

my friends Intotemak

Summer 2015 Vol. 44, No.2



Thousands march for reconciliation from Gatineau, Quebec to Ottawa, Ontario.
(photo: Moses Falco)



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Incarnation 2.0

Tim Froese offers up the following guest editorial, exploring a potential posture for the settler church living on Indigenous lands.

The year 1992 marked 500 years since Columbus and his companions had been discovered off the shores of what we now call Central American and Caribbean countries. In 1502, on his 4th voyage, he visited what is now Panama. My family and I arrived in Panama in 1993 at the invitation of the United Evangelical Church (UEC) whose members were *Wounaan* and *Embera* peoples. This church had its beginning in the Darien jungle of Colombia, but its people had migrated west through the jungle and now found themselves in Panama. The reason for their migration was their objection to elements of the *concordat* the Vatican had established with the Colombian government. Among other things, the *concordat* of 1928 included government financial support of missions sent to Indigenous tribes in Colombia and obliged heads of missions to use their influence on Indigenous converts to promote government development plans on their lands.

In Panama, I had my first real introduction to the interaction between Indigenous peoples, church, colonization, land rights, and mission. And it was complex! The UEC had issued a declaration that included 4 condemnations. Since when does a church come together to issue condemnations? For its part, the Catholic Church had put up signage around the country that said: "After 500 years, a new era of evangelization." Had the church learned anything in the previous 500 years? And then there was the matter of our reason for being in Panama. Several years earlier, in 1989, the United States had invaded Panama to safeguard U.S. interests – namely shipping rights through the Panama canal and its 15+

military bases in the country. The damage from that invasion was that more than 3000 Panamanian civilians were killed in the capital city: killed essentially because of ongoing land issues due to Panama's strategic importance geopolitically. The violence, death and grieving families prompted a vision among the *Wounaan* and *Embera* of the UEC. A church – yes, a church! – was needed among the citizens of Panama City; A church that emphasized respect, peace, community, and good news for the whole person. As North Americans, we were invited to join this effort because the UEC did not feel as adept at serving an urban population that was as diverse as Panama City.

My second experience with Indigenous persons, colonization, and mission was in South Korea. Koreans are Indigenous to their land, having almost 5000 years of written history. Much of that time has been lived in servitude to one of its larger neighbours. From 1910 to 1945 it was brutally colonized by Japan, the aftermath resulting in a bitter civil war which divided the people – and the land – to this day. Christian missionaries were present during the last 125 years and invariably they are gratefully credited by the nation as a whole for being supporters of the Korean language, of Korean rights and nationhood, and for sharing good news for the whole person. In fact, most of the early evangelists in Korea were Koreans themselves.

After being a "resident alien" or foreigner in several lands, I now find myself back home, and am still coming to grips with the idea of being a "settler" on my native land (i.e. the land of my birth). Having been a "missionary" in those other contexts, do I now assume a different, non-missionary posture? Or do I assert my rights as citizen and landholder, making the most use of my ability to navigate

the official language and current culture? What posture is appropriate for a settler who longs to follow the way of Jesus?

Letters to first century Christians – many of whom were diaspora (living in places that were not their ancestral homes) – are instructive to us. Peter wrote to his community telling them to live as "resident aliens." And in the Epistle to Diognetus, the "Manners of the Christian" are described as follows: "Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers." This resonates with my own experience as a foreign guest among other peoples and lands. My experiences have taught me respect for culture, people, history, and land, provided unending opportunities to learn, given deep appreciation for relationship and hospitality, and created awareness that our Creator is bigger than we imagine and more active than we realize. Could it be that to incarnate Jesus here in Canada, we also need to become resident aliens? In this issue of Intotemak you will find reflections, challenges and prayers that ponder, in some fashion, this question. May the presence of Jesus accompany and inspire us as we wrestle with the history of this land, our relationships and our identities.



Tim Froese, Executive Minister, Witness, Mennonite Church Canada

Upcoming Events

June 21, 2015: National Aboriginal Day. Join an event or celebration in your community or throw a party and invite Indigenous and settler friends to join you.

August 22-23, 2015: Spruce River Folkfest will be held at Ray and Shirley Falstead Funk's farm 20 kms north of Prince Albert. It begins at 11:00 am with presentations on Landless Bands in Saskatchewan. At 1:00 pm music from a variety of musicians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, will be offered up. There will be great food available and a silent auction to support Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan's work with Indigenous peoples. Everyone is welcome to attend.

October 12, 2015: Indigenous Peoples Day - An alternative US holiday to the Columbus Day celebrations.

Decolonizing our Hearts

Part 1 of 5

In seeking a faithful response to Indigenous rights struggles, Jennifer Henry talks of decolonizing the heart, for in biblical witness it is ultimately the heart that is the place of transformation, the place where through the Spirit, definitive change can occur. Henry suggests that for settler Christians, decolonizing our hearts entails a series of five faithful practices: hearing truth, enabling contrition, opening to wisdom, acting with courage and reconciling towards right relation. Over the next issues of Intotemak, we'll hear what Henry has to say about each of these.

1st Practice

Hearing the Truth:

Heart Speaking and Listening

Mohawk educator Taiaiake Alfred asserts that “the convenient way to deal with the founding injustice of Canada is to allow colonialism to continue by ignoring the truth, to erase it from our memory, ban it from the schools, and suppress it in public.” Telling the truth, including the story of the churches that “sat with empire”, provides a *context* out of which theologies and faithful practices can emerge. But, in so far as this history exposes a present-day lie - that there was no colonization - or bears witness to the suffering and resilience of “the people who lived on the land and fought and died to preserve the loving relationship that they had with this continent” (Alfred), the history is in itself a *theology*, and the telling and the listening is in itself a *spiritual practice*.

The Cree word for truth is “tâpwêwin” a concept that can be understood as “speaking from the heart.” “Heart speaking” can crack hard shells of pity, apathy, or denial towards an ethical witness. Legalized dehumanization endeavoured to silence Indigenous voices in Canada. Decolonizing hearts requires a fundamental shift where Indigenous voices are privileged so that truth - “heart speaking” about colonization - might be heard. In this process, diverse realities emerge that should not be reduced to a solitary perspective. Our first practice, as settler Christians, is to quiet our own voices and assumptions and listen with open hearts.

Paulette Regan, author of *Unsettling the Settler Within*, suggests that for settlers, “Connecting head, heart and spirit in ways that value vulnerability and humility enables us to accept harsh truths and to use our moral imagination in order to reclaim our own humanity.” In “heart listening” new truths are, in however partial a way, incorporated into our bodies. Imam Michael Taylor, an honorary witness to the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), confirms this when he says: “I held your pain - a small part of your pain - for a day and it hurt me, it moved me, it changed me.”

Embodied “heart listening” hears resistance, courage and contribution, and not only victimization. In the Halifax TRC, survivors told of how there was no love in the residential schools. Reflecting back what her “heart” had heard, Commissioner Marie Wilson said to the survivors, “there was love in the schools because you were there” and recounted to them their own stories of how, as older children, they brought the littlest ones into their beds, sheltered them from cold, smuggled them food and unlocked them from closets, even taking abuse so that the younger ones would be spared.

Avoiding further damaging characterization of passivity or victimhood, “heart listening” can honour powerful acts of “social and psychological resistance” — actions accompanied by God as much as the experience of suffering.

Check out the Fall issue of Intotemak for part 2 of “Decolonizing our Hearts”.



Jennifer Henry,
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Intotemak translates as my clan and are people who walk in solidarity. *Intotemak* is a quarterly magazine, published by Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

VISION HEALING & HOPE

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

Towards Right Relations:

A Sampling of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action

On June 2, 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made the following calls to action in order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation. For the full list of the recommendations, see www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890.



Thousands march for reconciliation from Gatineau, Quebec to Ottawa, Ontario. (photo: Moses Falco)

Legacy

1. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care by...
 - ii. Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.

Education

8. We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.

Language And Culture

14. We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:
 - i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
 - ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
 - iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.

Health

18. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.

Justice

30. We call upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to eliminating the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody over the next decade, and to issue detailed annual reports that monitor and evaluate progress in doing so.
35. We call upon the federal government to eliminate barriers to the creation of additional Aboriginal healing lodges within the federal correctional system.

Reconciliation

45. We call upon the Government of Canada, on behalf of all Canadians, to jointly develop with Aboriginal peoples a Royal Proclamation of Reconciliation to be issued by the Crown. The proclamation would build on the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Niagara of 1764, and reaffirm the nation-to-nation relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown. The proclamation would include, but not be limited to, the following commitments:

- i. Repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius.
 - ii. Adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.
 - iii. Renew or establish Treaty relationships based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining those relationships into the future.
48. We call upon the church parties to the Settlement Agreement, and all other faith groups and interfaith social justice groups in Canada who have not already done so, to formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation.

ensure that government accountability for reconciling the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown is maintained in the coming years.

Church Apologies And Reconciliation

- 59. We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church's role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities were necessary.
- 60. We call upon leaders of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement and all other faiths, in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders, Survivors, schools of theology, seminaries, and other religious training centres, to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy, and all clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities, on the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right, the history and legacy of residential schools and the roles of the church parties in that system, the history and legacy of religious conflict in Aboriginal families and communities, and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence.

National Council For Reconciliation

- 53. We call upon the Parliament of Canada, in consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to enact legislation to establish a National Council for Reconciliation. The legislation would establish the council as an independent, national, oversight body with membership jointly appointed by the Government of Canada and national Aboriginal organizations, and consisting of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members. Its mandate would include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - i. Monitor, evaluate, and report annually to Parliament and the people of Canada on the Government of Canada's post-apology progress on reconciliation to

Missing Children And Burial Information

- 71. We call upon all chief coroners and provincial vital statistics agencies that have not provided to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada their records on the deaths of Aboriginal children in the care of residential school authorities to make these documents available to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

Commemoration

- 80. We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.

Sports

- 87. We call upon all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.

Newcomers To Canada

- 94. We call upon the Government of Canada to replace the Oath of Citizenship with the following:

I swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada including Treaties with Indigenous Peoples, and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen.



Willard Metzger, Executive Director, Mennonite Church Canada. (photo: Moses Falco)

Shared Room

Near the conclusion of his remarks about the final recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission yesterday, Assembly of First Nations Chief Perry Bellegarde offered the following challenge to non-Indigenous people:

Make room.

Make room in minds and hearts for new ways of understanding and relating to Indigenous people. Make room for conceptions that go beyond “drunk” or “lazy” or “entitled” or “pagan” or any of the countless other stereotypes about Indigenous people that not only still exist in the broader culture, but flourish.

This is surely true. This is surely the beginning—the bare minimum!—of anything resembling true reconciliation. There have to be decisions made by ordinary non-Indigenous people to refuse to resort to cheap and easy answers like, “that’s just how Indians are”—answers that are, of course, not answers at all but a refusal to think or to consider that the real world and real human beings and cultures are just a bit more complex than that.

But for me, “making room” is a less abstract, much more personal thing. As I’ve written about here before, my “making room” has been quite literal by virtue of the makeup of our family. My wife and I are the parents of Ojibway/Metis twins. This is something that I quite literally could never have imagined growing up in an area where racism and anti-Indigenous sentiment was and remains rampant. But life has a funny way of surprising you, I’ve learned. Something (or, more particularly, two very special someones) I could never have imagined, that was not even on the remotest reaches of my radar as a younger person, has more than anything else squeezed its way into my life, my thinking, my mind, and, most importantly, my heart.



Photo: Moses Falco



Photo: Moses Falco

This, more than anything else, has made room where previously none existed.

I’ve been asked a number of times this week how it feels for me, a father of Indigenous kids, to be at an event like this, where I and those in analogous situations, are sometimes described as part of the problem. Where I am one of those “white people” that is responsible for depriving Indigenous kids of their language, culture, and spirituality, and for foisting upon them foreign versions of the above.

The truth is, it’s not always easy. Every time I see a picture taken in a residential school, every time I see a collection of beautiful brown faces in those pictures, every time I hear about children wrenched away from families and communities and the familiar identity-forming traditions and institutions that so many of us take for granted, I see my own beautiful brown kids. And I am not naïve. I know that there is a link between Canada’s history and the present-day realities that lead to Indigenous kids being put up for adoption and entering child protective services at a wildly disproportionate rate to the rest of the population. And I know that I am “assimilating” our kids into non-Indigenous ways of being in the world. So this making room, it comes with a cost. It’s a tricky thing to do well, whether in big ways or small ways, abstract ways or intensely personal ones.

But maybe it’s not as tricky as I am making it out to be. One thing I have learned over the years is that best way to “make room” for people, whatever their ethnicity, whatever their religion, whatever their politics, whatever their worldview,

whatever their relationship to you—is to quite simply follow the teaching and example of Christ: To love as you would like to be loved.

Among other things, this would seem to involve:

- Deciding that the person across from you is a creature of wonder, and that they stand before you “the way they are” because of a complex set of causes and a unique story that is more precious than all of the generalizations that we so easily resort to.
- Respecting and honouring the “other” not as a means to an end, not as a part of some broader agenda, but simply because they are a fellow creation of God.
- Asking questions, exhibiting curiosity, demonstrating an interest in what the world looks like through another’s set of eyes and experiences.
- Being open to having your own views expanded and nuanced.
- Deciding not to make assumptions about why others think the way that they do that you would not appreciate being applied to you and to your views.
- Being resolutely determined to never making sweeping generalizations about a group of people that you feel would be unfair if applied to the group (or groups) of people that you happen to belong to.

Each of these things would represent a good start toward “making room.” Each of these, if adopted broadly, would represent wonderful first steps toward improving

relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Each of these would be building blocks toward reconciliation. Each represents a small part of how room is made.

When we do this, I think we gradually discover that the big picture isn't necessarily about learning how to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but about simply learning to be good human beings who are kind and open toward each other. This is the best of what I have experienced from so many people I have talked to at gatherings like the TRC. The most rewarding and life-giving conversations I have had have never been a white guy

talking to a native guy or a Christian man talking to an Indigenous woman, but about two human beings making room for each other. This has been a true gift whenever I have experienced it.

And this is what I am most grateful for when it comes to my own family, too. So often, when our kids were younger, people would tell us, "Oh, they're so lucky to have you two as parents." And my wife and I would always bristle at this because we never looked at our kids as objects of charity or as some kind of exercise in cross-cultural relationships, but as two, precious human treasures that were to be received as a gift from God. We made room for

them once upon a time, yes, but the story ever since has been at least as much about them making room for us, and about the love that can grow in room that is shared.



Ryan Dueck,
Pastor, Lethbridge Mennonite Church



Photos: Moses Falco



The Response of Faithful Presence

A TRC Summary

As I leave Ottawa and my experience of the Truth and Reconciliation, I'm asking, "Now what?" For Canada. But also for myself.

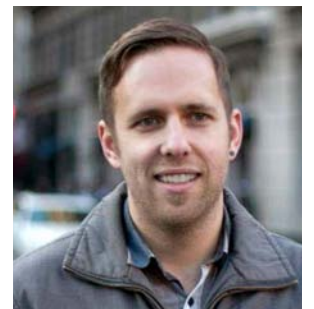
In part, I wonder what my role is as a Christian. You see, Christians have been a major part of this historical blemish on our country, and this responsibility goes beyond official parties who ran the residential schools. My own tradition, the Mennonites (of all streams), either sat idly by or even perpetuated the system by working in various roles for these schools. We can't ignore this complicity.

But we also can't stay in perpetual discomfort over our feelings of guilt or remorse. So far much of the Christian response to the TRC process has been necessarily reactionary: apologies and time spent listening. This needs to continue. But it's also time to imagine how Christians can become proactive in moving forward in relationship with our Indigenous friends and neighbours.

I attended the TRC conclusion as part of a delegation of Mennonite Church Canada, Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite Brethren leaders, pastors, individuals, and students. We are a diverse group of men and women in various roles, who beyond the importance of our presence at the TRC, are exploring what it means for us as Jesus-followers to honour and respect the spirituality and practices of Canada's Aboriginal population. While I can't speak on behalf of others in the group, one key area for proactive response that I can have as a Christian in light of the

TRC is in the area of faithful presence.

Far beyond just this issue, faithful presence is the call to value all people in our daily lives as worthy of our love, both in attitude and action. In my own community of Abbotsford, Aboriginals are often visibly hidden. I have little memory growing up of encountering local Aboriginal people in schools, parks or other local spaces. Or maybe I just didn't notice. I just remember driving through this mysterious place known only as "the reservation." But that was the extent of my interaction. Now I've learned Abbotsford sits on Sto:lo territory and in various settings I've begun to meet and develop relationships with some of these neighbours so visibly absent from my childhood. As Christians, we don't just love the neighbours that we see visibly in front of us. In fact, the New Testament concept of "lost" isn't limited to a spiritual loneliness for humanity. "Lost" can also describe the literal hiddenness of individuals and groups in the very social structures of our communities. Faithful presence means Christians need to literally be present with all our neighbours, seen or unseen.



David Warkentin, Director,
Praxis, Columbia Bible College

We Have Failed the Lubicon

A review of Dawn Martin-Hill's, *The Lubicon Lake Nation – Indigenous Knowledge and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 2008. 182 pp. \$26.95. ISBN: 978-0802078285.

Dawn Martin-Hill is a cultural anthropologist and academic director of the Indigenous Studies Program at McMaster University. Her aim in *The Lubicon Lake Nation* is to offer up an account of the Lubicon's culture and pursuit of rights that prioritizes their perspectives. In other words, how do they understand who they are and their relationship to Canada and its federal and provincial governments? This is contrasted with the perspectives held by both the federal and Alberta governments.

The Lubicon story is an unsettling one: they were overlooked during the treaty-making process with Indigenous nations in the 1870's, and the result has been a century and a half of increasing struggle over land. Traditional territory became Crown land – the claimed property of the government of Canada. As resource extraction industries expanded in post WWII Alberta – oil and gas, forestry, etc. – the province of Alberta, acting as the manager of Crown lands, granted leases for activity on Lubicon traditional lands. Road building, drilling sites, and clear cutting of forests ensued. It all sig-

nificantly disrupted the way of living on and from the land of the Indigenous residents. But in the eyes of the government, the Lubicon were squatters – a people in the way of resource extraction, productivity, economic well being, and progress.

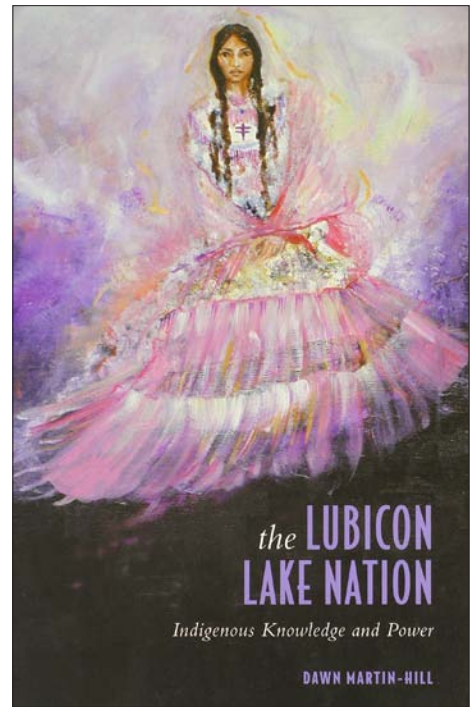
Martin-Hill is a Mohawk from Ontario. In the course of her research she introduced the Lubicon to the leaders of the Mohawk nation who had experience dealing with the colonization practises that have been the approach of the Canadian nation-state. Such solidarity in the face of overwhelming forces is critical.

As a Canadian citizen of European descent, as a Mennonite Christian by choice, and as an Albertan by residence, I am ashamed of our failure to honour the treaties with Indigenous peoples. It is even more frustrating that the Lubicon situation has not been resolved. How can they preserve their identity, their cultural heritage, their economy against the overwhelming forces of colonization (domination) which are embedded in mainstream Canadian culture?

Many settler Canadians in Alberta are proud of our homesteader roots. But we have ignored the rights of the first peoples – because of our assumptions about their supposed backwardness (as measured by us), our disdain for their spirituality, and our blindness to the assistance they freely gave when our ancestors first came to this land.

Yet Indigenous peoples struggle on. Indigenous spirituality is being rediscovered both within First Nations and by newer Canadians. The Indigenous approach to the land is a richer communal-holistic practise as compared to our individualistic notions of private property. They have a sense of community which we should envy, immersed as we are in the selfish ways of consumer capitalism which also shapes our Christianity.

There is common ground between the Jesus way and the



ways of the Lubicon and other Indigenous peoples. All are created by God with distinct histories and knowledges. We can teach each other. We settlers need to adopt a humble posture towards our neighbours. Indigenous peoples have been critiquing and developing their cultures for millennia, often in light of the Creator's work in the rest of creation. That has enabled them to develop lifeways that respect creation deeply – humans, plants, lands, waters. We would do well to learn from our hosts.

On May 5, 2015 the citizens of Alberta voted in a new government led by Rachel Notley. In her election night speech, Notley said she would consult with Indigenous peoples as well as the oil industry. Let us see that this does happen. The most difficult truth that we Albertans have to face is the one Justice John Reilly was confronted with when he set out to get to know the Stoney people at Morley. He had seen them only in the courtroom and sentenced them according to Canadian law. But he came to the realization that he needed to know them more fully. This was difficult since he was well known as the judge who had dispensed what he thought was justice for more than ten years. A friend spoke a truth to him – "John, we took their land. They don't like you." We settlers have to be courageous and face that truth.

Dan Jack is a member of Trinity Mennonite Church in Calgary, Alberta



Image: Gord Hill

Solidarity, Resistance, Recovery

Thoughts on a Mother's Day Walk



I chose to spend a portion of Mother's Day this year participating in the Sisters in Spirit walk that honours and remembers missing and murdered Indigenous women.

It was a holy thing to walk slowly and reverently with several hundred women, men, elders, children, and youth through Winnipeg's downtown; to absorb the drumming, dancing and singing; to hear the speeches and the prayers at the gathering place. This witness of remembrance for lives lost or vanished, this call for an end to violence; it was sacred space.

As I walked, the reasons for my being there became clear.

Solidarity – I wanted to stand with the Indigenous people in my community, people who have experienced the violent death or disappearance of a beloved mother, daughter, granddaughter, sister, auntie or friend. As a mother who has lost a child—my middle son died of cancer as an eight-year-old—I have a small window into the excruciating agony that families experience when a precious loved one is snatched away.

The reality of violence against Indigenous women in Canada is a travesty. Nearly 1200 Indigenous women have been murdered or gone missing since 1952. This represents a rate nearly four times greater than the representation of Indigenous women in the Canadian population. One study indicates that the national homicide rate for Indigenous women is seven times higher than for non-Indigenous. Not only do Indigenous women experience a disproportionate amount of violence, the violence is also much more extreme.

Like many others, I want to stand with those who suffer from the violence and call for it to end. We must all work together to address the poverty, racism, marginalization, and violence that turn so many Indigenous women into statistics. Showing up with the Sisters in Spirit is one way to do that.

Resistance – I wanted to participate in this Mother's Day community action because, to me, it is a powerful way of resisting all that is crass and commercial about Mother's Day. One of the realities of our advanced capitalist system is that it com-

modifies everything it can: joy and happiness, peace and security, water and clean air. We see the most egregious examples of this at Christmas time, but it increasingly happens on Mother's Day, too.

At Mother's Day, we are programmed to again head to the mall to buy stuff—jewelry, clothing, electronics, appliances, spa visits, vacations and more—to show our mothers we love them. According to one source, Canadians were projected to spend \$107 each on Mother's Day, with an overall Canadian total close to \$500 million. Many of us have bought into the lie that love is about buying and giving stuff, rather than expressing gratitude, compassion, and care.

Capitalism also teaches us that we are individuals, and only individuals. Our purpose in life is to seek our own personal gratification. Sure, if I buy a TV, I will help to employ the people who built or sold the TV, but there is little in the capitalist agenda that promotes community. There is little inherent in capitalism that shapes us to work for the common good, to build just and caring communities.

The women who organize the Sisters in Spirit walk know that life is precisely about caring, compassion, and community. Their actions are a wonderful act of resistance to the Mother's Day of capitalist enterprise.



Photo: Esther Epp-Tiessen



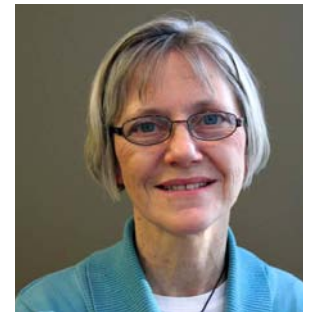
Photo: Esther Epp-Tiessen

Recovery – Ever since I learned of the roots of Mother’s Day, I have longed for a recovery of its spirit and vision. According to at least one (if debated) tradition, the day has its origins in the work and proclamation of Julie Ward Howe, an American suffragist, writer, and lecturer who lived from 1819 to 1910.

Moved by what she witnessed of both the U.S. Civil War and the Franco-Prussian wars, Howe issued her Appeal to womanhood throughout the world (later known as the Mother’s Day Proclamation) in 1870. The proclamation was a clarion call to women to condemn war, and to stop preparing their sons to kill the sons of other mothers. She understood that women — mothers, in particular — possess a special responsibility to build a world of peace.

The women of Sisters in Spirit hold a vision for Mother’s Day very much like Julia Ward Howe. They call people to mourn the murdered and missing, to acknowledge

that all human lives are precious and deserve protection, and to work together to end violence against Indigenous women, indeed, against all life. Sisters in Spirit embrace a vision of justice, peace, and healing. They embody the true spirit of Mother’s Day.



Esther Epp-Tiessen,
Public Engagement Coordinator for
the Ottawa Office of Mennonite
Central Committee Canada

Children of the Potlatch

A review of Leslie A. Robertson with the Kwaqu’l Gixsam Clan, *Standing Up with Ga’axsta’las*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2012. 596 pp, \$39.95. ISBN 978-0-77482-385-2.

In the summer of 1914 in ‘Yalis (Alert Bay) off of northern Vancouver Island, Ga’axsta’las (English name Jane Constance Cook) served as a Kwakwaka’waka/English interpreter at the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission on the distribution of reserve lands in British Columbia. Half of the Kawkwaka’wakw applications were dismissed on the grounds that the land was already in use, much of it by white farmers. Within weeks of Ga’axsta’las’ swearing-in, my great-grandfather, newly arrived from England, received a certificate of preemption to homestead a plot of land less than 100 km south of ‘Yalis.

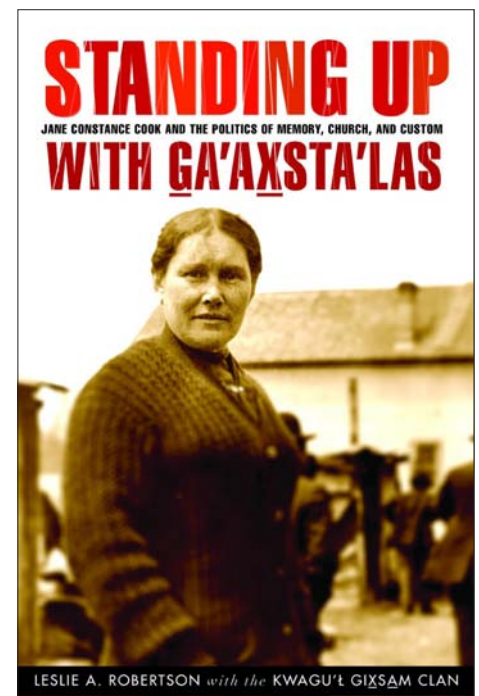
One hundred years later, as I read and write about Ga’axsta’las, her descendants, my Anglican clergy colleagues, and members of the church to which we both belong, are among the survivors, family members, chiefs, elders, and witnesses attending ceremonies in Alert Bay for the demolition of St. Michael’s Indian Residential School.

Mrs. Cook, in archival documents, or Granny Cook, to her family, (1870-1951) was a controversial and influential woman who had a public voice and active role in

Kawkwaka’wakw social and political life for decades. The dominant historical, anthropological, and community records depict her one-dimensionally as a half-white, missionary-raised Christian who supported the potlatch ban, colonized and inauthentic.

In *Standing Up With Ga’axsta’las: Jane Constance Cook and the Politics of Memory, Church and Custom*, Granny Cook’s descendants, members of the Kwagu’l Gixsam Clan, seek to “set the record straight.” They have collaborated with anthropologist Leslie Robertson to place Ga’axsta’las’ memory in its social, economic, political, family, and cultural context, paying attention to what she stood for as well as what she stood against. The book shows Ga’axsta’las’ family “standing up” in another way as well. It documents the Kwagu’l Gixsam Clan’s recent revival in the Big House of those treasures—names, positions, dances, masks, rights and responsibilities—that were cut off in 1888, when Ga’axsta’las, a noblewoman of high rank, renounced the potlatch, a requirement for Christian marriage.

Preparing to review this book, I alternated between feeling uniquely equipped



to comment, and barely qualified to read it. On the one hand, I am a member of the same church as Ga’axsta’las, I have visited Alert Bay, I know individuals and families mentioned in the book, and my familiarity with the trajectory of Anglican-Indigenous relations on Vancouver Island is well above average. On the other hand, I have not

studied history or anthropology, neither under the disciplines' former claims to document and preserve objective fact, nor under their more recent assertions about the cultural production of meaning. I have some experience of Westcoast First Nations' cultural and ceremonial practice, but what is reinforced for me with every exposure and invitation is that the more I learn about Indigenous ways of knowing, the more I realize how little I know and how much of what I think I know is actually inter-cultural translation or approximation. I see through white eyes.

While clear that there is much that will remain unknown, *Standing Up With Ga'axsta'las*, succeeds in presenting a multi-dimensional portrait of its protagonist: mother of 16 who raised both children and grandchildren; member of high status family; midwife; translator; activist and spokesperson for land claims, and health care; correspondent of colonial agents; advocate for economic support of women and children; Anglican Women's Auxiliary president; organizer in early native fishing unions; and the only woman on the Allied Indian Tribes of BC executive. The book engages important questions about race, gender, history, anthropology, marriage practice, collective identity, the relationship of scholars to communities, and how the past and present interact. Yet I found it disappointing in a couple of ways.

My first criticism comes from a faith perspective, and might not be noticed by the majority of readers. In this personal history, the authors do a very good job of addressing both "memory" and "custom" with depth and complexity, but their approach to "church," the third element of the book's subtitle, seems less engaged and was less engaging for me as a reader. Ga'axsta'las taught and preached in the church, she corresponded with bishops, attended synods and church meetings, and lead the Anglican Women's Auxilliary for 30 years. Her granddaughter, Christine Zurkowski, describes her activism as rooted in her Christian faith, "motivated into mercy and justice," yet she was stalwart in her practice and defense of traditional Indigenous values around food, family, land and fishing. Unfortunately, the depiction of Ga'axsta'las' Christianity, built from her own writing, historical documents, and commentary by Robertson and relatives who don't identify primarily as Christian, feels flat, and leaves

the false impression that a Kwakwa'ala Christian is an artifact of the past.

My second criticism will be relevant for more readers. This book is not easy to read. Nearly a decade in the making, it is scholarly in tone and nearly 600 pages long, with more than 100 pages devoted to notes, maps, genealogies and photographs. Despite the wealth of information provided, prior knowledge is assumed, and contemporary individuals, historical figures, key events and cultural practices are brought into the narrative with minimal introduction. Although it moves roughly from the time of Ga'axsta'las's immediate ancestors in the early 1800s to her death in 1951, the narrative is not linear nor chronological; the book is framed by transcripts from a potlatch in 2007, and within chapters, contemporary voices and events are juxtaposed with the past. Some parts of the text are anonymized, many individuals have more than one name, there is Kwakwala vocabulary in every chapter, and some people and places are named in both English and Kwakwala, a language which has been transcribed in different ways at different times. There is a lot to keep track of.

Pearl Alfred, granddaughter to Ga'axsta'las, initiated this project with the intention that "nothing is to be written at the expense of anyone else." The authors' commitment to this responsibility through a complex web of careful deference protocols is evident. But this highly relational writing, coupled with an understanding of history that refuses "definitive" statements, makes the project feel, at times, like amorphous information with little in the way of tools or direction for evaluation and interpretation.

Still, I learned from and was challenged by this book. It named a kind of mental shorthand that I fall into, imagining Indigenous people, especially in the past, as existing on a continuum from traditional to assimilated, and exposed my unexamined emphasis on cultural and ceremonial practice as an indicator of identity. It reminded me that intersectionality, the coming together of cultural, economic, political family, racial, gender, family, and other factors, applies as much to the past as the present. I learned more about the long history of white interest in and attempts to control native women's sexuality, mobility, marriage, and economic activity. I learned that I didn't know as much about potlatch and feasting as I thought I did. More than

an important ceremonial practice, it is a law and governance system pertaining to land distribution, marriage, wealth, welfare, rank and family with very specific restrictions on who participates and how.

The book brought into sharp focus the role of my church in the early industrialization and resource capitalism of BC: Anglican missions and churches owned lumber mills and fish salteries, and industrial training was core to the ideology of Residential Schools. As an Anglican priest who works on justice issues with Indigenous partners, I was particularly sobered by the role of church agents and structures. At face value, the provision of medical resources and education was a response to the clear requests of Indigenous people with whom they had relationships; indeed they made space for Indigenous voices. In the broader context, they were party to the transfer of land and water from Indigenous to white control, devastating epidemics of European diseases, and an education system that fits the UN definition of genocide.

As a reviewer, *Standing Up With Ga'axsta'las* made me ask, what makes a good book: challenging content, good research, readable prose, responsibility to community, integrity in writing? I am curious as to whether Ga'axsta'las' descendants feel that their book has or will achieve what they intended.

Standing Up With Ga'axsta'las is an important book. For scholars in Northwest Coast culture and history, including church history, it is essential. For anyone connected to 'Yalis or the Anglican Church on northern Vancouver Island, and for those involved in Indigenous and gender studies, it is a valuable resource. For others, the fact that the book has been written may be sufficient.



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The provinces and Indigenous territories (Comarcas) of Panama

Indigenous Mennonites in Panama Request Prayer for Land Struggle

Panama – Prayers for the ongoing land struggle was the main request that a Mennonite World Conference (MWC) delegation heard in a February 2015 visit with church and Indigenous community leaders in Panama.

Leaders of the MWC member church, *Iglesia Evangélica Unida Hermanos Menonitas de Panamá* (United Evangelical Church: Mennonite Brethren in Panama), invited the MWC delegation to inform them about the long struggle to have legally established titles to ancestral land recognized and enforced.

Despite existing constitutional guarantees of land ownership, the government is doing little to prevent illegal settlers from taking land, logging and selling trees - especially the cocobolo tree - and using the land for herding.

The delegation included four persons jointly sponsored by the MWC Peace and Deacons Commissions: Joji Pantoja, Mennonite Church Canada Witness Worker in the Philippines, Jack Suderman of Canada, Gladys Siemens of Brazil, and Henk Stenvers of the Netherlands.

They met for a day in Panama City with church leaders who are also providing leadership to the National Congress of the Wounaan people. They then visited three villages by boat, timing their departures and arrivals according to the rising tide in the inland rivers.

In each village there was an evening worship service and an overnight stay. In the morning, the delegation heard stories of how encroachments on Indigenous land are causing many to lose hope and patience because it seems to them that their pleas for help are going unnoticed.

The delegation heard repeatedly a resolute belief in the power of prayer and advocacy by the global faith community. The following prayer reflects the specific prayer requests that were named in the many conversations in which the delegation engaged.



Wounaan share stories of land struggle (photo: Stevner)

“They understand—at least in part—the limits of our capabilities,” noted Suderman in his draft of the delegation’s report. “They also understand the power of God in God’s praying people. The idea of allowing the story to become known is, in itself, the highest hope of the leadership. There is a profound sense that truth will eventually win out, but that it needs to be exposed and become known.”

Church leaders also asked for help in training leaders in areas such as conflict resolution, identity formation, restorative justice, and nonviolent strategies. Further, they asked for advocacy in international forums such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the government of Panama.

This article and the following prayer are republished with permission of the Mennonite World Conference.



The Commission of Diaconia and Peace of the Iglesia Evangélica Unida Hermanos Menonitas de Panamá (United Evangelical Church: Mennonite Brethren in Panama) has requested that God's people, around the world, pray this prayer on their behalf.



Creator God of Justice, Peace, Love, and Mercy:

You know the struggles of your people.

You know the struggles of the Wounaan People of Panama: a struggle for justice related to their Ancestral Domain amid the continuing invasions of those lands.

We pray to you.

We lament the ongoing loss of valuable resources of the Wounaan people.

We pray that the Government of Panama might act to secure the collective title to the land.

We pray to you for justice in the case of the three men who have been falsely accused and condemned to 20 years of prison due to their leadership in this struggle for land.

We pray for your justice in the legal processes led by their lawyer Leonidas Quiróz; processes that still seem to be without the sympathetic ears and hearts needed to resolve these struggles.

We pray for wisdom and patience for the local pastors and conference leaders of the United Evangelical Church: Mennonite Brethren of Panama.

We give thanks for their firm commitment to keeping this struggle free of violence.

We give thanks for their concerns for the life-giving flora and fauna created to secure life for generations to come.

We give thanks for their wisdom and patience.

We give thanks that they are your people and you are their God.

Thank you, God, for listening to our lament.

Thank you for knowing the integrity of our hearts.

Thank you that your will is the welfare of all your creation.

May your will be done.

Amen.

St. Michael's Indian Residential School Survivors Ceremony



Photo: Fr. Matthew Johnson

I journeyed in mid-February from the Lower Mainland to Alert Bay, off Vancouver Island, to represent the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster at an event commemorating the survivors of the St. Michael's Indian Residential School. The event also marked the demolition of the now decrepit school building.

The Anglican Church of Canada operated St. Michael's from 1882 to 1969. The existing structure dates from 1929.

Over the years, I have seen numerous black and white photographs of the formidable St. Michael's School building. Yet, arriving by boat at Alert Bay, on a bright spring morning, I saw for the first time in real life, this austere, foreboding edifice.

Even from a distance, the school building has a melancholy, overtly haunting presence. Now gutted and boarded up, this building holds painful memories for thousands of Indigenous persons who resided there as children and teens.

In contrast to the lifeless façade of the St. Michael's building, which formed the backdrop for some of the events, the ceremonies that marked its decommissioning were potent, profound, and life giving.

Although I wore a collar, and a nametag identifying me as a Church

representative, the survivors I met were extraordinarily generous in welcoming and including this middle-class, white priest. I am still in awe of the fact that people who suffered so enormously at an institution operated by our Church could be so warm and gracious to one of its representatives.

At various ceremonies, different survivors spoke of the scars they still bear, inwardly and outwardly, from their years at St. Michael's. Yet, despite the daunting prospect of returning to this place of grief, they had travelled there—courageously so—to reckon with a painful past so symbolized by that foreboding structure. And, to move beyond that past.

At the height of the event, over 500 people were present. In making this challenging pilgrimage, survivors came in order to heal themselves and to heal one another. As the overall theme proclaimed in Kwakwaka'wakw — I'tustolagalis — “Rising Up, Together”.

Trauma & Resilience

If any single word can sum up what I witnessed at Alert Bay, it is Resilience. Cultural, communal, familial, and personal.

If we think back on it, we are all, to some extent, products of the environments

in which we grew up as children. We were influenced—for better or for worse—by parents, relatives, and the other adults present in our lives.

The children of the Residential Schools were raised, for the most part, without the presence of their parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

To the contrary, as they grew up, the adults who surrounded these children were not family members, but employees, teachers, administrators, religious, and clergy. Adults whose formal mandate it was to demonstrate to these children, at every turn, that the only way of life they had ever known was deficient, and wrong, and something to be jettisoned.

With few exceptions, students were traumatized by this cultural cleansing (racial and psychological abuse), by emotional cruelty, by severe corporal disciplinary practices (physical abuse), and in many cases by sexual abuse and hunger.

Some children never made it home from the schools. Dying through illness, accident, suicide, or other causes.

The students who did leave residential schools carried within themselves the sort of traumas that can plague and victimize a human being for a lifetime.

Intergenerational Legacy

As if all of this is not painful enough, some survivors also brought home with them the negative, authoritarian, and violent relational dynamics, taught by example through the disciplinary practices of the schools. For certain survivors, these dynamics found their way into their own parenting practices, impacting their children and family members, including those who never attended the schools.

Negative familial relational dynamics make up one aspect of the ‘intergenerational legacy’ of the schools, a legacy of suffering visited upon some survivors and their family members. Addiction is another aspect of that intergenerational legacy.

When men and women carry within themselves the impact and memories of childhood or adolescent trauma, a common outcome is the practice of self-medication. Alcohol, prescription drugs, and street drugs, all serve to deaden,



Photo: Fr. Matthew Johnson

temporarily, some of the psychological and spiritual anguish that trauma survivors carry.

And so it is, that some residential school survivors resorted to alcohol or drugs to mitigate the pain and grief of traumas incurred at the schools; the type of substance abuse that can lead very readily to dependence and addiction.

Drug use and alcoholism carry with them attendant harms, including disrupted or disordered personal lives, unrealized personal potential, social and family violence, family stress and breakup, physiological and neurological damage, accidental death, and suicide.

Alcoholism and addiction, as well as negative family relational dynamics, if and when present in a survivor's life, become self-perpetuating destructive forces, visiting further harm upon survivors, as well as their children, families, and communities, and lasting long after the traumas originally experienced at the residential schools.

So, in addition to seeking healing for themselves, some survivors of St. Michael's came intentionally for the healing of their children, grandchildren, and other family members, who did not attend, yet were impacted very personally by the schools.

Remembering

The events at Alert Bay were hosted and led by 'Namgis elders, on whose traditional land St. Michael's was built. Present also were survivors and dignitaries from many other Nations and Peoples, all of whose children were forcibly sent to this school.

Many shared publicly, their remembrances of their time as students. And there were some deeply mournful moments.

At one point—reserved for silence—grief took voice involuntarily, in the sustained and inconsolable wail of a female elder and survivor. A vocal expression of the anguish of a tender human heart. Profoundly jarring. And, although unplanned, it was entirely fitting in that distressing moment. Penetrating to the very core of every soul in attendance there.

Neither I, nor anyone present, will soon forget that moment, or that endless lonely cry.

Dr Robert (Bobby) Joseph, Hereditary Chief of the Gwawae-nuk First Nation, led some of the events. Chief Joseph is an important leader in the work of the healing of survivors, and in the work of fostering reconciliation between the First Peoples and non-aboriginal Canadians, a critical effort in the wake of our

society's shared history with the residential schools.

Chief Joseph is an articulate public speaker, whose leadership and presence have played an important part in empowering others, at many gatherings—aboriginal and otherwise—over many years.

Yet, as the eloquent Bobby Joseph spoke of the day he finally left St. Michael's Residential School, his words came halting and slow, laden with emotion, as he looked up from the microphone at the school building that had been his custodial home for eleven years.

Angry Cries

Then came the moment, when the assembled people stood back, as an excavator approached the front steps of the building, the threshold across which so many bewildered, lonely children had stepped over the decades.

As the machine's engine revved, and its shovel was extended to pull down the porch at the top of these steps, there were angry, heartfelt shouts of "Pull it down," and "Never again." In the next moment, the shovel descended, crumbling brickwork and masonry, which toppled down around the steps, to the ground.

This was the first, symbolic step in the destruction of the four storey red brick structure. The entire demolition process will take a number of weeks, with special care required to contain the asbestos and lead paints used in its construction.

Acknowledging Responsibility

The survivors and hosts were quite gracious in inviting representatives of the Anglican Church and of the Government of Canada to be present and to speak.

Logan McMenemy, Bishop of British Columbia, spoke for the Anglican Church of Canada. He was low key, down to earth, yet intensely on-the-mark in acknowledging the Church's material responsibility in the operation of St. Michael's residential school.

Bishop Logan put the matter bluntly: "We failed you, we failed ourselves, and we failed the Creator." Elaborating further, that the Churches, which accompanied the colonial power, failed to recognize the Creator's presence, in the Creation, in Aboriginal culture, and particularly, in the First Peoples themselves.

Eric Magnusson, Regional Director General of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, cut to the very heart of the purpose of the residential schools. In the frankest and starkest of terms, he



Photo: Fr. Matthew Johnson



Photo: Fr. Matthew Johnson

described a system designed deliberately to isolate Aboriginal children from the influence of their parents and families; a system to assimilate these children into the dominant culture.

Youthful Witness

Elders and traditional healers led ceremonies, both in front of the school building and in the ‘Namgis Big House, just up the road from the school.

Although adults led most of the ceremonies, what was so striking to me was the central role played by Aboriginal young people, from Alert Bay and other communities, who led most of the drumming, singing, and dancing.

Superbly skilled, and profoundly centred in their songs and dances, these young people suffused the entire event with a vibrancy and spiritual power that come only from living and practicing these arts as a way of life. Out of these ringing cultural depths, the young people provided a living ‘frame’ for the wisdom and substance and grace brought by the adult survivors, elders, chiefs, matriarchs, and other ceremonial leaders.

It is powerfully ironic that these children, youth, and young adults are the same ages as were their forebears: those young students who stare at us so hauntingly out of the grainy black and white photographs that document life in the residential schools. These young people are the spiritual descendants, and living representatives, of previous generations of youth who suffered at the Church-run schools.

They, as well as the adult survivors at the centre of the ceremonies, are living proof of the ultimate failure of our government’s policy of cultural assimilation. A strategy that sought but failed to destroy the very languages, cultural teachings, ceremonies, songs, drumming and dancing, that provided the very fabric of this profound event.

At the conclusion of the ceremonies, Chief Joseph spoke of the impact of what had just happened. “For many years I would never have believed this day would come.... It was hard for many people to be here today, but for many of us a weight has been lifted.”

Crucifixion & Resurrection

In every ceremony, every word spoken, and every other action, there was a constant and powerful acknowledgement of the Creator’s presence and goodness, at the heart of the healing process. A healing so needed for the survivors. And for our Church, and our society as well.

Resurrection is not solely a joyful reality. New Life comes only after suffering and death. The depths of which are portrayed for us in Jesus Christ, ‘the Crucified God,’ who freely chooses to die among the marginalized.

Based on Jesus’ teaching of his presence in the person of oppressed people (Matthew 25:40), I believe that in and through the residential schools, our society and our Church—without insight or understanding—crucified God again, in the person of aboriginal children and their families.

In the aftermath of Lent, as we Christians move through the Paschal Mystery into this Season of Resurrection, the events at Alert Bay are a powerful demonstration in the present of what resurrection can be.

I’tustolagalis . . . A ‘Rising Up, Together’.

May the healing continue.

- Foster and support a political will to enforce environmental protection regulations, eliminate subsidies to fossil fuel companies/corporations, and subsidize renewable clean energy industries.
- Hold the moral high ground and graciously serve your ideals to benefit the greater good of all.
- Condense intent into actions that foster peace and prosperity for all.



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Following the Road to Oz

Christian Mission in Mishkeegogamang First Nation (Part 1 of a 3-part series)



Photo: Deanna Zantlingh

The road winds for miles through the sea of tall birch, pine, and poplar trees, amidst thousands of lakes speckling the landscape. I wonder at first if I have entered a time warp, beginning to feel as I imagine Dorothy did as she set out to follow the yellow brick road to Oz. As the yellow pavement lines whiz by beneath the tires of my car, I am reminded that I, too, am stumbling to Oz down a road marked by yellow. I am headed to Mishkeegogamang First Nation, affectionately referred to as “Oz,” the short form of the Hudson Bay Company’s trading post “Osnaburgh House” established there in 1786.

Though I have now entered and exited “Oz” many times, I remain on a journey to understand all the influences and struggles that have shaped the lives of my friends here in this community. It is this story I’d like most to share with you, a story of a friendship that has dared me to ask questions about my own Christian story in ways I never could have anticipated.

The history of Christian mission among Native North Americans, as well as Indigenous peoples around the world, is a story of paradox. It consists of inspiring stories of people who truly lived out the call of Christ, and at the same time (and sadly too often) appalling stories of Christian participation in oppression, violence, abuse, and utter disregard for human dignity that embody the very antithesis of Christ’s church. For this reason, the history of Christian mission may be said to have provided both good medicine and bad to Indigenous communities. While missionaries sincerely believed they were bringing good news, many Indigenous

peoples received their message as bad news. Christian missionaries took their own (particular) prescription and assumed it must be the cure for the ills of all Indigenous communities. The main side effect of this inappropriate prescription has been widespread illness in both Indigenous communities and churches.

Regardless of one’s denominational affiliation or race, in North America we are all shaped by the impact of colonial Christian mission. This story is still too much with us and necessitates that we begin to dissect the attitudes and actions surrounding Christian mission in order to find truthful answers to certain key questions: What did/does colonial Christian mission look like? What were/are the impacts of colonial Christian mission upon Indigenous communities? How might an understanding of that mission as bad medicine help us shape a post-colonial understanding of mission capable of moving us to embrace a truly good medicine? Can we rediscover the Good Medicine that moves both Indigenous communities (who experienced harm) and the church (that inflicted harm) toward mutual healing? Can we seek Mino-Pimatisiwin (the good life) together?

Welcome To OZ

Mishkeegogamang offers a unique perspective on Christian mission because, due to its remote location, virtually no missionaries came to the Osnaburgh House area until around 1870. So the direct impacts of Christian mission are less than 150 years old, even though the first contact

between white traders and the Ojibway of Northern Ontario occurred in the 1600s. As in other nearby communities, the earliest missionaries to Osnaburgh House were Anglicans, because they were favoured by the Hudson Bay Company which “owned” the region. Oz is situated approximately 500 kilometers north of Thunder Bay and is home to Mishkeegogamang Ojibway Nation (also known as Indian Reservations 63A and 63B).

Traditionally the people of Mishkeegogamang (hereafter, “Mish”) traveled over large areas of the land with the changing seasons. They lived in family clans of twenty to thirty people and, prior to the signing of Treaty No. 9, were not a cohesive group. Treaty No. 9 was presented to 350 native people who happened to be at the trading post at the same time. Daniel Misababay, a blind man and respected leader, was chosen to speak on their behalf. Treaty No. 9 was signed by him when he was promised by treaty commissioners that the Ojibway way of life - living on traditional lands and hunting and fishing as they had always done - would not be in any way compromised by the Treaty. One of the treaty commissioners was a man named Duncan Campbell Scott. Now remembered as a poet, Scott is also infamous for his development of the Indian Residential School system.

A 1934 document titled “Religious Affiliation of Osnaburgh House Indians,” issued by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, reports that the community consisted of 430 Anglicans, 66 Catholics, and 137 pagans. The wording of the report implies that the religion of all



Photo: Deanna Zantlingh

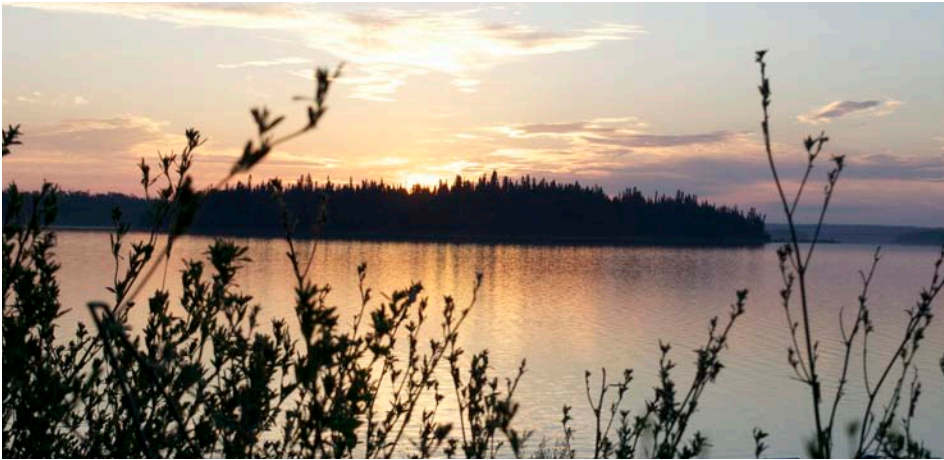


Photo: Deanna Zanlingh

non-Christian people in the community was contemptible, hence the urgency of converting “Indians” to Christianity. A statement from the Department of Indian Affairs regarding “Osnaburgh Indians,” also issued in 1934, makes clear that churches were in general agreement with the state’s project of civilizing the population: “The greater number of the members of this band are Anglicans, the remainder being Roman Catholics, and a few pagans who are easily distinguished from the Christian Indians by their dirty faces and long hair, uncombed.” To become Christian was to cease to be Indian not only in belief but even in appearance. It was to step up out of a “fallen” and depraved state, and into a “Christian” identity that included being clean-faced, clean-cut, and well-groomed.

By the 1940s and ’50s an Anglican minister preached regularly in Oz. Later, a Catholic church was also constructed there. When lightning burnt it down, the Bishop commissioned an Ojibway man to rebuild it. The man completed the project and waited to be paid. The Bishop told him he would receive his reward in heaven.

Eventually a village was established on the other side of the lake, allowing people to live nearer to the recently constructed Highway 599 (a project initiated by mining corporations that proceeded without consulting the community or the treaty). A new Anglican church was built there, too. In 1958, Mennonites established a mission at Slate Falls, a neighbouring community 100 kilometers west of Mishkeegogamang. The minister of the Mennonite Mission at Slate Falls visited Osnaburgh House each summer until 1963, when a Mennonite Mission was also established there.

In the 1950s, many community members were subjected to the government-

and church-run Residential School system. It was the brainchild of Duncan Campbell Scott, then the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs. It was his view that “Indians” were a problem to be solved, and that the solution to that problem was their “absorption into the general population.” Government-funded residential schools, where children would unlearn their native language and traditional ways and instead learn English and sound Christian morals, were the means by which the government sought to achieve that goal. And churches, intent on missionizing but low on funding, were its willing prime administrators. Thus, education to turn Indians into citizens of the state was adopted by churches as a means of also turning them into citizens of heaven.

Many in the Osnaburgh community lived in the bush more often than not, and so escaped the school system for many years. But eventually, many children were forced to enter the schools.

Jeff L. of Mishkeegogamang shared with me his experience of returning home from residential school and his struggle to communicate. Prohibited from speaking Ojibway by his teachers, he lost much of his knowledge of his mother tongue. He told me, “even now sometimes I don’t catch things ... [My partner] has to explain to me [Ojibway] words I don’t know.”

Mishkeegogamang’s current chief, Connie Gray-McKay, spoke to me of her one-year residential school experience in Pelican Falls before going into hiding in the bush with her grandparents. The same school, now under First Nation administration, operates as a high school for Indigenous youth. Today, Chief Gray-McKay’s daughter attends the very school where many in the community once experienced

traumas that have drastically affected their community and their youth.

The 1960s marked the solidifying of a cohesive community in their new location around the highway. People began to occupy houses year-round where formerly they had travelled in and out of the bush, living off the land. The timing of this settlement coincided with the beginning of the system of government pensions and social assistance. The proceeds of hunting, fishing, and trapping paled in comparison to government handouts, and so began generational cycles of dependency. It was also at this time that some of the children who had grown up in residential schools returned home. When children were initially taken, the older generation felt as though they had lost their future. When children returned, they returned to a community using drugs and alcohol to cope and with so little knowledge of their language or culture that in some cases communicating with their own parents was nearly impossible.

During the 1970s and ’80s, social problems in the community connected with drug and alcohol abuse had spiraled out of control. The people were not used to living together year-round in large groups, and lack of employment, paired with government social assistance, introduced drastic changes into community life. At the close of the 1980s, the community had experienced such a radical breakdown in its way of life that all ministers and missionaries were asked to leave.

In 2000, three churches operated in the community. Today, only one church remains, but non-Indigenous Christians are again allowed entry. The House of Prayer holds Sunday services led by a non-Ojibway pastor whose message follows the colonial principle that people must be taught they are fallen before they can be taught that God saves them. Presently, the residents of Oz may identify themselves as belonging to a particular denomination, even though their church buildings are gone and their priests or ministers no longer reside there. It is noteworthy that much of what is known about the history of various churches associated with Oz is recorded as statistics and numbers, a tell-tale sign of the nature and goal of Christian mission in the area.

The mission trend these days is “short-term missions.” Groups of evangelically-minded people come for short periods

to run tent meetings, church services, or “Vacation Bible School.” In my time in Mish, I have heard some shockingly sad things preached from the pulpit, yelled in a tent meeting, or declared boldly as sin with no regard for the cycles of trauma that have devastated this community. Despite evangelists’ extravagant claims of revival, healing, and movements of the Holy Spirit, the community sinks ever deeper into despair. Wave after wave of grief, oppression, and violence from earlier trauma—neo-colonial government imposition and thoughtless mission activity—have taken an awful social, economic, and spiritual toll.

There are major differences in the community as to which ways one should follow: Traditional ways or Christian ways.

The younger generation struggles when told that the traditions of their ancestors are evil. At the same time, the Christian message most frequently heard in the community is, “You are a terrible depraved sinner worthy only of hell until God rescues you.” The people of Mishkeegogamang do not need preachers to tell them how depraved God thinks they are; their lives and their experience as a nation have been profoundly problematized by both government and church. Both have attempted to force them to change from who they are as Ojibway people into someone else. The message “You are a sinner and need Jesus” will always be received as bad medicine.

Check out the Fall issue of *Intotemak* for part 2 of “Following the Road to Oz”.



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A Great Opportunity

Reflections on a Truth and Reconciliation Experience

I will never view our First Nations people the same way again. The truths coming from the hearts of the survivors was hard to believe at first, but when it kept coming in wave after wave, I found myself caught in a tsunami of pain and suffering. I witnessed a tragedy of which I am and have been a part.

I am a Canadian, unapologetic and proud to consider this country my home. I am a confident and happy member of an organized church, a good church. But, what went wrong, oh so wrong?

My history education didn’t include that Canada had a past policy of assimilation in its colonizing practice. My own growing up reality never gave cause to believe that priests and nuns and other clergy could be abusive to children in every way, including brutal sexual behaviour. How come this could happen to another race of fellow Canadians living in the same land, but mostly on Reserves?

Almost every presenter acknowledged his or her slide into addictions and crime and their long way back. But, now they at least are back. Yet thousands are still there and many are not willing to change. There are also thousands of non-Aboriginal persons who don’t want to hear these truths and basically say, “Let’s just get on with life!”

Society and the school system declared non-Aboriginal people to be superior and this has clouded our vision and fueled the assimilation practices to, “kill the Indian and save the child”. Just how wrong could that be?

Like the addicted and criminal minded, we also have to look for the way back. The lost love of a mother and father in stable homes needs to happen again. Our Governments must rule with integrity and respect. Our churches and their leaders dare not misrepresent God’s love. Many broken hearts have spoken to our hearts, the silence has been broken. A great opportunity for reconciliation and a much happier and healthy future lies before us.



Ernie Epp, Saskatoon, Sk.

TRC Insights

We heard the pain and felt the shame
As the abused adults declared the blame
To rest on those who forced the children
Of First Nations’ families to attend
Residential schools in the Government’s name

Fifty years have passed yet the hurt endures
Of broken trusts and scars without any cures
As generations suffer, their families destroyed
By damaged parents who never knew the strength
That love and safety in relationships assures

The Government commissioned the strongest church
To educate the innocent from the pines and birch,
These children of parents relegated to reserves
Who trusted the clergy, the priests and nuns
To provide what was best in their life’s long search

But the clergy betrayed what was thought to be best
Now addictions, jails, shattered homes and the rest
Of what happens in a culture when openly maligned
Lives in belief this is normal for all because
Most of their neighbours fail life’s healthy tests

Now the truths and the pains have been honestly shared
With thousands who listened and openly cared,
For reconciliation to happen we need mountains of hope
In a Nation that’s governed with equity for all
And Churches that nurture no joint efforts spared

