

Becoming neighbours: stories about healing and reconciliation



The Presbyterian Church in Canada

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Message from the General Secretary

As a national body, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has taken a number of initiatives to acknowledge our denomination's role and responsibility in the residential schools system, beginning with the adoption of the Confession by the 120th General Assembly on June 9, 1994.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a member of the All-Party Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. With this Agreement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established.

If those harmed by residential schools, and if subsequent generations are to find healing and wholeness, truth must be spoken. Non-Aboriginal people must hear these truths, painful as they are. Otherwise how can reconciliation take place?

The journey to restore right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people must happen in communities across Canada. This is where Presbyterians serve God - in communities across Canada.

The vast majority of non-Aboriginal Canadians have never visited a First Nations community or one of the 119 Aboriginal Friendship Centres in Canada. How many non-Aboriginal people live near an Aboriginal community and yet don't know their neighbours? Imagine the possibilities if non-Aboriginal people invited an Aboriginal elder to speak to their organization? Imagine the opportunities that might emerge from a partnership based on mutuality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together for a common purpose. Such initiatives are taking place, but there is scope for much more.

It is this vision of neighbours becoming acquainted, learning from each other, at times listening to hard truths and sharing hospitality that gives rise to this program to support local initiatives involving Presbyterians and Aboriginal neighbours.

The thirteen projects listed in *Becoming neighbours: stories about healing and reconciliation* are a sampling of the 59 projects supported through The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Healing and Reconciliation Program. The projects vary in terms of scale and approach. These initiatives occurred in communities, big and small, rural and urban.

The common theme in each of these stories – and the many others that could not be included here - is a commitment to mutuality, to listening to difficult truths, to learning from Aboriginal people, to sharing hospitality and to being open to walking with Aboriginal neighbours in the journey toward truth and reconciliation.

Rev. Dr. Richard Fee
General Secretary, Life and Mission Agency
The Presbyterian Church in Canada
April 2013

Message from the Healing and Reconciliation Animator

In 2006 the 132nd General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada established a program called Walking Together. The General Assembly is the highest decision making court of the church. At the heart of the Walking Together program is the belief that the fabric of Canadian life is fuller and richer when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people build relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. Healing and reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will emerge as we build community, learn about each other, and find ways to support each other.

Reconciliation built on restoring right relationships underscores the mandate of the Healing and Reconciliation program. A seed fund was established to assist and encourage Presbyterians to build and renew relationships with Aboriginal people.

The seed fund encourages Presbyterians to meet Aboriginal neighbours and to seek opportunities to learn about about their lives, traditions, and spirituality. The fund criteria requires leadership from Aboriginal people and from Presbyterians. Part of the fund is allocated for initiatives involving young people.

Becoming Neighbours: stories about healing and reconciliation provides an overview of some of the projects that have been supported through this fund. For some Presbyterians this represents their first attempt to reach out to Aboriginal neighbours.

To date, 59 projects have taken place since the fund's inception in 2007.

Becoming neighbours: stories about healing and reconciliation is a gesture of reconciliation from The Presbyterian Church in Canada presented at the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in Montreal April 24-27, 2013.

David Phillips
Healing and Reconciliation Animator, Justice Ministries
The Presbyterian Church in Canada
April 2013

Taiwan-Canada Aboriginal exchange

**Taiwanese Robert
Campbell Presbyterian Church
(Presbytery of Montreal), Montreal QC**

The purpose of this initiative was to facilitate a conversation amongst the Yu-Shan Seminary in Taiwan, the Mohawk community of Kahnawake and the Presbytery of Montreal. The Yu-Shan Seminary is connected with Aboriginal communities in Taiwan. Taiwanese Robert Campbell Presbyterian Church identified connections between the experience of Aboriginal people in Taiwan and Aboriginal people in Canada and sought to share and learn from these experiences.

Three activities were planned:

- 1) visit to the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake;
- 2) a workshop on Aboriginal theology; and
- 3) a visit from the Yu-Shan Seminary choir. Choir members are from Aboriginal communities in Taiwan.

Taiwanese Robert Campbell Presbyterian Church hosted an Aboriginal theology and mission workshop that was well attended by Presbyterian Taiwanese groups in Montreal. Planning for the workshop was spearheaded by Chief Martin Leborgne from the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake and Elder Amos Tsay from Taiwanese Robert Campbell Presbyterian Church. A video recording was produced from the workshop and was made available to the participants.

While the choir's trip was being organized, a typhoon struck Taiwan, and the choir's visit to Canada had to be cancelled.

The congregation of Taiwanese Robert Campbell Presbyterian Church strives to keep the objectives of education, healing and reconciliation before them.

"Taiwanese Robert Campbell Presbyterian Church identified connections between the experience of Aboriginal people in Taiwan and Aboriginal people in Canada and sought to share and learn from these experiences."

First Nations conference: loving our neighbour

Presbytery of Montreal and Presbyterian College, Montreal QC

This conference was organized by the Presbytery of Montreal, Presbyterian College (a theological college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada) and the Presbyterian chaplain at McGill University. There were several objectives. One objective was hearing stories.

Another was for Presbyterians and other Euro-Canadian Christians to express repentance for the broken relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. A final objective was for participants to network and discuss ways forward as partners.

The two day program included worship services and academic lectures on the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships, Aboriginal Christianity, and the theology of mission. Each lecture provided question and answer opportunities. The conference concluded with a panel discussion, communion, and a round dance.

Speakers and lectures included Elder Mavis Etienne from the Kanehsatake First Nation, Ed Bianchi, then KAIROS' Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator, Lori Ransom, then Animator of the Healing and Reconciliation program of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and three speakers from My People International, a Aboriginal theology institution. Leadership in the worship service was provided by McGill's Algonquin Youth Worship Team. The discussion included issues that are faced by Aboriginal people.

Future opportunities for relationship building and learning about Aboriginal culture have been discussed by the conference leaders. Some of these ideas include reading books and listening to music by Aboriginal authors and artists, attending educational symposiums and to attend worship services in the Montreal area to speak about healing and reconciliation.

"A final objective was for participants to network and discuss ways forward as partners."

Spirit circle

**Evangel Hall Mission,
Toronto ON**

“Each circle begins with smudging, prayer drumming and singing.”

The purpose of this initiative was to provide a space for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to get to know each other and to learn about Aboriginal culture. This space is provided in the form of a spirit circle that is led by Aboriginal elders.

Evangel Hall Mission provides a variety of services to low-income and homeless men and women in Toronto. Some of these services include meals, shelter, a food bank, health and dentistry services and spiritual counselling. Spirit circle leadership is provided by Cindilee Ecker-Flagg, of the Toronto Native Canadian Centre, Walter Lindstone, a member of Batchewana Bay First Nation, and Mark Crigger, a Resident Elder at the University of Toronto, Mississauga Campus.

Each circle begins with smudging, prayer drumming and singing. This is followed by teachings that relates to the change of the seasons and human kind's relationship with nature, and are thematically linked to the seven Grandfather Teachings.

The Presbyterian chaplain at Evangel Hall Mission, Rev. Katherine McCloskey, is a Healing and Reconciliation local leader in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Local leaders are volunteers who facilitate making connections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Spirit circle participants include Evangel Hall staff, clients, and community members. Some of the issues discussed in the circle include missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the legacy of residential schools. Spirit circle leaders are hopeful that the circle will become a regular part of Evangel Hall's programming.

Building a web of Aboriginal interconnections – teaching circles

Morningside-High Park Presbyterian Church, Toronto ON

The seed fund provided support for two parts of a nine month program of events. The overall objective was to provide learning opportunities for church and community members and to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Toronto together.

Some of the activities that were organized for participants included deer skinning, drum making, baking bannock, a community barbecue, a Bible study, Sunday school with thematically appropriate material, an annual story-telling festival, basket making, establishing a section in the church library that includes books written by and about Aboriginal people, KAIROS banner making, and inviting Aboriginal elders to lead a teaching circle. The seed fund supported costs associated with the teaching circle and the drum making workshop.

The leadership for this initiative was provided by the Mission and Outreach Team at Morningside-High Park Presbyterian Church and Aboriginal Elders Garry Sault and Maureen Belanger. The learning circle was led by Walter Lindstone, a member of Batchewana Bay First Nation. Walter Lindstone lives in Toronto and has experience leading teaching circles and other traditional teachings.

Twenty participants took part in the drum making session. Several participants attended the teaching circle.

“The overall objective was to provide learning opportunities for church and community members and to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Toronto together.”

Youth teaching youth: a cultural exchange program

**St. John's Presbyterian Church,
Bradford ON**



The purpose of this initiative was to enable two elementary schools - Mnjikaning Kendaaswin Elementary School, a Chippewas of Rama First Nation School and W.H. Day Public School of Bradford - to learn more about each other. The students at each school took part in a day of cultural exchange to get to know each other.

Students, their parents, teachers, school administrators and members of St. John's Presbyterian Church participated in this program. Students of W.H. Day School visited Mnjikaning Kendaaswin Elementary School for a day of activities. Five weeks later students from Mnjikaning Kendaaswin Elementary repaid the visit. The program for the day at Mnjikaning Kendaaswin Elementary included a visit with the Chief and Council of Chippewas of Rama First Nation, native language lessons, and drumming and dance. The program for the day spent at W.H. Day School included bowling, volleyball and a drumming circle.

Students and teachers were involved in planning the day at Rama. They chose the topics and arranged the events. The Rama Chief and Council, an elder, the Rama Social Service and Culture Departments and the Rama Police Service were involved in the program. These encouraging words were offered by one of the teachers: "an unqualified success...an invaluable learning opportunity." Another comment was from a Rama teacher: "The exchange gave my students an opportunity to say I'm proud of who I am and I want to tell others about my culture." Two reflections from students included: "It was the best two days of my grade 6 year" and "miigwech" (a huge thank you).

A relationship was established between administrators, teachers, students and parents of the two schools.

February 2012

We extend our thanks to the *Orillia Packet* and *Times* for the use of this picture

Flying on your own

Westwood Presbyterian Church, Winnipeg MB

“Flying on your own” was an intensive three-day workshop that focused on building trust, improving self-image, providing leadership in traditional spirituality and identifying coping mechanisms.

The program took place at Westwood Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg, October 17-19, 2007. It is not a pilot initiative and has an established leadership and program that is typically run through the Winnipeg Inner City Missions, one of seven Native Ministries in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Part of the program is designed to build trust between the leadership and the participants. The participants were primarily residents of “Place of Hope,” a residence run by the Winnipeg Inner City Missions. At least one church member participated in the program, and several volunteers provided hospitality. It was noted that the change of location for this program meant that the participants’ environment was quieter than usual, and provided a space for reflection.

The workshop facilitators were Stella Blackbird and Audrey Bone from Keeseekoowenin Ojibway First Nation.

Hosting the program at Westwood Presbyterian Church was an opportunity for different community members to be involved in the healing and reconciliation journey. Hosting the event at Westwood, for example, meant that Winnipeg Inn City Missions could stay open to provide other services.

The workshop organizer commented that she has confidence that running the “Flying on your own” workshop in a church space was a good “fit” and hoped that future programs could take place there.

“Flying on your own” was an intensive three-day workshop that focused on building trust, improving self-image, providing leadership in traditional spirituality and identifying coping mechanisms.”

October 17-19, 2007

“It starts with me.... along with you”

Manitobans for Healing and Reconciliation, Winnipeg MB

“Some of these activities drew attention to the intergenerational impact of residential schools.”

This one day event took place on May 26, 2010 in Winnipeg and is thematically linked with the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation (May 24). The goals of the organizing group include promoting positive healing and

reconciliation journeys in families and communities and encouraging education about the troubled historical relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, including the legacy of residential schools. The goal of this event was to highlight the impacts of residential schools and to provide safe and appropriate spaces for school survivors to share their stories through a variety of mediums (truth telling, art, music).

The program included traditional ceremonies (sunrise and the lighting of the sacred fire) a keynote address by the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Justice Murray Sinclair, and creative expressions from survivors regarding their school experiences. Several activities were led by young adults. Some of these activities drew attention to the intergenerational impact of residential schools.

Manitobans for Healing and Reconciliation is a volunteer based community organization that collaborates with Aboriginal organizations. Part of the event planning process included meeting with members of churches that ran residential schools to discuss their role in the event. Presbyterians volunteered at the event.

Organizers characterize the event as “successful” based on the number of participants and the comments on the evaluation forms. They note that there continues to be a need to acknowledge the history of residential schools and that there is a range of reactions from participants from “relief and empowerment in moving forward” to acknowledgement that the healing journey is just beginning.

Healing and reconciliation with our neighbour and creation

Saskatchewan Presbyterian Youth, Prince Albert and Camp Christopher

This event brought together young adults from the Synod of Saskatchewan September 28-30, 2012 to experience, explore, reflect and learn about healing, community and our place in creation. The objectives included building community and learning to explore faith in light of residential schools and the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The program began with a worship service. It was followed by two guest speakers. The first speaker was a young man who overcame drug abuse and involvement in gangs. The second speaker gave an overview of the Healing and Reconciliation program of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In the afternoon the youth and leaders went from St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Prince Albert to Camp Christopher (on Christopher Lake, 40 kilometres north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan) for four workshops. These workshops focused on life in a residential school; science and Christian faith; a scavenger hunt and the power of social media. The group returned to St. Paul's Presbyterian Church for supper and a time for recreation at the local swimming pool. Youth helped to plan the service the following morning.

Saturday morning was an opportunity to have two workshops for all of the youth and their leaders. The first workshop leader was of Métis descent and spoke of his time on the streets and gave the youth a realistic picture of the "life on the other side" and strongly encouraged the youth not to get involved in that type of life. This program included participation from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people.

This event included participation from four young adults from Mistawasis.* Their reflections were very positive. The opportunity for the youth from different congregations to get together, eat, have fun, worship and learn was important. The youth were engaged in all aspects of the weekend and there was evidence from discussions that they had learned a great deal about life on the streets, residential schools and the church generally. The future will be an indicator of the overall impact of the weekend.

Many of the youth who were present are planning to go to Camp Christopher in the summer of 2013 so they can see each other again. The youth from Mistawasis want to participate in events and programs with the youth from St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Prince Albert.

* Mistawasis First Nation is 120 kilometres north of Saskatoon and 70 kilometres west of Prince Albert. The reserve is named after Chief Mistawasis who first extended the invitation to The Presbyterian Church in Canada to establish a congregation on the reserve. It is the only Presbyterian congregation in a First Nation community.

Building bridges - a cultural day in a multicultural way

**St. Paul's Presbyterian Church,
Prince Albert SK**

This one day event was held on March 20, 2009 at Riverside Community School in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The event was to honour First Nations, Métis and other cultural groups and organizations in Prince Albert.

The program involved students at Riverside Community School and WonSka Cultural School and included volunteers from St. Paul's Presbyterian Church. The ceremonies included drumming and dancing provided by WonSka youth. Leadership was provided by Aboriginal elders and other community leaders. Participants were treated to a traditional stew and bannock feast. Twelve concurrent sessions were run. The content included storytelling, musical presentations and cultural teachings from First Nations, Métis, German, Irish and South African community members and organizations.

The idea for this event began as a conversation between Elder Stuart Amyotte and Rev. Sandy Scott, a Presbyterian minister. A working committee was formed that included representation from Prince Albert Youth Outreach, Riverside Community School, SK Rivers School Division #119, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church.

In preparing for this event teachers taught lessons about treaties and some of the cultures represented at the event. Organizers felt the focus on "learning and experiencing" was helpful. Two comments from event planners included "the visual impact of walking into the [school] gym will never be forgotten – the tepee, drummers and costumes were a visual feast!" and "the students really 'got it' and stated that they will do better than past generations did at showing respect for all cultures".

An informal partnership has developed between, Riverside School, WonSka Cultural School and St. Paul's Presbyterian Church. There is discussion about WonSka Cultural School inviting members of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church to visit their facilities and to discuss possible future partnerships.

"the visual impact of walking into the [school] gym will never be forgotten – the tepee, drummers and costumes were a visual feast!"

March 20, 2009

Event on Northern Gateway Pipeline

Calgary KAIROS group, Calgary AB

On September 20, 2012, Ha'eis (Clare) Hill spoke to an ecumenical group of 60 people at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary. Clare Hill was also keynote speaker at a conference in Lethbridge, organized by KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. Clare Hill is from Hartley Bay, BC and is a Hereditary Chief to the Hartley Bay Band, Gitga'at Nation. He is also a designated lay minister of the United Church of Canada.

Mr. Hill spoke about the concerns his people have with the proposed Northern Gateway Pipeline.

Hartley Bay is on the coast. Some of the concerns he shared included the risk of losing their food source and traditions.

One of the outcomes of both of these events was to bring together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to talk about an issue that will have implications for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Workshop participants learned about some of the traditions and history of the Gitga'at First Nation and the spiritual connection they have to their land.

Ha'eis (Clare) Hill shared some of the concerns of his community. This conversation is one way to breathe life into the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and an opportunity to deepen our understanding of Indigenous rights in light of the Declaration.

The KAIROS Calgary group, which includes Presbyterians, continues to explore ways of living in right relationships with Indigenous neighbours.

"This conversation is one way to breathe life into the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and an opportunity to deepen our understanding of Indigenous rights in light of the Declaration."

September 20, 2012

Han-Ca Native mission forum

**Presbytery of Western Han-Ca,
Surrey BC**

“The forum focused on Aboriginal culture and history, and Christian spirituality from the perspective and leadership of Aboriginal ministers.”

This was an educational forum organized by Rev. Hoo Sik Kim for Korean Presbyterian congregations.

The event was organized in consultation with the Edmonton Urban Native Ministry, one of the seven Native Ministries in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Over 60 participants from

the Presbytery of Western Han-Ca attended. This Presbytery is made up of congregations whose members are of Korean heritage from Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia.

The forum focused on Aboriginal culture and history, and Christian spirituality from the perspective and leadership of Aboriginal ministers. There was discussion regarding Aboriginal Christian theology and ministry.

The keynote speaker was Mr. Terry LeBlanc. Mr. LeBlanc is the executive director of My People International a holistic, training-focused ministry program with and for Native North Americans. Mr. LeBlanc is a member of the Mi'kmaq Nation.

One of the goals of this event was to share and reflect on the cultural differences that shape one's world view, spiritual practices, traditions and approach to mission work.

First and second generation Canadians from South Korea may have limited exposure to Aboriginal people and the issues that are of concern to them. This forum was an opportunity for two cultures to learn from each other.

The event organizer reflected that this event has led to an increased desire to make connections with local Aboriginal communities.

Cheryl Bear tour

Presbytery of Kamloops, BC

Cheryl Bear is a Nadleh Whut'en, Carrier First Nation musician. Hosted by the Presbytery of Kamloops and Rev. Shannon Bell-Wyminga, she toured the Kamloops region for two weeks in March 2009. Her trip included concerts at a number of churches, schools and Friendship Centres in the Kamloops region.

Ms. Bear did several concerts, speaking engagements, lead worship services, and offered cultural teachings at two schools, one Friendship Centre and two visits to First Nations communities and six churches including St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Prince George, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Armstrong, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kamloops and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Penticton. Ms. Bear's teachings and music were enthusiastically received in these venues and provided an opportunity for several hundred people in many communities in the Kamloops region to hear her music and teachings.

Participants were Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from the communities visited including Quesnel, Nazko, Lhoosk'uz, Prince George, Lac La Hache, Armstrong, Kamloops and Penticton.

Three churches that participated in this tour are planning educational events to develop interest in forming a delegation from the Kamloops region to attend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada national event in Vancouver in September 2013.



Cheryl Bear

Celebrating National Aboriginal Day

**Richmond Youth Service Agency,
Richmond BC**

The Aboriginal community in Richmond BC hosted a day-long National Aboriginal Day celebration that brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members in Richmond BC including members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Speakers included Chiefs from Tsawwassen and Musqueam First Nations and the Mayor of Richmond.

This event was coordinated through the Richmond Youth Service Agency and had the endorsement of Hummingbird Native Ministry (one of seven Native Ministries in The Presbyterian Church in Canada) and Richmond Presbyterian Church. The program included workshops about the history of Aboriginal people from the Richmond area, the screening of films by Aboriginal directors such as Loretta Todd, a drum making workshop and learning about Aboriginal crafts. An artist marketplace included displays by local Aboriginal artists, and traditional dance and music presentations by Kwakwaka'wakw Urban Dance Group, M'Girl, Mooshum Bob's Dance and Cultural Society, and Rapsure Risin.

The event was organized by the Richmond Youth Service Agency. Representatives from Richmond Presbyterian Church attended. More than 500 people attended the event.

It was the first time that National Aboriginal Day was celebrated by a large public event in Richmond. It has become an annual celebration.

"It was the first time that
National Aboriginal Day
was celebrated by a large
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Richmond."

The photograph on the front cover depicts John Vissers (centre), Moderator of the 138th General Assembly (2012) giving a Gesture of Reconciliation from The Presbyterian Church in Canada to Eugene Arcand (left) and Madeleine Basile (right), members of the TRC Indian Residential School Survivor Committee. The Gesture was placed into the Bentwood Box at the fourth national Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) event in Saskatoon June 21-24, 2012.

The Bentwood Box is so named because it is made from a single piece of wood that is treated and bent into shape. The Box was carved by Coast Salish artist Luke Marston. The carved panels represent cultures of former First Nations, Inuit and Métis students. The Box travels to each of the seven national TRC events.