



Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship

September 2021



Reconciliation

The recent unmarked grave sites on some of our Canadian residential schools reverberate loud and clear; this has really happened to our Indigenous people of Canada.

On the National Day of Listening this past June 30th, someone quoted an Elder as saying, "When we had spoken of this, no one was listening. Now the dead are speaking and everyone hears." These children have a voice that speaks to us today and we have heard them very loudly.

The reason this has impacted us so strongly is that it has placed these events in our time and in our context. That is why we can't just move on and leave this in the past, as suggested by some. These graves were "discovered" (although they've always been there) today for all of us who are a part of this "Dominion" of Canada. These children's voices speak to all of us. The old wounds have opened up for Indigenous people afresh once again. We are still bleeding from an old wounds and that is what makes this pain so great! Today, for many of the rest of us, new wounds have occurred as we have realized the truth.

I recently heard a very familiar word, pronounced differently; "re-conciliation". Over time words seems to evolve and change and sometimes their meanings do as well. We don't want this word forgotten or left behind in the past. Re-conciliation means something that needs to be acted upon once again. It's time for all of us to re-conciliate

once again. It is a renewed call to all of us. But we have someone who is also very familiar with this pain and suffering, who knows of reconciliation as well - Jesus.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5: 18-20

We are all called to go down the road of reconciliation because Jesus is the first one who started the call to reconcile. We as a church need to reconcile to one another. We need to embrace reconciliation, receive it and offer it as well.

Jesus has given us all a call to action. Let us all consider, reflect and carry through on the road to reconciliation.

Pastor Lyle Blackbird



Another Loss



We lost one of our Board members, a servant to our church family and a brother on April 7 this year due to Covid and other complications. Alan Edward joined our congregation about 7 years ago. He came from the Vancouver area to work with Winnipeg Teen Challenge and wanted to find an Indigenous Baptist church like he had back home. It didn't take him long to find us. Alan loved the Word, studied it voraciously and was ready to teach from it at any time. He had a huge heart and compassion for people who were "down and out". He worked at various jobs where he served people who struggled with addictions, had various forms of mental illness or lived in poverty. He was a natural story teller and regaled us with many stories of hunting in the mountains, the challenges of being a correctional officer for years and had us laughing many times with his sense of humour. He is very much missed in our church and the community.

Beth Wilton

HOW RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL AFFECTED MY LIFE A GENERATION LATER

Hi! My name is Rena. I have been married for 28 years and have 4 children and 2 grandchildren.

My life before Christ was dark and lonesome. I grew up on the reserve until I was 13. I came from a dysfunctional home as my parents were alcoholics. They believed in God but not as their personal saviour.

My dad went to a residential school from the age of 7 to 17. Although his home was about 30 minutes away, he never once was allowed to go home during those 10 years. It was a hard life growing up in a residential school and it made him bitter and dysfunctional. He was a quiet and gentle man who worked hard for his family. He had big machinery skills but earned his livelihood from fishing and hunting. But he lacked the skills to be a husband and dad. I knew he was hurting inside and drank to feel better, but when he drank he became another person. He would talk more and louder and became angry and physically abusive. He fought my mom all the time. My siblings and I spent a lot of time on our own without adult supervision and I ended up taking care of them. Often I took care of my parents too. Although I didn't know a lot about God, I asked Him to change my dad and bring peace to our home.

One day as a teenager in the city, I went to a girls' club held by Youth for Christ. I got to know who Jesus was there and in my early 20's I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. I made changes in my life for the better and stopped doing things that weren't pleasing to the Lord.

God took away my desire to drink and I felt free from the sadness, loneliness, anxiety and depression that I'd felt for years. God changed me and healed me from the inside. I was happy and the heaviness was gone from my heart.

As time went on I invited my siblings and parents to church. They all had an encounter with the Lord and before both my parents passed away they accepted Jesus into their hearts. My dad was more peaceful and happy.

Lately, in hearing about the unmarked graves at the residential schools, I have become saddened and hurt. It reminded me of my dad and all he went through at the residential school. It hurt to hear and see what was reported on the media. One day I felt like crying but couldn't because there was such a heaviness on me. I couldn't breathe. As I prayed, I felt God's presence and literally felt the heaviness lift off me. I realized that God had healed my broken heart from the effects of my dad's past at the residential school. It was gone. God did a miracle in my heart for which I am very thankful. There is no limitation in reaching out to God no matter how low you are in your circumstances because God hears when you call out to him.

People sometimes wonder if and how residential schools affect the next generation. I am proof that it does. But thanks to Jesus, that damage has not remained in my life.

Our Statement

We at Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship, (part of the CBWC) join with the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc to mourn the deaths of the 215 children discovered in an unmarked grave at the site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School.

We pray for all Residential School Survivors and intergenerational survivors as this awakens afresh layers of trauma endured for generations.

These children were precious in the eyes of God. Their lives and the gifts that they had to offer were stolen from their communities and their families. We lament this irreplaceable loss, acknowledging and repenting of the ways that the Christian church enacted the state mandated policies of assimilation.

We know that lament is not enough and there is a need for just action as well. We are reminded of our commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which guides us as a framework for reconciliation and we call for renewed commitment to the TRC Calls to Action.

Now is the time though to express sorrow. We lament and stand together.

*** from the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada statement with changes.*

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