

## **Work to examine the Legacy of Christian Mission among Indigenous Peoples**

*Submitted by Lori Ransom, Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animator, Indigenous Ministries & Justice*

On June 21, 2016, The Very Rev. Stan McKay wrote to then United Church of Canada Moderator Jordan Cantwell to lift up the need for the churches ecumenically to “undertake immediately the difficult task of addressing the legacy of mission and the present context of division, depression and injustice” which exists within Indigenous communities as a result of that mission activity. Inspired by TRC Calls to Action 60 and 61iv, McKay proposed that ecumenical delegations visit Indigenous communities to converse with local Indigenous spiritual leaders and youth about the spiritual violence which has resulted from Christian mission and discuss how to respond.

In response to McKay’s letter, Moderator Cantwell reached out to ecumenical colleagues who agreed to convene a conversation at the denominational staff level to consider McKay’s proposal.<sup>1</sup> The Indigenous leadership of The United Church of Canada endorsed this approach. From November 2017, the ecumenical staff group met over two years to discuss McKay’s proposal. This included a conversation in Winnipeg with some grassroots Indigenous ministry leaders and follow-up with them. From the start, the ecumenical group was concerned not only about the practicalities of organizing the community-based dialogues envisaged by McKay, but also, and more importantly, the size and cost of the effort which would be required to appropriately follow-up on such gatherings so as to prevent further damage.

The group agreed that the subject would benefit from theological reflection and analysis. Further, in keeping with models examined with respect to international mission, they identified a need for a set of principles or guidelines for Christians who carry out mission and ministry among Indigenous peoples in Canada that would help them understand and be attentive to the impacts of and potential for ongoing spiritual violence among Indigenous peoples and support healing.

The ecumenical group appointed a committee to work on the guidelines. This group of six people, most of whom are academics, worked from May 2020 to March 2023 and produced a document entitled, *Addressing Spiritual Violence committed by Christians among Indigenous Peoples in Canada*. The document is best described as a resource on the topic which includes suggested ethical guidelines, calls for work by churches that would support healing from spiritual violence, and questions for further study and reflection. The remaining members of

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<sup>1</sup>The following churches were represented on the working group: the Anglican Church of Canada, the Christian Reformed Church of North America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, the Jesuits of Canada, Mennonite Church Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Salvation Army, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and the United Church of Canada. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada were offered regular briefings and sent minutes of meetings of the working group.

the original ecumenical group which mandated this work have reviewed the document and agree it should be published. The document is currently with the Executive Minister, Indigenous Ministries and Justice, for final review. A publication and animation strategy for the material may be developed once it is approved.

Informed by the work of these ecumenical activities, Lori Ransom has made a number of presentations on the topic of spiritual violence and more recently has been working on the topic with the Christian Interfaith Reference Group of the Canadian Council of Churches.