

THESE ARE THE SPEAKING NOTES OF MS. LORI RANSOM, HEALING AND RECONCILIATION PROGRAM ANIMATOR, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA, AT THE CHARLES, H. MACDONALD MEMORIAL LECTURE, KNOX COLLEGE, TORONTO, ONTARIO, OCTOBER 14, 2009.

**CHARLES H. MACDONALD MEMORIAL LECTURE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2009
KNOX COLLEGE, TORONTO**

“MINISTRY IN OUR HOME AND NATIVE LAND”

GOOD AFTERNOON. IT IS AN HONOUR TO BE WITH YOU HERE THIS AFTERNOON IN THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE MISSISSAUGA PEOPLES OF THE THREE FIRES CONFEDERACY. THE ANISHINABE. PEOPLES OF THE LAND. MY COUSINS.

IT IS AN HONOUR, AS AN ABORIGINAL WOMAN, TO HAVE BEEN ASKED BY MY CHURCH TO ASSUME A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN HELPING OUR DENOMINATION MOVE FORWARD, IN POSITIVE WAYS, SEEKING GOD’S WILL FOR US, IN OUR RELATIONS WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLES.

AND IT IS AN HONOUR TO HAVE BEEN ASKED BY THE MACDONALD FAMILY AND CHARLES H. MACDONALD MEMORIAL LEADERSHIP & MACDONALD SOCIETY TO GIVE TODAY’S LECTURE.

THE INVITATION CAME AT AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT IN MY MINISTRY AS HEALING AND RECONCILIATION ANIMATOR FOR THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.

I AM ABOUT SIX WEEKS INTO THE FOURTH YEAR OF THIS MINISTRY, A NEW MINISTRY NOT ONLY FOR ME BUT FOR OUR CHURCH IN CANADA.

AND THE FUTURE OF THIS MINISTRY IS NOT YET CLEAR. IN FACT, SOMETIME WITHIN THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA WILL HAVE TO MAKE SOME IMPORTANT DECISIONS ABOUT WHERE WE GO FROM HERE.

IN WHAT SHAPE AND FORM WILL THE MINISTRY OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION CONTINUE? WHAT RESOURCES WILL WE CONTINUE TO PUT INTO THIS EFFORT, IN THIS CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIME, AND THIS CHALLENGING TIME FOR DOING ANY KIND OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN CANADA GIVEN CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS WITHIN OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES.

I AM THEREFORE STRUCK BY AND GRATEFUL FOR THIS VERY TIMELY OPPORTUNITY TO DO SOME IMPORTANT REFLECTION ON WHERE WE'RE AT IN TERMS OF OUR JOURNEY OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS WITH YOU TODAY AND, IN SO DOING, WITH YOUR HELP, TO DISCUSS THESE ISSUES AND SEEK YOUR ASSISTANCE DISCERNING WHERE GOD'S SPIRIT IS LEADING US.

First Slide: *Ministry in Our Home and Native Land*

AS YOU HAVE HEARD, THE MACDONALD LECTURESHIP WAS ENDOWED TO "RELATE TO SOME ASPECT OF PRACTICAL MINISTRY IN CHURCH OR SOCIETY." I HOPE TO HONOUR THAT OBJECTIVE . . .

BY EXAMINING THE QUESTION OF WHERE HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, THE FIRST NATION, METIS, AND INUIT PEOPLES

OF CANADA FITS IN THE PRACTICAL MINISTRY OF CHURCHES IN CANADA TODAY.

TO DO THIS, I WILL

▶ OFFER SOME THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS FROM MY WORK TO DATE, INVITING YOU TO REFLECT ON WHAT GOD IS TELLING US ABOUT THIS TOPIC

I WILL ALSO

▶ TELL YOU ABOUT HOW SOME MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH ARE RESPONDING TO THE CALL TO WALK WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES ON THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION: IN BOTH POSITIVE SUPPORTIVE WAYS, AND IN CRITICAL WAYS.

AND ALONG THE WAY

▶ I WILL ASK SOME HARD, PRACTICAL QUESTIONS

I HAVE TO THANK MY NEIGHBOURS, THE TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS, FOR THE TITLE OF THIS LECTURE.

YES, MY NEIGHBOURS, THE LEAFS. YOU SEE I LIVE DIRECTLY OPPOSITE THE AIR CANADA CENTRE.

AND I WAS STRUCK LAST WEEK, WALKING DOWN YONGE STREET BY A BANNER WITH THE PHRASE, "OUR HOME AND NATIVE LAND." A CLOSER LOOK REVEALED THE BANNER WAS DESIGNED TO MARKET OUR LOCAL HOCKEY TEAM.

YET I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, FULLY AWARE OF THE IRONY IN DOING SO, THAT WOW, THAT'S GREAT HOW THE LEAFS ARE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT CANADA IS OUR HOME – HOME TO ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE TODAY – BUT THAT CANADA'S ALSO NATIVE LAND.

I'M SURE THIS WASN'T THE DESIRED EFFECT OF THIS QUOTE FROM OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM, BUT IT SAID TO ME THAT IF ONLY ALL CANADIANS HELD A FIRM BELIEF IN CANADA AS THEIR HOME, AND THAT, IT HAS BECOME OUR HOME OWING TO THE HOSPITALITY OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CANADA WHO WELCOMED THE STRANGERS FROM AFAR TO THEIR NATIVE LAND.

IF WE UNDERSTOOD, OUR HOME AND NATIVE LAND, IN THIS WAY. I THINK WE MIGHT HAVE A VERY DIFFERENT COUNTRY, AND A MORE HOLISTIC VIEW OF OUR COMMUNITY.

AND SURELY COMMUNITY, AN UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNITY, IS VITAL TO THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY.

A KEY POINT IN MY THESIS CONCERNING HOW TO DO PRACTICAL MINISTRY WELL, IN CANADA, IS THE NEED FOR US TO UNDERSTAND AND GET TO KNOW THE PEOPLES WHO MAKE UP THIS COUNTRY; AND TO MAKE A MUCH GREATER EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND OUR DIFFERENCES, AND WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT, INCLUDING HOW OUR HISTORIES HAVE SHAPED EACH OF US, INDIVIDUALLY AND AS MEMBERS OF COMMUNITIES WITHIN COMMUNITIES.

UNDERSTANDING HOW AND WHY WE ARE DIFFERENT I BELIEVE IS CRITICAL TO OUR EFFORTS TO BE A TRULY UNIVERSAL CHURCH.

New slide: *And who is my neighbour?* Luke 10:29

WHEN I FIRST GOT INVOLVED WITH HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, DIFFERENT PRESBYTERIANS FROM ONTARIO, ON DIFFERENT OCCASIONS, COMMENTED TO ME THAT THEY'VE FOUND IT HARD TO MOVE FORWARD ON HEALING AND RECONCILIATION BECAUSE FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN IN THEIR COMMUNITIES; THEY TOLD ME ABORIGINAL PEOPLE LIVE PRIMARILY IN WESTERN CANADA.

THESE COMMENTS CERTAINLY TOLD ME A LOT ABOUT WHAT I HAD TO DO.

BECAUSE, AS IT HAPPENS, TWENTY-THREE PERCENT OF ALL ABORIGINAL PEOPLE LIVE IN ONTARIO, MORE BY POPULATION THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE COUNTRY, SOME 300,000 PEOPLE, AND CONTRARY TO SOME ASSUMPTIONS, MORE LIVE IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO, THAN IN NORTHERN ONTARIO, SO IT WAS IMMEDIATELY CLEAR THAT WE HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO TO HELP OUR MEMBERS SEE THEIR NEIGHBOURS.

AND TO MEET THEIR NEIGHBOURS.

IF JESUS TAUGHT US ANYTHING, SURELY IT WAS TO BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT SEEN, THOSE WHO ARE IGNORED OR EXCLUDED FROM SOCIETY, AND TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH THEM.

PRACTICAL MINISTRY IS CONTEXTUAL. IT'S ABOUT LOOKING OUT TO DISCOVER WHO LIVES WITH US IN COMMUNITY AND TO REACH OUT TO THEM, BECAUSE THEY LIVE IN OUR COMMUNITY, AND BECAUSE GOD LOVES THEM; NOT FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE.

THIS TEACHING HAS PROVIDED THE FOCUS FOR MY MINISTRY, WHICH HAS BEEN TO ASSIST OUR CHURCH TO GET TO KNOW, AND TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, AS MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY.

New slide: *Pay attention to how you listen*, Luke 8:18

THERE WILL COME A POINT DURING OUR JOURNEY THIS AFTERNOON, WHEN I WILL INVITE YOU TO HAVE A CHAT WITH OTHERS IN THE ROOM ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE HEARING AND THINKING ABOUT

AND WE WILL RESERVE TIME FOR FEEDBACK FROM THOSE CONVERSATIONS AND QUESTIONS AT THE END OF MY REMARKS

ONE THING I WILL ASK YOU TO DO THROUGHOUT OUR TIME TOGETHER IS TO PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN.

WHAT DO I MEAN BY THAT?

YOU'LL SEE I'VE LIFTED THIS PHRASE OUT OF LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT. PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN: JESUS' WORDS.

I HAVE LIFTED THE PHRASE OUT OF CONTEXT, ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF THE DANGER OF WHAT I CALL FRIDGE MAGNET THEOLOGY, THAT IS, THE DANGER OF PULLING A PHRASE OUT OF THE TEXT, STICKING IT ON A FRIDGE MAGNET, AND LIVING BY IT, WITHOUT REGARD TO WHAT ELSE THE TEXT SAYS.

HOWEVER, I LIKE THIS PHRASE, "PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN," AND SO I HAVE TAKEN THE RISK OF STICKING IT ALONE, OUT OF CONTEXT, UP ON MY SLIDE.

THE PHRASE WORKED VERY WELL IN A SERMON I PREACHED UP IN BRACEBRIDGE, ONTARIO, IN JULY 2007, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE I NOT ONLY READ MORE FROM THAT CHAPTER OF LUKE, BUT ALSO THE OTHER TEXTS

OFFERED UP BY THE LECTIONARY FOR THAT SUNDAY, NOTABLY FROM AMOS 8.

BRIEFLY, IN THE LUKE ACCOUNT, AFTER JESUS SAYS, PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN, OUR LORD SAYS THESE DIFFICULT WORDS: “FOR TO THOSE WHO HAVE, MORE WILL BE GIVEN; AND FROM THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE, EVEN WHAT THEY SEEM TO HAVE WILL BE TAKEN AWAY.”

IF WE DON'T LISTEN TO JESUS CAREFULLY, IT SOUNDS LIKE HE'S SAYING THE POOR WILL HAVE TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING THEY HAVE TO MAKE THE RICH, RICHER.

PUTTING ASIDE THE IRONY, THAT IN OUR TIME THIS SEEMS PROPHETIC . . .

WHEN WE READ THIS GOSPEL PASSAGE, ALONG WITH AMOS FRUSTRATION WITH A PEOPLE WHO HAVE HEARD THE WORD OF GOD BUT HAVE NOT LISTENED: “HEAR THIS, YOU THAT TRAMPLE ON THE NEEDY, AND BRING TO RUIN THE POOR OF THE LAND . . . THE TIME IS SURELY COMING . . . WHEN I WILL SEND A FAMINE ON THE LAND; NOT A FAMINE OF BREAD . . . BUT [A FAMINE] OF HEARING THE WORDS OF GODS.”

AMOS IS PULLING OUT HIS HAIR WITH FRUSTRATION OVER A PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT ACTING AS IF THEY ARE LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD, AND HE PULLS NO PUNCHES TELLING HIS LISTENERS THAT THEY ARE IN DANGER OF HAVING GOD'S WORDS TAKEN AWAY FROM THEM, OF HAVING THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD TAKEN AWAY, BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT ACTING AS IF THEY ARE REALLY LISTENING TO GOD.

THE LIGHT THIS PASSAGE SHED ON JESUS' TEACHINGS ABOUT GIVING TO THOSE WHO HAVE IN LUKE'S GOSPEL MAY BE PARAPHRASED THIS WAY:

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF THE BIBLE. FOLLOW CHRIST'S TEACHINGS AND YOU WILL GROW IN THE KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE OF GOD. DON'T LISTEN WITH ONE EAR, AND LET HIS WORDS SLIP OUT THE OTHER, OR YOU WILL BECOME POORER, FOR IT WILL BE AS IF GOD WERE TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU.

PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN.

New slide: *"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God, and do it."* Luke 8:21

JESUS GOES ON IN HIS SERMON TO SAY THAT "MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD, AND DO IT."

THIS IS HOW SERIOUS GOD IS ABOUT THIS MATTER OF LISTENING. GOD ACKNOWLEDGES AS MOTHER AND BROTHER ONLY THOSE WHO HEAR AND DO.

PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU LISTEN.

I INVITE YOU TODAY TO THINK ABOUT HOW WE, AND ABOUT HOW THE MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH, LISTEN TO THE STORY OF OUR MINISTRY WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE.

GOING FURTHER, THINK ABOUT HOW YOU LISTEN, AND THINK ABOUT HOW OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR FAITH COMMUNITIES LISTEN, WHAT GOES THROUGH OUR MINDS WHEN WE GO HOME AT NIGHT AND HEAR A NEWS STORY ABOUT A NATIVE LAND CLAIM, OR A PROTEST OVER MINING RIGHTS, OR DEMANDS FOR NATIVE SELF-GOVERNMENT?

HOW DO WE LISTEN?

WHAT IS OUR ATTITUDE TO FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE? OUR ASSUMPTIONS, PRE-CONCEIVED NOTIONS, OR MAYBE OUR GENUINE INTEREST, ENTHUSIASM, OR EXCITEMENT ABOUT THESE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN OUR COMMUNITIES BUT WHO ARE OF ANOTHER CULTURE?

OUR ATTITUDES WILL COLOUR HOW WE LISTEN, AND WHAT WE DO, OR DON'T DO, AFTER LISTENING.

WE NEED TO PAY ATTENTION TO HOW WE LISTEN, BECAUSE HOW WE LISTEN, JESUS SAYS, IS DIRECTLY LINKED TO HOW WE WILL REACT, AND ACT, OR NOT ACT.

HOW DO WE LISTEN TO NATIVE PEOPLE IN CANADA TODAY? HOW DO WE REACT WHEN WE HEAR THEIR CRIES.

WITH TIREDNESS? IS OUR RESPONSE, HERE WE GO AGAIN?

WITH SADNESS? WHY DOESN'T SOMEONE, ELSE, DO SOMETHING?

WITH ANGER? WHEN ARE THEY GOING TO CHANGE?

WITH HOPEFULNESS? THERE'S SOMETHING I CAN HELP WITH?

HOW DO WE LISTEN TO THE STORY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS?

WHAT ARE OUR ATTITUDES TO THOSE WHO RAN THE SCHOOLS?

WHAT ARE OUR ATTITUDES TO NATIVE PEOPLES WHO CONTINUE TO CLAIM SOVEREIGN RIGHTS IN CANADA?

LET'S PAY ATTENTION TO HOW WE LISTEN.

THERE MAY WELL COME A POINT THIS AFTERNOON, WHEN I WILL SAY SOMETHING YOU WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH. TRY TO PAY ATTENTION TO WHY YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY AT THAT MOMENT. IT CAN BE VERY INSTRUCTIVE.

New Slide: Pictures of Birtle and Cecilia Jeffrey Residential Schools and modern day ministry with Native peoples: *We have had a relationship for 500 years*

WHY IS HEALING AND RECONCILIATION A RELEVANT TOPIC FOR PRACTICAL MINISTRY IN CANADA TODAY?

WELL, FOR ONE THING, CHURCHES HAVE BEEN DOING MINISTRY WITH AND AMONG THE FIRST PEOPLES OF CANADA, SINCE CHRISTIANS FIRST ARRIVED IN WHAT USED TO BE CALLED THE NEW WORLD. WHAT MANY, THOUGH NOT ALL FIRST PEOPLES CALL, TURTLE ISLAND.

WE CHRISTIANS BELIEVE WE HAVE A CLEAR CALLING TO GO OUT AND SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL, A BELIEF WE HAVE FIRMLY HELD TO FOR TWO MILLENNIA

OUR FOREBEARS IN THE FAITH SET FOOT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, I.E. THE 1500'S, IN NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA, LANDS WHICH WERE HOME TO SOME 50 MILLION INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, PEOPLE WHO WOULD BECOME THEIR NEIGHBOURS, POTENTIAL MEMBERS OF NEW COMMUNITIES OF FAITH.

THERE ARE THREE POINTS I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE BY TAKING US BACK TO THE POINT OF FIRST CONTACT BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND NATIVE NORTH AMERICANS:

- FIRST, OUR RELATIONSHIP IS NOW MORE THAN FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OLD; HOW INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA GROW TOGETHER IN FAITH IS A 500-YEAR OLD STORY.
- SECOND, THE CHURCH'S HISTORY AND SOCIETIES' HISTORY WORK HAND IN HAND; THEY ARE INTEGRATED.

CHRIS COLUMBUS DIDN'T GET INTO ONE BOAT, MANDATED TO WORK FOR THE KING AND QUEEN OF SPAIN,

WHILE, WITH REMARKABLE SIMULTANEITY, A GROUP OF JESUITS GOT INTO ANOTHER BOAT, MANDATED BY THE POPE TO WORK FOR GOD

AND THE TWO BOATS JUST HAPPENED TO ARRIVE IN THE NEW WORLD AT THE SAME TIME, CONTAINING TWO ENTIRELY DIFFERENT GROUPS—SOME BENT ON BEING CONQUERORS, AND THE OTHER EVANGELISTS—WORKING SEPARATELY WITH ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT AGENDAS

MY POINT IS THAT LIKE THOSE EARLY EXPLORERS AND EARLY MISSIONARIES, THE PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH TODAY ARE ALSO MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETIES OF TODAY, WHETHER WE HAVE AN ENTIRELY FAVOURABLE VIEW OF OUR SOCIETIES OR NOT, AND WE INFLUENCE, AND ARE INFLUENCED BY OUR SOCIETIES—ALBEIT TO DIFFERENT DEGREES DEPENDING ON ONE'S PLACE IN SOCIETY AND HOW THAT SOCIETY IS ORGANIZED

UNDOUBTEDLY BECAUSE I HAVE BEEN A CAREER CIVIL SERVANT, I CONTINUE TO FIND IT ASTONISHING HOW EASILY CHRISTIANS CAN REMOVE THEMSELVES FROM RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT THEIR SOCIETIES DO, WHAT THEIR GOVERNMENTS DO, AS IF THEY HAD NO ROLE OR INFLUENCE ON THEIR OWN SOCIETIES.

DOING MINISTRY IN CANADA DEMANDS AN UNDERSTANDING THAT HOW PEOPLE ARE SHAPED IN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH, CAN AND DOES SHAPE THE KIND OF SOCIETY THAT IS SHAPED BY THEM ON THE SIX DAYS OF EVERY WEEK THAT THEY ARE NOT IN CHURCH.

- THIRD, PRACTICAL MINISTRY IS CONTEXTUAL, NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF PLACE BUT IN TERMS OF TIME. THE CONTEXT OF WHERE WE DO MINISTRY, WHO LIVES THERE NOW, AND WHAT OUR RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN LIKE UP TO NOW SHOULD CONSTITUTE KEY QUESTIONS AS WE TRY TO DISCERN WHAT MINISTRY WE ARE CALLED TO DO TODAY.

I WONDER HOW OFTEN MINISTERS AND CONGREGATIONS, APPROACHING THE QUESTION OF OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES, AND STRATEGIES FOR CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH, ASK THEMSELVES THE QUESTION: WHAT HAS OUR RELATIONSHIP BEEN LIKE UP TO NOW, WITH THE PEOPLES WHO NOW MAKE UP OUR COMMUNITIES; WHAT IS OUR HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM? IS IT GOOD, BAD, OR INDIFFERENT? HOW IS THAT GOING TO AFFECT THEIR RESPONSE TO OUR DESIRE TO HAVE THEM JOIN OUR COMMUNITY OF FAITH?

UNFORTUNATELY IT IS STILL A SURPRISE TO MANY PEOPLE IN CANADA, AND MANY MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCHES, TO FIND OUT JUST HOW BAD OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLES HAS BEEN.

New Slide: *Saskatchewan Presbyterian Youth opposite pictures from residential school*

THREE WEEKS AGO, I SPENT A WEEKEND AT A RETREAT WITH A GROUP OF SPIES, SASKATCHEWAN PRESBYTERIAN YOUTH.

THE YOUNGEST WERE ATTENDING GRADE 10, SO ABOUT 15-YEARS OLD, AND THE OLDEST, WERE TWO-TO-THREE YEARS INTO UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES AT UNIVERSITY.

IT WAS HEARTBREAKING TO LISTEN TO THEIR REACTIONS TO A FILM WE WATCHED ABOUT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS—CALLED *NIIGANIBATOWAAD, FRONTRUNNERS*, WHICH DEALT WITH THE PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, AFTER A DAY IN WHICH WE HAD REFLECTED ON THE HISTORY OF RELATIONS SINCE FIRST CONTACT

- WHY HAVE WE NOT HEARD ABOUT THIS?
- DID THAT REALLY HAPPEN? WITH REFERENCE TO A PARTICULAR FORM OF RAPE
- HOW COULD THOSE WHO RAN THE SCHOOLS CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIANS?

THESE QUESTIONS WERE ASKED AGAIN AND AGAIN, WITH TEARS AND WITH ANGER.

IT WAS HEARTBREAKING TO SEE AND HEAR HOW EMOTIONAL MANY OF THE STUDENTS BECAME. BUT IT WAS ALSO FRUSTRATING TO REALIZE HOW A POOR A JOB WE STILL DO IN CANADA, TEACHING OUR CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR CONTEXT FOR MINISTRY, THEIR OWN COUNTRY.

IT IS ALSO WORRISOME: IT IS GETTING HARDER AND HARDER TO CLAIM THAT RESOURCES ARE NOT AVAILABLE TO TEACH THE STORY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND THE IMPACT OF COLONIZATION ON FIRST PEOPLES OF CANADA. AND YET THIS STORY IS STILL NOT WELL TAUGHT.

New slide: *Artist, Ed Martin, reflects on his experience of being left at residential school*

FOUR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS WERE SET UP BY CHURCHES, NOT BY THE GOVERNMENT, IN THE 1830S, IN ONTARIO.

SHORTLY AFTER CONFEDERATION, THE NUMBER HAD GROWN, AND AT THAT POINT THE GOVERNMENT GOT INVOLVED IN A SYSTEMATIC WAY.

SO THAT AT THE HEIGHT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL ACTIVITY, IN THE 1930S, THERE WERE EIGHTY (80) SCHOOLS IN SIMULTANEOUS OPERATION ACROSS CANADA.

BY THE 1930S, PROBLEMS IN THE SCHOOLS WERE ALREADY WELL DOCUMENTED.

GOVERNMENT HEALTH INSPECTORS HAD LAMENTED IN PUBLIC REPORTS, AND IN THE MEDIA, THE CONDITIONS IN THE SCHOOLS WHICH EXACERBATED, WHICH FACILITATED THE SPREAD OF DISEASE AND DEATH.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES HAD PETITIONED THE GOVERNMENT TO STOP TAKING CHILDREN AWAY FROM THEIR COMMUNITIES.

AND THERE WERE CHURCH OFFICIALS WHO RAISED CONCERNS, THOUGH MORE OFTEN THESE HAD TO DO WITH THE ADEQUACY OF FUNDING FOR THE SCHOOLS, THAN THEY WERE OBJECTIONS TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AS A CONCEPT—THOUGH SOME DID SEE THE DAMAGE BEING DONE, THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF DELIBERATELY EDUCATING CHILDREN AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS, YET THEY WERE IN TOO SMALL A MINORITY TO MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE.

AND SO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLING CONTINUED. WITH CHURCH INVOLVEMENT FOR ANOTHER 40 YEARS, TO 1969; AND WITH GOVERNMENT SUPPORT UP UNTIL THE LAST SCHOOL CLOSED IN 1996

MOST OF THE SCHOOLS WERE IN WESTERN CANADA, 80 PERCENT OF THE 130 SCHOOLS THAT EXISTED OVER TIME.

THE FIGURE WHICH I'VE MOST OFTEN QUOTED FOR THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ATTENDED THE SCHOOLS IS 150,000. MANY GOOD SOURCES SEEM TO AVOID TRYING TO QUOTE AN EXACT FIGURE, WHICH TO ME SEEMS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE RECORDS ARE POOR.

FOR THE FIGURE OF 150,000 SEEMS LOW, WHEN WE KNOW THAT 80,000 SURVIVORS STILL LIVE IN CANADA TODAY

THE EXTENT OF THE ABUSE CONTINUES TO SHOCK, AND IS TOO MANY UNFATHOMABLE.

CHURCH MEMBERS STILL ASK ME WHETHER THERE WERE ABUSES IN OUR, PRESBYTERIAN SCHOOLS—UNAWARE OF THE SHOCKING NATURE OF THE QUESTION, WHEN SO MANY CHILDREN WERE ABUSED IN CHURCH-RUN SCHOOLS.

FOR THE RECORD, OF CASES THAT HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO OUR ATTENTION, SINCE THE 1990S, MEANING WE DON'T KNOW HOW MANY THERE MAY HAVE BEEN IN OUR SCHOOLS HISTORICALLY. SINCE CASES HAVE BEEN FILED, THERE HAVE BEEN OVER 300 DOCUMENTED CASES IN OUR TWO SCHOOLS, AND MOST INVOLVE SEXUAL ABUSE.

CLOSE TO 13,000 . . . 13,000 . . . SUCH CLAIMS HAVE BEEN FILED WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND CANADIAN CHURCHES IN RECENT YEARS.

THIS IS OUR CONTEXT FOR MINISTRY IN CANADA.

New Slide: *The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear, John 20:19*

WHEN THE TIME CAME IN MY NEW JOB AS HEALING AND RECONCILIATION ANIMATOR TO FIRST STAND UP ON A SUNDAY MORNING AND PREACH A SERMON ABOUT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION, I FOUND THAT I HAD BEEN ASKED TO PREACH ON THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER, IN 2007.

I'M VERY GLAD THIS OCCURRED FOR I DIDN'T REALIZE IT FULLY AT THE TIME THAT I HAD AN IMPORTANT CHOICE TO MAKE IN THE WAY I APPROACHED THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ABOUT MY MINISTRY.

AS I PREACH IN DIFFERENT PLACES MOST SUNDAYS, HAVING MADE ONLY ONE RETURN VISIT TO A CONGREGATION THUS FAR, I COULD EASILY HAVE DEVELOPED ONE SERMON ON MY TOPIC, CHOOSING A COUPLE OF CLEARLY RELEVANT BIBLICAL PASSAGES, AND GONE ON TO DELIVER THAT SAME SERMON OVER AGAIN AND AGAIN—MODIFYING MY TEXT ONLY TO THE DEGREE OF ACKNOWLEDGING LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES, AND INCORPORATED UPDATED INFORMATION OVER TIME.

I'M GLAD I HAD TO PREACH ON THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER, BECAUSE MY IMMEDIATE REACTION WAS THAT I COULD NOT GET UP THAT SUNDAY MORNING AND PREACH AS IF THAT CHURCH HAD NOT JUST GONE THROUGH ALL THE LEAD UP AND SPECIAL SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK, THROUGH GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER SUNDAY.

HI, DID YOU HAVE A NICE EASTER? AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT, LET'S TALK ABOUT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION.

IT DIDN'T WORK TO ME.

THAT DECISION SET THE COURSE FOR HOW I NOW APPROACH EVERY PREACHING INVITATION, AND THAT IS TO LOOK AT THE LECTIONARY, CONSIDER WHERE WE'RE AT IN THE CHURCH YEAR, AND LOOK AT MY THEME IN THE NEW LIGHT THAT EACH PAGE OF THE BIBLE, EACH SEASON OF THE CHURCH YEAR, BRINGS TO BEAR ON THE TOPIC.

IT'S BEEN AN INTERESTING JOURNEY FOR ME. AND I HAVE WORKED HARD AT TRYING NOT TO FIT THE TEXT TO MY TOPIC—THOUGH SOME OF THAT IS PROBABLY INEVITABLE, PROBABLY INEVITABLE FOR ANY PREACHER WOULD BE MY OBSERVATION—BUT RATHER TO TRULY READ THE BIBLE CONTEXTUALLY, THINKING ABOUT WHAT GOD IS TELLING US ABOUT MINISTRY IN CANADA TODAY IN RELATION TO THE FIRST PEOPLES

IT WAS INTERESTING THEN TO BE PRESENTED WITH THE TEXT ABOUT HOW THE DISCIPLES FELT, HOW THEY WERE REACTING TO FINDING THEMSELVES HAVING TO CARRY ON MINISTRY WITHOUT JESUS PRESENCE WITH THEM, INCARNATED, IN HUMAN-FORM

THE PICTURE OF FEARFUL DISCIPLES, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO, NEEDING MANY SIGNS, WHICH OUR GOSPEL WRITER TELLS US ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK OF JOHN, NEEDING MANY SIGNS TO MAKE THEM BELIEVE IN THEIR ABILITY TO DO MINISTRY

NEEDING TO HEAR THE WORDS, PEACE BE WITH YOU. DO NOT BE AFRAID. I WILL SEND MY SPIRIT TO HELP YOU.

THIS SEEMS LIKE JUST THE MESSAGE CANADIANS NEED TO BE REMINDED OF WHEN APPROACHING THE SUBJECT OF MINISTRY WITH THE FIRST PEOPLES OF CANADA.

FEAR IS ALIVE AND WELL IN OUR CHURCHES WITH RESPECT TO THE TOPIC OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION, AND IT IS SOMETHING WE NEED TO FIND WAYS TO ADDRESS.

THERE'S A HEALTHY SIDE TO THE FEAR: THE CAUTION, THE SIDE OF CARING, THE CONCERN TO GET THINGS RIGHT THIS TIME, TO NOT MAKE THE RELATIONSHIP WORSE, THAT GIVES PEOPLE PAUSE, MAKES THEM RELUCTANT TO OPEN UP THE DOORS OF OUR CHURCHES TO GO OUT AND MEET OUR INDIGENOUS NEIGHBOURS

THIS KIND OF FEAR, TO THE DEGREE IT ENCOURAGES THOUGHTFUL, DELIBERATE ACTION CAN BE USEFUL, EVEN IMPORTANT

BUT IT CAN ALSO LEAD TO INACTION, TO A BELIEF THAT SOMEONE ELSE SHOULD DO IT, TO A FAILURE TO ASK, WHO ELSE, IF NOT US?

ONE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION WHO ELSE CAN IT BE: THE GOVERNMENT.

CHURCH MEMBERS, EVEN CHURCH OFFICIALS, OFTEN POINT TO THE GOVERNMENT'S RECORD WITH DISDAIN. I HEAR COMMENTS LIKE THEY SPENT \$60 MILLION ON THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND ITS REPORT IS SITTING ON A SHELF.

I AGREE WITHOUT HESITATION THAT MUCH OF WHAT THE ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDED REMAINS UNIMPLEMENTED.

YET IN MY PREVIOUS LIFE I WAS RESPONSIBLE, AMONG MANY OTHERS, FOR TELLING CANADIANS WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DID IN RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS. I OBVIOUSLY DID NOT DO A GOOD JOB.

THE GOVERNMENT ISSUED A REPORT IN 1998 CALLED, *GATHERING STRENGTH: CANADA'S ABORIGINAL ACTION PLAN*. THIS WAS JUST OVER A YEAR AFTER IT RECEIVED THE ROYAL COMMISSION'S REPORT.

THE PLAN INCLUDED DOZENS OF PAGES OF NEW PROGRAMMING ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING SOME \$200 MILLION IN IMMEDIATE NEW SPENDING, IF MY MEMORY SERVES CORRECTLY.

THIS IS NOT ACKNOWLEDGED.

WHY NOT?

WELL PART OF THE ANSWER IS THAT THE ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDED NOT \$200 MILLION IN NEW SPENDING, BY \$20 BILLION IN NEW SPENDING OVER 20-YEARS.

DO CANADIANS SUPPORT THAT? DO CHURCH MEMBERS? INCLUDING THOSE WHO COMPLAIN THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT DOING ENOUGH?

IS THE FEAR ATTENDANT TO THIS TOPIC NOT WRAPPED UP IN WHAT WILL BE REVEALED WHEN WE TURN THE MIRROR ON OURSELVES?
AND YET, DOES GOD NOT TELL US THIS IS IMPORTANT, AS PAINFUL AS IT CAN BE?

WE CAME CLOSE TO A \$5 BILLION INJECTION INTO SPENDING ON ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS A FEW YEARS AGO, WITH THE KELOWNA ACCORD, BUT THE ACCORD IS ALSO SITTING ON THE SHELF.

New slide: *The beginning of the good news . . . a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* Mark: 1:1 and 1:4

IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS THAT WHEN THE SUBJECT OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE COMES UP, CHRISTIANS IN CANADA, ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM THE MAJORITY OF NON-CHRISTIAN, NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE: FEELINGS OF DISCOMFORT, FRUSTRATION, SOMETIMES SADNESS, ARISE . . . ALONGSIDE AN ABIDING SENSE, IN MANY, THAT IF ONLY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE COULD LIVE MORE LIKE THE REST OF US, STILL MAINTAIN THEIR CULTURE, I.E. THEIR DANCES AND MUSIC, BUT OTHERWISE BE LIKE US . . . THEN THINGS WOULD BE BETTER FOR THEM . . . THAT IS THERE IS STILL A PREVAILING BELIEF IN THE DOMINANT SOCIETY, IN THE DOMINANT SOCIETY'S WAY OF LIFE.

AND ON TOP OF ALL OF THIS, THERE IS GUILT.

NOW, WHEN I READ THE GOSPELS, I DON'T HEAR JESUS SAYING GO OUT AND LAY GUILT TRIPS ON PEOPLE.

NOR DO I HEAR JESUS SAYING GUILT IS GOOD FOR YOU, LIVE IN THE GUILT OF YOUR SINFULNESS, FEEL GUILTY DAY IN AND DAY OUT FOR THE MISTAKES YOU'VE MADE, IT IS GOOD AND RIGHT AND HOLY TO FEEL GUILTY.

SO THIS IS NOT ABOUT GUILT. AND IF I DON'T DO A GOOD JOB OF THIS AFTERNOON OF KEEPING YOU FROM FEELING GUILTY, I APOLOGIZE NOW! MAKING YOU FEEL GUILTY IS NOT MY INTENT. BUT I HOPE WE WILL ALL COME AWAY HAVING DONE SOME DEEP THINKING.

I'VE SAID WE DON'T HEAR A LOT ABOUT GUILT IN THE BIBLE, BUT WE DO READ A LOT ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF REPENTANCE, AND EVEN MORE ABOUT FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS, ACCORDING TO MARK'S GOSPEL, IS THE STORY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S CRIES TO THE PEOPLE TO REPENT, AS AN ACT OF PREPARATION TO RECEIVE THE GOOD NEWS.

THE BEGINNING OF A LIFE IN CHRIST, BAPTISM, THE BEGINNING OF OUR LIFE IN THE BODY OF CHURCHES IS LINKED DIRECTLY WITH THE SUBJECT OF CONFESSION, WITH SEEKING FORGIVENESS FOR SINS, WITH APOLOGY FOR PAST MISTAKES, AND A TURNING, A REPENTING TOWARD NEW LIFE.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST IS APOLOGY AND REPENTANCE.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE, EVERY SUNDAY, IN OUR CHURCH SERVICES, THE IMPORTANCE OF BEGINNING WITH REPENTANCE, WITH CONFESSION, SEEKING FORGIVENESS, IN PREPARATION FOR RECEIVING THE WORD OF GOD, IN OUR READINGS AND IN THE SERMON.

YET, HOW WELL DO PRESBYTERIANS UNDERSTAND OUR THEOLOGY OF CONFESSION, FORGIVENESS, REPENTANCE?

THE FIRST AND ONLY TIME, SO FAR, THAT I PUT THE SUBJECT OF "REPENTANCE" AT THE HEART OF MY SERMON, AS OPPOSED TO PART OF IT, I FELT THAT THE SERMON WENT OVER LIKE A LEAD BALLOON.

I KEEP AT IT, IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, STRIVING MYSELF TO DEFINE A THEOLOGY THAT PERHAPS WE PRESBYTERIANS HAVE NOT WELL DEFINED.

I HAVE ASKED MANY LEARNED PEOPLE IN OUR TRADITION TO RECOMMEND A BOOK ON CONFESSION IN THE REFORMED TRADITION, AND AT BEST HAVE BEEN REFERRED TO THE ODD CHAPTER OF A BOOK, BOOKS ON RELATED THEMES.

RICK FEE SEARCHED HIS ENTIRE LIBRARY FOR ME AND CALLED ME IN DESPAIR TO SAY HE HAD COME UP WITH NOTHING.

WE SEEM TO SHY AWAY FROM REPENTANCE IN OUR TRADITION, THOUGH WE CONFESS EVERY SUNDAY. THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION, THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION, AS IT IS NOW CALLED, IS A ROMAN CATHOLIC THING.

I SUGGEST THAT WE MAY HAVE SOMETHING TO LEARN, OR RE-LEARN, AS IT MAY BE FROM OUR CATHOLIC FRIENDS ABOUT THE SACRAMENTAL, OR AT LEAST, THE SACRED NATURE OF CONFESSION, REPENTANCE AND RECONCILIATION.

AND WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT, AND TO TALK ABOUT WHY WE CONFESS OUR SINS, COLLECTIVELY, ON EVERY SUNDAY MORNING.

SOMETIMES WE ARE ASKED AT SUCH TIMES TO REFLECT IN SILENCE ON OUR PERSONAL SINS.

HOW OFTEN ARE WE ASKED TO THINK ABOUT OUR COLLECTIVE SINS, OUR SINS AS A SOCIETY, AS A COMMUNITY, OUR SINS AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH?

ONE OF THE FEW NOTABLE QUOTES I DID FIND ABOUT CONFESSION COMES FROM DEITRICH BOENHOEFFER, WHO IN *LIFE TOGETHER*, WRITES THAT “IT IS IN CONFESSION THAT THERE TAKES PLACE A BREAKTHROUGH TO COMMUNITY.”

THE TOPIC OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS DEMANDS THAT WE CONSIDER OUR SINS AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT GOD HAS BEEN TRYING TO TEACH US THAT LOOKING BACK AT OUR PAST MISTAKES, THINKING THEM THROUGH, TALKING ABOUT THEM—CONFESSING—AND TAKING ACTION—REPENTING, IS GOOD FOR US.

IT'S NOT ABOUT GUILT. IT'S ABOUT HEALTH: OUR HEALTH, THE HEALTH OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS, AND THE HEALTH OF OUR COMMUNITIES.

AND YET CHRISTIANS TODAY, IN MY EXPERIENCE, ARE NOT WELL EDUCATED ON WHAT WE BELIEVE CONCERNING THE CORPORATE NATURE, THE COMMUNAL NATURE, OF TOPICS LIKE SIN, CONFESSION, REPENTANCE, AND THE RELATED WORK OF RECONCILIATION. MOREOVER, THAT WE BELIEVE, AS OUR SUBORDINATE STANDARD, *LIVING FAITH*, SAYS, THAT THE CHURCH IS UNIVERSAL OVER TIME, I.E. OUR COMMUNITY HAS A DIMENSION IN TIME, OUR ANCESTORS ARE PART OF OUR COMMUNITY.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE SHARE A THEOLOGY OF THE CONTINUITY OF COMMUNITY OVER TIME. THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THE PRESENCE OF THE ANCESTORS IN SPIRIT AT ALL TIMES.

WE CHRISTIANS SEEM TO HAVE LOST A CONCEPT OF THIS DIMENSION IN TIME OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS. AND THIS MAY POINT TO A REASON WHY WE TEND TO APPROACH RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLES WITH A LIMITED SENSE OF THE HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS OF THOSE RELATIONSHIPS.

New slide: Pictures of George Vais, Moderator of the 120th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada at The Forks, Winnipeg with Phil Fontaine, then Grand Chief, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 1994; Ann Calahan and Josephine Monkman both survivors of Birtle Residential School with Cheol Soon Park, Moderator of the 134th General Assembly, Parliament Hill, 2008

A HOPEFUL ELEMENT ON THE SUBJECT OF CONFESSION IS OUR CHURCH'S CONFESSION OF 1994. ALONE AMONG THE CHURCHES WHO HAVE APOLOGIZED FOR THEIR COMPLICITY IN THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA CHOSE TO FRAME ITS APOLOGY AS A CONFESSION TO GOD, AS WELL AS A CONFESSION TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE,

SEEKING BOTH GOD'S FORGIVENESS, AND THE FORGIVENESS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, AND PROMISING TO REPENT, TO WALK TOGETHER WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO FIND HEALING AND WHOLENESS TOGETHER AS GOD'S PEOPLES.

OUR EFFORTS AS A DENOMINATION TO KEEP THIS CONFESSION ALIVE, THIS NOW 15-YEAR OLD DOCUMENT, IN EFFECT RE-VITALIZED BY OUR CURRENT MINISTRY OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION, SHOULD PROVE HELPFUL TO MINISTERS AND OTHER CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS, AS AN EXAMPLE, AS A TEACHING TOOL, FOR HELPING OUR COMMUNITIES OF FAITH TO EXPLORE THIS DIFFICULT TOPIC OF REPENTANCE.

AND IT HAS BEEN BUT JUST OVER A YEAR, SINCE THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA APOLOGIZED ON THE COUNTRY'S BEHALF. THIS APOLOGY WAS ACCEPTED BY THE FIRST NATION, INUIT, AND METIS LEADERSHIP OF THIS NATION AS A COMMITMENT TO REPENTANCE, TO A FRESH START, TO A NEW BEGINNING IN OUR RELATIONSHIP.

New slide: *If you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go; first be reconciled* Matthew 5:23-24.

IT HAS ONLY BEEN 40 YEARS SINCE THE CHURCHES CEASED THEIR DIRECT INVOLVEMENT WITH THE RUNNING OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS.

NOT ONLY ARE THE CHILDREN WHO ATTENDED THESE SCHOOLS STILL ALIVE AND WELL, BUT WITH US STILL, NOW IN THE 60S, 70S, 80S AND 90S ARE MANY TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, COOKS, AND OTHER SCHOOL WORKERS, NOT TO MENTION FORMER NATIONAL STAFF AND WOMEN'S MISSIONARY SOCIETY MEMBERS WHO OVERSAW THE WORK IN THE SCHOOLS.

WE FORGET TOO THAT A NUMBER OF THESE FORMER RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL WORKERS, THEMSELVES, ARE FIRST NATION, INUIT OR METIS.

AND MOST OF THESE FORMER WORKERS, ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL, ARE MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCHES, MEMBERS OF OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES, MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

THEY HAVE WALKED, AND CONTINUE TO WALK A DIFFICULT JOURNEY OF FAITH.

THE FEW I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE TO MEET RANGE IN THEIR RESPONSES TO THE LEGACY OF THEIR WORK IN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS:

- SADLY, MANY ARE FEARFUL ABOUT SHARING THEIR STORIES, AFRAID OF HOW THEIR FELLOW CHURCH MEMBERS WILL REACT
- SOME NOW ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE SYSTEM TO WHICH THEY DEVOTED MUCH OF THEIR LIVES WAS WRONG; FOR THESE INDIVIDUALS, I WONDER WHAT SUPPORT HAVE WE OFFERED TO THEM IN MAKING SENSE OF THEIR LIVES?
- OTHERS DO NOT SEE THAT THERE WERE ALTERNATIVES TO THIS FORM OF EDUCATION FOR NATIVE PEOPLE; SOME OF THEIR OBSERVATIONS REVEAL A CONTINUING BELIEF IN THE CULTURAL SUPERIORITY OF THE DOMINANT SOCIETY, A BELIEF, I KNOW, THAT THESE INDIVIDUALS WERE RAISED WITH, AS THEIR PARENTS WERE, FOR GENERATIONS . . . AND THESE VIEWS REMAIN WIDELY SHARED AMONG CANADIANS TODAY
- THE FEW I'VE SPOKEN WITH HAVE ALL CONVINCED ME THAT THEY TRIED THEIR BEST WHEN THEY WORKED IN THE SCHOOLS, AND THAT THEIR MOTIVATION WAS TO HELP

I HAVE FOUND IT PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT, BUT IMPORTANT, TO HELP THESE INDIVIDUALS SEE THAT IN THE CHURCH'S CURRENT WORK OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION, THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE IS TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS. THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE IS CONFESSING AND IS

NOT BLAMING THEM, THE CHURCH WORKERS, FOR WHAT WE ALL SHOULD SEE AS OUR SIN.

IF THERE IS GUILT TO FEEL, WE MUST ALL FEEL IT. YET THE CHURCH WORKERS, TO WHOM I'VE SPOKEN ON THIS SUBJECT, DO NOT FEEL THAT THEIR CHURCH SHARES THEIR SENSE OF GUILT, THAT IT TRULY BEARS AND SHARES THEIR BURDEN.

THE PRACTICAL ISSUE FOR THOSE LEADING CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN CANADA TODAY IS HOW TO ENCOURAGE MEMBERS TO REFLECT IN A HEALTHY AND CONSTRUCTIVE WAY, I.E. IN A BIBLICAL WAY, ABOUT OUR NEED INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A SOCIETY TO REPENT, OUR ONGOING NEED TO REFLECT CRITICALLY, AND SOMETIMES PAINFULLY, ON OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHER PEOPLE, AND HOW OUR SENSE OF PRIORITIES, OUR BELIEFS ABOUT HOW PEOPLE SHOULD LIVE THEIR LIVES—ON ALL LEVELS--CONTINUE TO INFLUENCE HOW OTHERS ARE TREATED, AND MISTREATED.

THIS IS A REAL ISSUE FOR US TODAY.

THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW MINISTERS WHO HAVE CALLED ME UP IN DESPAIR, HAVING TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY, AND USUALLY HAVING WORKED AT IT FOR SOME TIME, TO CONVINCED THEIR SESSIONS, OR CONGREGATIONS, TO LOOK AT OUR NEED FOR HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE.

THEY HAVE ENCOUNTERED BRICK WALLS JUST BY RAISING THE TOPIC.

THEIR COMMUNITIES OF FAITH HAVE ALREADY DECIDED HOW THEY WANT TO LISTEN TO THE STORY OF FIRST NATION, METIS, AND INUIT PEOPLES, AND HAVE DECIDED, IN FACT, THAT THEY'VE HEARD ENOUGH.

AND YET EVERY TIME I HAVE ATTENDED AN EVENT WHERE FIRST NATION, INUIT OR METIS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN GIVEN A PLATFORM TO SPEAK, EACH AND EVERY TIME, CANADIANS, CHRISTIANS, HAVE COME UP TO ME AFTERWARD TO EXPRESS HOW EYE-OPENING, HOW MOVING, HOW INSPIRING, AND HOW REVEALING IT WAS FOR THEM TO LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF OUR ABORIGINAL NEIGHBOURS. THEY TELL ME THEY WERE GLAD THEY HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO LISTEN, AND THEY WANT TO HEAR MORE.

New slide: *Whose truth are we talking about?*

ONE OF THE WAYS IN WHICH OUR CHURCH, ALONG WITH THE OTHER CHURCHES WHICH RAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, IS SEEKING TO REPENT, HAVING ALREADY MADE OUR CONFESSIONS, IS TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF CANADA'S NEW TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION, AND THE MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR LISTENING TO EACH OTHER THAT WILL EMERGE OUT OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK.

THE SUBJECT OF "TRUTH" LINKED TO HOW WE ACHIEVE THIS NOTION OF "RECONCILIATION" IS AN INTERESTING TOPIC FOR REFLECTION.

ONE OF MY ECUMENICAL COLLEAGUES, ESTHER WESLEY, A CREE WOMAN FROM SACHIGO LAKE FIRST NATION IN THE FAR NORTHWESTERN CORNER OF ONTARIO, HAS OFTEN ASKED AT OUR MEETINGS, WHOSE TRUTH ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

ESTHER'S QUESTION STARTLES ANYONE WITH A TYPICAL NORTH AMERICAN EDUCATION. WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WHOSE TRUTH? TRUTH IS AN EMPIRICAL NOTION, IT'S AN ABSOLUTE, ISN'T IT?

THINKING ABOUT THE HISTORY OF OUR RELATIONSHIP, ONE MIGHT CONCLUDE THAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAVE A WELL-FOUNDED SUSPICION OF IMMIGRANTS WHO TALK ABOUT THE TRUTH.

VARIOUS EURO-CANADIAN TREATY-MAKERS, INCLUDING IN MANY INSTANCES CHURCH MEN (THEY WERE MEN IN THOSE DAYS) WHO WERE HIRED TO TRANSLATE THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS INTO LOCAL NATIVE LANGUAGES, CAME AND MADE PROMISES TO NATIVE PEOPLES, AND THEN WROTE THEM DOWN IN THEIR LANGUAGE, IN ENGLISH, AND WHAT WAS WRITTEN DID NOT REFLECT THE TRUTH OF WHAT THE NATIVE PEOPLES HAD AGREED TO.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TRUTHS CAN BE DISTORTED DELIBERATELY.

BUT THE ABORIGINAL UNDERSTANDING OF TRUTH IS SOMETHING MORE COMPLEX THAN A SIMPLE RIGHT OR WRONG, OBJECTIVELY JUDGED.

I WAS STRUCK BY THIS, AT THAT SAME GATHERING WITH SASKATCHEWAN YOUTH, WHICH I SPOKE OF EARLIER.

WE HELD A TALKING CIRCLE. A TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL MEANS OF COMMUNITY DISCUSSION AND DISCERNMENT.

DOES EVERYONE HERE UNDERSTAND WHAT I MEAN BY A TALKING CIRCLE, OR SHOULD I GIVE A QUICK EXPLANATION?

LET ME GIVE YOU JUST ONE EXAMPLE FROM THAT TALKING CIRCLE WHICH ILLUSTRATES THE COMPLEX NATURE OF TRUTH.

ONE YOUNG WOMAN COMMENTED THAT IF ONLY WE COULD THINK MORE LIKE CHILDREN WHEN IT COMES TO OTHER PEOPLE. HER EXPERIENCE GROWING UP WAS THAT HER CLASSMATES REFLECTED CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND NO

ONE THOUGHT ABOUT IT, NO ONE COMMENTED ON EACH OTHER'S DIFFERENCES, BUT THEY ALL TREATED EACH OTHER THE SAME. IT WAS ONLY AS THEY GREW OLDER THAT LABELS STARTED TO INFLUENCE HOW THEY THOUGHT OF EACH OTHER.

AFTER SEVERAL OTHER SPEAKERS REFLECTED ON THE THEME IN OTHER WAYS, ANOTHER YOUNG WOMAN SPOKE UP AND SAID, I DON'T THINK CHILDREN ALWAYS VIEW OTHERS WITHOUT NOTICING DIFFERENCES. IN MY EXPERIENCE, CHILDREN ARE ALL TOO QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT SOMEONE HAS FUNNY HAIR, OR WEARS STRANGE CLOTHING. THEY ARE CRITICAL OF THOSE WHO DON'T FIT IN, THEY TEASE OTHER KIDS MERCILESSLY, AND ARE QUITE HURTFUL OF OTHER KIDS WHO ARE DIFFERENT.

NOW THESE CONTRADICTORY VIEWS OF HOW CHILDREN VIEW OTHER PEOPLE ARE BOTH TRUE, ARE THEY NOT? TWO DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS HAD TWO DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES, THAT THEY RELATED TRUTHFULLY, THOUGH EACH EXPERIENCE LEADS TO AN OBJECTIVELY DIFFERENT CONCLUSION.

TO UNDERSTAND THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM, ONE HAS TO BE ABLE TO GRASP A STORY WHICH INCLUDES DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TRUTHS: SOME GOOD AND SELF-SACRIFICING TEACHERS; SOME MONSTROUSLY ABUSIVE TEACHERS; STUDENTS WHO LEARNED VERY LITTLE; STUDENTS WHO RECEIVED A GOOD EDUCATION. CHILDREN, WHO IN ALL INSTANCES, WERE FORCIBLY REMOVED FROM THEIR FAMILIES; AND ADULTS, CHRISTIANS, WHO BELIEVED THAT FORCIBLY REMOVING CHILDREN FROM THEIR FAMILIES WAS GOOD FOR THEM.

I COMMENTED TO THE STUDENTS ON HOW MUCH WISDOM WAS REVEALED DURING OUR TALKING CIRCLE. THAT ALL THE VIEWS WERE EQUALLY IMPORTANT AT GETTING AT THE TRUTH.

AND I ALSO COMMENTED, AN INSIGHT I HAD ON THE SPOT, THAT THE BIBLE IS LIKE THAT ISN'T IT. IT'S A COLLECTION OF VIEWPOINTS, STORIES OF EXPERIENCES THAT CAN LEAD TO CONTRADICTORY, EVEN OPPOSITE CONCLUSIONS, BUT THAT COLLECTIVELY ADD UP TO A PICTURE OF THE TRUTH.

WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION TO HOW WE LISTEN TO WHAT THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION IS TOLD, AND TO WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT OURSELVES.

I AM GOING TO CONTINUE MY BEST TO BE PATIENT AND CONSTRUCTIVE WHEN DEALING WITH QUESTIONS I FIND TROUBLING. BECAUSE THE VOICES ASKING THOSE QUESTIONS ARE IMPORTANT; THEY ARE THE VOICES OF MY COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

PAUSE HERE AND ASK PEOPLE TO REFLECT ON AND TALK TO OTHERS ABOUT WHERE THEIR FAITH COMMUNITIES ARE AT IN TERMS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE, AND HOW EASY IT WOULD BE TO INTRODUCE OUTREACH TO THIS COMMUNITY AS A FOCUS OF THEIR CHURCHES' MINISTRY.

WHAT IS THE RELATION OF ATTITUDES TO FIRST NATION, INUIT AND METIS PEOPLE AND ATTITUDES TO PEOPLES OF OTHER CULTURES, IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES, WHO WILL IN NUMBER GROW AND INCREASINGLY MAKE UP OUR COMMUNITIES. WILL THEY MAKE UP OUR COMMUNITIES OF FAITH?

HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE HEALTHY REFLECTION AND OPENNESS TO OTHERS' POINTS OF VIEW AND OTHERS' EXPERIENCES?

<TWENTY-MINUTE BREAK>

New slide: *There were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem . . . I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Acts 2:5 and 2:17*

THERE WERE DEVOUT JEWS, NOT DEVOUT CHRISTIANS, DEVOUT JEWS, FROM EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN, EVERY NATION, PRESENT AT THE BIRTH OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AT PENTECOST.

GOD'S SPIRIT IS Poured OUT ON ALL FLESH, NO EXCEPTIONS.

I FIND IT HELPFUL TO PREACH ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT WHEN PREACHING ON THE SUBJECT OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AS CHRISTIANS SHARE AN UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRIT WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

THE SUBJECT OF SPIRIT, THEREFORE, IS A USEFUL INTERSECTION FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN AND TRADITIONAL NATIVE SPIRITUALITY.

IN BOTH TRADITIONS, SPIRIT IS SOMETHING LIVING, ESSENTIAL TO WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GOD-CREATED BEING, AND THEREFORE SOMETHING THAT IS MYSTERIOUS.

WHERE WE CHRISTIANS START TO DIVERGE, AND START TO FEEL A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE, WITH THE USE OF THE WORD "SPIRIT" AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, IS THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES SPEAK OF ALL THE PARTS OF GOD'S CREATION AS HAVING SPIRIT.

PLANTS HAVE SPIRITS. ANIMALS HAVE SPIRITS. ROCKS HAVE SPIRITS. GRAINS OF SAND HAVE SPIRITS. AND OF COURSE PEOPLE HAVE SPIRITS.

WHERE WE HAVE MISINTERPRETED THIS EXPRESSION OF NATIVE SPIRITUALITY IS THAT WE HAVE EQUATED OUR NOTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BEING OF THE ONE GOD AND ASSUMED THAT NATIVE PEOPLE ARE SEEING GODS, PLURAL, IN ALL OF CREATION, AS OPPOSED TO SEEING GOD, SINGULAR, IN ALL OF CREATION.

THE INDIGENOUS NOTION OF SPIRIT IS TIED UP WITH A WORLDVIEW THAT RESPECTS THE VALUE OF ALL ELEMENTS OF GOD THE CREATOR'S CREATION. THAT SEES THE VALUE AND THE ROLE PLAYED IN NATURE BY PLANTS, BY ANIMALS, BY ROCKS, AND BY GRAINS OF SAND, AS WELL AS BY HUMAN BEINGS—AND ACKNOWLEDGES THOSE ROLES BY SEEING THE SPIRIT OF THE CREATOR AT WORK IN ALL PARTS OF CREATION.

THIS IS WHY NATIVE PEOPLES SPEAK OF THE SPIRIT OF THE TREATIES. THE TREATIES ARE SOMETHING SO IMPORTANT THAT THEY HAVE SPIRIT. IT IS NOT THAT NATIVE PEOPLES BELIEVE THE PIECES OF PAPER ON WHICH THE TREATIES WERE MADE HAVE A SPIRIT, THAT THEY ARE SOMEHOW A GOD, BUT RATHER THAT THE TREATIES HAVE SPIRIT FOR THEY REPRESENT SOMETHING VITAL IN CREATION, THEY REPRESENT, THEY ARTICULATE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLES.

AND GOD WAS AT WORK IN THE ARTICULATION OF THE TREATIES. FIRST NATION NEGOTIATORS OFTEN SPENT DAYS IN PRAYER IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE START OF TREATY NEGOTIATIONS, ASKING FOR GOD'S SPIRIT TO BE PRESENT IN THEIR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CROWN'S REPRESENTATIVES ABOUT THEIR NEW RELATIONSHIP.

ALL PARTS OF CREATION ARE RELATED IN THE ABORIGINAL WORLD-VIEW. SPIRIT IS CENTRAL TO THOSE RELATIONSHIPS. AND SPIRIT IS SACRED. GOD'S CREATION IS SACRED, IN ALL ITS PARTS. HENCE, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLES SIGNIFIED BY THE TREATIES IS SACRED, HOWEVER

FLAWED THE TREATIES ARE IN THEIR CONTENT, AND IN THEIR IMPLEMENTATION, AT THE HEART OF THEM IS THE SPIRIT OF A SACRED RELATIONSHIP.

New slide: *Teacher we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us. But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does deeds of power in my name will be able to soon afterward speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us, is for us. Mark 9:38-40*

IN RECENT WEEKS THE LECTIONARY OFFERED A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO READ THE WHOLE GOSPEL, IN SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S TEACHINGS, AND THE RISKS OF PULLING OUT A QUOTE AND ACTING ON THAT SINGULAR MESSAGE ALONE.

MARK 9:37, THE VERSE JUST BEFORE THE ONE YOU SEE ON THE SCREEN, READS AS FOLLOWS:

WHOEVER WELCOMES ONE SUCH CHILD IN MY NAME WELCOMES ME, AND WHOEVER WELCOMES ME WELCOMES NOT ME BUT THE ONE WHO SENT ME.

WHOEVER WELCOMES ONE SUCH CHILD IN MY NAME WELCOMES ME. THIS COULD BE, AND PERHAPS WAS, THE MOTTO OF MANY CHRISTIANS WHO WENT TO WORK IN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS. THEY WERE INTENT ON BRINGING THE CHILDREN TO CHRIST BY TURNING THE CHILDREN INTO CHRISTIANS IN THE MANNER OF WHITE EUROPEAN CANADIANS.

BUT IS THAT WHAT WELCOMING ONE SUCH CHILD IN JESUS NAME, MEANS?

WHEN WE LOOK AT THE VERSES FOLLOWING, THOSE APPEARING ON THE SCREEN, WE READ THE STORY OF "SOMEONE" UNKNOWN TO THE DISCIPLES

CASTING DEMONS OUT IN CHRIST'S NAME, SOMEONE WHO WAS NOT IN THE VIEW OF THE DISCIPLES FOLLOWING THEM.

CHRIST REBUKES THEM FOR TRYING TO STOP THIS UNKNOWN PERSON, SAYING WHOEVER IS NOT AGAINST US, IS FOR US.

TO ME, CHRIST IS TEACHING US SOMETHING ABOUT HOW TO REACT TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T WORSHIP HIM, WHO DON'T WORSHIP GOD, THE WAY WE DO.

CHRIST IS TEACHING US TO SEE THAT THERE ARE WAYS TO WORSHIP GOD THAT ARE FOREIGN TO US, BUT IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT THESE WAYS ARE AT CROSS PURPOSES TO HOW WE WORSHIP GOD, THE CREATOR.

I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER THAT IF THOSE WHO WENT OUT TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST, CHRIST'S TEACHINGS AMONG THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF CANADA, IF THEY HAD FOCUSED ON THIS TEXT—WHICH REMINDS US NOT TO STOMP ALL OVER THOSE WHO WORSHIP DIFFERENTLY—EVEN AS WE SEEK TO BE WITNESSES, TO BE AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST—I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHAT OUR CHURCH WOULD LOOK LIKE TODAY, AND HOW WE WOULD LOOK AT NATIVE PEOPLES TODAY.

I ALSO WONDER WHETHER WE PAY ENOUGH HEED TO THE PASSAGE TODAY IN OUR APPROACH TO INTER-FAITH RELATIONS. AND WHETHER MAYBE WE READ IT TOO LITERALLY, FOCUSING ON THE DEEDS OF POWER IN *JESUS'* NAME—FORGETTING TO BE TRINITARIAN IN OUR VIEW OF GOD, INSISTING THAT THIS PASSAGE REFERS ONLY TO OTHER CHRISTIAN FORMS OF WORSHIP, AND NOT ALSO TO OTHER FORMS OF WORSHIPPING GOD, THE BLESSED TRINITY.

New slide: *In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ. 2 Cor. 5:19-20*

THREE YEARS INTO MY MINISTRY, MY SPIRIT IS STRENGTHENED BY THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE MANY PRESBYTERIANS WHO HAVE RESPONDED WITH INTEREST AND ENTHUSIASM TO THE INVITATION TO REFLECT ON THE NEED FOR HEALING AND RECONCILIATION—TO LISTEN—AND TO ACT ON WHAT THEY HAVE HEARD.

THE NUMBER WHO HAVE BEEN WILLING TO LISTEN CONTINUES TO GROW. I HAVE LOST COUNT OF THE NUMBER OF SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS I HAVE HAD.

AND EVERY NOW AND THEN I HEAR OF SOME FOLLOW-UP THAT I MIGHT NEVER HAVE HEARD ABOUT, WHICH TELLS ME THAT THINGS ARE PROBABLY HAPPENING OF WHICH I REMAIN UNAWARE AS OF RESULT OF THE LISTENING PRESBYTERIANS HAVE BEEN DOING.

NOT ONLY TO ME, BUT TO THOSE MINISTERS AND OTHER LEADERS WHO HAVE RESPONDED TO THE CALL TO PUT ASIDE AT LEAST ONE SUNDAY A YEAR TO REFLECT ON THIS TOPIC.

AND ALSO TO THE GROWING NUMBER OF LEADERS WHO ARE ACTIVELY AND CREATIVELY DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FIRST NATION, METIS AND INUIT PEOPLE.

TWENTY PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN A TRAINING COURSE I OFFER. ANOTHER SEVEN, FROM OUR DENOMINATION, HAVE SIGNED UP FOR AN ECUMENICAL TRAINING EVENT IN NOVEMBER.

THESE VOLUNTEER LEADERS, ALONG WITH 25 OTHER INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS, HAVE LED 36 HEALING AND RECONCILIATION PROJECTS WHICH INVOLVE MEMBERS OF OUR DENOMINATION.

A GOOD MANY OF THEM INVOLVE BRINGING ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TOGETHER WITH THE GOAL OF LISTENING TO HISTORICAL INFORMATION, AND EXPERIENCING ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND SPIRITUAL CEREMONIES.

THESE CAN BE IN THE FORM OF HALF-DAY EVENTS; WEEKEND LONG RETREATS; CONFERENCES, AND SOME LONGER ACTIVITIES.

CHURCH MEMBERS HAVE ALSO SOUGHT DILIGENTLY TO HEAR WHAT FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES NEED OF THEM, TO FIND OUT AND RESPOND TO THE FIRST PEOPLES' VISION OF WHAT RECONCILIATION LOOKS LIKE. THESE CHRISTIANS ARE NOW WORKING ON PROJECTS IDENTIFIED BY THE FIRST NATION COMMUNITY TO MEET THEIR NEEDS, WORKING JOINTLY WITH THE FIRST NATION COMMUNITY TO CARRY OUT THE PROJECTS.

LET ME GIVE YOU A FEW EXAMPLES:

New Slide: *Telling Founding Stories at Riverside Community School, Prince Albert*

ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PRINCE ALBERT, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE REV. SANDY SCOTT, NOW SERVING A TOUR OF DUTY IN AFGHANISTAN, IS WELL AWARE OF ITS CONTEXT. ST. PAUL'S MEMBERS' LIVE IN A CITY WHOSE POPULATION IS ROUGHLY 45% ABORIGINAL. THEY HAVE FOUND WAYS TO BUILD COMMUNITY THROUGH THE SCHOOL SYSTEM, WORKING WITH FIRST NATION LEADERS TO PLAN CULTURAL DAYS, SHARING STORIES OF THE HISTORY OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLES WHO MAKE UP PRINCE ALBERT SOCIETY: SHARING FOUNDING

STORIES, BUILDING UP, IN THE PROCESS, A COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING, OF EACH OTHERS' MOTIVATIONS IN COMING TO PRINCE ALBERT TO LIVE.

ABORIGINAL AND CHURCH WOMAN FROM ST. PAUL'S TOGETHER COOK IN A COMMUNITY KITCHEN TO SUPPORT NEEDY FAMILIES.

SANDY HAS AN ANNUAL RUN TO RAISE FUNDS TO SEND INNER CITY ABORIGINAL KIDS TO CAMP CHRISTOPHER; AND THE PRESBYTERY IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY INVOLVED IN THIS EFFORT.

SANDY HAS DREAMS OF WORKING WITH GEORGE YANDO, WHO MINISTERS AT MISTAWASIS, OF BUILDING AN OUTREACH FACILITY IN PRINCE ALBERT WHICH WOULD SERVE MANY MISTAWASIS MEMBERS NOW LIVING IN PRINCE ALBERT ALONG WITH OTHER INDIVIDUALS IN NEED.

New slide: *Ottawa Healing and Reconciliation Committee with Inuit Elder following Quillig ceremony*

IN OTTAWA, THREE DOWNTOWN CHURCHES, ST. GILES, KNOX, AND ST. ANDREW'S HAVE EACH APPOINTED AN INDIVIDUAL TO A JOINT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE. THEY ORGANIZED AN EVENT FOR MEMBERS AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, WITH INUIT SURVIVORS OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, AND OTHERS. THEY ARE PLANNING ANOTHER EVENT FOR A SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN NOVEMBER WITH SEVERAL SPEAKERS FROM THE OTTAWA NATIVE COMMUNITY SCHEDULED TO MAKE PRESENTATIONS AND LEAD IN WORSHIP.

THESE INDIVIDUALS WERE INSPIRED TO MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION AFTER THEY ATTENDED A THREE-DAY LONG WEEKEND RETREAT ON HEALING AND RECONCILIATION AT GRACEFIELD CAMP AND CONFERENCE CENTRE—WHICH

AGAIN FEATURED LEADERSHIP BY FIRST NATION ELDERS. GRACEFIELD MADE AN EFFORT TO INCLUDE 50-50 PARTICIPATION BY ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, AND CAME CLOSE TO ACHIEVING THIS GOAL.

New slide: Photos of Members, Duff's Presbyterian Church at Webequie First Nation; Cover of Aboriginal Youth Services of Richmond, British Columbia's Aboriginal timeline and video project; quote from report on the Torrance, Ontario pow wow

THE REV. MARTY MOLENGRAFF OF DUFF'S CHURCH, PUSLINCH, ONTARIO AND MEMBERS OF HIS CONGREGATION HAVE MADE A 10-YEAR COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT THE NORTH-SOUTH PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN IN ONTARIO. THEY ARE BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY OF WEBEQUIE WHICH IS LOCATED CLOSE TO A THOUSAND MILES NORTH OF PUSLINCH. MARTY AND TEAMS FROM HIS COMMUNITY OF FAITH HAVE ALREADY MADE TWO TRIPS TO WEBEQUIE AND MORE ARE PLANNED.

THE COMMUNITY OF RICHMOND BRITISH COLUMBIA IS NOW HOLDING AN ANNUAL NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY CELEBRATION, THE IMPETUS FOR WHICH CAME FROM CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HUMMINGBIRD MINISTRIES AND RICHMOND YOUTH SERVICES AGENCY, SUPPORTED BY RICHMOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. THE YOUTH MADE A VIDEO, NOW AVAILABLE ON THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA'S WEBSITE, REFLECTING ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY CELEBRATIONS AND THEIR HISTORY AS ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

ZION CHURCH, IN TORRANCE ONTARIO, CONTINUED A YOUTH SUMMER ABORIGINAL STUDIES AND CRAFT CAMP FOR CHILDREN IN ITS CONGREGATION WHICH CULMINATED IN A FIRST COMMUNITY POW WOW ORGANIZED AT THE IMPETUS OF THE CHURCH, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NEARBY WAHTA MOHAWK FIRST NATION, NEAR GIBSON.

New slide: *Ah-nab-awen Park, site of 2010 Pow Wow, World Council of Reformed Churches Uniting Meeting*

AT A NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, SIGNIFICANT EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE, AND A VERY SIGNIFICANT, WELCOMING, ENCOURAGING, AND POSITIVE RESPONSE HAS BEEN RECEIVED FROM THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY TO CHURCH EFFORTS TO WALK THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION.

THE TRIBES OF WEST MICHIGAN HAVE BEEN GALVANIZED BY AN INVITATION FROM NORTH AMERICAN CHURCHES FOR THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE UNITING MEETING OF THE WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES AND REFORMED ECUMENICAL COUNCIL IN GRAND RAPIDS IN JUNE 2010.

THE CHURCHES HAVE APPROACHED THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY WITH RESPECT SEEKING A TRADITIONAL WELCOME FROM THEM, AND INVITING THEM TO HOLD A PAW WOW ON THE BANKS OF THE GRAND RIVER FOR DELEGATES TO SHOW THE WORLD THE RICHNESS OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE.

THE TRIBAL LEADERS AND MEMBERS ARE ENTHUSIASTIC AND HONOURED THAT SOMEONE HAS REMEMBERED THE EXISTENCE OF A PEOPLE THAT IN WEST MICHIGAN IS VERY MUCH UNDER THE RADAR SCREEN. AND THAT NOT ONLY HAVE THEY BEEN REMEMBERED BUT THEY ARE BEING ASKED TO TAKE A PLACE OF HONOUR IN A SIGNIFICANT COMMUNITY EVENT BEING ORGANIZED BY THEIR NEIGHBOURS.

THEY KNOW THAT IN AND OF ITSELF THE EVENT WILL CHANGE NOTHING IN THEIR LIVES. BUT THE POTENTIAL THIS EVENT SPEAKS TO FOR A NEW AND DIFFERENT FUTURE IS SELF-EVIDENT.

New slide: *My People Are Dying*, pictures from Winnipeg Inner City Missions

FOUR OF THE SEVEN NATIVE MINISTRIES SUPPORTED BY *PRESBYTERIANS SHARING* . . . THOUGH NOT FULLY FUNDED BY THAT BUDGET ARE DOWNTOWN STREET MINISTRIES IN EDMONTON, SASKATOON, WINNIPEG, AND KENORA. THEY PROVIDE VITAL SERVICES TO PRIMARILY NATIVE, BUT ALSO NON-NATIVE MEMBERS, OF THESE CITIES WHOSE BASIC NEEDS FOR FOOD, SHELTER, AND FRIENDSHIP ARE ACUTE.

THE NEEDS EXCEED THE SUPPORT AVAILABLE, NOT ONLY FROM OUR MINISTRIES, BUT FROM OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS—THIS IS A COMMON, AND TRAGIC, SITUATION ACROSS CANADA.

THE SHOCKING FACT IS THAT PEOPLE ARE DYING FROM NEGLECT, AND POVERTY, OF COURSE, IS NOT JUST AN INDIGENOUS ISSUE.

THE ETHICAL DILEMMA FACING OUR SOCIETY IS THE KNOWLEDGE THAT UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE MAJORITY POPULATION COMES TO UNDERSTAND THE HISTORICAL ISSUES IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLES THAT ARE AT THE ROOT OF ALL FORMS OF POVERTY, WE CANNOT HOPE TO ERADICATE MATERIAL POVERTY, AND THE KINDS OF DESPAIR IT PRODUCES THAT LEAD TO DESTRUCTION OF LIVES AND COMMUNITIES: SUBSTANCE ABUSE, SUICIDE, AND FAMILY VIOLENCE.

AND, FOCUSED, AS WE ARE TODAY, ON RECOVERING A KNOWLEDGE OF RELATIONS IN CANADA WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THIS WORK IS TIME CONSUMING, I.E. IT WOULD SEEM LIKELY TO BE MANY YEARS BEFORE A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF OUR MEMBERS, AND CANADIANS GENERALLY, ARE READY TO DEMAND THE KINDS OF POLICY CHANGES NECESSARY TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES. AND MEANWHILE, PEOPLE ARE AND WILL GO ON DYING.

HOW DO WE ACCELERATE THIS EFFORT, TOWARD RECONCILIATION? OUR FAITH DEMANDS HOPE AND OPTIMISM. OUR SOCIETY DEMANDS QUICK RESULTS.

THESE DAYS I'M OFTEN ASKED, HOW ARE THINGS GOING? ARE WE GETTING CLOSER TO RECONCILIATION? IT'S KIND OF LIKE KIDS ASKING THEIR PARENTS, ARE WE THERE YET? FOR THE JOURNEY AHEAD IS A LONG ONE.

SO HOW DO WE MAINTAIN A SENSE OF OPTIMISM AND COMMITMENT KNOWING HOW FAR WE HAVE TO TRAVEL, THAT THE WORK MAY WELL TAKE GENERATIONS TO COMPLETE?

AND HOW DO WE BALANCE THE CHOICES WE NEED TO MAKE AS A CHURCH, AND AS A SOCIETY, ABOUT WHERE TO PUT OUR TIME, ENERGY, AND RESOURCES—ADDRESSING THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE DYING. ADDRESSING THE UNDERLYING CAUSES THAT CONTINUE TO RESULT IN PEOPLE BEING IN POVERTY?

MY COLLEAGUES IN NATIVE MINISTRIES AND I STRUGGLE TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS FAITHFULLY.

New slide: *The work of seven generations? Come to him a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4-5.*

I LIKE THIS IMAGE OF LIVING STONES BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD. IT REMINDS ME THAT EVERY STONE, EVERY INDIVIDUAL, HAS A NECESSARY ROLE TO PLAY. AND WHILE THAT ROLE SEEMS SMALL IN THE BIG PICTURE,

THAT BIG PICTURE, THAT SPIRITUAL HOUSE, THAT KINGDOM OF GOD
REQUIRES EACH LIVING STONE TO PLAY ITS PART.

I'VE ARGUED TODAY THAT PRACTICAL MINISTRY IN CANADA TODAY DEMANDS
ATTENTION TO THOSE WHO ARE INVISIBLE TO MANY IN OUR SOCIETY, TO THE
ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.

I'VE ARGUED THAT AS THEY ARE MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY WE ARE
CALLED INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM.

AND THAT WE NEED TO CONSIDER OUR HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR
INDIGENOUS NEIGHBOURS, AS WE SEEK TO BUILD THE KIND OF
RELATIONSHIP THAT GOD ASKS US TO HAVE WITH EACH OTHER

AND THAT INCLUDES FACING UP, WITH COURAGE AND HUMILITY, TO THE
BROKENNESS OF OUR HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP, OUR ONGOING NEED TO
FIND WAYS TO CONFESS, SEEK FORGIVENESS, REPENT, AND RECONCILE.

AND I'VE SPOKEN OF THE FEARS, TO SOME EXTENT THE APATHY, AND I'VE
ALSO ALLUDED TO THE HOSTILITY PRESENT WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES OF
FAITH TO THE SUGGESTION THAT REPENTANCE AND RECONCILIATION WITH
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IS A PRIORITY FOR CHRISTIANS IN CANADA TODAY.

WHAT I HAVEN'T YET SPOKEN OF IS THE POTENTIAL FOR RENAISSANCE IN
OUR CHURCHES OF RECOVERING A SPIRIT OF LOOKING OUT INTO THE
COMMUNITY NOT WITH A VIEW TO CONVERSION TO BE LIKE US, BUT WITH A
VIEW TO OFFER FRIENDSHIP, ACCEPTANCE, AND LOVE OF THE OTHER—
REMEMBERING THAT CHRIST TAUGHT US THAT WHOEVER IS NOT AGAINST
US, IS FOR US.

AND THAT BREAKING BREAD WITH THE OTHER; SITTING AT TABLE WITH THOSE EXCLUDED FROM THE COMPANY OF OTHERS; GETTING TO KNOW THEM; TALKING WITH THEM; TREATING THEM, IF THEY ARE SICK; GIVING THEM FOOD OR SHELTER IF THEY ARE HUNGRY OR COLD; AND ABOVE ALL SEEKING TO SHARE A GOOD TIME WITH THEM, IS HOW TO LIVE OUR FAITH.

LET ME CONCLUDE BY REFLECTING FOR JUST A MOMENT ON MY OWN PERSONAL JOURNEY OF RECONNECTING WITH MY ABORIGINAL HERITAGE.

MY ALGONKIAN GRANDMOTHER JUDY MUST HAVE BEEN A REMARKABLE WOMAN. AS A YOUNG, FIRST NATION WOMAN SHE LEFT HER HOME COMMUNITY IN THE 1920S TO GO TO LIVE FIRST IN TORONTO, THEN IN OTTAWA—COMMUNITIES WHOSE SOCIETY WAS NOT PARTICULARLY WELCOMING TO WOMEN, PARTICULARLY ABORIGINAL WOMEN, AND A SINGLE MOTHER TO BOOT.

MY DAD HAS TALKED ABOUT HOW YOU DIDN'T GO AROUND TELLING PEOPLE YOU WERE AN INDIAN IN THOSE DAYS. BLENDING IN WAS IMPERATIVE. AND I HAVE OFTEN THOUGHT THAT IT WAS A GOOD THING DAD AND HIS DARK HAIREDD, DARK SKINNED FAMILY, GREW UP IN LITTLE ITALY, AND HUNG OUT AT ST. ANTHONY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, AT LEAST ON WEEKDAYS.

AND YET WHILE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE WAS HOSTILE, MY GRANDMOTHER JUDY WOULD HAVE NEEDED SUPPORT IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. PEOPLE WHO GAVE HER JOBS, WHO HELPED HER LOOK AFTER HER FOUR CHILDREN, PEOPLE WHO BEFRIENDED HER.

WHEN MY DAD MET MY MOTHER—OF PURE SCOTTISH, IRISH, PRUSSIAN, AND DANISH BACKGROUND, A PRESBYTERIAN—HER FATHER WAS JUST A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE, THOUGH ULTIMATELY ACCEPTING OF THE NOTION THAT HIS DAUGHTER WAS GOING TO MARRY AN INDIAN.

I WAS RAISED OFF RESERVE, AND MY MOTHER'S VERY EUROPEAN CULTURE DOMINATED HOW WE WERE RAISED. I KNEW OF MY ALGONKIAN HERITAGE, BUT DIDN'T LIVE THE CULTURE, AS GRANDMOTHER JUDY AND DAD HAD HAD TO REPRESS IT.

IT WAS DAD WHO ENCOURAGED ME TO PURSUE A CAREER AT INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS, TELLING A BIOCHEMIST, WITH INCLINATIONS TOWARDS SCIENCE JOURNALISM, THAT I'D ONLY BE THERE A YEAR.

AND SO IT IS A PROFOUND MYSTERY TO ME, HOW THE SPIRIT HAS LED ME TO RECOVER A KNOWLEDGE, THROUGH DIRECT EXPERIENCE, OF MY ABORIGINAL HERITAGE, INCLUDING HOW MY ANCESTORS WORSHIPPED, AND RELATED TO THE GREAT MYSTERY, THE CREATOR: FOR I HAVE RECOVERED THIS KNOWLEDGE BY WORKING FOR THE TWO GREAT HISTORICAL AGENTS OF REPRESSION: THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, AND THE CHURCH.

THE LORD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS. HIS WONDERS TO PERFORM.

IN THE NAME OF ALL MY RELATIONS. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

- DISCUSSION OF WHERE TO GO FROM HERE.
- WHAT MIGHT WE DO IN RESPONSE?