



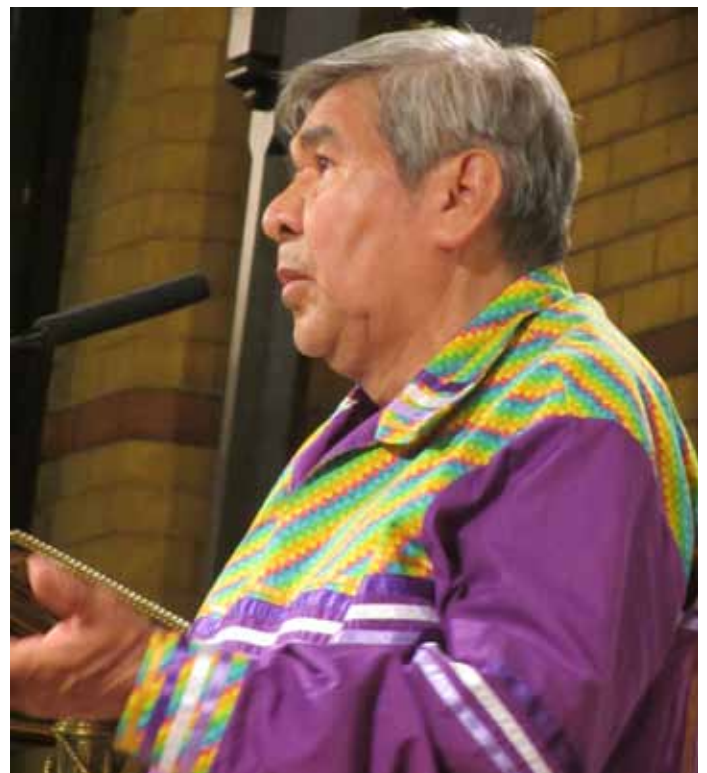
Moving Toward Truth, Healing and Reconciliation

Jim Boyles

THERE'S A danger that these three words—truth, healing, reconciliation—become too commonplace, easily dismissed as a slogan, not worthy of our attention. Yet in this year that marks the twentieth anniversary of Anglican Church's apology, and the tenth year of reaching a settlement agreement with the government, these words continue to have life and strength. In 20 years, in 10 years, how far have we come? How is our pace, our commitment to moving towards truth, healing and reconciliation?

In 1993 the Primate, Archbishop Michael Peers apologized to Aboriginal people for the disastrous policy of assimilation most dramatically highlighted by the residential school system in which Anglicans fully and willingly participated. In a court case in Vancouver where I was a witness for the church, the video of his apology was played, and I was grilled on its meaning. He had said several times in the apology, "We." At one point he said, "We failed you, we failed ourselves, we failed God." The opposing lawyers for the plaintiffs and the government wanted to know who he was talking about when he used this word. He was speaking for Anglicans, for Anglicans at Church of the Redeemer as well as others across the land.

In 2003 the Deputy Prime Minister, Ralph Goodale came to Anglican Church House in Toronto and together with the Primate signed a major agreement



in which Anglicans pledged to continue healing efforts and to contribute \$25M to a fund for compensation. To my amazement, within three months the thirty Anglican dioceses across the country had responded in pledging to fully fund our commitment. Later, when a more comprehensive agreement was signed that brought in the other churches, our amount was reduced to \$16M, and rather than go towards compensation, it was dedicated to healing work, with the government taking on responsibility for direct compensation.

Since then? The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been working at uncovering truth. The Commissioners and staff have been involved in thousands of events and interviews where survivors of the residential school system have been able to tell their stories, sometimes reliving the pain and loneliness, the harsh discipline, the abuse, the degradation they had endured. They have told the stories of the effects of their schooling on their lives, on their families, on their own children and grandchildren. They learned only one set of parenting skills, based on school discipline and order.

The Commission has undertaken research studies on the history of the schools, for instance looking into the many children who died while at school, and often not returned home for burial. They are looking into the health supports that were or were not in place to care for students. The Commission comes to an end next June, and we await its final report, as a contribution to uncovering truth.

Another provision in the final settlement agreement was the establishment of a national research centre on residential schools. Last month an agreement was signed with the University of Manitoba which will set up and manage this centre. The churches and the government are supplying copies of 'all relevant documents,' and I have been working on a Document Collection Committee as a representative of the Anglican Church, ensuring that all our relevant documents are collected and submitted. The new centre will make materials available to survivors and their families, as well as being a resource for researchers.

Meanwhile the Anglican Church's Aboriginal Healing Fund which was first established in 1991 continues to make grants to local communities or churches who are pursuing programs of healing. Some have said that it will take more than a generation to heal the wounds of the residential school system. We continue to support healing, but we non-aboriginals





cannot be the healers. That's what we tried a hundred and fifty years ago, and trying to fix the problems facing others only brought grief. We stand with our brothers and sisters as they find the path to healing and wholeness.

And finally reconciliation. First truth, then healing, and then reconciliation. That's where we can enter into dialogue, one in which we need to be active listeners. Many Canadians are woefully uninformed about aboriginal history, current living conditions, and aboriginal spirituality. Listening and learning with an open mind is our challenge. Our forebears long ago decided to put Indians on 'reserves,' hidden away, often on poor land, so they could be conveniently forgotten. We still have reserves, and we still have the outdated Indian Act. Our task is to listen to aboriginal voices as they seek a way forward. We are challenged to give thoughtful support on their journey, not imposing on them, but travelling with them seeking a rich reconciliation in which we can grow together in appreciation and in love.

At Church of the Redeemer we are setting out on that path. We have formed an Aboriginal Issues Working Group (perhaps it will be called an Aboriginal Justice Group). During the fall months they will be sponsoring

several events with Aboriginal speakers/teachers, times for us to be active listeners and active seekers of reconciliation.

Jim Boyles is the newly appointed coordinator for adult faith formation at Church of the Redeemer. We are blessed by his leadership in this role that he adds to that of preside, preacher and pastor in our midst.



This autumn the Aboriginal Issues Working Group will be hosting a three-part series of evening events:

- ☞ Wednesday, September 25: *First Nations Historical Issues and Residential Schools Indoctrination* presented by Mike Cheena
- ☞ Thursday, October 3: *Aboriginal Education and Modern Urban Native Issues* presented by Kim McDougall
- ☞ Thursday, October 10: *Residential Schools—History, Stories and the Legal Saga* presented by Murray Crowe

Further information and registration will be available on the church website (www.theredeemer.ca) in the near future. 