

Report of the Biennium Reconciliation Task Force

Task Force Roster

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At Assembly 2014 the Eastern Synod in Assembly committed itself to the Biennium Reconciliation Initiative (BRI), a two-year synod-wide effort to take increasingly intentional steps toward Right Relations with Indigenous peoples. The Assembly took this action after three days of listening, reflecting, worshipping, and engaging with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. At the 2014 Assembly the Biennium Reconciliation Task Force was charged with assisting the Synod to live out its commitment. The Task Force has tracked progress and is requesting a two-year mandate extension since momentum and action have been slow in coming, but growth is evident and more support is needed to be faithful to our commitment made to Survivors.

During Assembly 2014 delegates took seriously the call to deep listening to 1) the evidence of Canada's history with First Nations through the KAIROS-led Lutheran Version of the Blanket Exercise, 2) a panel moderated by Bishop Pryse of three speakers (Commissioner Marie Wilson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Anglican Indigenous Bishop Mark MacDonald, Seminary Principal Allan Jorgenson), 3) the songs and prayers of Intergenerational Survivors and their drums with Mino Ode Kwewak N'Gamowak and video testimony from the TRC, 4) feedback from delegates on matters of social policy and congregational life, and 5) the Spirit that unites us as petitioned in Bible study, song, prayer, sermons, challenging conversations and even dance. Delegate "Twitter Prayers" showed that Assembly delegates "did not know" about Residential Schools, intergenerational trauma, and the systemic discrimination and racist roots of Canada's colonial history built upon the Christian Doctrine of Discovery. We were moved.

Desiring to better understanding the truth of Canada's history and to rectify our own Lutheran disconnect from the realities of Indigenous lives, the Assembly set out to imagine how to live differently in our contexts as congregations, Ministry Areas, and Synod as a whole, now that "we know the truth." Resources to build Right Relationships were provided including Ministry Area maps with information on how to contact a relevant First Nations neighbour to begin a path to Acknowledging Territory, to understand the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Indian Residential School Legacy from the perspective of that neighbour, to reconcile local Lutheran and Indigenous history, to build relationships of justice both in First Nations, Church and Society, as reconciliation is the gift of the Creator who made us all. As Assembly 2014 Ministry Areas clustered together to strategize how to access and use resources to take contextually-relevant next steps following Assembly.

While there has been significant progress (which Assembly 2016 will hear about), critical relationship development is really only gaining momentum just now in Areas and congregations that were able to take Next Steps quickly. For various reasons many congregations, Ministry Areas and corners of the Synod life, are still at First Steps, some remain unaware of their territory and have not yet contacted their neighbours. On whole, as Synod, we have recognized and can name the arms-length societal injustice of the Canadian legacy with First Nations peoples, but we as Synod need more support and sustained commitment to follow through towards close-up reconciled relationships. We have further distance to travel for reconciliation. We need more guidance to persevere in the journey.

Synod Assembly 2016 will include efforts to further guide the Eastern Synod on the journey of reconciliation. Chief Ava Hill of the Grand River Six Nations will speak to us about reconciliation from her perspective and will guide us in learning to take new steps together. The Biennium Reconciliation Task Force will host an interactive event where delegates can move around to hear from guides who have made progress on the journey in these last two years, or can debrief and seek help consequent to having experienced obstacles to reconciliation in the last two years. On Thursday of Assembly delegates will be provided with information on congregation-specific First Nation neighbour materials and information of Synod guides and resources for contemplation prior to the Friday event.