

Walking Together – A Path for Healing and Reconciliation Treaty Land Acknowledgements Three Cups of Tea

Submitted by Judy Look, Past President

We live in interesting times; times that continue to shake us to our very core. A pandemic shut us down for a while and a Pope came to affirm what our indigenous brothers and sisters have been saying for a very long time...that there was a systemic effort to eradicate their culture. The pandemic is still with us, but we are managing it. We no longer fear it as we begin to understand how we can protect ourselves. The journey that we are called to walk with our indigenous brothers and sisters is not quite that easy. The pandemic calls us to turn to science for understanding. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls us to turn inward to our heart to try to understand how we could live with another culture without recognizing its existence.

Although many of us are hesitant it's time to drink from our first cup of tea. In that cup of tea are the following two quotes from the visit of Pope Francis from his pilgrimage. At Maskwacis he said,

“Dear brothers and sisters, Many of you and your representatives have stated that begging pardon is not the end of the matter. I fully agree that is only the first step, the starting point. I also recognize that, “looking to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient’ and that ‘looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening.”

Meeting with Indigenous Delegation, Quebec City he said: “I have come as a pilgrim, despite my physical limitations, to take further steps forward with you and for you. I do this so that progress may be made in the search for truth, so that the processes of healing reconciliation may continue, and so that seeds of hope can keep being sown for future generations – indigenous and non-indigenous alike - who desire to live together, in harmony as brothers and sisters.”

We all have many emotions, opinions, and some facts in this first cup although many of us just stare at it and are hesitant to raise it to our lips. Father Jim Corrigan at our provincial convention in Lac La Biche in 2022 admitted that he too had reservations about sipping from this first cup but agreed to facilitate a workshop to help us (including himself) investigate the ingredients so to begin a discussion. The groups shared some of their emotions and realized that it was ok to feel the way they did but also it was

necessary to become better educated to continue the discussion and not continue with the limited knowledge from the past that shapes our present-day opinions.

So let us begin our process of reconciliation and healing by looking at one phrase that we constantly hear and tends to get under our skin that is prefaced with something like...”we would like to acknowledge that Treaty # is the ancestral land of.....”

Reactions to the acknowledgements are varied with some rolling eyes, others ignoring the statement, and others with negative comments. Not many ask why is this so important to our indigenous brothers and sisters or why does it bother me so much? Of what am I afraid?

The Alberta Bishops share that, for the indigenous peoples, “land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values” (Pope Francis, *Laudato si*, n. 146). As well the bishops comment they, the indigenous people understand treaty as a solemn covenant, entered between equal and sovereign peoples, to confirm and preserve the respective rights of each party.

With that understanding we should ask what our knowledge of the settlement of this land is. If we go to a timeline of Canada, we find that the first peoples on this land arrived around 10,000 BC and we realize they are the ancestors of the present-day indigenous community. So, when treaty lands are acknowledged, we are saying to the indigenous community we are grateful that your ancestors welcomed our ancestors to this land. With this understanding we come to the realization that we are all treaty people living on land gifted to all of us. Like COVID when scientists began to study and continue to study and share their knowledge some of the fear dissipates; so too by seeking the truth about treaties and ancestral lands information helps us understand the importance the indigenous place on acknowledgements and this gives a foundation from which to talk and listen. This foundation recognizes that a nation of people existed on these lands before exploration of the Europeans.

By making a land acknowledgement at our meetings we are saying we understand. We understand that there were peoples on this land before colonization; that these people were a civilization and that they welcomed newcomers. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to give us the courage to become seekers of knowledge so that we can engage with our indigenous brothers and sisters as we walk side by side to make Canada the country that God has called it to be. Let us follow in the footsteps of Pope Francis.

Treaty Land Acknowledgments in Churches and a Liturgical Events created by the Alberta Bishops has been posted to our website.