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# In a Spirit of Reconciliation

*Meeting with Indigenous Peoples*

## In this Issue

### 3. O Canada! Our Home and Native Land!

In this year of Canada's 150th anniversary, what are Aboriginal Peoples celebrating—peoples who have been living here for more than 10,000 years?  
*Nicole Nanatasis O'Bomsawin*

### 5. Reconciliation: Our Path to a New Future

A reflection on what reconciliation is, what some of its characteristics are, its context for us in Canada and how we can engage in this process.  
*Sister Priscilla Solomon, CSJ*

### 9. A Landscape to Discover: My First Nations Brother

The CRC Workshop on *Meeting with Indigenous Peoples* was an informative and enriching experience for the Little Brothers of the Cross.  
*p. fr. Gilles Laberge, PFC*

### 11. Reconciliation Begins with You and Me "Returning to Spirit" Workshop

Genuine miracles happen when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants come together for a Reconciliation Workshop.  
*Gigi Jakobs*

### 13. ANARC — Toward Healing and Reconciliation

The life of the Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Relations Community (ANARC) told from its birth to today.  
*F. Gary Kuntz*

### 15. First Nations and Immigrant Peoples in Quebec ENCOUNTER ONE ANOTHER FOR REAL

250 First Nations people from 11 different communities, and some 100 non-natives — "immigrants," who have been in this country for 400 years — came to the Shrine of Notre-Dame-du-Cap (Quebec), to re-establish connections.  
*Bernard Ménard, OMI*

### 17. Canoe Pilgrimage: A Unique Journey towards Reconciliation

An account of the canoe expedition that left the Canadian Martyrs' Shrine in Midland (Ontario), on July 21<sup>st</sup> and arrived at the Shrine of St. Kateri Tekakwitha in Kahnawake on August 15<sup>th</sup>.  
*Erik Sorensen, SJ*

### 19. Marie de l'Incarnation and the Aboriginal Peoples

Marie de l'Incarnation, who came to this country in 1639 to devote her life to the Aboriginal Peoples because of the love she felt for them, was a true witness to their life during her 33 years of missionary work in seventeenth-century Quebec.  
*Marguerite Chénard, OSU*

### 20. "Sacred Water" — What Indigenous Spirituality Teaches Us?

Testimony of a participant at the JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation) National Gathering organized by the Canadian Religious Conference.  
*Rezebeth Noceja*

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Follow Us!



# O CANADA! Our Home and Native Land!



## Nicole Nanatasis O'Bomsawin

In this year when Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary is being celebrated, is it also a celebration for the Aboriginal Peoples who have lived here for over 10,000 years? To ask the question, is to answer it.

Canada has kept the Indigenous Peoples on the margins of history, has repeatedly wished for their disappearance and has made efforts along those lines.

### What Can We Celebrate?

We celebrate life; we celebrate our cultures. They are many of them—a stunning diversity—and they are unique in their traditions and languages, which are unfortunately endangered throughout Canada. Yes, we also have a common history, one of colonization, but we have so many treasures to share...

### Relationships and Alliances

Our history and cultures are made up of relationships and alliances. Relationships with the mineral, plant and animal worlds and alliances with other nations, for trade, for the sharing of territory, resources and exchanges.

At a very young age, I learned at my grandfather's side that life is woven of links like a spider's web and that a great invisible thread above our heads connects us to our ancestors and urges us to raise our heads to look toward the horizon.

### Childhood and Enculturation

I was lucky and fortunate enough to be raised by my grandparents as was customary in many First Nations communities. I am Abenakis, proud of being Abenakis and I live in Odanak, because that is where my roots are.

My grandfather passed on to me part of the Abenakis history, traditions, and a whole universe of images. He also had a great respect for the land, since he was a horticulturist.

My grandmother communicated her wonderment at the beauty surrounding us, to gaze at with my eyes and feel with my heart. She also taught me to pray, to ask and to give thanks. She was a musician.

It was alongside them that I came to understand humility and vulnerability, when old age settles in with its griefs and its fragilities. I grew up with respect for the elders; one must first listen to them and then love them.

Alongside them, I also understood that humour was a key to remaining healthy, and an essential asset for communicating one's ideas and emotions.



Wendake (Quebec): Nicole Nanatasis O'Bonsawin, guest speaker at the *Meeting with Indigenous Peoples Workshop*

Photo: CRC

## Education and Openness to the World

As you can understand, I did not experience the uprooting caused by the residential schools. Yes, because that was the sought-after goal, to uproot the “Indians” from their culture and the harmful influence of their parents, to educate them in order to make them “real Canadians.” It must be noted that the goal was never achieved, but it has left scars, traumas to generations of Indigenous people and their descendants.

As early as 1898, the Abenaki of Odanak had their own school, run by the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa. They taught three generations of Abenakis there until 1959, the year they left. The same year that I was starting in the Quebec school system with its share of taunting and meanness too. However, the family ties were intact; my parents were always involved in my studies, right up to college.

It was at CEGEP that I opened up to the world and its realities and, at the same time, to the reality experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada: the creation of reserves, the Indian Act and injustice against native women. This was the beginning of my activism in defending the rights of native women. I have been a militant activist on these matters for thirteen times thirteen moons.

## Involvement with, and Promotion of, Culture

When I returned to my community and my three children, I devoted myself wholeheartedly to enhancing our culture, keeping it alive, honouring the memory of our ancestors, and I committed myself to passing it on to the younger generations. I also worked to combat the prejudices and stereotypes present in Quebec society by visiting hundreds of schools throughout the Mauricie and the Centre-of-Quebec region.

## Two Events and a Turning Point

In 2007, the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples gave me wings of hope and gave me a glimpse of a promising future for the world's Indigenous Peoples, even if it does not mean the end of the fighting and struggles for justice, and despite the fact that Canada waited until November 2010 to sign it.

In any event, the second event was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that crossed Canada from west to east. It has moved and shaken Indigenous peoples, of course, but also many Canadians who became acquainted with the story for the first time.

Establishing the truth to achieve reconciliation—that is an agenda that has took shape in a report with 94 Calls to Action, addressed to the State, to institutions and to citizens. It is a dynamic process that will take whatever time is needed, in order to uphold respectful relationships.

Last September 13, I attended the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Montreal. There, Mayor Denis Coderre inaugurated the new city flag, which now sports a white pine to recognize the Indigenous presence within the city. That would have been unthinkable 10 years ago. Institutions are challenging us to collaborate in decolonizing our relations. Quebeckers are showing more interest and open-mindedness, and this is encouraging me to continue to participate in this decolonization process. All this is a sign of hope in our troubled world.

I still have the sacred fire and I imagine a better future for my grandchildren. ■

# RECONCILIATION: *Our PATH to a NEW FUTURE*

**Sister Priscilla Solomon, csj**

Reconciliation is an interior process, and a journey, that must find expression in both internal and external relationships. Reconciliation is personal. It needs to take place in one's very being before it finds expression with others. It invites a shift in our relationships. Whether it is our relationship with God, with self, or with others (including the entire earth community), we must enter into an interior journey and express the fruits of that journey in the relationship itself.

Evidence of the need for reconciliation is everywhere. In a world that daily, even hourly, faces the crises of violence, racism, economic and social oppression, environmental degradation and destruction, terrorism, even nuclear war, the need is clearly visible. Even in situations that are not so extreme, we feel the need for reconciliation.

## Canadian Context

We, in Canada, face the challenges of reconciliation between Peoples of Settler and Immigrant origins and Indigenous Peoples. This message was very clearly expressed and articulated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) through its work and its reports, especially its summary report on June 2, 2015, and in its final report in December of 2015. The TRC created 94 Calls to Action, including calls to the churches to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and the concept of *Terra Nullius*, to engage us in responding to this need.

In this article, I reflect on what reconciliation is, what some of its characteristics are, its context for us in Canada, and how I engage in this process and journey. There is far more to reconciliation than what I can say here, but this is a beginning in the conversation.



Photo: CRC

Much of what I want to share with you comes out of the writings of Fr. Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S. who is a professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His writings, as reported in his second book, are the fruit of his reflections and lectures on “suffering and deliverance from suffering” and a request from Caritas Internationalis to write “a field manual on reconciliation for relief workers.”<sup>1</sup>

Among the many messages he gives is the recognition that the process of reconciliation needs to be contextualized. For Canadians, the immediate context is the residential schools which gave rise to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada. The more general context, but significant nonetheless, is the colonization process that has had such debilitating and destructive effects on Indigenous Peoples communally and individually. The creation of residential schools is but one aspect of the government policies that facilitated the colonization process.

What Schreiter says about reconciliation includes what has been taught in basic Catholic theology over many generations but it also articulates, expands, and contextualizes some of those ideas and teachings. In his book, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*, he also provides some refreshingly unexpected interpretations of the Resurrection stories. In so doing, he highlights some of the qualities of reconciliation.

## What is reconciliation?

There are as many definitions of reconciliation as there are situations in which it is needed. However, for the sake of shared understanding in our context, let me share these with you. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in its report says:

**To the Commission, reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be an awareness of the past, acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.<sup>2</sup>**

Robert Schreiter says: “The experience of reconciliation is the experience of grace – the restoration of one’s damaged humanity in a life-giving relationship with God.”<sup>3</sup> He says also: “This restoration of humanity might be considered the very heart of reconciliation.”<sup>4</sup>

Some of what I share comes from my own personal journey. I have been involved in inculturation of my faith and interculturalization of faith for most of my adult life. By its very nature, inculturation of the Christian faith by an Indigenous person involves reconciliation. I have come to know that, while holding very different realities in tension, and owning the deepest values and truths of each, it is possible to come to wholeness. The wholeness of who I am includes being Indigenous and being Catholic.

As I was reading, reflecting and working with others on reconciliation, I thought about the three R’s in education. People of my generation are familiar with the three R’s – three basics –, which we could rhyme off as: reading, writing and ‘rithmetic. There are three basics to reconciliation as well: They are Recognize, Respect and Reconcile (Reach out). Let me reflect on each of these basics.

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S. *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Orbis Books NY, 2002), introduction, p.1. This second book continues Schreiter’s reflections begun in the first book: *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, (Orbis Books NY, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S. *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Orbis Books NY, 2002), p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.15.

## Recognize

This entails a number of recognitions. Each person needs to recognize one's self, one's experience and one's reality as well as the other's self, the other's experience and their reality. We also need to recognize the separate and distinct journeys that have brought us to this point personally and as peoples who share this land.

Another very essential recognition is that reconciliation is not of our doing. Schreiter reminds us often that reconciliation is gift – it is grace – God's action begins a process of transformation. No one can impose reconciliation on another, or demand it.

I am reminded that, as Schreiter says: 'the restoration of one's damaged humanity in a life-giving relationship with God' is core to reconciliation.' I recognize that what led to the TRC was God's life-giving restoration of the humanity of Indigenous individuals who attended residential schools. Because God was active in their lives, inviting them to healing and transformation of their hearts and their reality, often through participation in talking and healing circles, sweat lodges, and other ceremonies, they were able to speak their truth and to call Canadian society and culture to account and to transformation.

As the TRC indicates, transformation requires both education by Indigenous Peoples regarding Indigenous experience of colonization and a willingness on the part of Peoples of Settler origins to be educated, reconciled and called into a new relationship.

## Respect

The Latin roots of this word help us understand that it means to see again, or to look again more closely, more deeply in search of what we have not yet seen. For many Indigenous people, the experience has been of not having been seen at all in the first place. Rather, our presence often triggered deeply-held prejudices, rejection and exclusion.

In order to reconcile, it is necessary for us to look again at each other and see more clearly who the other really is. We need to look again at our perceptions of the other. We need, also, to look beyond the surface and see the heart of the other. Indigenous people need to see more clearly that there are people of Settler origins who are working to bring about transformation and reconciliation.

Those of Settler origins need to see more clearly that alcoholism, lateral violence, and social disorder within the Indigenous communities is not an indication that Indigenous Peoples are "less than, incompetent, violent by nature, lazy" or any of the other degrading descriptions that have been applied to us. Rather, they are the effects of a process of colonization that has dispossessed and disempowered Indigenous Peoples.



Photo: CRC

This process has not clearly been seen by peoples of Settler and Immigrant origins because, for the most part, it is not your experience. In addition, respect requires that we see more clearly the benefits enjoyed by Peoples of Settler origin that have arisen out of the unjust structures and policies that have been created by successive governments.

## Reconcile

Reconciliation is a two-way process. Among other things, it involves awareness, forgiveness, repentance and changed behaviour. God initiates reconciliation in the heart of the offended one, who then is empowered to take the first step toward the offender. That step may include forgiveness at some point. It entails reaching out to the offender and, at the least, articulating the pain and/or suffering caused by the other's action.

The one offended may forgive, but that does not accomplish reconciliation. For reconciliation to take place, the offender must repent and reach out in return. Expressing sorrow is important, but not adequate. Reconciliation requires action that seeks to right the wrong done, and to change the relationship in the future.

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S. says: “Reconciliation is both a spirituality and strategies.”<sup>5</sup> He says this about the need for reconciliation in the many social and political contexts in our world today, which includes the Canadian context.

**“The reconciliation called for presents two faces. One face is social. It has to do with providing structures and processes whereby a fractured society can be reconstructed as truthful and just. It has to do with coming to terms with the past, punishing wrongdoers, and providing some measure of reparation to victims. It must create a secure space and an atmosphere of trust that makes civil society possible.**

**The other face is spiritual. It has to do with rebuilding shattered lives so that social reconciliation becomes a reality. Social reconciliation sets up conditions that make reconciliation more likely but these conditions, of themselves, cannot effect it.”<sup>6</sup>**

The 94 Calls to Action and the choice of the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation in Canada addresses the strategies component. The spirituality component is the work of people like ourselves.

As an Indigenous person, I was among the group of individuals invited by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to discuss its response to the TRC Calls to Action regarding The Doctrine of Discovery and *Terra Nullius*,<sup>7</sup> and to consider how we might more effectively respond to and engage in reconciliation. That group and its mandate have been expanded to form the Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle.<sup>8</sup> As part of your personal growth in awareness, I invite you to find and read these documents on the CCCB website.

As a Sister of St. Joseph, whose charism is sometimes described as ‘unity and reconciliation’ and at other times as “reconciling love”, I am deeply committed to engaging in the reconciliation process that is expressed in the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action.

As an Indigenous person, I have great hopes for the healing and restoration of my people. As a Christian and as a Canadian, I also have great hopes for a Canada that lives out of Christian values and relationships of equity, integrity, respect and love for one another – a love that reaches out to each other as brother and sister in this land. May we have the vision, courage and grace to reconcile! ■

<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S. *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Orbis Books NY, 2002), introduction (p vi), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> “The reconciliation called for presents two faces....cannot effect it.” Ibid (p. 4. & p. 9)

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops website:

<http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/statements-a-letters/4446-catholic-responses-to-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-call-to-action-48-and-questions-regarding-the-doctrine-of-discovery>.

<http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/catholic%20response%20to%20doctrine%20of%20discovery%20and%20tn.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops website:

<http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/4641-national-catholic-organizations-form-catholic-coalition-to-strengthen-and-foster-relations-with-indigenous-people-our-lady-of-guadalupe-circle>



## *A Landscape to Discover: My First Nations BROTHER*



**p. fr. Gilles Laberge, PFC**

On Tuesday, July 18, our community, the Little Brothers of the Cross, had a very informative and enriching experience with Ms. Stéphanie Gravel of the Canadian Religious Conference on the history and situation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Stéphanie presented the actions currently being undertaken to bring Aboriginal Peoples and non-Aboriginals closer together, including the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which made 94 Calls to Action. The Commission has led to the involvement of churches, religious communities and governments in efforts to repair the damage done to the Aboriginal Peoples and their population. A work of rapprochement is underway and it will probably take a long journey of mutual listening and concrete involvement to better know and appreciate one another in a spirit of reconciliation and brotherhood.

### **Understanding from Within the Injustice Experienced**

In the spirit of acquiring a better understanding of the history of Indigenous Peoples, we went through a special experience, one that was very simple. In a role-playing scenario, consisting chiefly of blankets — representing the territory of Aboriginal Peoples — laid out on the ground, participants from our community were spread over these spaces as First Nations.

The territories progressively diminished as we were told, in chronological order, about the various treaties adopted (not to say imposed) and the measures taken by the federal government (just to mention the establishment of residential schools, in which children were torn from their families to uproot them from their culture). The more that events unfolded over time, the more we felt in our being the injustice suffered by our country's First Nations. Anger arose in our hearts, but we could not really express it because we were supposed to respect our role in this game. Everyone shared their surprise at the extent of what was perceived as a cultural genocide.

This simple little exercise brought us to a heightened awareness of a facet of Canadian history that until recently has been practically unknown, hidden.

### **The “Talking Stick”**

In the afternoon, we had the opportunity to express our views on concrete actions that we could take to help bring about closer ties with Aboriginal Peoples. Everyone had a turn at taking the “talking stick” to express themselves. When someone was holding the talking stick, all of the other participants had to listen to the person without interruption as long as the stick was in their possession. What a beautiful symbol of Aboriginal culture that demonstrates its great wealth of respect for people!



On the right: br. Andrew-Marie with the Little brothers of the Cross community

## Prayers, Pleas for Pardon, Proposals for Action

First of all, prayers arose in our hearts to ask for forgiveness from our Aboriginal brothers for all those years of failure to understand, and non-respect of their identity and culture. We then spontaneously turned to our brother Andrew, one of our community's novices, 22 years old, who is an Innu from the Baie-Comeau region. In the name of his Aboriginal brothers, he welcomed our prayers, our requests for forgiveness and our proposals for action with great emotion and respect.

## Links with the First Nations Approach

One of the requests encouraged by the majority was to provide themselves with the means to learn more about Indigenous culture. At Andrew's suggestion, we invited his sister Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine, an Innu poet, to talk to

us in October about the situation of her people. Our community feels a special connection with the First Nations approach which emphasizes the family and group bond because our charism (which revolves around the spirituality of Nazareth) causes us to consider ourselves as a family.

## Greet Each Human Like a Brother, a Sister

Following this experience, our brother Andrew has found a new motivation to know better his own culture and to integrate it insofar as possible into his new monastic vocation.

I am eager to discover this culture, which, I am convinced, will offer me a great deal as a human being, but also as a monk who is trying to live under the gaze of God by welcoming every human being as a brother. Especially since Brother Charles de Foucauld (our community's spiritual guide, a monk among the Tuareg nomads in the Sahara desert at the beginning of the last century) spent more than fifteen years of his life getting to know and promote the culture of those who welcomed him among them. A work of humanity, but also one of humanization as our brother Jesus did in Nazareth by being a Jew among the Jews.

Would not this be a great opportunity for us to appreciate the spirituality of those who have welcomed us and whom we have not always succeeded in fully recognizing as brothers and sisters in their own right? An invitation to discover a territory that surprises by its beauty and its richness of meaning. ■





## “Returning to Spirit” Workshop

# Reconciliation Begins with YOU and ME

### Gigi Jakobs

World War I, the War to End all Wars officially ended on November 11, 1918, almost 100 years ago. Every year since, there has been an armed conflict somewhere in the world. Even when peace treaties are signed and combatants go home and hang up their weapons, the victim toll keeps rising.

In 2007, two professional de-miners from Metz (France) died when a World War I bomb they were transporting unexpectedly exploded. Around the world, farmers and children, house builders and excavators are continually discovering pieces of unexploded ordnance. As the soil erodes with the wind and the rain, as the frost heaves, munitions long buried find their way to the surface of the earth. These long-buried munitions are now corroded and far more unstable than they were years ago. It does not take much to set them off.

### The Way Forward

In many ways, our lives are similar. Things happen to us when we are children – we are hurt, we are angry, we feel betrayed, and we are ashamed. However, we may not have the ability to handle our feelings. We may not be given the space to express them. Very quickly, we learn to bury our feelings, to hide them from others and from ourselves. We bury our hurts, we bury our anger, and we bury the guilt and the shame. We put on a happy face, or a successful face, or a calm face, or a stern face.

People think we have it all together. Yet, in reality, the things we buried long ago will not remain buried forever. As we age, events in our adult lives begin to heave the long-buried emotions to the surface. We can try to ignore the things that surface however; the better way is to handle them, to defuse them. The way forward is to reconcile with them.

### Surviving at All Cost

When children were taken away from their families and sent to Indian Residential Schools, they experienced many painful thoughts, emotions and feelings. They felt hurt, angry, abandoned, confused, guilty, embarrassed. The list is a long one... and unique to each individual. Each handled the experience differently, but all were impacted.



Children learned to bury their emotions; they learned to cope with life; they learned how to survive. As students transitioned through residential school and into adulthood, long buried, unresolved emotions and experiences made their way to the surface over months, years or decades. Not surprisingly, experiences of residential school corroded by time mutated into alcoholism, running away, domestic violence, drug addiction, homelessness, hopelessness, despair, shame, guilt, rage, blame.

### Looking Within Ourselves a First Step

Reconciliation between the Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians begins with each one of us. We each need to look within ourselves and see how we have long buried our pain, how we have learned to survive, cope and fix life.

We need to **reconcile** with ourselves first. We can never hope to **reconcile** with the other until we have first handled what is in our space – the log in our own eye that prevents us from seeing ourselves and the other with true sight. Only when we have looked within, can we begin to **reconcile** with others and with Life itself.

### Letting Go

As we identify and let go of the stories that we have created about ourselves, others and about life, we are able to gain clarity about ourselves. We are able to step into an entirely new way of being – one built on a foundation of non-judgement and peaceful communication. We have been living our lives as if we are “stupid,” “invisible,” or that we always “need to be perfect” or that the other is “wrong.” When we can see the story that has taken over our lives, we can take responsibility and see the choices that empower us to create a new experience. We can choose to step from slavery to the story into the freedom of new possibilities.

When Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants come together into a Reconciliation workshop, miracles truly do happen as individuals sit down together and speak Spirit to Spirit. It requires each individual to do their own work – to let go of their story about the other, to let go of the



Returning to Spirit Reconciliation Workshop - February 2013, Winnipeg, MB  
Waylon Young (Hollow Water First Nation), Fr. Gna Arockiyam Bastin Raj (Archdiocese of Winnipeg), Dennis Sinclair (Hollow Water First Nation), Sr. Norma MacDonald CSC (Université de Saint-Boniface).  
Copyright 2013 - Returning to Spirit

claim for revenge, to let go of the guilt, to let go of the defensiveness. Into the space created by the letting go, there is room for something else to show up, a genuine readiness and willingness to listen to the other and to speak the truth.

### Moving Forward in Mutuality

There is no blaming, no making wrong – there is simply an acknowledgement and a listening to the pain experienced on both sides. There is a willingness to examine the long-buried hurts that have festered beneath the surface and to reconcile them – to bring them out of the darkness into the light. There is a realization that only when we can meet Spirit to Spirit can we truly move forward together – in mutuality, in partnership and in fulfillment.

The work of *Returning to Spirit* does not end with our workshops. We are all required to reconcile with ourselves, with others and with life, on a daily, ongoing basis. It is the only way to bring peace to our world. ■



# ANARC — *Toward Healing and Reconciliation*

## Fr. Gary Kuntz

In 2009, at the request of the Archbishop of Regina, our ANARC (Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Relations Community) began. A hired facilitator and a three-member appointed team began gathering bi-weekly to build relationships and to develop a vision. On the advice of an Indigenous Elder, we held a traditional feast and pipe ceremony, and two members committed themselves to a series of fasts to support the team's vision-seeking.

To root our vision in the past, we reviewed the very positive history of Indigenous ministry in our archdiocese. To root it in the local setting, we undertook a demographic study focussing on economic, educational, health and cultural issues. We compiled a list of over 50 organizations and groups throughout the city involved with Indigenous people and began to have regular contact with about a dozen of these.

## Our Vision

The vision that emerged centred on facilitating relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people journeying together inter-culturally, rooting ourselves in truth, justice, love and humility. We saw our community as the dawning of Good News in the face of so much in our history that had been less than Good News. Currently, we are at the tender, beginning stages of building a strong foundation on the rock of justice and compassion, with the focus on healing and reconciliation.

In order for any community to be vibrant and alive, relationships have to be strong. It has become clear that in order for reconciliation and right relationships to happen between peoples, they need to come together to get to know, and to learn from, one another.

Many of the people in our community have lived through the painful experiences of residential schools or have been affected inter-generationally. Building relationships of trust and reconciliation has been important. It takes a lot of time to nurture the kind of trust that is the foundation of all good relationship.

## Ceremony and Presence

In our experience, the resurgence of Indigenous ceremonies is one of the strongest signs of the dawning of this new era of Good News. Indigenous and Christian ceremonies alike give us opportunities to address life's struggles, difficulties and questions, many in relation to faith and spirituality, and to heal. Indigenous Elders working with us have consistently stressed that the best way to get to know Indigenous people is to participate in their ceremonies.





Coming together in ceremony and to address common personal and social concerns, we are discovering the importance of simply being present to one another. People often underestimate the value of presence but we are finding that it is making a powerful difference in our lives. In listening and being present to one another, more and more members of our community have begun to open up about painful experiences in our lives. We have entered into a healing journey together.

### Cross-Cultural Life-Sharing

This healing journey is a cross-cultural undertaking. We are getting to know one another's Indigenous and/or Christian ways of understanding and doing things. Our goal is to become equally at home with these ways and the rapidly changing ways of contemporary mainstream culture.

Our gatherings are primarily in the city, and include both traditional Indigenous and Christian events as well as secular events. However, because our urban Indigenous members tend to stay connected to the reserves they come from, or to other reserves in the surrounding area, we often also travel there together to attend different ceremonies and events.

At the heart of our community are our monthly potlucks and sharing circles, where cross-cultural relationships are slowly growing. When families are struggling to negotiate personal and systemic challenges, they can count on one another for support. One young mother seeking to have her children returned to the family home said she never realized how many friends she had in the community.

Members who had never accompanied anyone through such challenges commented on how their eyes were being opened to the ongoing struggles that exist because of our history of residential schools. Another woman said that it is only in the circle that she feels safe to really share her feelings and open up. These are powerful testimonies to the gift that cross-cultural relationship brings.

### Our Future

As we move forward, we continue to encourage more people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to become involved, inviting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Elders to work with us.

We have evolved to the point where the original appointed team is morphing toward a new leadership model, the community taking responsibility for itself, its leadership a shared intercultural undertaking. The position of the hired facilitator, fostering the ongoing development of the community, its vision, and its leadership, remains essential and itself seems destined to evolve toward being an intercultural co-facilitation position.

The work of facing the truth and seeking reconciliation and healing is not easy. Without the facilitator's constant invitations, reminders, and encouragement to continue, ANARC could still lose its momentum. Reconciliation requires a full and ongoing commitment. It is clearly going to be a marathon not a sprint! ■



# First Nations and Immigrant Peoples in Quebec ENCOUNTER ONE ANOTHER FOR REAL

Bernard Ménard, OMI



Presentation of the Peace Mission: A nine-day canoe expedition down the St. Lawrence River carried out for the tenth year. Photo: Daniel Roy

## What happened on May 30–31, 2017?

There were 250 First Nations people, from 11 different Communities, from as far away as Schefferville and Natashquan on the North Shore. For once, we “immigrants” — in this country for 400 years — were a minority: some hundred non-natives participating in the two days of this ENCOUNTER at the Notre-Dame-du-Cap Shrine (Quebec), and having the experience of *living with*; not just *talking about*. In the evening, when we had grown to 700 people, the First Nation rituals and texts enhanced the symbols of our Eucharistic liturgy.

The poster announcing the event describes its meaning: intercultural gathering and inter-spiritual celebration symbolized by the two forms of teepees ... the word ENCOUNTER translated into 14 aboriginal or non-aboriginal languages. In addition, at the four corners, the colours of humans on earth. The oval shape expresses Community, in the forest-green of our great woodlands ... an invitation to universal solidarity.

## Genesis of the Project

Such a gathering was born out of a long missionary presence of Oblates: there was a time when we served almost all of the missions among the Inuit and First Nations, often in tandem with women religious from various congregations. Even though our numbers are diminishing, we are renewing our alliance with these peoples. How is that possible? The Oblate provinces from the South are providing us with five young priests to take over.

Since Vatican II, the evangelization approach recognizes the traces of God that were at work long before the arrival of the Europeans. This is a call for mutual appreciation instead of the sense of cultural and spiritual superiority of the past.

On the other hand, we became aware of the plan advocated by the federal government — at one time and in various ways — to exterminate these populations, which included the abduction of young children to “get the Indian out of them.” This led us to make a public request for pardon in 1991 at Lac St. Anne (in Alberta), for our naïve involvement in that scheme. Recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission enabled victims of this system to express the serious traumas they suffered, a necessary expression but which has its limits. In addition to giving rise, in certain cases, to falsified accusations, it does not reflect the happy experience of some residents or educators: that is, however, also part of the “truth.”

Faced with these wrenching experiences, the Canadian bishops wrote, in response to the Commission's report, that we must develop "a culture of encounter." And the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, Ghislain Picard, commented on May 30: "This meeting must go all the way to attain communion." We have a long road ahead of us...

3. On the second day, four workshops on: ecology, justice-reconciliation, Indigenous and Christian spirituality and the dispossession of ancestral territories.
4. Then, guided by women, we experienced a moment of spiritual healing at the Spring, and we dropped our burdens (and tobacco) into the "sacred fire," before entering in single file, dancing as we went.



Closing ceremony. Photo: J.-E. Allard

## Scope and Future of this Event

We did not want this precious time to be a show, like the opening of a sports competition or a parade. Encountering in a real way presupposes the sharing of wounds, opening up to understanding rather than to exclusion. It also means the sharing of wealth in order to create the necessary solidarity to dream together of a better future for all.

Let us not forget that Ville-Marie (Montreal) was founded by visionaries of a new city "where we will form a single people with the inhabitants of the country." The King of France himself sent out his people "to make alliances" rather than to conquer. Moreover, the "coureur des bois" engaged, not massacres, but in sexual relations with the local peoples. The history of the Aboriginal peoples and of the French people includes common sufferings under the British regime: houses burnt, deportations, obstacles to speaking their language, etc.

Like them, we must leave behind the victims/oppressors dynamic, and take our destiny into our own hands. Will 21st-century humanity be permitted to leave behind our partitions and establish new spiritual and cultural alliances?

If the future of the Church is in simplicity, the welcoming of differences, the return to the Spirit (the Holy and Great One), and every step towards reconciliation with First Nations is prophetic. If the future of the world is in respect for nature, industrial degrowth, solidarity between peoples, then we have much to learn from the resilience of the Aboriginal Peoples without, nonetheless, idealizing them.

What future is there for the ENCOUNTER? This year's participants made it clear that they want it to continue, even to hold it every year. The event will therefore take place again in spring 2018. If you missed it this year, give yourself this gift next year, at least for the big celebration in the evening. Welcome! ■

## An ENCOUNTER in Four Steps

1. We began by hearing the story of three happy collective experiences: *Missinak*, a home for abused aboriginal women in Quebec City; the *Peace Mission*, a nine-day canoe expedition down the St. Lawrence River from Kahnawake to the Plains of Abraham, carried out for the tenth year; *Kiuna College* in Odanak, where First Nations youth are reintegrated into their culture and receive academic and professional learning.
2. In the evening, in the great "meeting tent" — i.e., the Basilica of Notre-Dame-du-Cap — a celebration of the Eucharist was held, highlighting the eight values that sustain the community, such as the poles of a tepee, prayer in the six directions, singing in Atikamekw.



## *Canoe Pilgrimage: A Unique Journey towards Reconciliation*

Photo: Dominik Haak

**Erik Sorensen, sj**

The pilgrimage is an ancient spiritual practice that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. People have been setting out on journeys to visit sacred sites for millennia. Individuals and groups have been learning that the journey to the sacred place is just as sacred as the place itself. This summer a group of travellers had the opportunity to learn first-hand this age-old wisdom, that the journey makes the destination.

Our pilgrimage departed from the Canadian Martyrs' Shrine on July 21<sup>st</sup> and arrived at the Shrine of St. Kateri Tekakwitha on the shores of the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory on August 15<sup>th</sup>. Along the waterways in between these two sacred places the paddlers were immersed in the journey. Amongst the paddlers were Jesuits, a Sister of St. Joseph, a Xaverian Sister and many lay men and women.

Importantly, there were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous paddlers sharing in this journey. Our journey was about getting to know ourselves and getting to know each other by listening to each other's stories.

### **Becoming Passionate about Healing**

Reconciliation was the theme of our pilgrimage. We set out knowing that this month together would not solve the 500-plus years of colonization, abuse and cultural genocide that has come to characterize the relationship between the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and the new arrivals from the European continent. However, we were inspired

by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and others, to take a practical step (or in this case paddle stroke) towards reconciliation. We implicated ourselves into the ongoing journey towards healing and reconciliation.

How did we do this? Quite simply, we got to know each other. We created a safe space where we could listen and be listened to. In order to be reconciled, we need to know who we are reconciling with and why. For us paddlers, we wanted to become personally implicated in this healing process. It is impossible to be truly passionate about an abstract concept of reconciliation. However, it is easy to become passionate about healing wounds when a friend shares their experience of inter-generational trauma with you.

We started to incarnate the process of reconciliation through talks by several paddlers, such as Sister Eva Solomon, csj and Michel Andraos, a theology professor; through participating in the KAIROS Blanket Exercise; through having the opportunity to share in small groups, and most importantly, through individual conversations and relationships that developed during the journey.

These means of promoting dialogue within the group were both structured and unstructured. This was very important because some of the structured moments provided a jumping off place for deeper and more profound sharing among the different members of the pilgrimage. It was in these conversations where long-held perspectives and beliefs were challenged and nuanced, that personal transformation occurred.

## Challenges

This is not to say that the entire journey was smooth or easy; we experienced our share of difficulties. The first challenge was the physical one: paddling is tough work; sore muscles, minor bumps and bruises, and exhaustion were all part of our daily routine. Early mornings (4:30am wake ups), long days and tenting on the Canadian Shield tried everyone's patience and ability to cope, but we persevered.

Anytime you bring a diverse group of people together and put them in close quarters there are bound to be some personal conflicts. Our group was no different, but we learned that working through these issues only made us stronger.

Our schedule also provided a challenge for us. As we planned this voyage, we had hoped that during each day there would be time for group prayer, reflection and sharing. However, we quickly realized that after paddling eight to ten hours a day in rough conditions, our group lacked the energy to have prolonged organized activities at the end of each day. We had to become creative about how to fit these activities in the best we could around our constantly shifting and changing schedule. Overall, these challenges only helped bond the group closer together.

## Hospitality of Local Communities

As the pilgrimage moved from the extreme isolation of the Georgian Bay and French River towards North Bay and then the Ottawa River, we shifted gears. What we had experienced as a group in the first half of the journey, we had the opportunity to share with the communities we met in the second half of the journey.

From North Bay to Montreal, we were hosted by many parishes, religious communities and towns. At each of these stops, we shared with the local community our experience of pilgrimage. These communities joined us in the pilgrimage by providing for our needs, like food and shelter. The hospitality we encountered at every stop was amazing and provided us with a constant witness of God's providential care for us.



Photos: Dominik Haake

## The Journey Continues

Looking to the future, we recognize that we are not done with our pilgrimage. When we arrived at Kahnawake, the band member who welcomed us to the territory reminded us that our journey was just beginning. This pilgrimage is a starting point for us. The paddlers returning to their home communities are sharing their experiences with their friends, families and colleagues.

I know many of us will be looking for more opportunities to continue our involvement on the journey of reconciliation. More concretely, we are looking at how this experience might be shared with other groups in an ongoing way. Perhaps we will see annual canoe pilgrimages in the future. ■



# Marie de l'Incarnation and the Aboriginal Peoples



Monument of Marie de l'Incarnation in front of the Quebec Monastery. Work of art designed by Émile Brunet in 1942. Photo: Daniel Abel

**Marguerite Chénard, osu**

Marie de l'Incarnation, who came to this country in 1639 to devote her life to the Aboriginal Peoples because of the love she felt for them, was a true witness to their life during her 33 years of missionary work in seventeenth-century Quebec.

## Language

As soon as the Ursulines arrived, a two-room house was placed at their disposal by Mr. Noël Juchereau of the Company of One Hundred Associates.

The tight living space facilitated the learning of the language. The first six boarders taught their mistress. Marie de l'Incarnation exclaimed: "This language is difficult!" The words "roll around like stones in my head." Regardless, at forty years of age, this Virgin of Prayer, as the Algonquins called the nuns, could converse with these young people after three months of apprenticeship; the Jesuits provided additional training.

Marie de l'Incarnation worked on leaving as much written material as possible for teaching purposes. She noted: "A large Algonquin book of sacred history and holy things, with an Iroquois dictionary and catechism, which is a treasure. Last year, I wrote a large Algonquin Dictionary with the French alphabet; I have another one in the native alphabet."<sup>1</sup>

## Opening

The Ursulines began welcoming young Algonquin girls to their convent within the first fortnight of their arrival in the country. One of them, an orphan, Marie Négabamat, did not want to have anything to do with the boarding school. She jumped over the fence whenever she felt like it. Her father had to work very hard to convince her; we know that Indigenous peoples could not stand to see their children sad! He was so persuasive that he managed to get her to return to the boarding school. The girl changed her behaviour and became a model for the other residents.

Children and outside women also regularly attended Saint Joseph Seminary, the first school for girls built in 1641. Nothing could stop Marie de l'Incarnation's zeal for "her heart's delights," as she liked to call the girls. This included her fasting so that they would have the food they needed.

Men had a different privilege. Welcomed in the parlour, a good dish of sagamité [a Native American stew made from hominy and other ingredients] whetted their appetite to receive the Word of life that Marie de l'Incarnation and her companions gladly spread.

Soon, and at any time of the day or night, the great First Nations Chiefs and their leading women came to seek advice in the parlour. While respecting their values, the Ursulines presented Jesus Christ to them.

When difficulties arose among the tribes, the Ursulines were there to help them reconcile. Aboriginal peoples are very sensitive, as intelligent as they are resourceful. Having no written material at this time, they transmitted their way of life by example. Sorcerers sometimes influenced them. Their stories were enhanced by trickery that they had difficulty letting go of.

## To Frenchify?

For the foundress, there was no question of Frenchifying the Aboriginal Peoples. The reply to the King of France, Louis XIV, is clear in the 1660s. For all the many years that we have been in Canada, she writes, "we have barely managed to Frenchify" a few individuals, and they are orphans. It was necessary to respect the customs and values of these people.

At the end of her life, Marie de l'Incarnation, having totally given herself to the cause of the Aboriginal peoples, testified to the prosperity of the country. The Intendant Talon organized the colony for its well-being, in the hope that these Peoples would be respected and would be but one people with the emigrants from France. ■

<sup>1</sup> Letter CCXXXVI, Correspondance, p. 801.

# “SACRED WATER”

## What Indigenous Spirituality Teaches Us?

**Rezebeth Noceja**, Candidate  
Sisters of Providence of Western Canada

As blood is life giving to our bodies, so is water life giving to the body of Mother Earth. Water is an inseparable part of Creation given to us by God and it brings about and sustains anything and everything that breathes. For this reason, how can we not say that water is “sacred?”

The Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) National Gathering entitled “Sacred Water” was the very first conference I have attended that focused on indigenous spirituality, social justice, and ecological issues in connection with water. Water is indeed the string that connects all areas of our society and so when we talk about the spiritual aspect of respecting water we find ourselves discussing the social need to utilize water.

### Exploitation of Water

Interestingly enough, as pointed out numerous times during the conference, the political exploitation of water is also a fact. For someone like me who is very new to this scenario, the amount and kind of information was very enlightening. I used to buy bottled water even before coming to Canada, not knowing its damaging effect

ecologically and being completely unaware of the social injustice committed by large companies who commercialize the natural supply of water.



Thankfully, there are people like Maude Barlow and Fr. Nicolas Barla, and organizations like KAIROS, Development and Peace, and Ecologos that strive to educate people on the real situations surrounding the exploitation of water.



The dumping of waste into bodies of water, the privatization of the water supply, the technological processes that affect nature such as extraction of oil and gas through fracking and mining that disturbs the earth—and consequently the natural water resources—are examples of this exploitation. It is happening not only in Canada but also all around the world and contributes to the rapidly-changing climate globally.

### Seeing Water as Our “Relative”

Dissemination of information is the key to solving problems on the water crisis but a more important key is realizing how sacred water is. In accepting and adopting the indigenous spirituality of respecting nature and seeing it as a “relative,” then we can truly take it upon ourselves to protect the nature, to protect our “Sister Water.”

On the first day of the JPIC conference, I saw Elder Josephine Mandamin walking aided by a walker. She said that at the time of the conference she was finishing her last water walk. That is what I would call determination and deep love for “Sacred Water.” This woman has a strong conviction that no medical diagnosis and physical hindrance would keep her from doing what she started. She walked all the five great lakes of Ontario and other bodies of water including the St. Lawrence River.

How can she not love water so much when she sees water as a relative, a person, someone who can hear and talk and someone who has emotions just like a human being? She would speak of Mother Earth and Sister Water in the same way that she would speak of a woman. The cleansing period of a woman referred to as “moon time” is comparable to when the gravitational force of the moon causes a change in the tides of Mother Earth’s water.

When Elder Josephine referred to the exploitation of our Mother Earth, she used the word “prostituted” as if talking about the body of a person. She said, “Mother Earth’s body is being prostituted by those who are after money.” Sadly, this is true when water is being sold as a commodity rather than it being a gift from God freely given to all.

### “We are all related”

The role of women, particularly indigenous women, in the protection of water is rooted in the fact that when women conceive life in them, this life, sheltered for nine months, is cradled in water inside a woman’s womb. In this context, water is synonymous with life. Elder Josephine points out that we are all related. In fact, all of our DNAs are formed in water ... we are all born from water and that makes us all related no matter what our skin colour is.

In the prayer honouring the four directions, Sr. Priscilla Solomon prayed for our brothers and sisters of the red-skinned, white-skinned, black-skinned and yellow-skinned races, indicating that all of us are connected. In accepting and adopting the indigenous spirituality of respecting nature and seeing it as a “relative,” then we can truly take it upon ourselves to protect the nature, to protect our “sister water.”

### Being Stewards of Creation

The way Elder Josephine Mandamin spoke was a wonderful witness to how we, as stewards of Creation, should respond with gratitude and respect to the wonderful gift of nature given to us by God. Water is an indispensable part of Creation entrusted to us humans so we can be stewards of it.

Contrary to previous belief that everything we have on Earth exists for us humans to “subdue,” we must rather relate to nature with as much respect as we would with other human beings. This does not mean that we place nature in the same hierarchy of Creation as humans but we need to realize that all parts of Creation have value simply because God is the source of Creation and the author of everything. This echoes the teaching of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si...the Gospel of Creation*.

The goods of the Earth are there to sustain us but as good stewards we must take only what we need, nothing more nothing less. However, the problem with our society now is that we are driven to consume more than what we need. In this day and age, marketing strategies succeed at creating the “want” in people to have more and better products than what is really “needed.” “More” requires more materials and energy, which are ultimately coming from natural resources. Taking only what is needed also ensures sufficient if not equal distribution of the goods of the Earth to humankind.

### Our Experience of Water

Elder Josephine invited each of us to introduce ourselves and speak about our experience of water. A lot of us spoke beautifully about our memories of the oceans, rivers, falls and lakes...there were also some who spoke about the “anger” of water during storms and typhoons. In addition, there were the missionaries who have been to different parts of the world where they experienced the lack of clean water. We are very blessed to have 24/7 access to clean drinking water and most of the time we forget how others are deprived when the rest of us have an abundance of it, and because we have an abundance of water we fail to responsibly conserve it.

With this, I began to examine my own use of water. When people take a shower for more than 40 minutes with constant running water or when someone keeps the water running while brushing his/her teeth, is it **needed**? Is it **respectful** to Mother Nature? Most of all, is it **just** to use that much when other people do not even have enough? With the current ecological situation, we need to protect our natural resources more than ever.

I believe Mother Earth is now speaking loudly to us beginning with last year’s massive forest fire in Fort McMurray dubbed as “The Beast,” and before that was the fire in Slave Lake. Recently there were wildfires in Portugal and in Italy where casualties were recorded, there was extreme heat in Arizona some months ago, and now the forest fires around British Columbia. If we do not start protecting Mother Earth, we will be uprooted from our homes so we had better start listening.

### Hope in the Future

Elder Josephine said that water spoke to her when she was ready to listen. Her presence in itself, as simple and as gentle as she was, was a strong image of advocacy for our sacred water. To me, she is the image of hope for the future of Mother Earth. Her faith in the Creator, her heartfelt prayer for her children and her children’s children to have a clean, life-giving water, and her reverent appreciation each time she drinks water spoke to me and to most of those present at the conference.

It enkindled in us a desire to take a stand to protect our water but, more importantly, to examine ourselves on how we use and appreciate water. I believe there is no better way to be an advocate for a cause than to start the change in your own self.

When asked how she sees hope in the future of Mother Earth and of water, Elder Josephine answered, “*Ask our Creator in a good way, always in a good way.*” This is a confession of how water and the rest of Creation is from God, and how God is the ultimate healer of a planet that is hurting... ■



# THE CRC AT A GLANCE

## Mission Statement

Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 250 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada.

*“The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.”*

Mission statement adopted in 2010

## Theological Commission of the CRC

The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while taking into account the various charisms of the congregations.

## CRC Publications

Published three times a year, the *CRC Bulletin* presents reflections on different aspects of consecrated life in relation to the orientations and objectives of the Canadian Religious Conference.

Issued monthly, the *CRC Newsletter* (formerly *Le Lien CRC Link*) provides information on the commitments and activities of the CRC, on the life of religious congregations, on the life of the Church and on community groups involved in social justice.

