

# Aboriginal Issues Working Group Keeps on Keeping On

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In early June, the Truth & Reconciliation Commission issued its executive summary report and presented it to the four involved churches and the federal government. As part of the release of the report, a three-day ceremony was held in Ottawa. In Toronto, Church of the Redeemer supported a large ecumenical walk on May 31, ending in Queen's Park.

On the date of the report's release, a Prayer Vigil was held at Redeemer for several hours, organized by the Reverend Jim Boyles. We hosted many people who read and prayed with ministry leaders from the Presbyterian, United & Roman Catholic churches. We continue to pray for a change of heart in every Canadian.

We hosted a TRC discussion group over seven weeks of the summer as members of Redeemer and other parishes and inquirers read and prayed the words of the report and its 94 calls to action. We also discussed the continuing media coverage of the report and its significance to the next generations.

The final report will be extensive and may be out over the winter. The summary is over 300 pages, with a companion book entitled "*The Survivors Speak*," a third document entitled "*Principles of Reconciliation*," and a fourth volume which contains the 94 *Calls to Action* from the Summary with no discussion.

There are 11 Calls to Action directed at our churches:

- ☞ Develop and sign a Covenant of Reconciliation (#46);
- ☞ Adopt and comply with the principles and standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and follow through (#49);
- ☞ Repudiate concepts of sovereignty and discovery (#59);
- ☞ Develop and teach curriculum fulfilling specific criteria (#60);
- ☞ Establish and fund projects for healing, education, spirituality, self determination and reconciliation etc. (#61);

- ☞ Require denominational schools to provide comparative religious studies (#64); and
- ☞ Establish and maintain a registry of cemeteries with commemoration ceremonies (#73, 74, 75, 76).

Of course there are many calls to action which churches and other groups must support by advocacy and understanding, such as education, child welfare, health and justice.

On Monday November 16, three speakers discussed the *Call to Action* which will affect them most. These three, Mike Cheena (Cree), Murray Crowe (Oji-Cree) & Kim McDougall (Oneida) may be familiar to many of you since they each shared their story of going to residential school, and have participated in our events and Feasts. This event follows one in October with the Reverend Andrew Wesley and Esther Wesley who led a discussion after the audience of 45 watched "*We Were Children*." It was a moving and powerful afternoon.

Your AIWG is working with Council Fire, as well as other denominations, to support the work of Council Fire in pursuing reconciliation and the implementation of the calls to Action. AIWG is also part of a growing group of neighbours and other parishes interested in encouraging their communities to engage with the report and its calls to action. This Aboriginal Justice Coalition is providing insight and support to each member. We circulated *Questions for Candidates* arising from the calls to action during the election.

I, representing AIWG, attended two Kairos events in the fall. One was an annual meeting in London, Ontario; the other was called "Covenant Chain VI" in Ottawa. Both conferences helped me grow in understanding and knowledge, and to make contacts with other parishes outside of Toronto. The Ottawa conference had powerful speakers and presentations, including an Inuit Elder telling of his school experience. I will go in 2016, I hope. Kairos does amazing work. It is concentrating on Call #62 concerning age-appropriate education about our true history, aboriginal culture and practices from Kindergarten to Grade 12. This is also an important focus for the education cadre of the AIWG. A hand-signed petition will be circulated very soon, and I encourage each of you to take a page or two for signing by neighbours, colleagues, sports teams and so forth.

In 2016, we hope to host a few events before we celebrate Aboriginal Sunday on June 19. 