts

On November 14, Moderator David Giuliano sent a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper (copied to Minister Bev Oda) expressing deep concern over the recent withdrawal by Heritage Canada of \$160 million set aside in 2002 for the recovery of Aboriginal language and culture. The funds have been replaced by a token \$5 million a year for seven years.

In part the letter said, “Language and culture are the fundamental building blocks of identity and social development. The loss of indigenous languages and cultural practice has not only had a devastating effect on Aboriginal communities, it has prevented Canada as a whole from benefiting from the rich diversity of the indigenous peoples of this country. It is both healing for Aboriginal communities and in the interests of our nation that Aboriginal peoples recover as much of that diversity as possible.”

### Advance Payments

In anticipation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) and the Common Experience Payment, the federal government has made available an advance payment of \$8,000 to former students 65 years of age and older as of May 30, 2005.

As of December 4, there have been 12,787 advance payment applications received out of the estimated 13,400 eligible former students. Over 9,000 cheques have been issued. The application deadline is December 31, 2006.

About 800 applications were rejected because they failed to meet the criteria (age, etc.) and about 350 have been denied due to missing school records. The government is actively expanding its search for records into church and provincial archives.

### Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Applications Still Flowing

Applications for the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process from former residential students with claims of physical and sexual abuse or wrongful confinement will now be accepted until the day the approval orders are issued for the Settlement Agreement. Originally the deadline was December 1, 2006, by which time it had been hoped that the agreement would be approved by the courts.

At the beginning of December 2006, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (IRSRC) had screened in 6,116 applications to the ADR process.

Number of ADR applications forwarded to the United Church as of Dec. 13:	440
Number of hearings completed or scheduled into Feb 2007:	277
Number of hearings attended by United Church representative*:	132

\*United Church attends all hearings except when requested not to by the claimant

### Truth and Reconciliation Commission Revisited

“Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness” was the theme of a recent international conference in Cape Town, South Africa. A reflection after 10 years of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was also an opportunity to celebrate the past 30 years of Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Desmond Tutu’s life of peaceful justice.

Tutu declared, “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission had been a blessing to heal a traumatized people. People should have been bristling with anger but they were fantastic. They had a right to be angry but they had remarkable magnanimity. Without this readiness to forgive, the country would have gone up in flames.”

## **Residential Schools Update 2006**

More than 300 people gathered from over 30 countries to examine the impact of Truth Commissions in countries such as Northern Ireland, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone, as well as the Holocaust and the Middle East. Several Canadians attended, including David MacDonald, the United Church's Special Advisor on Residential Schools.

Building on the conference theme, there was particular emphasis on the critical importance of forgiveness. There were many examples of extraordinary acts of reconciliation. Ginn Fourie, whose daughter Lyndi had been killed in a massacre in 1993, attended a homecoming ceremony for the commander who had ordered the massacre. Subsequently, she has established with him a foundation in her daughter's name to deal with the challenges of poverty and ex-combatant anger. Other survivors talked of their experience of seeking to recover their lives through forgiveness.

Conference co-chair Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela acknowledged, "Forgiveness is not an event but a beginning of the journey. How do you deal with the pain of a child who is missing? How do you deal with a country which is filled with victims and perpetrators? How do you confront the pain that is all around?"

As part of the comprehensive Settlement Agreement, Canada will have its first national Truth and Reconciliation Commission next year to examine the painful history and legacy of our Indian Residential Schools. The information and experiences from the South African conference can assist in creating an effective and worthwhile truth commission here.

### **Front Runners on Film**

In the last issue, we told you that the Steering Committee contributed financially to a film production of *Front Runners* as well as to the development of a study guide. The filming will take place in a Winnipeg church in January.

*Front Runners* tells the story of several former students of residential school who excelled at running. Their notoriety on the school track team brought them to the attention of the organizers of the 1967 Pam Am Games in Winnipeg. They were invited to carry the torch from Minnesota to Winnipeg. Once they successfully reached the gates of the stadium, however, the torch was given to a White runner to carry inside.

### **Churchill Park United on the Healing Way**

During October, Churchill Park United in Winnipeg focused on "Aboriginal Relationships—Seeking Understanding and Building Bridges." Worship was held in a circle. Traditional harvest produce and the "gifts" of Aboriginal people—snowshoes, moccasins, corn, rice, berries, etc.—were displayed in the centre. From Sturgeon Creek United, we borrowed "Respecting the Circle" banners. We discovered a wealth of First Nations worship materials available for use, and displayed information on residential schools.

We welcomed guests for Sunday worship. Bill Gillis, the conference staff member who co-ordinates the United Church presence at ADR hearings in Manitoba, spoke of the history of First Nations Peoples within our church. With passion he encouraged us along the healing way—for our own sake as a church and people in need of healing.

We heard Aboriginal women's voices in a powerful way in excerpts from *Bridges in Spirituality: First Nations Christian Women Tell Their Stories* (as told to Joyce Carlson & Alf Dumont, UCPH, Toronto, 1997). On the third Sunday, we welcomed Sandra Hayes-Gardiner, a mediator and consultant to share

## Residential Schools Update 2006

her story of cross-cultural bridge building—the surprises, pain, joy, and the persistent call to healing work. One church group visited the local Aboriginal Health Centre and marvelled at the healing programs available for all ages despite the constant shortage of funding.

Our last speakers, Gary Dano and Doug Ross, both Aboriginal Health Support Workers, brought to us their healing ways through music, drum, guitar, smudge, eagle feather, and story. It's a painful story they told—one we hear again and again in the ADR hearings—of grand-parents kept silent for years but now telling their stories for the sake of the children. It was long and repetitive, as stories tend to be. It was uncomfortable for many to sit and listen. Yet there was the slow recognition that as a church, in our relationship with Aboriginal people, we have already spoken and acted enough. We need now to listen—courteously, respectfully, openly—if we are to journey on this healing way.

(Thanks for this story to the Rev. Pat Wotton, minister at Churchill Park and a United Church representative at ADR hearings.)

### **UCW National Consultation**

Liaison Minister Cecile Fausak and All Native Circle Conference women Gloria Muskego and Sophia Jamieson shared in a circle for some 30 leaders of United Church Women at their National Consultation held in Pickering, Ontario, in September.

Exploring the legacy of residential schools unsettled the women's hearts and minds. It is hard to acknowledge the systemic damage caused by the IRS system and the church's role in it, as well as the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, and the ongoing harm experienced by former students, their families and communities.

### **Treasured Steering Committee Member Dies**

A funeral worship service and feast was held in Hazelton, B.C., on December 2, 2006, in honour of Charlotte Sullivan, hereditary chief among the Gitksan, faithful United Church member, and B.C. Conference staff member with B.C. Native Ministries Council. The Moderator was among hundreds who mourned.

Charlotte's influence was felt across the country as she advised the Residential Schools Steering Committee and provided leadership in First Nations circles. Quiet, full of insight, quick to laugh, gentle in her advice, humble in her leadership, Charlotte made a significant difference in The United Church of Canada.

### **Next RSCC Meeting**

The next Residential Schools Steering Committee (RSSC) meeting is Feb. 21–23, 2007, in St. Albert, Alberta. We will meet with former students at Nechi Institute/Poundmaker's Lodge, a healing centre that is the site of the former Edmonton Indian Residential School. Members of Edmonton and surrounding presbyteries are invited to meet with the RSSC at Trinity United Church in Edmonton on Feb. 22 at 7:00 p.m.

### **To Contact Us**

With questions, concerns, or comments

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