

Pro D 2017

Reaction to Assignments on TRC by June Cox

It doesn't matter how many times I hear the stories, whether in person told for the first time or the fiftieth time, whether on video or TV, whether with just audio or with still photographs or video, or whether written, I am always profoundly saddened. I am not necessarily left saddened, because there is hope, and many survivors have experienced healing, but I cannot hear the stories without sadness being part of my process—my experience.

I am saddened because of what the Aboriginal/First Nations/Native American people and communities experienced, and the impacts of those experiences. I am deeply grieved that the abuses were usually done in the name of God. I am grieved that God was dishonored and portrayed as being very different than He truly is. I am grieved that this has created a barrier which makes it far more difficult for many Native people to trust Him, to love Him, to be open to Him, and to surrender to Him.

I probably first heard of the Truth and Reconciliation movement from Brig Judy during the time when he was in Manitoba, and he talked about Terry LeBlanc. I have now heard Terry, Ray Aldred, Adrian Jacobs, and numerous others speak about the issues that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission addressed. I remember when NAIM staff began to talk of these issues. I remember when some of us discussed whether or not to speak of them at the Native Women's Retreats. We were told not to because there wouldn't be time to deal with the issues that would be raised; wouldn't be time to do enough to bring healing. But the stories started coming out anyway. And the telling of the stories, and the responses of respect and love started the healing.

It's hard for me to know what to say in regards to what NAIM's response should be. I look forward to the discussion. Even though experiences in the States were essentially the same, the way it has been dealt with has been very different. The residential schools, what was experienced there, and the impacts aren't well known among non-Native people. At Lummi, the sharing of the stories of abuses at the schools started coming out years later than in Canada. And it is different among the various Native American Tribes. Not being in the Canadian context, it is difficult to know what to suggest for NAIM. I applaud NAIM for having staff do this even though I didn't want to at first because I have done so much learning about it before. I learned new details though, and it was good.

I think the thing I struggle with the most is the mandate by the TRC that churches mitigate spiritual conflicts. How to do that and retain the truth of a saving relationship with God being only through Jesus is complicated at best.