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THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

L'ÉGLISE UNIE DU CANADA

**April 14, 2016**

Two weekends ago leadership from all of the constituencies of the United Church's Aboriginal ministries gathered together with some representatives of the General Council Executive for a consultation.... really a weekend of conversation. This



gathering was held in response to the need, identified by the Comprehensive Review Task Group and supported by General Council, to give the Aboriginal ministries of the United Church full scope to reflect on and make decisions about what structures in our church would best enable their full participation. It was a weekend of hope, humour, courageous sharing of painful struggles, prayer, and commitment to continuing the journey together.

These discussions are timely. Or we might actually say that they are overdue. Our church's support for Aboriginal ministries, our work on right relations, and our follow-up to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including [our response to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), are intertwined with the issues that sit at the heart of Canadian society as a whole. This week we have been reminded of that by the state of emergency declared at the Attawapiskat First Nation. More than 100 people there have attempted suicide since September, a dramatic situation that led to an emergency debate in the House of Commons. A month ago, the Pimicikamak Cree Nation (where the Johnston Garrioch Memorial United Church, Cross Lake is located) was in the

news, after its sixth suicide since December. Sadly, these cries for help that have received national news coverage are representative of the situations in many northern Aboriginal communities.

It can be daunting to know how to help, and where to begin. As former Truth and Reconciliation Chair (now Senator) Murray Sinclair was quoted as saying this week, dealing with these problems will take a long time. “I said for seven generations Aboriginal people have had their rights denied by legislation in this country and children have been taken away in institutions called residential schools and we need to realistically think that it’s going to be a multigenerational approach before we can get proper answers in place,” [he told the CBC](#).

There are lots of problems, problems so large that they could feel too big to tackle, but sometimes we are reminded of the wonderful possibilities for new and healthier relationships that exist. This past weekend, I was privileged to be part of one of those moments.

As I drove to the Delaware Nation in southern Ontario on Sunday in the midst of a spring snowstorm, I wondered how many people would make it to the Moraviantown United Church for the afternoon worship service. I needn’t have worried: the church was full of people from the community, and from all across the southern part of London Conference. The weather was not going to deter them from joining in the celebration of a landmark moment for right relations.

Several years and many conversations — difficult conversations, courageous conversations — had led to the decision by London Conference at its Annual General Meeting in 2015 to transfer a piece of land across the road from the Fairfield Museum to the Delaware Nation for their use as a cultural heritage site. The service on Sunday included the signing of documents to legally formalize this commitment.

I knew that the conversations around this decision had not been easy. They never are. Important decisions are often difficult ones.

One of those in attendance at the church service was Les Hogg, the farmer who has farmed this piece of land for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for the past number of years. He would be one feeling the loss of this change, I expect, yet he was there in support of it. His work isn't quite done yet — the First Nation has said that they would like the land to continue to be used for the Foodgrains Bank until their heritage project has its approvals and is ready to go ahead.

On the face of it, this worship service in Moraviantown has nothing to do with the suicide crisis in northern Aboriginal communities. In another way, it has everything to do with it. It represents one significant and concrete step toward new ways that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can work together to create a better Canada for our children and grandchildren, for the seven generations.

Peace and blessings,

Nora

[Photo courtesy of London Conference, 'Latest from LoCo' April 12, 2016 ]

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