



Photo Hubert Den Draak

Christian Outreach & Social Action

COSA newsletter Fall 2016

COSA CAMBRIANPRESBYTERY.ORG/COMMITTEES/OUTREACH-SOCIAL-ACTION

An introduction for affirming ministry services

By Rev. Rob Smith, Thunder Bay

As a community of faith, we are committed to living into right relations with all people. We endeavor to be a safe place for all people regardless of race, creed, age, cultural background or sexual orientation.

Therefore, no matter where you find yourself on the journey of your life you are welcome here. As we gather in this sacred circle may you find whatever it is that you need today for that journey.

We also take a moment to acknowledge our First Nations brothers and sisters and their stewardship of this sacred land that we all call home. We acknowledge that we worship on the ancestral lands of the Fort William Indian Band

RIGHT RELATIONS

by Ernie Epp

The United Church of Canada has been concerned about the development of good relations with the Indigenous People of Canada for a number of decades. We were reminded of that fact by the August commemoration in Sudbury of the thirtieth anniversary of the United Church’s apology to Residential School survivors. The Memorial Walk in Fort Frances during the September meeting of Cambrian Presbytery, described in the adjoining report, provided still another opportunity to enhance Right Relations.

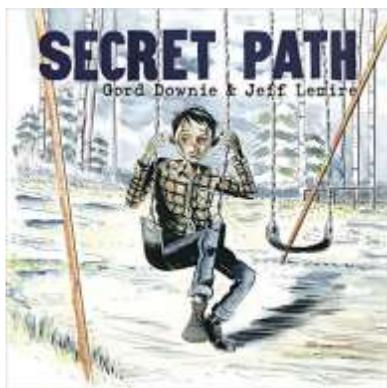
The second half of October provided a number of opportunities in Thunder Bay to enhance Right Relations. The first occurred on Tuesday, **October 18th**, by *Walking in the Light* from the International Friendship Garden to the Columbus Centre on May Street. The event was subtitled “Addressing Racism in Thunder Bay Guided by Faith” and sponsored by the Matawa First Nations Management (the Matawa communities are located close to the Ring of Fire mining prospects). The United Church of Canada banner was carried in the walk by Shane Judge and the Rev. Ed Prinselaar; a

photograph and newspaper report appeared the next day on the first page of the *Chronicle-Journal*. There was a symposium following the walk, to which people were invited: “Join us for fellowship and discussion on how faith based values can be part of the solutions.” Darius Ferris, Board President for the sponsoring organization, declared, “Because of the concern we have [about] systemic racism and also stereotype racism, we asked the people of faith within the city to come together to pray for the safety of the people of First Nations and every other race here in Thunder Bay.” The newspaper report focused on members of the Baha-i community, but the reporter also talked to the Rev. Ed Prinselaar and he expressed the intention of the United Church of Canada to be “part of the solutions.” (I might add that the recent inquest in Thunder Bay, investigating the deaths of a number of students from the northern communities who had come to our city to advance their education here has forced us to think about the community to which they came and where they tragically died.)

The second event, a showing of Gord Downie’s “The Secret Path” in the



Thunder Bay Community Auditorium on Sunday, **October 23rd**, was closely related to the theme of the walk. The local showing of the film, which was broadcast nationally that evening by the CBC, was sponsored by the Nishnabe Aski Nation. The NAN Drummers were in attendance and sang for us before and after the showing. Also in attendance were members of the Wenjack family, including a sister of Chanie's who sang a hymn in Cree while holding the hand of Mike Downie, one of the two film producers in attendance. Also in attendance was NAN Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, who was recently awarded an honorary degree by the Law Society of Upper Canada. Mike Downie spoke movingly after the showing about the fact that Canada, on the brink of its 150th Anniversary, had failed to make the Indigenous People a central part of its imagery and history from Confederation to the present. (*Maclean's Magazine* reprinted its 1967 article on the tragic attempt of Chanie Wenjack to walk back to Ogoki Post from the Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School in its September 26th issue. It was this article that inspired Gord Downie to undertake his "The Secret Path" project, quite possibly his last gift to the Canadian people before cancer takes him away from us.



The book: *Secret Path*

The book, *Secret Path*, including the lyrics of Gord's songs, is available at Chapters and other bookstores.)

Only four days after that powerful and moving event, we were privileged on **October 27th** to listen to a presentation by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People, at Lakehead University. Her presentation on "Free, Prior and Informed Consent: A Local and Global Issue" was part of a conference



Victoria Tauli-Corpuz

organized by the Lakehead University Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Mining and Exploration and the Wilfrid Laurier Indigenous Rights and Resource Governance Research Group. The conference was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Lakehead University's Office of Aboriginal Initiatives, and the Matawa First Nations. The UN Special Rapporteur is an Indigenous Person from the Philippines, who was involved in the drawn-out struggle of Indigenous People to prevent the building of the Chico River Project during the decade 1975-85. This opposition led the World Bank to withdraw funding from the five dams and go on to draw up the principles that should govern projects where Indigenous People live. I would encourage you to "Google" Chico River dam to learn more about this struggle. (When I worked for the Shibogama First Nations Council fifteen years ago, and more, I learned about the negotiation in the 1990s of the first agreement between the Shibogama and Windigo First Nations Councils and Placer Dome, before this company put the Musselwhite gold mine into operation in Northwestern Ontario. A tragedy of Ontario mining history is that this model, which reflected some measure of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, was not established in law at the time and that the Harris and McGuinty governments failed to require other companies to act as Placer Dome did—under the encouragement of the Rae government!)

The middle of November provides another opportunity for learning as Dr. Ken Coates, Canada Research Chair in Regional Innovation at the University of Saskatchewan, speaks on Monday, **November 14th**, at Lakehead University. The presentation is entitled "In the Wake of UNDRIP: Canadian Indigenous Policy in Global Perspective." This title reminds us that the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* challenges many practices, in this case the policies of Canadian governments. The harsh fact is that Indian policies of the past failed the UNDRIP test completely. This presentation will certainly be illuminating, but we in the United Church of Canada need to be aware that UNDRIP also challenges the churches. That fact is being recognized by our church nationally. Have we begun to recognize it locally?

ACTIONS BY OUR CHURCHES

Fort Frances

During our meeting time at Fall Presbytery (September 23 –September 25) our Christian Outreach and Social Action (COSA) committee was sharing different social action events that were happening in our areas. We were talking about getting involved in events as they occurred in our communities. One of the members said that there was going to be a breakfast and walk on the Saturday to bring attention to and support murdered and indigenous women in



Photo: Susan Ivany Memorial Walk in Fort Frances

our area. We discovered that the walkers would pass by the church we were sitting in and stop across the street at the court house for a period of time. Our committee decided that this was an opportunity for us to put our words and faith into action. We requested permission from the court to attend the walk and support this cause. Due to a quorum needed to pass the resolutions that were to take place the following morning one presbytery member joined the walk at the beginning and the rest would join as the group got closer to our church. Presbyters brought out our United Church sign and went out to meet the people walking as they approached our church. At the court house a traditional song was played and we joined in with the dance that followed. Many of the presbyters continued walking down to the river. Some carried posters of murdered indigenous women in the Fort Frances area. Others walked with the families and heard stories of their daughter, sister, aunt or mother. A mother of one of the murdered women expressed to me her thanks to the United Church and said how much they appreciated that we took time out of our meeting to walk with them.

This is just one example of social justice events going on in our communities. We can all become aware of what they are and join in.

Remember the Women

December 6 is a day to honour the 14 girls who were murdered at Ecole Polytechnique University in Montreal in 1989. Knox Fort Frances hosts a candlelight vigil on this date to remember these women as well as murdered indigenous and other women in our area. The service is led and coordinated by members of the Rainy River District Services, with help from our United Native Friendship Services. There is singing from the youth and a native women's drumming group also performs. Every year the service is a bit different with different speakers. One year the schools were involved with the Faceless dolls project and a quilt with faceless dolls representing the murdered and indigenous women was displayed. At the end of the service pictures of murdered women in our area are projected on a screen. It is very moving as friends and family are in the pews reliving their experience. After the service people are invited downstairs for a lunch. Our Right Relations group which is made up of Knox members from Fort Frances, Emo, Rainy River, Stratton churches provide a hot meal, fruit and veggies. Members from the Rainy River District Services and Friendship Center provide dessert and bannock. It is a time for all to reflect and talk about their loved ones and the pain they endure. It has turned into a wonderful partnership and experience. Everyone is so respectful of each other and others. It is a sad but wonderful experience.

Blanket Exercise



Photo KAIROS

In the spring, Knox Fort Frances hosted "The Blanket Exercise" which is a powerful tool to foster truth and reconciliation. Participants share the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the past and present. Participants take part in the exercise and speak either from the European perspective or indigenous perspective. All people start on

blankets or pieces of land and experience the loss of land and other rights as the indigenous people did. This is a very moving exercise. At the end of the blanket exercise participants are asked to make a personal connection to their experience. We also had elders at the workshop who shared their perspective. We had 35 participants from all aspects of our community. During refreshments after the presentation they talked about how moving and informative this experience was. Information on the Blanket Exercise can be found on the Kairos website.

Thunder Bay

Refugee Family Update
BY INTER CHURCH REFUGEE COMMITTEE

All 11 churches in the Inter Church Refugee Committee have been holding fundraisers and collecting and storing household goods since January. We have sufficient funds and enough furniture to furnish a whole house. Once the family actually arrives we can make known any specific needs. We have sub-committees set-up with volunteers from each of the churches. Once the family arrives these sub-committees are ready to go into action.

Although the wait has been long the Inter-Church Committee has not been idle. We have sponsored two education evenings for ourselves and others. As well we have responded to the great need for sponsors by agreeing to sponsor a single refugee from Africa in addition to a Syrian family.



Photo Josh Zakary

After initial disappointments - first when we did not have a family assigned before the government's closing date in February and then when the Syrian family we were eventually assigned did not get the necessary medical clearance - we now have a family.

Saeid Arroub and his wife Hikampt have three girls Hanan, age 10; Fatima, age 8; Ritaj, age 6; and one boy Kahled, age 4. The children have been able to continue their

schooling and Saeid has worked as a welder in Syria. They have advanced to the next stage in the Canadian Government visa office so it could be just a matter of weeks until their arrival. We are very excited and will keep you informed.

Pinegrove uc Rosslyn



Pinegrove, the rural church in the Thunder Bay area, started a local community outreach project: *Café del Soul*: An accepting community where faith, food & the arts come together. A place to connect, to be welcome for who you are and simply enjoy each other's' company.

pinegroveuc.org/cafe-del-soul/

ETHICAL PRODUCTS



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