

Speaker 1:

I am mindful that there are many in our Southridge community across three locations that I don't know or who don't know me. My name is Lori Workington and I attend the Vineland location. Both my husband Chris, and I have been part of this church since it started when we were both very young kids. For the last six years, I've been part of a small working group here of mostly volunteers called the Becoming Good Relatives Team, where here at Southridge, we've been listening and learning and inviting our community into the verb of becoming the types of people that indigenous folks would want to be in relationship with. We're in week two of a series called Hope Lives. Last week, Tom helped us to see from a meta view the creator's vision for all people to live in right relationships with each other. If you weren't with us, I'd invite you to go back and give that a listen and make sure to catch the next two weeks after today as well.

Speaker 1:

As we continue to dig into what this means for us as a church community, to me, how we collectively respond to this four week series and how it continues to shape us is an indicator of the health of who we are collectively. This week, I'm joined by Adrian Jacobs to talk about Canada's commitments to truth and reconciliation, and why that is crucial to who we are as a faith community. I'll let Adrian introduce himself, but I just wanna say that as I've been getting to know you Adrian, over the last couple of years through my work at Mennonite Central Committee Ontario and sort of learning a little bit about your heart for calling communities of Faith to healing through owning their responsibility to truth and reconciliation has been really inspiring and informing and instructive to me. Adrian, do you mind introducing yourself and give us a hint as to why this conversation we're about to have should be important to us as a church community?

Speaker 2:

Uh, my English name is Adrian Jacobs. My clan name is <inaudible>, and my grandfather said it means Dear Lodge. I'm of the Turtle Clan of the Keuka Nation, and I'm from the Six Nations Reserve in Southern Ontario. I'm a father of five and a grandfather of four, uh, three grandsons and one granddaughter. And I live in Waterdown near Hamilton, and that is within the dish with one spoon Wampum territory, uh, here in Southern Ontario. And I wanna say about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that it is, it is the Survivor's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Uh, they issued calls to action to address the damage of Indian Residential School upon the survivors. Uh, not only them, but their families and communities. And these calls to action were directed at the governments, the child welfare agencies, the schools, the museums, uh, the, uh, loss societies, the churches and the clergy.

Speaker 2:

And even though each of these groups contributed, uh, in some way to the loss of land, loss of our languages and our culture, the survivors have extended grace to each of these segments of society and that ask them all to be a part of the healing that's needed to restore our communities. So it's important to me that the church listen to this call to healing and not run away from that responsibility. The church claims to be the conscience of the country. So this is a really good place, uh, for the church to do what it says it is.

Speaker 1:

Thanks, Adrian. Um, we hear about truth and reconciliation now, um, but I would say many of us settler people, most who participate in the Southridge community, who aren't first peoples to this land, we don't fully understand or haven't paid attention to, what contributed to the need for truth and reconciliation at a super high level. Could you summarize how we got to a place where we needed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and what purpose the TRC serves?

Speaker 2:

Well, indigenous nations all across Canada have lived in this land for millennia, and we thrived in the land. We governed ourselves. Uh, we learned to live in a good way with the land, and we taught our coming generations all the wisdom from our past. Now, when colonialism happened, European nations imposed their languages upon us and their systems also as well. And they tried to remake us in their image. They tried to make us good English or French folk by forcing their language on us and their ways of thinking. And this is called a policy of assimilation, where foreign languages, ways of thinking, educational systems, ways of governing, spiritualities, et cetera, are different than what, uh, was in our communities. And they actually use the Indian residential schools to enact that policy on us. And so they came into our communities and took our children away from parents.

Speaker 2:

And some of them were as young as three years old until they were 16 years old. And so they were away from their communities for a long period of time. Uh, uh, 150,000 of our children were taken and often taken hundreds of kilometers away from our community so that it would be difficult for parents to visit them or take them back outta the school. And when the Prime Minister, uh, Stephen Harper apologized for this policy of assimilation in the Indian residential schools, he said, and these are his words, that they were trying to kill the Indian in the child. The sad truth is that thousands of our children actually did die in those schools, and many were buried in unmarked graves on those school grounds from about the 1830s until 1996. The schools were primarily run by the churches, the Catholic church, the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and the Anglican Church of Canada.

Speaker 2:

There were other churches like the Mennonites that ran similar kinds of schools, and our children suffered psychological abuse because, uh, being separated from their, uh, parents, uh, separation anxiety was endemic for them. There was cultural and physical and even sexual abuse to, uh, the children in the schools. And with any kind of trauma, it is always passed on not only to the person that experienced it, but often to their children. So the survivor's children, the that next generation, uh, have experienced the effects of trauma. And so that's the intergenerational, uh, uh, effect, uh, on other, uh, uh, future generations of our people. And so that's what's happened and what has been, uh, occurring in our communities. Now, even though this present generation may not have run Indian residential schools, the damage that was enacted in the community still requires healing. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, both the perpetrators and the victims of trauma need healing.

Speaker 2:

Yes. The same policy of assimilation has been utilized to colonize indigenous people into all the western forms of Christianity. All the churches contributed in varying ways to our loss of languages, our cultures, and our connections to our lands. So when the survivors asked all of Canada to be a part of dealing with the wrongs of the past and to bring healing to the present generation, this is an act of grace and forgiveness. And in, in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there were seven national events held all across Canada from 2008 to 2015, where the Indian Residential School survivors were able to tell their stories and be able to say, uh, in telling their stories, we want you to hear these stories so that this will never happen again in Canada. So when the truth and reconciliation, uh, uh, commission commissioners heard from all the survivors, including the churches, they said, these are the calls to action to that healing process.

Speaker 1:

I'm hearing that, uh, we don't understand, as settler people, we don't understand at a heart level how we have participated and benefited from the harms heard through the TRC. And, um, I'm hearing that as a faith

community, we have a lot more work to do, um, to understand how this history connects to, um, us and, and so that we can come to a place of a shared understanding of truth. Um, a shared understanding of truth, I think is, is a good place to start pursuing the healing that you're speaking about. Um, and would that be a fair reframing of, of what you've said?

Speaker 2:

Yeah, I think that that's, uh, essentially what is there, and the idea is that, um, we may be in a culture, we may be a part of a system and not even know that we are. Yeah. It's kind of like a fish in water. It doesn't really, uh, it's not really aware of the water environment, but you take the fish outta water and suddenly it's aware that it's out of its element. Yes. Uh, the Western system came here and basically took us like fish outta water into another system, and we, we didn't do well. Yeah. So I think that that's, that's a good way of mentioning it. I

Speaker 1:

Love, I love that analogy. <laugh>. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, the TRC concluded with the 94 calls to action, which you mentioned, uh, which is Canada's map or mandate on what we should be working towards. Can you share with us the essence of five specific calls that include church bodies and then what that means for the church across Canada?

Speaker 2:

Sure. Uh, uh, call to action, which I'd like to say that that's what it was called, a call to action. So it wasn't, you know, change your mind. It was do something Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> different. And so there are, uh, calls 48, 49, 59, 60 and 61 that mention the church and what it can do to be a part of the healing. So call to action number 48 was a call to all the churches, to faith groups and to interfaith, uh, social justice groups to comply with the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people as a framework for reconciliation. And this would mean that making sure that each of these churches, that their policies would respect indigenous self-determination in spiritual matters, including the right to practice, develop, and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies. So, uh, this was a part of what was not done in the residential schools.

Speaker 2:

Uh, uh, another way of being in the world in a spiritual way was enforced on people. So they were asked, the churches were asked to make a statement no later than March 31st, 2016, to declare how they will implement the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people in their churches and groups and, and churches responded to that called to action. 49 is a call to the church and faith groups as well to repudiate concepts used to justify the European sovereignty over our lands and our people, such as the doctrine of discovery. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and Terra, that those ideas call to action. 59 is a call to the churches to educate their own congregations about what the church's role was in colonization, the history and the legacy of residential schools, and why there was apologies that were necessary, uh, from the churches to the residential school survivors. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Speaker 2:

Uh, not only to them, but to their families and to the communities as well. Call to action number 60 was a call to the church and faith leaders to partner with indigenous spiritual leaders, the survivors schools of theology, seminaries and religious training centers to teach their up and coming student clergy, and then other clergy and staff who work in aboriginal communities about the need to respect indigenous spirituality. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> in its own right, Indian residential schools and the church's complicity and the, in perpetrating the harm they needed to know about that as well. And then their responsibility to mitigate conflicts and prevent spiritual violence. Uh, called to action number 61 was to

the churches in partnership with the survivors to establish permanent funding for community controlled healing and reconciliation projects, culture and language revitalization, education and relationship building projects, regional gatherings for indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss indigenous spirituality, self-determination and reconciliation. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Speaker 1:

Thanks, Adrian. Um, that was a pretty clear call, uh, for our church in our responsibility. To me, um, participating in the calls to action doesn't exclude us. What I heard you say, who were, who weren't directly involved in the things like running of residential schools or developing harmful frameworks or policies. But because we've collectively benefited from those things at the expense of indigenous people, um, and we represent a body of people that participated in that harm, it is our responsibility as a community and as followers of Jesus to lean into responsiveness in these calls of action. That's our invitation. Um, would you wanna add anything to that, or does that sum it up pretty good?

Speaker 2:

Uh, that's a really good summary because, uh, it, it, uh, it's not a matter of blame. We're, uh, indigenous people are not trying to make somebody feel guilty. I think western Christians feel guilty enough without us saying anything, but to be honest about things and to call people into a responsible healing relationship. Things didn't go well, let's make them go well now. So let's begin working together. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, because not only were we hurt in the process, I think it twisted the, uh, church as well. And they need the healing as much as we need the healing, and together we can heal together

Speaker 1:

Ly um, learning can start in our heads. But if this learning is to be transformative, it has to make its way into our hearts. So what's the shift in our thinking that needs to take place as followers of Jesus? And if our thinking was different, how might that look in action?

Speaker 2:

As an educator, I know that it takes something like listening to something 11 times before you can remember it, and that it takes 25 times hearing it for it to become your thought. So the mindset and the attitude that allowed Indian residential schools to even exist was a very long time in the making. And so it will take an equally long time for society to think differently about that tragic reality. I have a missionary friend who told me that in America, he wondered why Christians gave so little to benefiting others, only about 5% of their giving. He said, then he looked through the hymnal and he noticed that only 7% of their hymns spoke about blessing other people.

Speaker 1:

Interesting.

Speaker 2:

So most of the hymns were about their own blessing as Christians. And so he told me that people practice what they sing about. So we need to read about justice, meditate about justice, sing about justice, write in our journals about justice, talk about justice at our dinner tables, talk about justice issues at, at work in our work, break tables, friendship tables at Tim Horton's. Perhaps then we will begin to do justice. The church in Canada claims to be the conscience of the country. The survivors of Indian residential schools have, have accepted the church at its own word and is called it to live out that justice that they proclaim in restoring life for the indigenous community. They, and we are asking the church to be part of the healing from the damage that they were part of making. This sounds like restorative justice that Mennonite folk

like to say they are working with when they deal with criminal offenders. The church is the offender in the loss of our languages, our cultures, and our connections to our land. So they can be a part of the restoration of those things as well.

Speaker 1:

It sounds like we have some very important work to do in unsettling our thinking, untangling really. And that's can be challenging and uncomfortable to see our own assumptions and biases, especially maybe as Jesus followers. In my experience, this, this requires us to come with a posture of curiosity and is, um, humble in how I come to know what it is that I think that I know. And listening to voices like yours, Adrian, who experiences Canada from a different perspective, uh, than someone like me. Um, it sounds to me like our first call to action, first step is to transform the way that we think and see ourselves through listening to the experiences of indigenous people as shown through the calls to action. Would that be a fair way to understand what you're saying?

Speaker 2:

Uh, I feel like the thing that really changes people's minds when they have strong feelings about anything or stories. Yeah. And that's what the survivors did. They told their stories and, and not from a rancorous uh, you know, angry position, although there people were angry for what happened to them, but they told it in such a way that it broke the hearts of the listeners and they wept. And it's in that atmosphere of recognizing what happened and say, oh, I didn't know that that's what occurred. And then you can, uh, calmly ask yourself, how was our system? How am I benefiting from what happened a long time ago? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And if that's something that, uh, pricks your heart, then you can begin to say, what can we do now to make things better? So it's stories that change people's lives. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Thank you. Um, thank you, Adrian, for inviting us to some collective unsettling where we've been challenged to lean into listening to stories, um, hearing some uncomfortable truths and, and really doing some internal reorientation. Um, and also the, the hope of this active restoration work that we're invited to be a part of. I wanted to read a reflection from Richard Wammes. Um, it's from his book Embers on page 1 32. My gauge each day in all things is simply, this is what I'm choosing to think or do or say, moving me closer to my creator or farther away. For this question, I am immensely thankful. It saves me an awful lot of backtracking, worry lines, frustration, angst, and apologizing today and every day. I give thanks for my ability to exercise the power of choice even when I've chosen wrong. Um, thank you to all of you who have joined us today, and thank you to Adrian for, um, sharing with us. And, uh, we'd like to invite you back into the next two weeks of this series where we will continue to envision where this listening into action journey takes us as a community here at Southridge. I will hope that you'll continue to join us in our learning. I.