

A Landscape to Discover: My First Nations Brother

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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!

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.