

"Recapturing the momentum of reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours."

By Brander Raven McDonald, Indigenous Ministry Coordinator, diocese of New Westminster.

Keeping on the track of *walking out* our talk of reconciliation with our Indigenous relations has been an interesting thing to watch over the last 2 years. Attending national TRC events and other meetings has made it even more evident that we are only in the beginnings stages of building bridges of healing and reconciliation.

Since the Vancouver Truth and Reconciliation Commission events of September 19-25, 2013, there has been limited movement and engagement from local churches with regards to First Nations relationship development. Many have been asking "what we can do next"? The better question is "what can we do better in walking out this talk of reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours?" I have prepared the following road map which includes a brief tidbit on protocol. This should help you begin, restart or improve your work in bridge building.

There are 3 phases of "**engagement**" levels we should pursue in walking out the work of reconciliation and intentional follow up to the Recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada presented in Ottawa this summer of 2015.

The first level of engagement is:

1. "**Talking About**" First Nations issues, history, culture, spirituality, language and the like. This level of engagement does not demand much in the area of relational development with our host Indigenous peoples. We can read books, watch videos, listen to music or informational CDs such as "Buffalo Shout Salmon Cry" or "Unsettling the Settler Within", or any such materials where you may or may not actually engage. This is where you possibly begin to peak an interest in a future discussion with Aboriginal peoples.

The second level of engagement is:

2. "**Talking With**" Indigenous peoples. You may have a church that invites native peoples of renown and expertise to share their talents, work or story. Of course this may peak some interest in future relationship building but it is not real relationship development yet. In fact it might even be considered tokenism if this is where the engagement ends. The purpose for this degree of engagement is to move onward to a level of commitment, continuing to invite speakers and experts in native fields as an ongoing part of education, making your community more aware of Indigenous issues. First Nations people that you connect with in this way may become your cultural guides in the area of relational protocols which you will need if you are going to advance toward healing and reconciliation. This means moving past fear and dismissing stereotypes. "**Talking With**" really means that you must do the work of acquiring,

and then using First Nations ways of communicating, listening, all with the hopes and plans of walking with Indigenous neighbours.

The last level of engagement is:

3. "**Walking With**" our Aboriginal Neighbours. After you have sincerely put in the effort to move through the first 2 levels of engagement there is self-examination that needs to be done both individually, as a member of a parish and as a parish faith community. In this stage the decision may be made to either stay in the first 2 stages of engagement or venture forward, committing to the process of being a good neighbor. The level of engagement should be cooperatively set as you begin this very important part of building the real bridge of reconciliation. It demands an even greater degree of communication, listening skills and allowing native communities the safe space to share their dreams, goals, and needs with you as a member of a faith community and subsequently or concurrently with the entire faith community. This means volitionally becoming part of this relationship.

This is when and where real healing is done. It might be in a simple thing like attending: soccer games, longhouse gatherings, pow wows - dance festivals, family gatherings, or you can offer someone a ride or simply make arrangements to meet for coffee (or tea in my case). **Walking With** might be a gym night of volleyball, indoor soccer, a fishing trip or hiking. This is really about taking the time and the initiative to be together, continuing to build the kind of trust that has the opportunity to grow into long- lasting relationships. It does not mean however, making disciples for Jesus . By stage 3 you will be watched more closely as to how you represent the "Jesus Way" and not the problematic institutionalized understanding that came from such things as residential school. Native people want to see Jesus in you, not the old negative stereotype that comes with an hierarchical paternalistic evangelical colonialism. So this is the stage when you strive to be as genuine about what is truly in your heart as you continue the walk together.

Finally, it is very important to know about "**Protocol**". This is the way in which we as First Nations meet and greet each other, start our meetings and live together in our communications. A general rule of thumb is **ALWAYS** allow local First Nations to lead the protocol; after all, it is most respectful that they speak first as you are all guests in their local territory and lands. Making this clear at the outset will alleviate possible tensions on the part of Indigenous peoples as they too wade into this relationship with you.

Remember these are baby steps to help guide you in this process. "**Engagement**" demands that you be **process people without agenda**. Remaining flexible and teachable will help you make better strides as you move towards walking with Indigenous folks representing the Jesus Way. *2 Timothy 1:7* encourages us; "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and

of love and of a sound mind." Knowing and fully understanding this process will help alleviate fear. By understanding that you are a learner and listener you will achieve the ability to move forward in relationship without fear and with a keener insight into the cultural protocols that will allow you to be better relatives to Indigenous peoples, showing you are a person of the "Jesus Way" and maybe without even having to open your mouth.

Blessings on your journey.

Miigwetch,

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