

Residential Schools UPDATE

January 2008

“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.”

(The United Church of Canada Brief to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, November 1993)

Relations with First Nations ~ Church/Government Relations ~ Settlements
Dispute Resolution ~ Ecumenical Relations

Priorities and Resources Shift to Right Relations Work

With the implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) on September 19, 2007, the financial liability of The United Church of Canada for claims arising from residential schools ended. Since our church has already surpassed its financial obligations under the agreement, we will receive a refund from the government. The Executive of the General Council (GCE) has decided that this refund, supplemented by resources from the Morrison Bequest, will be used for residential schools and right relations work.

The focus of our energies and resources will now shift to education, healing, and right relations programs including the five-year Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

This past fall, the selection committee for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reviewed over 320 nominations for three commissioners. Fifteen candidates were interviewed and recommendations were sent to the government on December 7.

After consultation with the Assembly of First Nations, the government will likely announce the appointments sometime in February.

Preliminary conversations with various groups have taken place about the launch of the commission after the commissioners are announced. In addition, the Truth and Reconciliation Roundtable, of which the United Church is a member, will develop a strategy paper on the community-based dimension of the commission’s work, as a reference for the commissioners.

In the October 2007 Speech from the Throne, the federal government made the following commitment: “Our Government recently concluded a final settlement on Indian Residential Schools and will launch a commission for truth and reconciliation. The Prime Minister, on behalf of our Government, will use this occasion to make a statement of apology to close this sad chapter in our history.” (Office of the Prime Minister, www.sft-ddt.gc.ca) The United Church is strongly supportive of the government’s commitment to a national apology and has joined with its ecumenical partners to seek a meeting with Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl to discuss this and other issues.

National Leaders Tour March 3–10

In early March, church and Aboriginal leaders will together host a series of public events in major centres across Canada. Beginning on March 3 in Ottawa and then travelling to Vancouver, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, they will be urging all Canadians to prepare for and participate in the upcoming Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In each location, there will be different events acknowledging the harms of the residential school experience and the need for healing and reconciliation.

This unique coalition of Aboriginal and church leaders illustrates their strong commitment to having the whole truth of the Indian Residential Schools experience fully revealed and clearly understood. They believe the next five years will be critical for survivors and their families, as well as for the wider public to come to a much better understanding of the impact of this tragedy today.

Independent Assessment Process

The Settlement Agreement provides for an enhanced Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process called the Independent Assessment Process (IAP). Former students may pursue a claim for sexual or serious physical abuse, including for student-on-student abuse, which was not compensable under the ADR process. As former students are more likely to be alive than former staff, it is anticipated that the number of “person of interest” hearings will increase and lengthen the process.

New adjudicators were hired in the fall and training took place in November. Residential Schools Steering Committee (RSSC) staff represented the churches on interview panels in Edmonton and Ottawa. The new Chief Adjudicator is Dan Ish, who will replace Ted Hughes. It is estimated that the IAP Secretariat will process about 12,000 claims over the next six years.

Schools Added to IRSSA

Nearly 3,000 requests have been made by former students to add 474 institutions to the Settlement Agreement. Residences can be added only where the residence was operated through a joint agreement by the federal government and a church that is a signatory to the IRSSA, and where the student was accommodated for education.

Decisions to add some schools have been made. Research and assessment is incomplete and decisions are pending for the vast majority. There are five outstanding requests related to the United Church.

Common Experience Payments

Over 82,000 applications were received in the fall for the Common Experience Payment (CEP). Government statistics about the number of CEP applications received, processed, and rejected can be found at: www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca/english/CEP_stats.html

Working Group on Missing Children

RSSC staff and the chief archivist of the United Church are participating in the Working Group on Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, initiated by the government in spring 2007 in response to concerns about children who did not return home from the schools. Archival research by the government and churches on student deaths and burials will be carried out under the auspices of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Archives held by provincial governments, universities, and child welfare agencies will also be researched.

The United Church archival holdings on residential schools will remain open and accessible during the move of Central Archives to Church House in Toronto, currently underway.

Major Right Relations Initiative

In 2000, 94 people from across the church attended a three-day Leadership Support Gathering on Reconciliation and Justice between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. In 2007, an inter-unit initiative by Aboriginal Ministries, the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit, and the Residential Schools Steering Committee created a planning team to host a second gathering to further the work of building right relations. The planning team, however, sees the need for the church to enter a deeper and more intentional process of dialogue and “walking together” than is possible in one-off conferences.

The planning team envisions a *five-year journey* during which folks from across the church, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, can “covenant together” to model and facilitate right relations. This journey, which reflects the priority identified by the GCE in May 2007 that the church address the brokenness in our relations with Aboriginal people, will parallel and complement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

A letter has been sent to each Conference inviting them to identify three Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal people to attend the first step of this journey—a conference in May 2008 in Manitoba. Participants will consider the barriers to, and the nature of, right relations, and begin to work toward the development of a network of right relations regionally in succeeding years.

Leadership Development Workshops

“The truth creates a living loss whose grief is so powerful that change is inevitable. In healing, we are always seeking the truth.” Elizabeth Hill of Six Nations spoke these words to begin her presentation at Five Oaks Centre. Some 20 leaders from Aboriginal ministries in Ontario experienced grief and healing at the last of four leadership development workshops, “Responding to the Reality of the Residential Schools Legacy as a Community,” held in

November. Hill also spoke of healing as “recovering the ability to feel and express joy, being kind and generous, communicating, and being self-disciplined.”

CEP cheques were beginning to arrive on Carry the Kettle reserve as over 25 people from Saskatchewan and Alberta gathered for the workshop held at Calling Lakes Centre in the Qu’Appelle Valley, Saskatchewan, in October. The discussion about dealing with the impact of lump-sum payments was immediately relevant.

At both workshops, the majority of survivors present had attended non-United Church residential schools. This fact serves to emphasize how much an ecumenical response to the legacy is needed. Participants shared their experiences and listened to the stories of others in a safe circle where the sense of aloneness in suffering is reduced and speaking the truth heals. (The July and October 2007 Updates have articles about the first two workshops held in Vancouver, B.C., and Beausejour, Manitoba).

The planning team will submit its final report with recommendations for follow-up to the next Steering Committee meeting, Feb. 6–8.

Edmonton Inner-City Event

Mary Trottier of Bissell Centre and the Rev. Rick Chapman of Edmonton Inner City Pastoral Ministry, having attended the “Responding to the Legacy” workshop at Calling Lakes, saw the need for inner-city workers to be more informed. On December 12, they held a one-day workshop for 30 people at All Saints Anglican Cathedral.

The day opened with prayers by an Elder. Participants then viewed the documentary *Where Are the Children?* and received information about the Settlement Agreement from Service Canada staff, a health support worker with Native Counselling Services of Alberta, and RSSC staff. Excellent ideas for preventing negative impacts when clients

receive large cheques were generated in small-group sessions. The participants appreciated the joint presence of church, government, and an Aboriginal agency.

Would your community benefit from hosting a one-day workshop like this? If so, and you need help to locate resource people and material, please contact Cecile Fausak.

Delivery of Apologies

Over the fall, the 1986 and 1998 apologies have been delivered verbally and presented as plaques in the following places:

- Curve Lake First Nation
- Saugeen First Nation
- Cape Croker First Nation
- Chief Star Blanket; Calling Lakes Centre
- Francis Sandy Theological Centre
- Five Oaks Centre

The First Nations people present at all these events received printed copies, some in Plains Cree, Assiniboine, Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Mohawk, and Oneida, as well as in English.

10th Anniversary of 1998 Apology

In October 1998, then-Moderator the Very Rev. Bill Phipps issued an apology to former residential school students, their families and communities.

Could your congregation learn more about residential schools to mark this 10th anniversary year by visiting a reserve or a Native Friendship Centre for a conversation with survivors? Or by watching a film featuring survivors? AVEL West has a great videography.

A special anniversary worship service will be posted on the United Church website in March. It could be used between May 26 and June 21 (the period between the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation, and National Aboriginal Day), or in October to mark the anniversary.

“Returning to Spirit” Goes Ecumenical

“Returning to Spirit” is a three-part residential school healing and reconciliation program that brings together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in an experiential encounter. It is highly recommended by those who have participated in it. Part 1, for Aboriginal participants, and Part 2, for non-Aboriginal church participants, use the same process. In Part 3, the two groups meet together. See the July 2007 issue of Residential Schools Update for more details.

The Roman Catholic entities who ran residential schools have developed and supported Returning to Spirit as their primary healing program. In the past, Part 2 has been attended mostly by Roman Catholic religious. Now, Gerard Pettipas, Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan, has invited other denominations to participate in a Part 2 workshop being held March 3–7, 2008, in St. Albert, Alberta.

It is hoped that about 10 people from the across the United Church will register. Approximately 300 invitations have been sent out to Conferences and GCE members. For more information about this opportunity, please contact us.

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The update is available on the website:
[www.united-church.ca/communications/
newsletters/residentialschools](http://www.united-church.ca/communications/newsletters/residentialschools)

Residential Schools UPDATE

April 2008

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“Remembering the Children”

National Leaders’ Tour, March 3–10

Aboriginal and church leaders appeared together in public events in Ottawa, Vancouver, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg in early March. They pointed to the importance and exceptional opportunity of the soon-to-be-launched Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The unique and visible presence of the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations with the Primate of the Anglican Church, the Moderators of the Presbyterian and United Churches, and Bishops and Archbishops of the Roman Catholic Church was welcomed as a hopeful sign of a new, mutual relationship.

Church leaders offered their apology for their complicity in the century-long legacy of Indian Residential Schools. Aboriginal leaders affirmed the importance for Native people to finally come to terms with this legacy. Canadians were urged to prepare for and actively participate in the five-year process of sharing the difficult truth of the Indian Residential School experience; and seeking practical ways for healing and the creation of right relations.

The theme image “Remembering the Children” served as a visible reminder that very young children were often taken great distances from their families and communities and placed in bleak and unfamiliar surroundings for long periods of time. The institutionalization, hardship, and varieties of abuse they experienced resulted in lifelong suffering for most.

Nearly 2,000 interested persons, some survivors of residential schools and/or their families, attended these events and welcomed the positive steps being taken by leaders in support of this important initiative. There was a strong message that we must now work together to alleviate the shame and pain of those who had been in the schools.

These new resources may interest you:

- *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*: a publication of essays available free from www.ahf.ca or by calling toll-free 888-725-8886
- “Remembering the Children” website: www.rememberingthechildren.ca

Five-Year “Right Relations” Vision

Planning continues and registration is underway for the Right Relations conference in Pinawa, MB, May 10–12, as the first step in a five-year, national, right relations building vision. See *Residential Schools Update*, January 2008, for more details. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal representatives from each Conference will be supported by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal elders as they explore barriers to relationship, stereotypes, and realities that foster “two solitudes,” and the nature of “right relations.” Facilitated by Faye Wakeling and Stan McKay, participants will be introduced to resource tools (e.g., *Circle and Cross*) and invited into relationship with each other and into a longer-term covenant of relationship-building in regions and congregations.

On the weekend of April 25–26, Ottawa Presbytery will hold a retreat to identify first steps in developing its own strategy for building and nurturing right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people over the next five years. The retreat will be resourced by staff from the Assembly of First Nations, the Residential Schools Steering Committee, and KAIROS.

Leadership Development Follow-up

The Planning Task Group that facilitated the four workshops “Responding to the Reality of the Legacy of Residential Schools as a Community” in 2007 presented their recommendations for follow-up to the Steering Committee in February. The entire work plan was accepted in principle, and more detailed thought is being given to timelines, funding, and staff workload. To the extent possible, the work is to be undertaken ecumenically.

The priority is on hosting five follow-up gatherings in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. The intent would be to gain a deeper understanding of healing work and how to help others, to seek ways for the church to be part of a community’s

needs assessment, and to strengthen a support network in responding to the legacy. It is hoped that five regional planning teams will be established, and that more people will be involved in addition to the original participants.

Other ground-breaking recommendations refer to a feasibility study regarding a mobile team of counsellors for remote areas; a consultation on preparing and caring for ministry personnel more fully to deal with the legacy; and a multi-unit team to investigate the training of adults and youth in Aboriginal communities to foster resiliency, positive youth development, and empowerment.

Justice and Reconciliation Fund

The Justice and Reconciliation Fund supports regional church initiatives that foster engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and that advance the church’s commitment to justice and right relations. In 2008, a total of \$75,000 is available to support projects.

As of early April, grants have been made to support ongoing work in Fort Frances to overcome racism, advocacy for fair treatment for hydro-affected Aboriginal communities in northern Manitoba, a get-together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in Prince Rupert Presbytery, and the marking of the 101st anniversary of the File Hills congregation in Saskatchewan where a residential school once existed.

The criteria for the fund and the application process can be found at: www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/relationships/fund

10th Anniversary of 1998 Apology

In October 1998, then-Moderator Bill Phipps issued an apology to former residential school students, and to their families and communities.

- **Watch for Special May Mandate**

The May 2008 issue of *Mandate* magazine on the theme “Empire and Racism” carries

several articles related to residential schools and living out our 1986 and 1998 apologies. Be sure to get a copy from the United Church Distribution Centre if you do not have a subscription.

- **Worship Service Suggestions**

Suggestions for worship are posted at www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/resources/trservice. You are encouraged to mark the 10th anniversary of the 1998 apology, and to promote the Truth and Reconciliation Commission during the period May 25–June 22 between the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation, and National Aboriginal Day; or in October, the anniversary month. Interesting “letters from First Nations” people might be read as the epistle lesson.

- **Conversation with Children**

The section of the worship service suggestions related to children provides four options. These have been printed as a flyer that is included in the spring Infopac coming to every pastoral charge.

Common Experience Payments (CEP) Reconsideration Process Available

As of April 8, 2008, the Government of Canada had received 90,552 CEP applications. The total number of applications processed is 78,986, with 62,123 payments issued. There were 16,863 applications deemed not eligible for payment, largely because the applicants had gone to schools that are not included in the Settlement Agreement.

An applicant who is not satisfied with the outcome of his/her CEP decision can apply for the Reconsideration Process. S/he must do so *within 6 months* of the date noted at the top of the CEP decision letter. If you have questions about this review process, go to www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca/faq-eng.asp and choose “Reconsideration Process” from the links at the top. A CEP Request for Reconsideration form can be found along with all the other CEP and IAP forms at www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca/index-eng.asp.

Independent Assessment Process

The Alternative Dispute Resolution and Independent Assessment Processes continue at a much-reduced pace from last year at this time. In the first three months of 2008, the United Church has only received 13 new applications, of which four are IAP applications. Twenty hearing dates were established, with five being subsequently postponed. United Church representatives have attended six hearings from January to March 2008.

“Returning to Spirit”—

Creating New Ways to Be Together

“Returning to Spirit (RTS): Residential School Healing and Reconciliation Program” is a three-part program. Part 1, for Aboriginal participants, and Part 2, for non-Aboriginal church participants, use the same process. In Part 3, the two groups meet together. See the July 2007 and January 2008 issues of *Residential Schools Update* for more details.

Five denominations, including three people from the United Church, participated in a church workshop held March 3–7, 2008, at Star of the North Retreat Centre in St. Albert, Alberta.

From March 27 to April 2, 60 church and First Nations people met at Queen’s House Retreat Centre in Saskatoon, SK, for the Part 3 Reconciliation workshop. Sue Everton with ANCC, and Cecile Fausak, RSSC staff, were enthusiastic participants, along with four other non-Roman Catholics. Although First Nations participants in past workshops and in this one were from a variety of spiritual backgrounds, the involvement of “church people” from denominations other than Roman Catholicism has added a much-welcomed dimension. On the last day, “peace, joy, tranquility, exhilaration, excitement, and gratitude” were very much present in the room. RTS defines reconciliation as “a new way of being together.” First Nations and church people can form a new creation, a

third circle. In this space, “forgiveness shows up.” The program receives ringing endorsements from everyone, and is rapidly becoming one of the key ways forward in building right relations.

Sandra Hayes-Gardiner, one of the United Church representatives to the hearing process, also attended the facilitator training program in January 2008.

The current workshop schedule is available by contacting info@returningtospirit.com. If finances are an issue, consider doing a fundraising event to sponsor both a First Nations person and a non-Aboriginal person who worked or works with First Nations peoples.

Steering Committee to Meet in Saskatchewan, June 2008

The Residential Schools Steering Committee (RSSC) will be meeting at Calling Lakes Centre June 11–13. The day of June 12 will be devoted to visiting the sites and gathering with former students of the File Hills and Round Lake Residential Schools. Interested persons from Plains, Good Spirit, Twin Valleys, and Wascana Presbyteries will also be invited to meet with the RSSC.

National Day of Healing and Reconciliation (NDHR), May 26

NDHR’s national launch site this year is in Winnipeg and Brandon. The Lance Runners Society is planning to undertake a “Canada Heal with Me” Unity Walk/Run May 22–26 from Fox Lake Cree Nation to Winnipeg and on to Brandon.

For several years, there has been a solidarity walk from Blue Quills First Nations College (formerly an IRS), St. Paul, to Saddle Lake First Nation, Alberta. The walk will take place this year again. Consider planning your own unity walk/run and getting your municipality to issue a proclamation that May 26 be observed as NDHR, following the lead of such places as Thompson, Manitoba. Go to www.ndhr.ca

for ideas for celebrating this day, and to order supplies.

Order your “no-charge” copy of *A Healing Journey for Us All* from the United Church Distribution Centre. This is a three-session study in uncovering the wounds of empire in Canada.

Learning Opportunities in Vancouver

The Interfaith Summer Institute at Simon Fraser University is presenting several programs that may be of interest in seeking a new way for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to be together.

- **June 14** Public Form: “Indigenous Worldviews on Truth and Reconciliation”; will include some dialogue with Christian views
 - **August 5–8** Course: “Decolonizing the Body and Indigenous Principles: Connecting through Creativity” with Alannah Young and Denise Nadeau
 - **August 11–15** Course: “Truth and Reconciliation: The Politics and Possibilities of Memory” with Lorena Sekwan Fontaine, Angela Contreras-Chavez, and Chief Robert Joseph
- See www.interfaithjustpeace.org for registration information.

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July 2008

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“Right Relations” Event—Pinawa

The United Church held a three-day conference in Pinawa, Manitoba, May 10–12, as the first step in a five-year national right relations building vision. Each Conference across the country was represented by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants who explored what is needed to begin to understand each other and to work toward living in harmony together on Turtle Island.

Supported by the facilitation of Stan McKay and Faye Wakeling, the wisdom and teaching of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Elders, drumming, ceremony, and worship, participants met in a large circle in a tent on the beautiful grounds of the Wilderness Edge Resort. In addition to plenary sessions, participants also met in “home groups” to get to know one another, reflect on the teachings, and discuss what could be done to further this initiative locally as we covenanted to walk together for five years.

It was a powerful event, manifesting the harmony, respect, and goodwill that is possible. Many home groups have already met back home to begin their work.

National Apology—June 11

Across the country, people heeded the call of the United Church and others who urged Canadians everywhere to stop what they were doing and witness the national apology offered to former students of residential schools and their families by Prime Minister Harper. It was a defining moment in Canadian history. You can watch the video at:

www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/rqpi/apo/pmsh-eng.asp

People gathered in churches, community centres, hotel ballrooms, and living rooms to witness the apology on television. The Residential Schools Steering Committee, which was meeting in Ottawa, sat in the visitors’ gallery in the House of Commons.

See the Moderator’s Blog: Between the Great Scenes of the Apology:

www.united-church.ca/communications/news/moderator/080616

Read the Residential Schools Steering Committee’s Reflections on an Apology:

www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/diary

Many found the apology and the responses of Aboriginal leaders very powerful.

Marilyn Carroll in Dawson Creek, B.C., wrote: “A note to let you know that the chair of the church board and I were humbled to be part of the survivors’ feast at the Nawican Friendship Centre. The event opened with prayer, smudging, watching a tape of the Prime Minister’s speech, a new drum was blessed, speeches, and of course food. It truly was a time of presence.”

Robert Wright of GoodFish Lake and Saddle Lakes United Churches on the WhiteFish Lake Reserve, Alberta, wrote: “I was invited by Councillor James Jackson Sr. to join a group of Elders at the Health Centre for a barbecue at 11:30 followed by viewing the apology on TV...When the actual session of Parliament finally began, I sat near Miles Hunter and his wife and I was interested in his response, especially when the examples of abuse were enumerated. He nodded his head vigorously and he was obviously pleased that these things were being named.”

Kathy Hogman in Edmonton, former minister at St. Andrew’s United Church in Alberni, which hosted an apology feast for the Nuuchahnulth people, wrote: “I sense ...that it was a similar feeling to that in the gym of the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council in 1997. It fuelled my passion. This is the culmination of what began in Port Alberni so long ago, and I am so very proud to be a member of the United Church. We are living proof that apologies have meaning.”

Russell Daye, from Halifax, co-chair of the Right Relations Task Group, wrote: “Accompanied by the American biblical scholar Ched Myers, I travelled to Indian Brook First Nation to join several hundred others in the community hall for a broadcast of the apology. We sat, surrounded by Micmac folks from around the Maritimes—some former residential school students, children, a young Micmac woman who works as a lawyer in Halifax. Many of those around us had made a several kilometre pilgrimage from the old site of the Shubenacadie Residential School.

“I was very concerned about the apology, knowing that a bad apology is much worse than none...After some wonderful drumming and dancing performances, the broadcast started. As soon as I saw Phil Fontaine descending the stairs beside Stephen Harper I knew it would be alright. I knew that he would speak; I knew that he and the other Aboriginal leaders present had seen the apology and had found it acceptable. The strength of my emotional response surprised me. I found myself weeping.

“Later...after witnessing the speeches by party leaders...after hearing the powerfully articulate speeches of the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit leaders...after seeing the varied responses of those around us—some were joyous and hopeful; some said ‘it’s good, but much too late’; some said ‘let’s see what actions follow those pretty words’—Ched and I walked to my car. Ched seemed consumed by emotion. Later he explained: ‘I was reminded of the women fleeing from the empty tomb at the end of Mark’s gospel. Mark says they are taken by trauma and ecstasy. I was ecstatic at the greatness of the truth-telling. I felt traumatized because I knew this could never happen in my country.’ (U.S.)”

Canada’s Apology Inspiring Others

Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas said that Canada’s apology has increased the pressure on Washington and that he thought there was a decent chance if the House of Representatives were to make a motion. (*Globe and Mail*, July 2, 2008)

The *Los Angeles Times* carried two stories on Canada’s apology quoting RSSC member Geraldine Robertson and staffer James Scott.

Uri Avery’s column, published in several places including *Desert Peace* (June 15, 2008) and *Canadian Dimension* (June 17, 2008) suggests that real peace between Israeli and Palestinian people would start with an apology.

Meeting with TRC Commissioners

On June 12, the Residential Schools Steering Committee met for an hour with Justice Harry LaForme, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and Commissioners Claudette Dumont-Smith and Jane Brewin Morley.

The commission began work on June 1, 2008. We raised with them the particular perspectives of the church and of the survivors among us.

You can “meet” the commissioners and learn more about the TRC on its website: www.trc-cvr.ca

The commissioners will take the summer to read briefing papers, meet with various stakeholders, and plan for implementing the elements of their mandate.

10th Anniversary of 1998 Apology

In October 1998, Moderator Bill Phipps offered an apology to residential school survivors, their families and their communities on behalf of the United Church.

- **Special May 2008 Mandate**

The May 2008 issue of *Mandate* magazine on the theme “Empire and Racism” carries several articles related to residential schools and living out our 1986 and 1998 apologies.

- **Worship Service Ideas**

Suggestions for worship are posted at www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/resources/trservice to mark the anniversary of the 1998 apology, and to promote the Truth and Reconciliation Commission during October. They include “letters from First Nations” that might be read as the epistle.

- **Conversation with Children**

The suggestions for the worship service related to children provide four options that could easily be expanded into summer or Sunday school sessions on “Living into Right Relations.”

Archival Research Project

At its June meeting, the Residential Schools Steering Committee approved a research project to “understand and record the history of each of the 13 residential schools with which The United Church of Canada was associated, named in the Settlement Agreement.” It will also include the Red Deer Industrial Residential School run by the Methodists, which closed in 1919.

A contract researcher will gather as full and complete a picture as possible of each school, including information about its history, students, staff, relationship to the community, and interaction with the church. The project will involve direct research in archival and other records, on-site visits, and anecdotal information acquired from former students, staff, and community and local church members.

Independent Assessment Process

The processing of claims under the Independent Assessment Process and the Alternative Dispute Resolution process continues. As of June 17, we have received 129 applications in 2008, for a total of 737. Dates have been set for 475 hearings and church representatives have attended 200. Where an alleged perpetrator or “person of interest” is identified, they can choose to have an adjudicated hearing as well. The United Church offers pastoral support over the phone, or at the hearing, if desired.

National Day of Healing and Reconciliation (NDHR)

The number of locations marking NDHR on May 26 is growing every year. In Edmonton, the highlight was a showing of the new film *Fallen Feather* at the Royal Alberta Museum. Co-producers Randy Bezeau (active at Revelstoke United) and Jannica Hoskins were on hand. The film includes interviews, some with survivors of the Kamloops IRS, and an examination of the economic and political structure of the schools. It can be obtained from many universities and libraries.

Around the Conference Meetings

The theme of Bay of Quinte Conference was "Right Relations." A panel discussion included Dave Iverson (church rep to the IAP/ADR Chief Adjudicator's Advisory Group), Doreen Oke (survivor of EIRS), Dixie Whetung, Rodney Merkley-Smith, and Bronwyn Harmon (Pinawa participants).

At Hamilton Conference, a special greeting song was offered by Melody McKellar, Principal of Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre. President Maggie McLeod from Saugeen United presided, and Stan McKay was the theological reflector. A panel including Kim Uyede-Kai (national staff for Racial and Gender Justice) and Carrie Montour of Six Nations reflected on "Towards an Intercultural Church." A field trip went to Six Nations sites, Caledonia, the Chapel of the Delaware, and Port Credit.

In B.C. Conference, the theme was "To Reconcile and Make New." The opening reflection by President Janice Young and a theme address by Brian Thorpe are at: www.bc.united-church.ca/AGM2008 Chief Robert Joseph gave an outstanding keynote urging members to participate in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process to "show that you care." RSSC staff Jamie Scott helped to facilitate a Kerygma Café process on the theme.

In London Conference, Phil Schulyer, minister on the Oneida Pastoral Charge, was thanked by the President for permission to hold the Conference on First Nations territory. Phil later spoke to the delegates about the Healing Fund.

Manitou Conference showed the film *Front Runners*, and had a panel including Pinawa participants, Lee Claus (vision keeper at Francis Sandy Centre) and the Moderator. A Sacred Fire burned during the gathering.

Many Conferences displayed the set of four poster boards about United Church involvement in residential schools and the apologies.

Learning Opportunities in Vancouver

The Interfaith Summer Institute at Simon Fraser University has two programs exploring ways for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to be together. See www.interfaithjustpeace.org for registration.

- **Aug 5–8:** "Decolonizing the Body and Indigenous Principles: Connecting through Creativity and Ceremony" with Alannah Young and Denise Nadeau. Of particular interest to service providers working with women who have experienced multiple forms of violence.
- **Aug 11–15:** "Truth and Reconciliation: The Politics and Possibilities of Memory" with Lorena Sekwan Fontaine, Angela Contreras-Chavez, and Chief Robert Joseph.

New Membership of RSSC

At its June meeting, the committee welcomed back Murray Whetung of Curve Lake, Ontario, as Honorary Elder, recognizing his peaceful and wise presence. We also welcomed Elaine Jacobs of Walpole Island, Ontario, who replaces Liz Pike representing All Native Circle Conference. Marie Dickens will replace Louisa Smith as the representative of the B.C. Native Ministries Council.

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The update is available on the website:

www.united-church.ca/communications/newsletters/residentialschools



Residential Schools Update

The United Church of Canada



L'Église Unie du Canada

"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."

*The United Church of Canada Brief to the Royal Commission
on Aboriginal Peoples (November 1993)*

October 2008

Commission Chair Justice LaForme Resigns

On October 20, 2008, Justice Harry LaForme resigned as chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The resignation has created serious concerns about the ability of the commission to accomplish the important, historic mandate given to it by the negotiating parties of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

The United Church has been in regular communication with the other parties to the Settlement Agreement. We remain deeply committed to the goals of the commission and to the importance of it for residential school survivors and for all Canadians.

In a joint statement released on October 23, the signatory churches expressed regret over the resignation of Justice LaForme while affirming their confidence in Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners Claudette Dumont-Smith and Jane Brewin Morley.

"It is critical that all the parties to the Settlement Agreement agree on a process for appointing a successor as soon as possible," said General Council Officer James Scott. The parties are currently holding meetings to negotiate a reappointment process.

Other Commission Matters

Alvin Dixon, chair of our Residential Schools Steering Committee, served as the United Church representative on the selection panel for the Survivor Committee, which will act as an advisory body to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission throughout its five-year mandate. Nearly 200 people applied for the 10 positions with good representation from across the country, except for the Maritimes. A call has gone out to Atlantic Aboriginal groups for additional candidates.

Over the summer, Aideen Nabigon, former director of Health Canada's Mental Health and Addictions division, was named as the Interim Executive Director of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Secretariat, replacing Bob Watts.

For more, see the Truth and Reconciliation Commission website at www.trc-cvr.ca.

Post-Apology Era



The Residential Schools Steering Committee on Parliament Hill, June 11, 2008 (Photo: AFN)

The Residential Schools Steering Committee takes seriously the coming of, as National Chief Phil Fontaine puts it, "the post-apology era." A month after the government's apology on June 11, speaking at the Assembly of First Nations in Quebec City, Fontaine suggested we are now in an era of post-apology and reconciliation. He asked the questions, "What do we now mean by reconciliation and what relationship should we have with the rest of Canada?"

The National Chief described the post-apology era as having four dimensions. "Each is a separate priority but they are all interrelated. They are political, economic, legal, and moral," he said. "The moral dimension of reconciliation means our relationship with the rest of Canada. There needs to be mutual respect and dialogue. We need some definition to reconciliation and respect. There is an incredible opportunity for something good for all peoples."

As we look to the 40th General Council 2009, the Residential Schools Steering Committee encourages General Council to hear from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to engage in a meaningful discussion of concrete ways in which the whole church can participate in this unique national opportunity.

The Academic Community Looks at Truth and Reconciliation

The Centre for Research on Ethics of the University of Montreal (CRÉUM) and the Centre on Values and Ethics (COVE) of Carleton University held an event Sept. 26–27 at the University of Montreal, "Breaking the Silence: An International Conference on Indian Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." Its purpose was to engage the academic community in Canada in an extended conversation about the issues concerning the commission's work planned for the next five years. National Chief Phil Fontaine and TRC Commissioners Claudette Dumont-Smith and Jane Morley spoke to participants, stressing the enormous challenges as well as the significance to Canada of this opportunity.

On October 23 at Hart House, University of Toronto, a panel presentation was held on "Toward Reconciliation: Residential Schools in the Role of Public Apology." There was a particular focus on the Prime Minister's apology of June 11 and its impact on residential school survivors and their families and communities. The Rev. Andrew Wesley, a survivor, and Lee Maracle, an outstanding writer and daughter of survivors, both spoke eloquently on the significance of apology especially as it relates to truth and reconciliation. Dr. Donald Shriver Jr. of Union Seminary in New York spoke of his own research on the meaning and impact of apologies and their potential significance to Canada. Photographic artist Keesic (an OCAD grad) also exhibited his work.

In the New Year, Jan. 21–22, 2009, there will be a winter conference at King's University College in Edmonton on the theme "Indian Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." More than 600 students will be attending along with other interested people from nearby communities.

Remembering the Children

The Aboriginal and Church Leaders' Tour held in early March 2008 helped prepare for the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in June and is now anticipating a series of initiatives in 2009. A number will occur beginning on May 26, the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation, through June 21, National Aboriginal Day. The website www.rememberingthechildren.ca will continue to provide information from this year's events as well as to carry announcements on upcoming events next year.

Update on the Film *FrontRunners*

In 1967, ten Indigenous young men were chosen to carry the torch from St. Paul, Minnesota, to Winnipeg for the Pan American Games. When the runners arrived at the stadium, they were not allowed to enter. Instead, a non-Aboriginal runner was given the honour of carrying the torch inside. Thirty-two years later, the province of Manitoba issued an official apology to the runners, nine of whom were students at residential school. *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners* explores this story, and the despair and abuse suffered in the residential school system. It is a story of survival, hope, reconciliation, and a dream for a new beginning that transcends hatred and racism.

The dramatic presentation, written by Laura Robinson and seen by many commissioners at General Council 2006, has been filmed for APTN with funding assistance from the national church and hands-on support from Winnipeg churches. It has received a variety of film awards.

The United, Presbyterian, and Anglican Churches are working together to produce a discussion guide to go with the DVD, to be available from AVEL by March 2009. Two writers, Dixie Shilling with the United Church in Curve Lake First Nation and Adele Finney of St. John's Anglican in Peterborough, have been contracted to develop the guide. They have held two fruitful focus groups so far in their communities, and will be conducting two more in the Parry Sound area.

The film on DVD may be ordered as of November 1 from the National Film Board at 1-800-267-7710 or www.nfb.ca.

Laura Robinson will be guest writer at the Edmonton Public Library in late November. She will be attending two screenings along with Bill Chippeway, one of the original runners: Nov. 18, 6 p.m. at the University of Alberta, Van Vliet Building, Room E-120; and Nov. 20, 7 p.m. at Stanley A. Milner Theatre, Edmonton Public Library downtown.

Apology Feast for Wii Haughtkm Skiik in Lax Kw'alaams

On September 20, 2008, the United Church hosted an apology feast in Lax Kw'alaams (Port Simpson) for Wii Haughtkm Skiik (Don McKay), who was a student at Edmonton IRS from 1952 to 1964 and experienced repeated sexual assaults there. The feast was one provision of his out-of-court settlement negotiated in 2005. Doug Goodwin, Executive Secretary of B.C. Conference, and Cecile Fausak, Liaison Minister: Residential Schools offered apologies to Don, to his family, and to other survivors present. Apology plaques were presented to four different groups in the community. The Government of Canada also offered an apology.

About 90 people attended, including members of each of the nine tribes in the Lax Allied Tribal Council, and members of Don's house in the Gitandoh tribe. Don was welcomed home by his



Wii Haughtkm Skiik responds to the church's apology, Sept. 20, 2008 (Photo: Doug Goodwin)

tribe. He responded very positively to the apology, saying that “the words had come closer” and he had heard everything he needed to hear from the church. Some 15 people responded with commendations for Don’s courage and expressions of support, personal acceptance of the apology, and gratitude for the actions of the church and government. Gifts, including blankets and mugs with the “Meeting of the Eagle and Dove” image (presented to the United Church in 1986 by artist Mervin Meekis), were made to Don and the witnesses. Don presented gifts of eagle feathers and cedar roses to the representatives of church and government, and to the health support workers.

Health support workers provided by the B.C. Indian Residential Schools Survivor Society were on hand for a number of days prior to the feast, holding information sessions and sharing circles in the community. As a result, it is likely that a support group will form to further community healing. Reflections on the event will appear in the “Dispatch” column of the December *Observer*.

Former Staff of Residential Schools

The Residential Schools Steering Committee recently contacted former staff of the schools, inquiring about ways in which the church could be supportive to them. A number of former staff responded and expressed interest in gathering or receiving information about the work the church is doing in response to the legacy of the residential school system. The committee is following up with those requests.

Several former staff expressed the feeling that the church has abandoned them or even denigrated their service in the schools. In a letter to the editor of *The Observer* (Oct. 2008), James Scott, General Council Officer for Residential Schools, addressed the concern.

He wrote, “Many staff worked in the schools with kindness, competence and love. They carried out a ministry on behalf of the whole church. They deserve our respect and gratitude. Most were not abusers and as a result, some children remember positive elements of the school experience. These stories need also to be told in the Truth and Reconciliation process.

“As an institution, however, we have come to see that former staff, and the church as a whole, were caught up in a system that was destructive not only for many individual students, but for Aboriginal families and communities. The impacts range from the loss of individual identity and self-worth to the breakdown of familial relationships and the loss of language and culture. The impact has been immense and overshadows the good work of the many caring staffers who worked in the schools, and the well-intentioned church policy makers who administered them, and the well-meaning congregations who raised money to support them.

“I believe that our church does stand with its former employees, groaning with them in the emerging recognition that the service which we all believed was a ministry of faithfulness in fact embodied prevailing attitudes and government policies that perpetrated a huge and tragic wrong done on the Aboriginal people of this land. For this, we apologize.”

Cemetery Site of Red Deer Industrial School, 1893–1919

A group at Sunnybrook United Church in Red Deer, Alberta, began a process in September 2005 to reclaim and recognize the cemetery attached to the former Methodist-run Red Deer Industrial School. At least 45 student deaths, due to tuberculosis and other epidemics, are recorded. It is not known whether the children were all buried at the now overgrown school cemetery on private property.

Recently, the landowner sought to sell the property to Red Brook Developments and applied for rezoning of the land and a development permit. Presentations were made at a county public hearing on October 21 to request co-operation in protecting and marking the site. Nothing can proceed until a Historic Resources Impact Assessment report is completed by a professional archaeologist for the province. The cemetery is mostly within an environmental reserve area, and the landowner possesses four pieces of grave headboards. Three members of the Sunnybrook group recently visited the site with the archaeologist, conducting a smudge and offering prayers. It is hoped that the Impact Assessment report will be prepared by the end of November, and that a meeting of all the interested parties, including representatives from various reserves from which students came, can be convened in the new year. The developers have promised their full co-operation in whatever next steps are deemed appropriate.

Prince Rupert Presbytery Intercultural Youth Leadership Event

On their arrival in Hartley Bay, B.C. (after a tumultuous four-hour ferry ride in an April blizzard), the members of Prince Rupert Presbytery, seven youth delegates, and B.C. Conference youth leaders were met by almost the entire Tshimshian village at the dock. Thanks to a grant from the Justice and Reconciliation Fund, this was a wonderful opportunity for youth to feel connected to each other and to presbyters, as well as to learn more about faith and the United Church.

Independent Assessment Process—New Website

Daniel Ish, Chief Adjudicator of the Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat, announced in September the launch of the official website on the Independent Assessment Process. For an application form and guide, a list of eligible schools, and information on hiring a lawyer, reopening an ADR claim, group IAP, the compensation framework and more, check out www.iap-pei.ca.

Contact Us

Questions, concerns, or comments? We'd like to hear from you!

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