



Circles for Reconciliation Gathering Theme

Reconciliation

Author: This theme is comprised of four readings: two from the TRC final report, a comment by Murray Sinclair, and a reflection on reconciliation particularly directed to Indigenous people from an article by Maggie Hodgson

Facilitator:

1. Reconciliation at the Crossroads

“To some people, reconciliation is the re-establishment of a conciliatory state. However, this is a state that many Aboriginal people assert never has existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. To others, reconciliation, in the context of Indian residential schools, is similar to dealing with a situation of family violence. It’s about coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward. It is in the latter context that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has approached the question of reconciliation.

To the Commission, reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.

We are not there yet. The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is not a mutually respectful one. But, we believe we can get there, and we believe we can maintain it.”

“Reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share.” (TRC, pages 6-8)

Participant 1:

2. Commission Activities

“Until the Commission was established, the voices of those who were most directly affected by the residential school experience, particularly the former students, had largely been missing from the historical record. The Commission made a commitment to offer everyone involved with the residential school system the opportunity to speak about their experience. The Commission received over 6,750 statements from survivors of residential schools, members of their families, and other individuals who wished to share their knowledge of the residential school system and its legacy.”

“In an effort to understand all aspects of the residential school experience, the Commission also made a concerted effort to gather statements from former staff of residential schools. With the assistance of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement, the Commission conducted ninety-six separate interviews with former staff and the children of former staff. In addition, the Commission received statements from former staff and their family members at its National and Regional Events and Community Hearings. The statements gathered will form part of a permanent collection of documents relating to residential schools.” (TRC, p. 25-26.)

Participant 2:

3. Reconciliation Nation

“Many people came to the conversation without really thinking about reconciliation was. They kept focusing on what reconciliation wasn’t. It wasn’t about forgiveness. It wasn’t about sovereignty. It wasn’t about title to the land. It wasn’t about government control. So they came with a bunch of negative perspectives. Once we came to terms with understanding that reconciliation is establishing a balanced and respectful relationship between two or more sovereign and existing entities, and in a way that allows them to function in a partnership going forward, I think that idea gelled very quickly for us.” (Shead, 2015, p. 27)

Participant 3:

4. Reconciliation: A Spiritual Process

“It is up to you!” Elder Abe Burnstick

“Reconciliation is a Western concept that describes a process of bringing one’s spirit to a place of peace. The long-term goal of reconciliation is to prepare ourselves for the time we go to the other side in peace. Peace is a state of spirit. We get there through hard work on our part or a willingness to ask the Creator to help us find peace in our hearts. The process of reconciliation is embodied in our mind, flesh, spirit, and attitude. We either

choose to stay in pain and in anger or we are willing to do the work to effect change for ourselves. This does not necessarily mean the person or the government or the church that hurt us has to be sorry before we come to a place of peace. Coming to a place of peace and setting our spirits free from pain is a long-term process for most people and communities. Finding that place in our spirits is a lifelong journey. The reward for doing our work is being a people of hope, spirit, and commitment. We do this to ensure that our grandchildren will not have to live with our spiritual, emotional pain.”

“Many former residential school students experienced trauma from being disconnected from their family. Those who have moved forward understand that in order to heal from our pain we have to speak our truth and take responsibility for change. We have chosen to reverse the central pillars of the intent of residential schools and surrounding legislation that drove a spike into the hearts of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples. The chilling language surrounding the “Indian question” clearly defined the legislators’ intent, which was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples by outlawing traditional ceremonies, removing children from families, and cutting off access to language and sense of identity. In 1920, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, told Parliament that the object of assimilation was to continue ‘until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question.’ One cannot separate residential schools from those policies because they decreed that our children should not live with their parents and should not have access to ceremony while they were being trained to believe our cultural beliefs and ceremonies were of the devil.” (Hodgson, 2008)

***Note:** Maggie Hodgson is a member of the Nadleh Whuten Carrier First Nation who works locally, nationally, and internationally on justice and healing initiatives. She was the founder and host for the first “Healing Our Spirit Worldwide” gathering held in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1992.*

The full article can be found in “From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools” (see References).

References

TRC. Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*.

Hodgson, Maggie. Reconciliation: A Spiritual Process. In the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, 2008. Retrieved from

<https://www.ahf.ca/files/from-truth-to-reconciliation-transforming-the-legacy-of-residential-schools.pdf>

Shead, Ruth. "Murray Sinclair in Reconciliation Nation". *UM Today: The Magazine*. Fall 2015, p. 27.

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