

ABORIGINAL JUSTICE

Our Recent Events in Review

Pamela Thomson

WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE:
Settlers and Aboriginals.
ALL.

So begins my journey of learning, un-learning and re-learning. I have, after many years of cogitation and financial support, begun my walk with our aboriginal partners in an active way. I invite each of you to join me.

I am reading, listening, praying. I am reaching out to other groups in the community, always guided by Andrew Wesley and Jim Boyles. I am aching to prepare myself to journey, in whatever way my partners ask, toward healing and reconciliation—ours, and theirs.

Below are brief notes from the five aboriginal events held at Redeemer since June, and at the Diocesan outreach conference this October.

Aboriginal Feasts

What fabulous food and music! I particularly loved the women drummers. I hope they will return. The entertainment was so much more meaningful in the context of reading about aboriginal history and stories. At our second feast we focussed on getting to know at least one stranger, with drums, games and laughter.

Aboriginal Issues Working Group Presentations

Mr. Mike Cheena

Mike is one of our consultants to the AIWG. He is from northern Ontario, and works as a counsellor at Council Fire, the Native Men's Residence and the First Nations School. He is a survivor, as are our other two consultants.

Mike spoke about the Royal Proclamation and the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 which took away all inherent rights. The Indian Act followed in 1876,

together with the Residential Schools Act. The last residential school closed in 1996! The schools were for the explicit written purpose of "killing the Indian in the child."

The 1950's and '60's Scoops created the "Split Feather Children" who were adopted or fostered, without any sense of their own heritage or values.

Mike invited us to plan for the final closing ceremony of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) at Ottawa in 2014.

Mr. Kim McDougall

Kim, who comes from a Chippewa reserve, was raised in an Oneida settlement before going to Mount Elgin residential school in south-western Ontario. He is an independent educator, with a special interest in aboriginal stories

Kim made an eloquent plea for the introduction of Aboriginal history into the curriculum of elementary and secondary schools, as well as at universities and in citizenship education.

There are 92,000 Aboriginals living in Toronto, with poorer wages and fewer jobs than our new Canadians. Aboriginal professionals too often assimilate rather than return.

Kim spoke about the hundreds of missing aboriginal women in Canada and the lack of political will to fund investigations. He handed out a list of links.

Kim referred to parts of GTA history: the Foxhole, the Petroglyphs, Rattlesnake Hill. He then illustrated the difference in teaching techniques.

Aboriginals teach by giving the answer, and rarely ask the five "W" questions or use active verbs. Learning is to be received from example and accomplishment. Time is a healing circle within which one does good things and works for the members of the circle.

Kim spoke of the SEVEN Directions in the circle: the four directions on a compass, in addition to out, in, and

still. Out is for teaching and doing. In is for learning. The centre still point of the circle is for reflection and listening. This is where patience is born.

Kim reiterated the importance of the land to each life. It is our responsibility to care for and nurture this essential part of each of us Canadians.

Mr. Murray Crowe

Murray is a member of the Big Trout Band in Treaty Nine land near the Ring of Fire in north-western Ontario. He attended Anglican and Mennonite residential schools for seven years after being scooped by the OPP in 1950 at five-and-a-half years old. In that time he had one visit from his father, who had to search for him.

It is only with the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that Murray began to speak of his time at residential school. This was a time of continuing sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Murray's story was hard to listen to, but he told it with frankness and without rancour. Many of us were moved to tears.

He spoke of the challenges created for him by the bureaucratic mechanisms of the Settlement Agreement, and of his having to give testimony twice. He had kind words for the Mennonites who educated him in later years here & in the United States.

Responses to the Presentations

The Rt Rev'd Terry Finlay thanked and responded to Mr. Cheena. He began by acknowledging that we were on the land of the Mississauga of New Credit Nation. His deep understanding and support of aboriginals was eloquent.

The Venerable Jim Boyles thanked and responded to Mr. McDougall with warmth and respect for the struggles and successes of survivors.

Mr. Stephen Allen thanked and responded to Mr. Crowe with clear and impassioned sorrow that the residential schools were administered in the name of Jesus. How can one not be angry? The unspeakable cruelty experienced by Murray and so many others can never be excused or condoned. We must work to forgive the actions and attitudes of our forebears, which continue to implicate us. We must hear the stories of the past so as to understand the present.

Diocesan Outreach Conference

Keren Elemir, a nurse, reminded us that "outreach" is made up of two words, each of equal value. In order to reach out, one cedes control to the other in order to create a level field. We need to hear the stories of our neighbours in order to know both what and who you are fighting for. Referring to the Book of Nehemiah chapters 1 to 3 and 9, Keren emphasized that "The Gospel and God are in the details." She closed with a reminder that "God's Heart is with you always."



Although the focus of our aboriginal issues working group is to walk with our neighbour, the urban native, the Water Project in Pikangikum, North-Western Ontario north of Red Lake, grabbed my heart. This Ojibway village of 2,600 has the highest suicide rate in the world, and is suffering from broken government promises (a school promised in 2008 will/might get built by 2017), unemployment and the general ravages caused by 200 years of society's indifference. A group of volunteers (PWG) is working with the people and members of the band council to raise money for clean water systems for the residents.





There are over 200 homes that get their (filtered) water from three standpipes. The water comes from the river, downstream from the leaking sewage lagoon. The water will help all residents, but particularly the young (over 1000 are under 25). The PWG is focussing on 10 homes. The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) has undertaken to contribute about half the cost. You can donate through PWRDF (www.pwrdf.org), with a specific designation for PWG Water Project. It is hoped the rest of the money will come from private businesses. PWG has arranged for a portable sawmill to be brought in this fall so homes can be built on site as people get trained on the job to harvest, prepare and use lumber.



The Reverend Martha Tatarnic, St. David's Evangelical Lutheran, Orillia, showed us how a parish can raise money through The Advent Conspiracy.

Plight of Pikangikum native reserve spurs Toronto relief effort – CBC News – <http://bit.ly/Pikangikum>



Bishop Mark MacDonald reminded us that healing and reconciliation is for all, not just the aboriginal community. It is a two way road. We settlers are just beginning to understand the damage we have done to ourselves and our 'society' in the breaking of treaties, the ignoring of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the support (active and passive) of the "kill the Indian" policies of successive governments. It is not for the oppressor to just recognize the need for change. The oppressed must work to claim their true humanity.

Bishop Mark spoke emphatically about "Free Prior Informed Consent" (FRIC). These are the words of



the Royal Proclamation, which affirmed aboriginal "sovereignty" over the land. Despite the colonial language of the treaties which followed, Aboriginals have never given up their spiritual relationship with, or their trusteeship of, the land. Land is a theological concept, not a political one: aboriginal relationship to land is inherent and cannot be changed. The Proclamation (a statute) has been used to draft Article 26 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and is referred to in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

You have heard of the Treaties. A treaty is made between nations—it is much more than a contract. We are the inheritors. We also carry the shame of their breach.

Pre-Confederation Royal Proclamation, 1763, by King George R. – <http://bit.ly/treaty1763>

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – <http://bit.ly/UNindigenous>

The Redeemer AIWG will be holding more events in the coming months. Please attend events as they arise and, as we seek a path and create opportunities for growth, consider joining our group. In addition, we will be compiling resources including a reading list.

Pamela Thomson is a member of the Redeemer community and attends the 9.30 and 11.15 services. She is deeply committed to creating opportunities for us to learn about aboriginal issues and in particular how we can become engaged in a process of healing and reconciliation with the urban Aboriginal community.

