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Truth and Reconciliation Commission Debriefing

The church, no matter how much I'd like to initially defend it, was guilty of participating and causing much of the hurt and pain of residential schools and colonization. This is a huge growth point from me - admitting wrongdoing - in a public sphere such as this movement. I came from the realm of politics and defending one's 'side' of an issue, whether you were in the right or in the wrong, was common place. It wasn't so much about the truth as much as getting the 'win' in the debate or standing up for your 'side' on an issue. That's why I am pleased that the leadership of this movement focused on the words 'Truth' and 'Reconciliation', as that is ultimately what has to be done. It's not so much about getting someone's 'side' to win, but as Ron stated in the video, it is an invitation from first nations to walk in their grief and reconciliation process with them. It is almost entirely a relational process, which isn't surprising given the relational tendency of first nations, but it is humbling to me as someone working as a representative of the 'church'. Working with first nations people has changed me over the years, as well as just my own growing up and perspective shifting. The truth of the matter that one simply cannot avoid is that the government contracted with churches to get residential schools up and running. There was 150 years of policy that included the rounding up of kids in order to get them 'civilized', with the last residential schools closed in the 1990's.

The TRC was created for the children who experienced residential schools to have a voice, to teach us from their perspective, to 'have their day in court' so to speak and to publicize their stories. It's not just for white people to feel bad, but I think the notion of 'history repeating itself' is an important concept here. The last thing first nations want to happen is for what happened to them to happen elsewhere in the world, and with population centres growing in coming years, I think the possibility is still there if there is not good education on this issue. So now that we know about this history, what do we do about this? It's not about how you feel but what you're gonna do.

The TRC has focused their efforts on youth who are outraged over this issue and who are beginning to process this all with their relatives telling them stories. The youth are the people who are dealing with some of the deadly consequences of actions taken during colonization and they now want to find solutions to this issue. So the question is asked - Where do we go from here? Well, there has to be an openness to learning in TRC events and the contexts that come out of the movement. We can only educate those who are willing to listen. Some of the things done from the TRC include survivor sharing circles, which is an opportunity to speak about experiences and perspectives on residential schools. The whole notion of these experiences being 'transformational' should be emphasized as well. People ought not to stay in the same emotional place or have the same perspective when they leave as when they arrived. We must change in some way, whether that be politically, emotionally, etc.

So how does NAIM organizationally, and as staff members individually, address this movement and specifically the "Call to Action" points 58-61? As stated in Ron's video, I was surprised that only 4 of these points of action were directed at the church and i'm kind of overwhelmed by that fact. This is a chance for us to go over and above what we are 'required' and really show how much we care and want to participate in this as a whole movement. I am also surprised by the in depth nature of the calls to action. It is clear that this was well thought through and its not thrown together lightly.

The apology from the Pope doesn't have much relevance to us, but public acknowledgment of the church in general's role in things is essential in moving forward. That

still clearly applies to us as 'church' workers. As we work with churches, I think there are a number of ways that we can educate those who gather around us as the flock. Taking short term teams to first nations villages has given me the best platform to share the woes of the TRC and the situation with those who are not aware. It combines knowledge with faces that they will see on reservations and I think the truths of the issue become more real when real people are involved and not just statistics on a page. I think discussion of these hard issues is also prime material to discuss from the pulpit and more public events where the church body is gathered.

When it comes to respecting Indigenous spirituality and teaching the history of residential schools in all levels of church education and training, I wholeheartedly agree. I think indigenous spirituality gets a lot closer to Biblical spirituality that the stereotypical 'white/western/American church' does. There are so many crossover points that can be beneficial for both parties, some of them being the yearning for prayer in everyday life, the reality of a 'spiritual' side to life in addition to our flesh and blood, and emphasis on community and sharing of resources. As workers, we can emphasize these similarities and in a way build bridges in our teaching and training. It also validates their spirituality and shows that it has merit and isn't just from 'heathens'. The people in power at the establishment of colonization policies knew that in order to 'civilize' the native population, separating them from their families was essential. We must also understand this, but understand that families are a central part of native culture and we need to be strategic in our outreach to take note of families, lift them up, encourage and build them up together.

The trickiest one out of all these points is probably the funding of Aboriginal community-controlled projects, because as we all know, the topic of money is always an easy subject to discuss in church (please note my sarcasm here). But the reality is because it is such a rough subject in our culture, it probably means that it is an idol that has to be torn down...and people don't like to give away their idols without a fight. People are going to want to know why 'their' money is going towards 'this'. It will be up to us, as clergy and ministers to articulate clearly the reasons why this is so important. We can't sit on the sidelines on this one, but we absolutely have to interact in every level that we find ourselves able to.

Within all of this is a huge opportunity to teach about the theme of reconciliation in Scripture and to play out this theme in our lives and situations we find ourselves in. It is such a cool bridge that can be crossed with such a tough circumstance. As I watched the videos again, I was amazed at how they used a lot of words we use in Christianity (reconciliation, transformational, truth, etc). The opportunity is there for us and it is up to us to grab it while it is still there. It seems clear to me that God has worked this out for His Word and character to be known by more first nations people all over North America, and truths in Scripture like in Romans 8 show us that he is working for our good and knows what he is doing. Praise be to the God who knows what he is doing in our crazy world that we live in.