

NAIM Professional Development 2017

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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Over the 30 years that I've been connected to the Nuu-chah-nulth people I've heard many stories from First Nations folks I know who have experienced traumatic events at the hands of staff or fellow students while attending residential school. And yet... It never fails to surprise, shock, infuriate and/or sadden me. But in the words of Commissioner Dr. Marie Wilson, "How people *feel* about the history of First Peoples in Canada is only relevant in terms of how people *act*."

So where do we go from here? This is a question that I've been wrestling with, especially since the TRC was formed and it published its 94 Calls to Action. I am so thankful that this sordid history has had its day as part of the present public discourse and that there are specific things that we as a country can put our hands to as a way forward. There is *such* a long way to go and the point is driven home as we recall the recent outfall from Gerald Stanley trial who was charged with second degree murder in Colten Boushie's death and acquitted on all counts. How do we move forward in reconciliation in light of that?

What is our role as a mission in this; my role as a NAIM missionary; my role as a citizen of Canada? It goes without saying that as a mission and as followers of the same Christ in whose name much of the damage was done we have a significant role to play in this reconciliation journey. Here are some of my thoughts...

- 1) Although this is a relationship in which indigenous and the "settler" population ideally should have equal footing—and one day will have, hopefully—I believe we must defer to what is being recommended to us by the First Nations who have initiated this movement. In the Principles of Reconciliation, the first point is that any framework for reconciliation needs to come from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Perhaps as a mission we should familiarize ourselves with this document as well.
- 2) Publically adopt the Principles of Reconciliation as a mission. I believe that this would be a way of educating our supporters about our role in reconciliation with our First Nations brothers and sisters and our way forward in this. As principle ten outlines, "Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue...about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties and Aboriginal rights as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society."

- 3) As a missionary of NAIM who is providing employment opportunities for First Nations women through Wild Blueberry Gourmet Eats my desire is to work toward closing the gap in economic outcomes that exist in our community. Also, as I engage with these women my desire is, at the grass roots level, to contribute toward closing the gaps in social and health outcomes.
- 4) Call to Action #60: We call upon leaders of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement and all other faiths, in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders, Survivors, schools of theology, seminaries, and other religious training centres, to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy, and all clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities, on the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right, the history and legacy of residential schools and the roles of the church parties in that system, the history and legacy of religious conflict in Aboriginal families and communities, and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence.

I know that we are a mission that works toward establishing the church and being a witness to those around us. But we also need to engage in this Call to Action. As a matter of respect toward our fellow human beings who walk this earth with us, to be able to come into this relationship with our own faith convictions and allow them to have their own faith convictions and establish together the ground for honest dialogue around faith instead of having a hidden agenda to convert, I believe is respectful and godly. The Holy Spirit will do His work as the Choreographer, the Mover and the Shaker; let's listen to His direction in all of our relationships.

- 5) Call to Action #61: We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement, in collaboration with Survivors and representatives of Aboriginal organizations, to establish permanent funding to Aboriginal people for:
 - i. Community-controlled healing and reconciliation projects.
 - ii. Community-controlled culture—and language—revitalization projects.
 - iii. Community-controlled education and relationship-building projects.
 - iv. Regional dialogues for Indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss Indigenous spirituality, self-determination, and reconciliation.

Can we as a mission, or even as missionaries within our own communities, contribute financially toward some of these projects mentioned in Call to Action #61? I know some of us are in tight spots financially (believe me...I know!) but I would be happy to give a percentage of what I earn toward a project that is going on in my community that works toward recognition of my neighbours' identity as First Peoples and their journey toward healing and wholeness as a people. That is a tangible way to be involved.