



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)*

May 2013

An invitation to join the Idle No More Movement

There's a new spirit of cautious but determined optimism in the air, thanks to Idle No More (INM). That's the grassroots Aboriginal movement that seemed to leap into spontaneous existence late last year in response to a suite of federal government bills that INM says is swiftly and stealthily eroding both recognition of Aboriginal rights and environmental protections—not to mention the democratic process.



Participants in a New Year's Day Idle No More round dance and bridge blockade at Burleigh Falls, Ontario.

Wherever the Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools staff travel lately, we encounter United Church folks (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) who have been participating in Idle No More actions—round dances in malls, in town squares, and on bridges, letter writing, educational forums, walks, even road or railway blockades.

INM has no formalized governance structure or links with other organizations like the Assembly of First Nations. Launched by Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, and Jessica Gordon last fall, it uses social media like Facebook and Twitter as a very effective educational and organizational tool.

INM is celebratory, determinedly non-violent, and resolute in its commitment to long-term goals. Plus, it's just the latest manifestation in a half-millennium of Aboriginal resistance to colonial processes that continue to view this earth as a collection of resources to be exploited for the benefit of a few—and at the expense of the First Peoples for whom relationship with the land is central.

As Anishinaabekwe author and INM supporter Leanne Simpson has written, none of the major Canadian political parties have ever committed to work with First Nations “based on our sovereignty, nationhood and our treaties.”

Although it is a uniquely and distinctly Canadian movement, INM has also caught the attention and support of Indigenous rights activists around the world.

We encourage all interested folks to connect with the movement.

For more information:

- The official Idle No More website: www.idlenomore.ca
- A summary of the legislation that is sparking the movement, from lawyer Lorraine Land's blog post: www.oktlaw.com/blog/a-legislative-road-map-as-idle-no-more-revs-up
- Wikipedia article on Idle No More: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idle_No_More
- A great collection of backgrounders on the Montreal Presbytery website: www.montrealpresbytery.ca/?q=node/119
- Moderator Gary Patterson's video statement inviting acts of hope: www.united-church.ca/communications/news/releases/130108
- General Secretary Nora Sanders' blog: www.montrealpresbytery.ca/?q=node/196

Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence's fast gives Idle No More a boost

Just before Christmas last year, The United Church of Canada wrote to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, urging him to meet with Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence as soon as possible, so she could end her fast before Christmas.

Chief Spence had started a spiritual fast on December 11, to focus public attention on First Nations issues, support the Idle No More movement, and highlight concerns about Bill C-45.



United Church folks, including members of the Ottawa Presbytery Right Relations group, visited Victoria Island January 6 to offer their support to Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence.

“I’m willing to die for my people because the pain is too much and it’s time for the government to realize what [it’s] doing to us,” said Spence in a public statement.

She called on Harper and the Governor-General to meet with First Nations chiefs

about a nation-to-nation relationship honouring the treaties.

Our church wrote: “We state clearly and unequivocally that we stand in solidarity with Chief Spence’s statement that ‘Canada is violating the right of Aboriginal peoples to be self-determining and continues to ignore (their) constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights in their lands, waters, and resources.’” (www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/121219b)

The letter also referred to apologies of the federal government and of the church to those affected by residential schools, and noted that we both need to show by our actions that we mean it.

A large contingent of Ottawa-area United Church folk joined a KAIROS delegation on January 6 to visit Chief Spence at her tipi on Victoria Island where she was conducting her liquid-diet fast.

The Prime Minister did meet with Assembly of First Nations National Chief Atleo and others on January 11. Chief Spence ended her fast January 24.

Montreal TRC event: Residential schools were 'cultural genocide'

The residential schools were nothing less than "the use of education for cultural genocide," said former prime minister Paul Martin, speaking Friday evening at the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event held at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal, April 24–27.

"What that really means is that we've got to offer Aboriginal Canadians the best education system that it is possible to have," added Martin, who was appointed an Honorary Witness at the event, which took place on traditional territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) First Nation.

The growing importance of Honorary Witnesses in helping bring the work of the TRC before the public eye was one of the heartening signs at the Montreal gathering, the fifth of seven such national events to be held over the TRC's five-year term. Besides Martin, Éloge Butera, a survivor of the genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda, former National Hockey League player Joé Juneau, and documentary filmmaker Alanis Obamsawin, were also named in Montreal as Honorary Witnesses.

An estimated 4,000–5,000 people attended the gathering. Over 600 residential school survivors registered to participate, and 160 of them made statements about their school experiences for the commission's archives. Documenting what really happened at the schools is a central part of the TRC mandate.

One observer also welcomed signs of a growing commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation process by the federal department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (AAND). Not only did AAND Minister Bernard Valcourt attend for part of the gathering, but so did his deputy and assistant deputy ministers.

"Testimony is an important element of reconciliation," said Assistant Deputy Minister Andrew Saranchuk at the event opening. "Though we cannot experience what former residential school inmates went through, we must listen attentively to those former students, who thus become our instructors."

All parties pledge support as TRC faces time and money challenges

On November 20, 2012, after a long hiatus, the All-Parties table of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reconvened in Ottawa at the call of TRC Chair Justice Murray Sinclair.

Leaders from the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the federal government, the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and United

Churches, and legal counsel for former students, gathered with the Commissioners to hear an update of their activities and consider how best to support the TRC in the remaining months of its life.

The Commissioners said that as they consider the final 18 months of their mandate, they are increasingly concerned that there won't be enough funds or time to successfully complete their work.

After an intense but productive day, the parties and the TRC agreed to a more active partnership in working with the Commission on four key areas:

1. the national events
2. the document collection process
3. a public education strategy
4. the translation and distribution of the Commission's Final Report



Commissioner Marie Wilson

The parties created working groups for each of the first three priorities, and initiated a bilateral conversation on the Final Report between the TRC and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. They also created an All-Parties Coordinating Committee to guide the process.

The All-Parties table met again February 12, heard progress reports from the Working Groups, and agreed that a new spirit of goodwill and co-operation now mark the relationship between the parties and the Commission. Progress continued to be made at the April 8 meeting of the leaders when they discussed the recommendations arising from the Commission's Interim Report of February 2012.

Court tells government to provide complete historic record to the TRC

In January, Provincial Court Justice Stephen Goudge told the federal government it must turn over its four- to five-million archival documents on Indian Residential Schools to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

"The plain meaning of the language is straightforward," said the judge about the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement that established the Commission. "It is to provide all relevant documents to the TRC."

The ruling came after two days of December hearings in Toronto, as the TRC sought to secure these historic records that document the government's involvement in Indian Residential Schools over 120 years.

The Assembly of First Nations and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami actively supported the court challenge.

The federal government's reluctance to comply seems based on cost, which is expected to run somewhere between \$50 million and \$100 million. The files are spread among more than 20 government departments, with many additional records in Library and Archives Canada.

The TRC argued it cannot fulfill a central part of its mandate to document the history of the schools without complete access to the documents.

Music, dance, drama, and drums tell the story of “silent survivors”

Silent Survivors was a spellbinding performance of music, dancers, drama, and drums sponsored by Dance Saskatchewan and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Both First Nations and non-Aboriginal youth and adults took part in the 90-minute performance at the Broadway Theatre, Saskatoon, on March 8. The sold-out audience was also mixed.



A scene from Dance Saskatchewan's powerful residential schools production, Silent Survivors (Darrell Reine, photo)

Through the power and beauty of song, traditional dance, and creative expression, performers told how children were taken away from their families to the residential schools, and what it did to the families and children.

The audience was left in silent tears at the intermission, as the harsh reality of what happened to First Nations children unfolded. But the story ended on a high note as we saw healing take place in the body and spirit of the

warrior father whose children were ripped from their mothers' arms.

A panel discussion followed the performance with participants including First Nations Elders, youth, and a representative from The United Church of Canada (myself, as president of Saskatchewan Conference). We were tasked with hearing statements and answering any questions that came forward. Through the next hour, we heard powerful, personal stories of the residential schools.

Some of the speakers are continuing on their long journeys of healing, while others are just starting to speak out for the first time.

—Rev. Darrell Reine, President, Saskatchewan Conference

Red Deer community plans Truth and Reconciliation event for June

A community Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing and public education event at Red Deer College on June 6–7 will precede the fourth and final feast of Remembering the Children at Fort Normandeau, Alberta, June 8.

TRC Commissioner Wilton Littlechild will attend. The Métis Nation of Alberta is the primary host this year, and entertainment both evenings will showcase Métis performers.

About 2,000 Grade 4–12 students will attend at Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery and Red Deer College, funded by the Commemoration Project (managed by Project of Heart) and the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation. One of six learning centres will focus on the national IRS-rememorial, stained-glass window in the House of Commons. Another will feature Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, author of the children's book *Fatty Legs*.

Students have created Project of Heart Tiles to remember the children who died in residential school. These have been placed in the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery, along with one of the grave markers from the school, and an audiotape of members of the Remembering the Children Society telling about the recovery of the cemetery.

The planning group, chaired by Charles Wood from Saddle Lake Cree Nation, includes representatives from Ermineskin and Samson Cree Nations, Stoney Nakoda Nation, Métis Nation of Alberta, United, Anglican, and Roman Catholic Churches, City of Red Deer, Red Deer College, and Red Deer Urban Elders.

United Church congregations and presbyteries have been invited to raise funds to help survivors attend from the First Nations of Saddle Lake, Goodfish Lake, Paul, Alexander, Hobbema, and Morley, as well as Nelson House, Manitoba.

TRC Community Hearings precede Vancouver event

The Rev. Janice Young is serving as the United Church representative on the regional planning advisory group. B.C. Conference will engage a person part-time to encourage the participation of United Church members.

Prior to the national event for British Columbia in Vancouver, September 18–22, there will be four community hearings in the interior:

- May 13–14, Prince George
- May 16–18, Williams Lake
- May 28–29, Kamloops
- June 25–26, Terrace

Reconciliation Canada recognized for vision in facing social challenges

Reconciliation Canada, a year-long campaign initiated by Chief Bobby Joseph and Karen Joseph, is conducting dialogue circles throughout British Columbia until this September. For more information, see www.reconciliationcanada.ca.

Tides Canada recently honoured Reconciliation Canada as one of the nation's top ten "most innovative and forward-thinking projects and organizations, demonstrating outstanding leadership, vision and impact in addressing pressing environmental and social challenges."

This dynamic team is planning a Canoe Gathering in Vancouver on September 17 from Kits Point to the Olympic Village along False Creek, to highlight traditional ceremonies and welcome all Nations to Coast Salish lands for the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission event.

Reconciliation Canada is also organizing a Walk for Reconciliation on September 22 following the TRC National Event, and hopes to bring 50,000 people from all of Canada's many cultures together in shared commitment to reconciliation. The United Church has provided funding to help support these efforts.

Okanagan Presbytery addresses residential schools history

Kamloops-Okanagan Presbytery spent five hours in February studying the residential school history and legacy, and the church's role and response.

Former Moderator Marion Best and the Rev. Kathy Hogman (minister at St. Andrew's United Church in Port Alberni, which hosted an apology feast for the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations in 1997) spoke about steps on the journey of truth-sharing, healing, and reconciliation.

The presbytery also viewed *The Fallen Feather*, a film that contains interviews with many former students of the Kamloops Indian Residential School.

Churches prepare as Truth and Reconciliation comes to Alberta

The seventh and final TRC National Event will be held at the Edmonton Shaw Conference Centre, March 27–30, 2014.

A number of advance community hearings will be held throughout the province of Alberta this summer (nine months before the main event). The schedule is as follows:

- June 6–8, Red Deer College and Fort Normandeau
- June 18–19, Slave Lake
- July 3–4, High Level
- July 24–25, Hobbema
- July 30–31, Calgary

Area churches and Aboriginal groups are working diligently to mobilize the Indigenous and ecumenical community to participate in these hearings.

First off the mark were the Native Counselling Services of Alberta and Resolution Health Support Workers, who convened Healing Dialogues March 12–13 in Edmonton, a conference with time for private statement gathering.

The Social Justice Institute, an Edmonton ecumenical body that holds annual spring conferences on various social issues, focused on the TRC at an April 12 gathering at Trinity Lutheran Church.

Hard-won hearings begin on social services bias against on-reserve Aboriginal children

After a six-year legal fight waged by a prominent Aboriginal-children's advocacy group and the Assembly of First Nations against the federal government, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal is finally hearing a case about the welfare of on-reserve Aboriginal children.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (FNCFCS) filed a human rights complaint in 2007 asserting that federally funded on-reserve child-welfare services were discriminatory. They are funded at 22 percent lower levels per child than for other children.



Cindy Blackstock, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society

On-reserve children have less programming and lower-quality services, and are taken into care faster and more often than off-reserve children.

The FNCFCS and the AFN filed the complaint through the Canadian Human Rights Commission to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. But the tribunal dismissed the case in 2011, after the government argued against comparing federal and provincial funding. So the Caring Society and the AFN filed a lawsuit and, on April 18, 2012, the Federal Court ruled the tribunal was wrong to dismiss the application and ordered it back to business. The federal government appealed—and lost.

FNCFCS head Dr. Cindy Blackstock says Indigenous children make up just 5 percent of Canada's overall child population, but 30 to 40 percent of those in foster care. Recent studies have shown that the number of Aboriginal children in foster care currently is greater than the number brought into Canada's residential schools system in any year during their 150 years of operations.

"It remains unfortunate that the federal government continues to battle us in court on a fundamental issue of justice and equity for First Nations children," said AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo.

The Canadian government has spent about \$3 million trying to have the case dismissed. On March 11, it lost yet another court appeal. Meanwhile, the hard-won hearings started February 25, 2013, and resumed April 2. They will run a total of 14 weeks, until the summer.

Contact us: irs@united-church.ca

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

James Scott
General Council Officer:
Residential Schools
1-800-268-3781 ext. 2032

John Bird (newsletter editor)
Program Coordinator:
Indigenous Justice & Right Relations
jbird@united-church.ca
1-800-268-3781 ext. 4045

Cecile Fausak
Liaison Minister: Residential Schools
780-676-0562 office cell (AB-based)

David MacDonald
Special Advisor
416-686-5449

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Momentum Building for the Vancouver National TRC Event

When: Sept. 18-21, 2013

Where: Pacific National
Exhibition, Vancouver, BC

Cost: Open to everyone. Free.



We all need honesty to heal ourselves and our relationships. For centuries, our settler society has lied to itself, through our educational, religious, and governmental institutions, about our intentions towards Indigenous peoples and their land.

It's fitting, therefore, that **Honesty** is the theme of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada's sixth National Event in Vancouver.

For over 100 years, thousands of Aboriginal children were sent to residential schools where they were stripped of their language, cultural identity, and traditions. Five of the 14 schools the United Church operated were in British Columbia, at Port Alberni, Ahousaht, Coqualeetza, Kitimaat, and Port Simpson. We said our intentions were honorable and "Christian"—to help the Aboriginal people. But we were lying to ourselves, as we supported government efforts to assimilate the people and gain clear access to their land. The result has been a tremendous amount of trauma and ongoing suffering.

These National TRC Events offer a wonderful opportunity for all Canadians to begin, or continue, to learn the truth about the legacy of the Indian Residential School system, and to engage in a dialogue of mutual healing and reconciliation.

Come and listen to the stories of former students, share your truth about the schools and their legacy, witness the resilience and resurgence of Aboriginal cultures, and participate in the Reconciliation Canada walk in downtown Vancouver on September 22. Be part of the healing.

If you can't attend the event personally, many of the proceedings will be webcast, and archived, on the TRC website (www.trc.ca).

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Namwayut—We Are All One Is the Theme for Reconciliation Canada

Operating under the banner **Namwayut—We Are All One**, a BC-based organization called Reconciliation Canada is supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada by encouraging stronger and deeper engagement in the Vancouver event by all peoples in British Columbia. A charitable project, founded by Hereditary Chief Dr. Robert Joseph of the Gwawaenuk First Nation, the organization is helping find and create a new way forward.

Reconciliation Week Events

- **September 16**—Lighting the Flame of Reconciliation
A sacred fire will be lit to symbolize the commencement of Reconciliation Week proclaimed by the City of Vancouver.
- **September 17**—All Nations Canoe Gathering
Kits Point to the Olympic Village. People-powered craft will join traditional canoes in a welcome ceremony to Coast Salish lands.
- **September 22**—Walk for Reconciliation, and A New Way Forward Ceremony
Vancouver Public Library to Creekside Park. Bringing Canada's many cultures to walk a path together in a shared commitment to reconciliation.

From September 16 to 22, Reconciliation Canada will host three milestone events during what the City of Vancouver has proclaimed as Reconciliation Week. These events (surrounding the September 18-21 national TRC event) will launch a new process of community-building and encourage wider public engagement in reconciliation.

Moving Past Blame and Shame: Preparing for Edmonton National TRC

Edmonton's ecumenical Social Justice Institute hosted over 100 people, April 12, at Trinity Lutheran Church for a luncheon symposium to encourage clergy and lay leader participation in this summer's Alberta community TRC hearings and the Edmonton National TRC Event next March. The theme: *Why now? Why my church? Resourcing for Reconciliation*.



The TRC's Marie Wilson

TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson urged people to "get honest" about something we have avoided talking about—"massive prisons for little children"—but which "has left tremendous dysfunction." We have to move beyond blame and shame to forge new relationships, she said.

Terry LeBlanc, Founding Chair and Director of the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies, talked about colonization and decolonizing. Resolution Health Support Workers facilitated table conversations on what could be done in congregations to learn about this horrific history, and to inspire reconciliation through our common richness and goodness.

Each of the national events has carried the theme of one of the seven sacred teachings. The theme for the final event in Edmonton is **Wisdom**. As the United Church rep to the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) organizing the event, Debbie Hubbard, from Trinity United, Edmonton, is working to raise interest throughout Alberta and Northwest Conference. In coming months, the Conference's Living into Right Relations group will address each of the nine presbyteries, and offer a special worship service on Wisdom.

Church Listening Circles Foster Reconciliation in Hobbema, Red Deer

The churches tried something new at recent TRC Community Hearings in Red Deer and Maskwacis (Hobbema). Recognizing the healing power and safety of a sharing circle, the planning groups invited each denomination to designate a representative to sit in a circle with those who wanted to make public statements directly to the

Not once today nor in any other gathering have I heard these words: "forgiveness is impossible."

I heard today: "Forgiveness is possible but it's really, really hard." "Forgiveness is possible and I have forgiven." Or, "Forgiveness is possible, I'm not quite there yet, but I'm working on it."

And I did not hear today, or in any hearing I have ever been to: "It's hopeless."

I heard examples of hope and I heard the words, "I have hope," and I heard people describing things that give others hope because they told of either their own transformation or the transformation of family members.

—TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson

churches. Past Moderator Bill Phipps joined two circles in Red Deer, and national Residential Schools Liaison Minister Cecile Fausak took part in two in Maskwacis.

Six to eight survivors or descendants spoke of their spiritual confusion, and questioned why "servants of God" acted as they had in the name of God. They told of their journeys to reconnect with the Creator, and to know themselves as spiritual beings, of their struggles to forgive, of reclaiming their

traditional spiritual practices, and of how sexual and physical abuse was also spiritual abuse.

Thank you to Lorne Greene, a residential school survivor and Maskwacis Resolution Health Support Worker, for moderating all four circles. After hearing Sister Lucille of the Sisters of Assumption speak of teaching in residential schools and parishes in Onion Lake and Ermineskin, Lorne said: "I thought the Roman Catholic Church was like a stone, not caring. Today you have put a human face on the institution, and I think I can forgive the Roman Catholic Church."

Red Deer Community TRC Hearing and Feast—June 6–8

Over 750 regional Grade 4–11 students learned about residential schools at the Red Deer TRC hearing—one of the best responses to education day so far. The blanket exercise, films, a tour of the Red Deer museum, and a variety of presentations kept students fully engaged, and teachers told organizer Charlene Bearhead it was one of the best "field trips" they'd ever taken.

Commission Chair Justice Murray Sinclair, Eugene Arcand, and Gordon Williams, of the TRC Survivors Advisory Committee, presided for the TRC. Red Deer Mayor Morris Flewwelling and Uta Fox were Honorary Witnesses.

Each day featured a Forum on Reconciliation with church and society, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. Speakers



The Rev. Nelson Hart, from Nelson House, Manitoba, wrote his private statement to the TRC in Cree syllabics. Here, Darlene Auger checks her translation with him.

addressed the questions: "What does reconciliation mean to me?" and "What steps will I take when I leave this place?" They also offered examples of steps to take, including teaching, speaking, writing and sharing stories and photos, following First Nations people in caring for the earth, and supporting Idle No More.

Red Deer College donated its facilities, and faculty who dropped in to listen said the experience sensitized them to the realities of Aboriginal college students and to gaps in their courses.

About 750 people in 16 countries watched the event on live streaming.

Releasing the children's spirits

First Nations leaders also held special pipe ceremonies and feasts to release the spirits of children who had died at the Red Deer School: at the unmarked school cemetery on private land beside Sylvan Creek, where the Rev. Nelson Hart remembered at least two of his ancestors buried there; in the Michener Hill cemetery where four students who died in the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic are buried; and at Fort Normandeau where the women of Saddle Lake Cree Nation prepared a feast augmented with squares and cupcakes supplied by Red Deer Presbytery bakers. Six descendants read the names of over 325 children who attended the Red Deer Industrial School and an honour song was offered.

A stone block from the Red Deer Industrial School building and a brick from the boys' building were presented to Rosy Steinhauer, who is collecting items for the art installation, *Witness Blanket: Pieces of History*.

Justice Sinclair gave an inspiring speech on the recovery of Indigenous identity, and told the story of "The Ugly Duckling" (which he regularly shares with his granddaughter), reminding us that each person needs a supportive environment to live out his or her beauty.

Among the many generous contributions to make the event successful, United Church congregations raised over \$5,000 for survivors' meals and accommodation.

Local Minister Bears Witness at the TRC Hearing in Maskwacis

I bore witness last week. I attended the Truth and Reconciliation Regional Hearing last Wednesday and Thursday at Ermineskin Junior Senior High School, Maskwacis. I was not just there to observe, but to witness, as individuals made public statements about their experiences and perspective on residential, or boarding schools.

As TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson, who received these statements with immense compassion, explained it, I was part of the human blanket of support that was wrapped around each person addressing the Commission.

Last week was the first time I completely understood that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is not a product of our federal government. Rather, it is one of five parts of the settlement of Canada's largest class-action court case—when survivors of residential schools took the government to court. It was settled out of court, which meant that unless the settlement included creation of the TRC, there would be no public record of what happened to the 150,000 children who attended those schools over 150 years—or the 4,000 children who died while attending residential school.

It is the first time in the world that victims have caused a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be formed, and the first time that one has focused on the injury to children. Testimonies were all filmed, and everything the Commission hears will be archived at the University of Manitoba so the horror of the residential schools can never be denied.

Some people think these hearings are only for Canada's Indigenous peoples. But the residential schools are part of our shared Canadian history. Churches ran the schools. Every attempt was made to Christianize the children. They were told "you have to

become Christian—you'll never get to heaven if you don't." I found it sad and painful to hear more than one person say that "it's hard for me to go to church anymore."

Christianity is a religion of reconciliation. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:18)

A fourth generation survivor of the Ermineskin Indian Residential School, Marilyn Buffalo, was unequivocal in telling the Commission: Churches have a moral and spiritual obligation to help us rebuild the Cree Nation at Maskwacis. I ask what can the churches in our area do toward this end?

—The Rev. Beatrix Schirner, Ponoka United Church, Alberta

Marie Wilson Says Staffer's 'Regret' Is a First for Her

At TRC hearings in Slave Lake, Alberta, June 18-19, former residential school staffer Francois Preveaux described how he had whipped a boy one day. He recognized he had "hurt that boy, and hurt himself at the same time." He knows now that the boy was deeply emotionally troubled and was one who appeared as the "walking dead" who came out of periods spent in the administrator's office.

Commissioner Marie Wilson told the audience of about 50, that in all the hearings she had attended, she'd never before heard a school staff person express deep regret in a public statement for a wrong they had done during their employment.

Wetaskawin Mayor Recognizes You Can't Just 'Get Over It'

In the new Ermineskin Junior-Senior High School built on the grounds of the former Ermineskin Residential School, Elder Harry Watchmaker opened the July 25 hearing with a song for understanding. Neighbouring Wetaskiwin mayor and retired public school teacher Bill Elliott told the audience he realized survivors are not going to "get over it"—his war-veteran father still suffers flashbacks after 50 years.

Ermineskin Residential School survivor Lorne Greene closed the day by reciting a list of 49 classmates, most of whom had suffered tragic deaths. Then he made three recommendations for reconciliation: 1) repatriation of artifacts and sacred bundles 2) implementation of Indigenous restorative justice 3) use of Indigenous methods of recovery. You can read a great story of how people like Greene and Elliott are creating understanding between their communities at:

www.edmontonjournal.com/Signs+appear+improving+relations+between+Hobbema+Wetaskiwin/8693972/story.html.

The United Church Justice and Reconciliation Fund provided a \$10,000 grant to the May 16 "Building Bridges" event.

Mary Moonias, of nearby Louis Bull First Nation, and the first survivor to receive her Common Experience Payment, was a gracious Honorary Witness, as was Roger Epp, author of the popular book *We are All Treaty People*. Settler people, he said, must challenge the notions that nothing was here when settlers came, that "we" made



Honorary Witness Mary Moonias (left) and TRC staffer Anne Wildcat watch opening ceremonies.

something out of it, or that “our” civilization is superior. We have a “settler problem,” not an “Indian problem.” While the federal apology was important, Epp believes it is more important that neighbours themselves take on the work of reconciliation and “re-membering.”

A powerful adaptation of his comments can be found here in the *Edmonton Journal*: www.edmontonjournal.com/Opinion+After+years+residential+school+abuse+reason+hope/8757183/story.html

***Gently Whispering the Circle Back* Film Premieres at Dreamspeakers**

Beth Wishart-MacKenzie, daughter of United Church minister the Rev. Vern Wishart, premiered her new film, *Gently Whispering the Circle Back*, at Edmonton’s Dreamspeakers Film Festival, June 1. She also showed it to appreciative audiences during the Red Deer and Hobbema TRC Community hearings, followed by discussion.

The film takes its title from the poem *Reconciliation* by Rebecka Tabobondung, and explores the journey of healing in a people wounded by the Canadian Indian



Residential School system. With dignity and deep sincerity, survivors—including the recently deceased Elder George Brereton, who attended Edmonton Residential School—and the children of survivors share their personal stories.

Viewers become part of a “healing circle” as participants speak of their recovery of tradition, language, ceremony, and personal dignity. Their stories move us to look inward at our own participation in the ongoing pain of the Indigenous peoples, and inspire us to join the circle of healing for the benefit of all.

Gently Whispering the Circle Back is a celebration of Indigenous spirituality and practice and its power to transform the lives of individuals and communities.

To contact the producer, e-mail: bwishmac@gmail.com.

Repentance Meets Forgiveness in Terrace, BC, June 24–25

Commissioner Marie Wilson accepted the talking stick at the grand entry at Kitsumkalum First Nation Hall near Terrace, then emcee Arlene Roberts opened the day of TRC hearings by leading a group in singing the Paddle Healing Song.

“Today we write our own history,” she said, before Elder Louisa Smith invited the audience of about 65 people to “make the paddle healing song our anthem. The canoe is a big one and everyone can come aboard for healing . . . with the Creator at the helm.”

Local United Church minister the Rev. Debbie Bentham encouraged United Church members and ministers to attend as witnesses—often the only non-Aboriginal people in the room. Knox United, Terrace, contributed coffee.

Many survivors of United Church schools in Alberni and Edmonton (including participants in the Blackwater case) live in the area, so Cecile Fausak, national Residential Schools Liaison Minister, attended. She was honoured to sit with Alberni survivor Louisa Smith as Louisa made her public statement.



Louisa Smith assists with the cedar-branch brushing of health support workers and TRC staff at the beginning of the Terrace hearings.

Cecile offered her own public apology on behalf of the United Church: “Every time I hear another story, my heart is just broken,” she said. “I have to deal with a lot of anger towards my ancestors. I don’t know how anybody could treat children in the way we have heard,” especially as followers of “a teacher like Jesus. I just want to say how truly sorry we are. It is our commitment that we walk together in healing and reconciliation, in seeking justice.

“It’s going to be an ongoing process. We’re going to make mistakes. We’re going to trip up again. And we’re going to have to say we’re sorry again. But I think that it’s a living commitment to never again perpetrate these kinds of racist policies.”

Louisa Smith, a former member of the United Church Residential Schools Steering Committee, responded by saying

she had forgiven the United Church and wished to shake the hand of each of the United Church folk standing in solidarity at the front of the room. She invited others to do so as well if they felt so moved, and about 20 survivors came forward. It was a stunning, grace-filled moment.

“This is an example of reconciliation—when repentance meets forgiveness,” said Louisa, quoting Marie Fortune. “We saw and heard Cecile talking about their repentance, even though they weren’t a part of the atrocities that we experienced.” But “they have stepped forward to take part in the healing process of the residential schools legacy.

“In order for us to heal our spirit, we work through and empty out—as we’ve been doing since yesterday—and we do it throughout our lives, to get rid of that trauma inside of ourselves, to the point where we acknowledge our own spiritual nature. And when we come to that place of spirit inside of us, we’re able to see more clearly where our path is going to take us.”

Later, survivor William Abraham said that for him “reconciliation means people who come here and listen.” He also thanked United Church members for their presence.

Abuse Claims Continue to Be Heard, New DVD Will Help Explain the Process

As of July 10, 2013, the United Church had received 2,771 Independent Assessment Process (IAP) applications alleging physical and sexual abuse at our 14 schools. Three hundred of those were received in the last seven months.

Over 1,900 adjudicated hearings have been arranged since 2005—over 200 in the last seven months. We have attended less than 10 hearings so far in 2013; we always make it known that we are willing and available, but only attend if the former student desires it.

In Saskatchewan Conference, we are grateful that two new representatives have attended their first hearings: the Rev. Dave Moors and Ms. Jordan Cantwell, DM. The Rev. Peter and Elsie Douglas have “retired” from the role, and we give thanks for their faithful ministry as ambassadors of reconciliation.

The IAP Secretariat has hired Bearpaw Media to produce a DVD to help explain to claimants how the adjudicated hearing process works. For the production, Bearpaw interviewed Cecile Fausak about the role of the Protestant churches at hearings. The DVD will launch at the Vancouver National TRC Event in mid-September. We hope it will encourage claimants who feel they want to have a church representative attend their hearing as a caring witness and to offer a personal apology.

Government and Churches Colluded in 'Nutritional Experiments' on Residential Schools Students

Canadians were justifiably horrified in July by news reports about a study showing that federal government scientists had conducted surreptitious nutritional experiments on residential schools students between 1942 and 1952.

Ian Mosby, who authored the study, concluded that "a whole range of experts exploited their 'discovery' of malnutrition in Aboriginal communities and residential schools to further their own professional and political interests rather than to address the root causes of these problems." The experiments were an abuse of power based on patronizing and dehumanizing colonial attitudes of profound disrespect for Aboriginal peoples, many of whom may still be suffering their effects to this day.

Many Idle No More supporters, including members of The United Church of Canada, attended hastily called rallies in response to the news, under the theme National Day of Prayer: Honour the Apology. Speaking in Peterborough, Ont., Aboriginal Justice and Right Relations coordinator John Bird, said: "Whenever I think I've heard the worst possible thing about residential schools, I hear something else that is even worse. The residential school system is an unbelievable example of our arrogance and brutality, and I am so sorry for that."

The United Church also issued a statement on July 31, calling the reports "a tragic reminder that paternalistic and racist attitudes, common in Canadian society, pervaded even efforts to study and improve public health. . . . Sadly, such attitudes continue to exist today. We believe that such painful truth-telling and an acceptance of responsibility are necessary steps on a journey to a renewed relationship of justice and respect."

You can read the entire text of the July 31 statement on the United Church website: www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/130731

Contact us: irs@united-church.ca

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

James Scott
General Council Officer:
Residential Schools
1-800-268-3781 ext. 2032

John Bird (newsletter editor)
Program Coordinator:
Aboriginal Justice & Right Relations
1-800-268-3781 ext. 4045

Cecile Fausak
Liaison Minister: Residential Schools
780-676-0562 office cell (AB-based)

David MacDonald
Special Advisor
416-686-5449

This update is available on the United Church website:
www.united-church.ca/communications/newsletters/residential-schools-update

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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)

December 2013

Vancouver National Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Event the Largest Yet, with Tens of Thousands Joining Reconciliation Walk

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's sixth national event, held in Vancouver last September 18–21, was the largest TRC gathering yet. Some 2,000 survivors were present, with over 10,000 people attending on the opening day. Five to six thousand students from local high schools participated in the education day, and several universities cancelled classes so students could attend.

United Church support and participation, led by the Rev. Janice Young, and in conjunction with Ecumenical Advocates, was strong in every part of the event,



Residential school survivor Marie Dickens shares the "birthday card" she received at the Vancouver TRC, while United Church Moderator Gary Paterson watches TRC proceedings.

from volunteers in the Churches

Listening Area to offering an Expression of Reconciliation to knitting prayer shawls and providing Birthday cupcakes. Sunday, September 22, saw a full house at a powerful worship service at St. Andrews-Wesley United where the Moderator preached on the "fountain of tears" he had witnessed the previous three days. The congregation then joined an estimated 70,000 people on the Reconciliation Walk through the downtown streets of Vancouver, organized by Reconciliation Canada.

Three blogs by the Moderator on the event can be found at www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/trc, and a short reflection by James Scott ("Reflection on the B.C. Truth and Reconciliation Event"). A video of the worship service is at <http://youtu.be/KneMDPfgzLw>.



TRC Head Murray Sinclair (left) joined Commissioner Marie Wilson, BC Conference President Jenny Carter, BC Native Ministries co-chair Jim White, and TRC Survivors Advisory Committee members Madeleine Basile and Eugene Arcand, as BC Conference offered an Expression of Reconciliation.

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Sharing in "Tears of Healing" at the Vancouver TRC

At the Truth and Reconciliation event held in Vancouver, I was honoured to be one who listened. A few of us were asked to meet one on one with any Residential School Survivors who might want to tell their story specifically to a church representative and, if they so desired, hear an apology.

I met for two hours with a brother and sister who had been forced to attend the Alberni Residential School. They were joined by her daughter and his daughter, so there were five of us sitting closely in a circle. It was the most intense listening I've done in a long while.

Each in turn told their story, and, though different, each of their four stories was utterly heartbreaking. The two daughters had never been to a residential school, but their lives were completely changed by the fact that their parents had been forced to go there, leaving devastating effects. It was so very natural for me to respond with the most sincere apology and, when appropriate, with words of support and assurance. Rivers of tears flowed, and as the brother said: "These are tears of healing."

Through it all, two of the women wore a prayer shawl, one draped around her shoulders, another folded on her lap. We first met outside the listening area, where a round table was beautifully laden with prayer shawls lovingly made by different congregations. I asked if they might like a prayer shawl. They said they thought they would. We walked around the table, reviewing the shawls of different colours and sizes, until they found the one that most suited them. I took the shawl in both hands and respectfully offered it to them, explaining how the shawls had been knitted with prayer and blessed by a congregation. They were touched, and I believe the gift of a prayer shawl helped crack open the door for truth to be told.

In that exchange, I believe some degree of healing happened. I believe important things were said and heard. I believe some small degree of reconciliation happened right there in that listening tent. It was for me holy ground, and I am grateful that the healing work of the Spirit could be facilitated by the gift of a prayer shawl.

—Dan Chambers, BC Conference

Powerful Confrontation and Healing in Churches Listening Circles

"I hate you church people! I hate what you did to me in residential school. All the abuse. You destroyed my life, and I don't really know whether you care. Are you just pretending? Sitting there nodding but saying nothing? I don't know what to believe anymore!"

These strong sentiments of deep pain and anger give but a glimpse into the profound damage and brokenness wrought by the Indian Residential Schools system on former students, their children, and their children's children. They were expressed by a former student in the Churches Listening Circle at the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Event in Vancouver, and they remind me how very much farther we have to travel on the road to reconciliation.

Other survivors were able to speak about their long healing journey, still not complete, and their hope that the church is doing some healing of its own. There were prayers and apologies and the gift of prayer shawls for those who would accept them. It was a step, a face-to-face conversation about this horrid part of our history.

In the worship service on Sunday, September 22, at St. Andrews-Wesley in Vancouver, prior to the Reconciliation Walk through the downtown, Moderator Gary

Paterson referred to the TRC experience as witnessing a “Fountain of Tears.” It was an apt title for an experience that first calls us to face the pain before we can glimpse the hope that we can yet build relationships of respect and reconciliation.

Tears are God’s healing gift, too.

—James Scott, General Council Officer, Residential Schools



Strong words, tears—and movement toward healing—at the Churches Listening Circle, Vancouver TRC

Alberta prepares for the Seventh National Event, March 27–30, 2014

The seventh—and final—national Truth and Reconciliation Commission event will be held at the Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton, March 27–30. It’s your last chance to experience the powerful, life-changing healing that these events can offer, to folks from both sides of the residential schools experience. If you can, please do take advantage of this opportunity.

Debbie Hubbard represents the United Church on the event’s Regional Advisory Committee, which is responsible for local

connections. It also has two subcommittees—Culture and Programming (United Church represented by Ruth Lumax, Wetaskiwin); and Logistics and Planning (Theresa Wynn, Southminster-Steinhauer United Church, Edmonton). These three are playing key roles in promoting participation in the TRC in the Alberta church.

No Shame in Tears, or in Anger

What I experienced in Vancouver was a gathering that created space for truth telling. There was intentional and reliable care for those who were sharing very personal, painful, hopeful and love-filled story. Each story-teller was affirmed: “Yes, we believe you.” And time was given to reflect back to the speakers their wisdom and courage. The environment supported all—even those who witnessed. There was no shame in tears, or in anger.

There was a strong sense of community...in part, it was achieved by honouring the land, its people and the spiritual gifts that were at the heart of the TRC event... I witnessed also the love and courage needed to speak out against causing any further harm to each other.

—Maggie McLeod, Executive Minister, Aboriginal Ministries Circle

Workshop Focuses on Using Resources to Prepare for TRC Event

On November 30, the Social Justice Institute in Edmonton hosted its second workshop to help prepare for the national event. Engaging the Churches was held at King's University College, and the emphasis this time was on using various resources to educate about how the residential school system was a key tool of colonialism, as well as to facilitate conversation and action about reconciliation in congregations.

These videos were highlighted:

- *Where Are the Children?* (www.legacyofhope.ca/projects/where-are-the-children/video) A 20-minute historical overview of the establishment and operation of the Indian Residential School system.
- The Mennonite church has a playlist on Indigenous Relations (www.youtube.com/user/mennonitechurchca), which includes a video about the experience of attending the Montreal national TRC event.
- *Justice for Aboriginal Peoples—It's Time*. A great six-minute video by the Public Service Alliance of Canada responding to the question: "Why don't you people just get over it?" (<http://youtu.be/r5DrXZUlinU>).

Each of the nine presbyteries in ABNW Conference have been supplied with a resource package and suggestions, to use for education and discussion at one of their presbytery meetings between now and March. Many are making their plans now. It's a good time to get on board.

This follows on the heels of a presentation about the TRC national event at the early November ABNW Conference-wide, mid-triennium meeting held in Red Deer, as well as a Blanket Exercise workshop, and open space time on Emerging Aboriginal Issues, and Truth and Reconciliation. A show of hands indicated that 30-40 people had already attended a TRC hearing, and read at least one essay in the book *Speaking my Truth* (free from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, www.ahf.ca).

Worship resources for Growing in Wisdom Sunday on February 2 will be circulated early in January 2014. Congregations are invited to reflect on this one of seven sacred teachings, which is the theme for the seventh national event, and to hold "wisdom circles" in the weeks thereafter. The beaver is the symbol of wisdom.

Lethbridge and Calgary: The TRC's Last Community Hearings

Alberta's massive spring floods postponed community TRC hearings scheduled for Lethbridge and Calgary until October 9–10 and November 4–5, respectively. These were the last of the TRC's community hearings before the final national event in Edmonton, March 27–30.

George Takashima, a retired lay pastoral minister from the Japanese United Church in Lethbridge, was invited by hosts the Blood Tribe Department of Health to join the Lethbridge planning committee. He was pleased that about 20 United Church members attended the event, and many "had their eyes opened" and offered positive feedback.

George also made a public statement concerning his perspective as a young man from a United Church background who taught for one year in the Anglican school at Fort Albany, Ontario. You can listen to archived livestreaming on the TRC video labelled D2P1, at <http://livestre.am/4FKHS>. George's testimony starts at about 1:08:45, but of course, we invite you to watch it all.

A week before the hearings in Calgary, George Calliou, director of the hosting Calgary Aboriginal Friendship Centre, asked for help covering the costs of lunches and coffee breaks for about 200 people. Calgary Presbytery responded with \$4,300 originally earmarked for a youth trip to Mexico that never happened. What better place to

redirect the funds. Other congregations in Calgary and Foothills Presbytery raised further funds, which brought the total close to \$5,000.

Over two days, about 35 United Church members were faithful witnesses to the proceedings with the Commissioners, or in a sharing circle conducted by Elder Casey Eaglespeaker. Lee Spice, ministering with Scarboro United Church, offered her public statement in memory of her father who attended residential school in the Yukon.

A group speaking on behalf of the Alberta College of Social Workers in the child welfare system offered an apology and made commitments. Both statements can be heard during D2P4: <http://livestre.am/4FM7d> (November 5—second or third last testimony).

In the evening of November 5, Glen Lowry, co-editor of the book *Speaking My Truth*, and two contributors, Drew Hayden Taylor and Roy Miki, were guests of the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, the Calgary Police Service, and University of Calgary Faculty of Arts Interdisciplinary Programs. *Speaking My Truth* is a collection of stories on the experiences and legacies of residential school survivors. Drew offered thoughts on the role of humour in healing, and Roy drew parallels to the need for apology and redress with Japanese internment camps survivors and descendants. Published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and offered for free to the public, *Speaking My Truth* is rapidly becoming a part of the dialogue on reconciliation in Canada. You can order it for your book club, Lenten series, or presbytery members: www.ahf.ca.

Living into Right Relations Work Continues, But without Task Group

More than two dozen participants gathered in Winnipeg in November for the last meeting of the national Living into Right Relations task group. But the end of the five-year mandate for the LIRR group (which has reported to both the Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools Committee and the Aboriginal Ministries Council) does not mean an end to the work.

The meeting participants, which in addition to the task group members, included LIRR Home Group members from some of the more active Conferences, plus other guests, left the event more determined than ever to continue living into right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in whatever ways they can in their local areas.

The staff and members of the Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools Committee and Aboriginal Ministries Council will also continue offering support to the ongoing Home Groups network, as well as guidance to the national church.

Five themes emerged in the LIRR meeting that folks clearly want to make sure get continued or heightened attention: 1) youth and young adults; 2) healing for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples; 3) advocacy and justice work; 4) education and resources; and 5) communications, sharing, and networking.



The broken chalice (centre), the four-directions candle, and the talking stick, made by George Montour, have all been potent symbols of living into right relations.

How Will the Whole Church Continue This Work post TRC?

Facing declining membership and resources, the United Church has begun a Comprehensive Review process to create a smaller, leaner, and more effective church structure. At the same time, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement mandates are also nearing their ends—the TRC has been extended for a year to allow more time for document collection and writing the report (but no more national events or community hearings).

So staff and volunteers working on Aboriginal issues from several viewpoints have been gathering input from a number of meetings this fall—Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools Committee, Aboriginal Ministries Council, national Living into Right Relations task group, and Aboriginal Leadership Retreat—to bring options to General Council Executive for the continuation of this work.

Here is what we have asked GCE to consider as possible next steps the Spirit may be calling the church to on its journey toward reconciliation and right relations:

- a. **Doctrine of Discovery:** Appoint a body to identify, educate about, and lead the church in dismantling policies and structures that reflect or are based on the doctrine.
- b. **New Office Space:** Ensure that Aboriginal architecture and design, as well as residential school commemoration, are incorporated into the new General Council offices.
- c. **“Treaty as Covenant” Church:** Live into this emerging “identity” and consider the “two houses” model of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia, which recognizes the importance of treaty and the principles of partnership and bicultural development.
- d. **Land Reparation:** Offer an apology and restitution for land dispossession by allocating a percentage of the sale of every church building to Aboriginal ministries.
- e. **Healing:** Provide funds for language and cultural recovery and undertake church-wide education on White privilege, decolonization, and racism.

Option c, above, has particularly caught the interest of the Comprehensive Review Task Group, and we will be exploring it further with them in 2014, with the hope that the group will bring a proposal before the whole church.

We invite all who have an interest in healing, justice, and right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to consider these options and to offer us their input. You may want to discuss these and other possible options in your home groups.



Hagersville Secondary School student Holly LaForme

A HIGH SCHOOL ART STUDENT’S STORY:

We Are the Generation That Will Help Our People Be Happy Again

Toronto has declared November 12, 2013, to November 12, 2014, a Year of Truth and Reconciliation, to acknowledge the impact of the residential school system on Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians. Speakers included Elder Andrew Wesley, City Councillor and chair of the Aboriginal Affairs Committee Mike Layton, Chair of the TRC Justice Murray Sinclair, and former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Phil Fontaine.

Most moving was an address by high school student Holly LaForme, about whom Phil Fontaine said, “With young women like Holly, I know the future is in good hands.” Here are excerpts from her address:

Hello, my name is Holly LaForme; I attend Hagersville Secondary School. I am a young Anishnaabe woman of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, my clan is turtle.

I am here today to share with you a project we did last spring at my high school called the "Walking Together: Intergenerational Community Arts Project." It was about the Indian Residential School system in Canada. The goal was to bring together youth and residential school survivors in a relevant and experiential learning opportunity. We each created mixed-media collages representing what we learned.

The project involved 30 students, who also had the opportunity to meet five former students of the Mohawk Institute, to hear their personal stories, and to have a tour of the Mush Hole (as the school was commonly known) led by those former students.

Our artwork was featured last May in the First Nations 2013 Art Exhibit at the Woodland Cultural Centre (the former Mohawk Institute building), and at the Hagersville school art show. It is an honour for us to donate some of our work to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada today, and to donate a piece to the City of Toronto to recognize their commitment to a "year of truth and reconciliation."

This experience would not have been possible without funding, planning and facilitation by the Woodland Cultural Centre, and the participation of the residential school survivors who trusted us with their very personal stories of life in the Mush Hole: Geronimo Henry; Sherlene Bomberry; Karen Hill; Lisa Miller; and Laura Butler.

Residential schools were something I had always been aware of. Going to school on the reserve, you would listen to a lot of Elders in the community tell their stories about the horrors of residential schools. The Elders would come to my school and do teachings. They always told us that we are the generation of change, and we are the generation that will help our people be happy again, reconnecting our people with our traditions and ways of life.

I was determined to be in the group led by Geronimo Henry. I had a keen desire to hear his stories because I really wanted a man's perspective on the residential schools. I felt that a man showing his actual emotions would have real impact on the experience because it's thought that "to be a man," you have to be "tough as nails and not show any emotion."

It seems though, that when you're older, that kind of stuff doesn't matter as much anymore. During the day with the survivors, I really tried to step through those front doors of the school as though I were walking in the survivors' shoes. It helped me understand what the survivors were saying. By putting myself in their positions, their stories became real for me.

When we started our art pieces the next day, I decided to keep the metaphorical shoes on. On the left side of my art piece was a portrait of Geronimo, and surrounding him, were hazy memories of the school, portraying sadness, darkness, and loneliness. On the right was a picture of the residential school, with its bright blue sky and green grass. The picture of the residential school is burning away to the government apology letter underneath. I created it to show the darkness consuming the happier side, because in Geronimo's words, "there really were no happy times I can remember."



Multimedia collage art created by Holly LaForme and based on interviews she did with Geronimo Henry, an Elder and survivor of the infamous Mush Hole residential school, officially known as the Mohawk Institute.

Through this project I realized how important it is for all of us to have a deeper understanding of the impacts of residential schools not only on Aboriginal people but also on Canada as a Nation. In spite of its negative intent, Aboriginal people have preserved our culture and continue to exist and thrive in Canada today.

Today, I see native students wanting to learn, and I see them striving for a better life. I understand now what our Elders meant when they said we are the generation of change. The young Aboriginal men and women today, WE are the generation that can turn it all around and start on a path to recovery. WE are the generation of healing, and WE will lay the groundwork for a better tomorrow.

It will be a change toward reconciliation. And it is my hope that this generation will forgive past indiscretions, but never forget them because we dare not risk repeating them.

Kanesatake Parishioners Reclaim Historic Bell

Over 80 people crowded the small sanctuary of Kanesatake United Church on Saturday, September 14, 2013, to commemorate and dedicate the reclamation of an historic bell. The bell came from the first Methodist Church in the community, demolished by the Quebec provincial police in 1878 as ordered by the Sulpician priests.

For over 100 years the bell sat under the back pew of a second church, built in 1903. Recently, Harvey Gabriel arranged for a steel tower to be built in front of the building to hold the heavy bell and it rang out at the dedication service in remembrance of Kanesatake children who attended Shingwauk Indian residential school, and to those who never returned.

Also dedicated were a plaque outlining in Mohawk, English, and French the history of the bell, and a memorial booklet.

Community and congregational members attended, with former ministers, representatives of Montreal and Ottawa Conference, and of the General Council Office.

George and Wanda Montour travelled from Six Nations to be present.



Elder Satewas (Harvey Gabriel) and his spouse Susan Gabriel beside the historic Kanesatake Methodist bell.

Contact us: irs@united-church.ca

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

James Scott

General Council Officer:
Residential Schools
1-800-268-3781 ext. 2032

Cecile Fausak

Liaison Minister: Residential Schools
780-676-0562 office cell (Alberta)

David MacDonald, Special Advisor
416-686-5449

John Bird, outgoing editor
Home email: johnbird@sympatico.ca

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