



A Resource for Church Leaders from Diaconal Ministries Canada

Dancing the reconciliation dance

By Harold Roscher

It wasn't until I was 35 that I experienced my own, personal moment of truth and reconciliation. It was then that the government of Canada formally told me I was an Indian.

Though Native Canadian by birth, I was adopted by an immigrant family from the Netherlands. I saw myself, and was treated by friends and family, as a dark-haired little Dutch boy. Even today, I speak better Dutch than Cree.

Despite my adopted context, there was no doubt I had a different heritage, a different story than many of my loved ones. In October 1995, news came that would change my life: I was now considered an Indian, placed on the government's official registry as having Cree descent. Suddenly I had two stories for myself: one that was obvious, and one that required unearthing. I was a Dutch boy raised in the Christian Reformed Church, but I was also a Cree man with a rich Native Canadian heritage. So began my own journey of reconciliation.

I am not journeying alone. On June 11, 2008, a similar, but corporate journey began for all Canadians:

"On behalf of the government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you...to apologize to aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian residential schools system...You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time, and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood in the House of Commons and apologized for the government's policy of assimilation towards First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in Canada. It was an historic moment of reconciliation, long awaited and much deserved by the Native Canadian community.

I am proud of the courage and humility displayed by our Prime Minister. And I'm even more grateful for the grace with which our Aboriginal leaders accepted the apology, urging Canadians in turn to embrace the honour we

bring to each other when it is defined by love, not by difference.

No doubt many Canadians were previously unaware of the assimilation policies of the past, or at least unaware of the extent of its damage. In some ways, this corporate apology represented a vindication for me, after arguing with family, friends and church communities about government policies that have held our people captive. Even more satisfying will be the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set to travel across Canada hearing the many stories of hurt and pain caused by the residential schools.

I hope that Canadians will listen intently to the stories this Commission will uncover. It is in listening that the burdens of survivors and their loved ones will be released, and the healing will begin. I also hope we listen for the positive stories of nuns and priests nurturing young children to become all they were created to be. Our actions as churchgoers and as citizens can extend hands of help and of hope to the damaged.

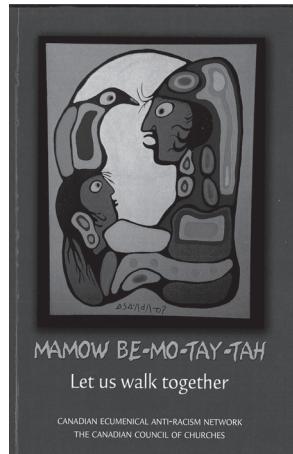
It has been ten years since I discovered I was Cree, and my own reconciliation process continues with each new thing I learn about my culture and ceremonial life. In the same way, the apology from

the government is the starting point on our broader journey of reconciliation. It reminds me of the Snake Dance (known also as a "unity dance"), where we dance in a single line, then separate into two lines (signifying the shedding of skin), then come together again in a single line as a new creation, ready to reflect the Creator's glory.

In our ritual and ceremonial lives we as Aboriginal peoples dance as a reminder of our covenant relationship to the Creator. So I invite you to dance the reconciliation dance with my people right across Canada in friendship and peace as a reflection of our covenant relationship with Christ. When we share each others' burdens and joys, the Creator's glory shines brighter for all to see.



Harold Roscher is director of the CRC's Edmonton Native Healing Centre.



Hear from other Aboriginal voices like Harold Roscher's in "Mamow Be-Mo-Tay-Tah—Let us walk together."

TAKE NOTE

1. Thank you very much for your offerings for Operation Manna.

2. Seek justice for a people group:
www.diaconalministries.com/diaconalministry/justice

3. A mini-workshop accompanies this issue of *Partners* online, providing a venue for further learning on this topic with other deacons.

One day at Six Nations

By Katie Karsten

The day was cold... the teasing of an occasional snowflake and the chill of a northerly wind invited us to scurry from our vehicles to the Woodland Cultural Centre. The day's weather was a strong contrast to the warm and gracious welcome by Rev. Norm Casey, the Anglican rector on the Six Nations reserve. This reserve, near Brantford, Ontario, is by far the largest reserve in Canada by population.

A motley dozen folks we were...all representing interest in attaining knowledge and understanding about our Aboriginal people so that reconciliation may take place between all people groups.

In the Woodland Cultural Centre, the story of the Six Nations Reserve was shared by Leona, our tour guide, with stories, colourful displays and artistic exhibits. It was not long before the media's portrayals of the Six Nations people were being challenged in me.

The Indian Act of 1924 brought compulsory enfranchisement and the establishment of school education to the Reserve. In the years following a separation from traditional learning in families and community, difficult social problems emerged. There were also the challenges that came with impoverished circumstances...unemployment, a lack of educational access and ongoing prejudices outside the reserve. In recent years, a search for a positive identity as a people is taking place as many have begun to reclaim their native languages and appreciate their traditional ways of life and practices. In this effort to rebuild their self-respect and worth, the journey has been accompanied by pain, frustration and uncertainty.

However, hope and the Christ-like presence of His people on the reserve were obvious throughout the activities of the day! One highlight was our worship service when we read Scripture with our Anglican family and encouraged each other with the words: "Hear what the Spirit is saying to the

church." Our hearts together claimed that prayer!

Then Nina shared her experiences of hope on the reserve!

There is a deep spirituality on the reserve witnessed through many opportunities to worship—most denominations are represented on the reserve. She rejoiced at the good attendance that they experienced at their Good Friday service. (Was that a CRC'er talking?...oh no, we were on the reserve.) Farming was being encouraged through a co-op and in the recent past, 30 participants had been recruited to be part of this co-op. This spring, a health care clinic had been opened on the reserve. One of its blessings was that the necessary dialysis was in close proximity for many. The ability to share information between reserves through the gift of technology was delightfully noted. One reserve was well aware of the government's conversations with another reserve. Pride was expressed in their art, music and athletes.

Familiarity struck a chord as we heard of parents and grandparents who hoped for opportunities for their young people to go to school. Their post-secondary schooling was often postponed or interrupted due to the lack of financial resources. Beside this, the gaps between the poor and rich were observed! How do we close that gap in all parts of this globe so all may share deeply in the resources of God's creation?

After a hearty meal served with love, we left having tasted together bits and bites of that "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

Thank you God!

Katie Karsten is Regional Diaconal Ministries Developer for DMC.



The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

What can I/my church do?

- The mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (referred to by Harold Roscher) is to inform Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools. The Commission will document the truth of survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected by this school experience. Through this effort, the TRC hopes to guide and inspire Aboriginal peoples and Canadians in a process of reconciliation and renewed relationships that are based on mutual understanding and respect. Follow the work of the Commission at http://www.trc-cvr.ca/index_e.html. Attend one of its national events to promote awareness about the schools and their impact.

- Read the stories of other Aboriginals in "Let us walk together" compiled by the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network.

- Decide to do one of the Ministry/Advocacy activities suggested by Diaconal Ministries at www.diaconalministries.com/diaconalministry/aboriginals.htm.

www.DiaconalMinistries.com

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