

Manitou Conference Minute for Right Relations: The Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

You may have seen the film “Long Walk to Freedom.” Based on the book by Nelson Mandela, it tells of the Black struggle for freedom in the once racially-segregated South Africa. When apartheid finally ended and Mandela became President, vengeance could have reigned.

Instead, the South African TRC was created. Jailed for 27 years for wanting blacks to have the same rights and opportunities as whites, Mandela chose the Commission—a peaceful process of truth-telling and bridge-building, as a way to seek justice for all, in the long term.

The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission was inspired by South Africa’s legacy. In South Africa, the Commission was tasked with exposing and healing wounds sustained over centuries of inequity between the Indigenous black peoples and the settlers who dominated them. There are obvious parallels with the Canadian TRC mandate: to inform all Canadians about the Indian Residential Schools and their devastating legacy; to guide and inspire a process of reconciliation based on trust and renewed relationships.

For over 100 years, Canadian Aboriginal children were taken from their families and sent to residential schools. The government-funded, church-run schools, were established to eliminate parental involvement in the spiritual, cultural and intellectual development of Aboriginal children. More than 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were forced to attend these schools. The last school closed in the mid-1990s.

The impact of residential schools is a legacy of unresolved trauma passed from generation to generation, manifesting itself in many ways including strained relationships between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. Although the Apology given by PM Harper in 2008 was crucial, the work of healing and reconciliation belongs to us all. Indeed, this goal will take the commitment of multiple generations.

One of the ways we can each join in achieving this goal is to listen to those who share their story at the final TRC event to be held March 27-30 in Edmonton at www.trc.ca Our involvement is essential in this peaceful, bridge-building process that will benefit us and all generations to come.

Written by Teresa Jones, Member of the MTU Conf Right Relations Group; 03/14