



Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada

March 28, 2014

Dear London Conference,

Yesterday was the official opening of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the induction of the Honorary Witnesses who are charged with ensuring that we never forget what we have heard here. Dr. Cindy Blackstock, who is renowned for her tireless challenge of the inequitable treatment of Aboriginal children and who spoke so powerfully at our last General Council in Ottawa, is one of the witnesses. So also is Edmonton Mayor, Don Iveson, who announced that this city, home to the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada, has just declared a year of reconciliation. Governor General, the Honorable David Johnston and his wife, Sharon, will also be witnesses.

We too are witnesses. The United Church is represented here by the Moderator, General Secretary, Staff Leaders, and Conference leaders from Toronto, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwest, and British Columbia along with ourselves.

Many of us were witnesses to yesterday's Churches' Listening Circle. In that circle, survivors (or as one of the survivors called himself, 'victors') of the residential school system or their families tell their stories. Two things are abundantly clear from listening to these stories:

- 1) the pervasiveness of physical and sexual abuse; and
- 2) the impact that abuse has had on generation after generation of First Nation families.

Knowing that intellectually is one thing; listening to the stories changes the way we know it. To paraphrase the Moderator, who sat in this circle on our behalf: "Our hearts are breaking and we can only imagine the heart break for you who lived this."

May the power of the stories shared at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission not only break our hearts but change them so that we may emerge from this process committed to a new way of being in relationship with the First Nations of Canada.

Today, Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Gary Paterson, will speak at the Commission. He will be joined by the Very Rev. W. Phibbs, who served as Moderator when our church apologized for our role in residential schools in 1998 and by Rev. Maggie MacLeod who is senior staff for the Aboriginal Ministries Circle.

Please continue to hold the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in prayer.

Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa
Philip Newman