

St Mark's Lutheran Church Social Ministry Committee

Reconciliation Workshop Notes

May 7, 2022

Attendees: Jennifer Moroz, Rhonda Lorch, Chrissy Cordingley, Stephen Sauer, Donna Fiebelkorn, Signe Jewett, Marijus Timmerman, Kurt Simonsen

Following up to two sessions on the need for reconciliation presented by Jim Thunder, the Social Ministry Committee hosted a workshop to discern what might be recommended to St Mark's Church Council related to the congregation's reconciliation work.

In preparation for the workshop, questions about thoughts on the issue were posed to St Mark's members. The compilation of the input from a few parishioners and the Committee members is attached (see: Reconciliation Project Perspective Collection).

The Committee members met to review the information and discern a possible route forward. Rhonda Lorch facilitated the workshop, posing a series of questions to the participants. The following responses and brief outline were collected.

1. What was the one thing that you learned from Jim Thunder's presentations that surprised you or gave you pause?

- Moved by faith of Jim and his family despite the harms visited on them by Canada's colonial history
- Dismay that colonizers recognized Indigenous people as 'flora and fauna'
- Grace that Jim offers given the background
- Taken aback by Jim's emotion related to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women video – obviously very painful and personal to him
- Indian Act – no idea about what it involved – we should study it a bit more
- Canada needs to revisit the Indian Act
- What is success? Dismayed by the long timeframe; worried about consultation fatigue

2. Was there anything in the notes captured that struck you as being helpful to our cause of discerning where we might go?

- Different notions of what reconciliation means – need a common definition or description
- Reconciliation – repair relationship in an active way, compare to a personal relationship one on one; more than just saying 'sorry'
- Doing something more active to remedy the harms

- Indigenous people call for going beyond apologies; remedying harms for what has been done
- Perhaps need to make clear we are looking for more than just educating ourselves – further define what we mean by reconciliation; education is a component to the plan but not the only thing; annual or semi-annual event for education but need more than that; there are already lots of educational pieces out there

3. Is there anything that you are particularly concerned about as we try to move the reconciliation needle at St Mark's?

- Fatigue by people involved – burnout for volunteers
- Apathy, disengagement, information falls on 'tired' ears
- Concerned about people buying into the plan
- Optimism bias, complacency
- Not clear based on what we've done so far how many people are interested in pursuing a reconciliation plan
- Worried about the suggestion to go through all the TRC calls to action – seems there's lots for government to do and not a lot what we might do; people might say it's up to government and not be inspired to do what we can do at our level

4. Please jot down the 3 ideas that you saw in the notes or that you have thought of since, that you think would make the greatest impact for our congregation.

5. Share your 3 ideas. Are there any commonalities?

(The facilitator grouped common ideas/thoughts into clusters to help the group see where there was agreement.)

- Determine interest level/barriers from the congregation
- Define reconciliation in a common way for our congregation
- More collaborative activities/services – relationship with Indigenous church/community
- Collaborative activities
- Medicinal planting/teachings related to our gardens
- Host another open Social Ministry meeting with Vince Solomon (Epiphany Indigenous Anglican) and maybe Jim Thunder as well – helpful to have them give advice as to what would work and what wouldn't (mentioned a number of times)
- Educate ourselves by listening to Indigenous voices rather than assuming we know what needs to be done

- Use the widest definition of education for our plan – foster interest in Indigenous issues; keep issues at forefront so it's real and ongoing; relationship building as an end goal; our statement at the beginning of our service is an example; more subtle ways of educating, messaging, active, engage in activities
- Obtain Church Council's buy in and blessing for our plans – leadership comes from the top
- Sit down with Church Council in different stages to keep them posted on where we are at and how we plan to move forward
- Do more research in terms of organizations that already doing reconciliation work and how we might collaborate with them rather than reinvent the wheel
- Further connections through the Urban
- Focus on smart things that can make a difference – don't have to be big; small actions can make a difference
- Leverage young adult active engagement

6. The basic outline of a plan was agreed to:

1. **Research/consultation:** plan for hearing Indigenous voices; perhaps an open panel session to get questions answered and to hear what is most helpful from an Indigenous perspective
 - a. Clarify what we consider reconciliation to be
2. **Congregational engagement:** Obtain buy in and support from Church Council and the congregation
3. **Collaboration:** Invite participation from other Lutheran churches, the MNO synod and/or other denominations
4. **Identify two or more projects that each have a different scope and purpose,** such as:
 - a. *Continuing education:* Helping other groups/committees in the congregation to offer education on reconciliation: Pastor Zsofi, Sunday School, adult education, youth, Worship Committee, social media
 - b. *Fundraising:* Seeking financial support for a selected organization or project
 - c. *Hands-on Project:* Develop plans for a meatier project which might involve volunteerism or community work by congregational members

Other thoughts that were raised:

- Perhaps strike a Sub-committee on Reconciliation that invites other congregational members to participate; might also be responsible for researching and providing appropriate resources to members and committees for use in their education initiatives and for posting to the e-news and website
- There are lots of folks in congregation who care about the Urban; perhaps use that familiarity to develop congregational traction and to take them on a journey that encompasses more than meals and charitable donations etc.; could involve spearheading Urban initiatives such as funding a sharing circle leader for a year

Actions:

- Jennifer to let Vince Solomon and Jim Thunder know of our intentions for an open session in September
- Jennifer and Rhonda ask for a time on Church Council's agenda in the fall to let them know of our progress and gain their support
- Next Social Ministry Committee meeting: identify possible dates for open session

Addendum: Reconciliation Project Perspective Collection

Members of the Social Ministry Committee and anyone else in the congregation who wanted to participate were asked to provide input on the possibilities for reconciliation work, using a series of provided questions as prompts for their responses. Nine people in total provided input and that input is captured here. Where more than one person suggested the same thought, it is not repeated but the number of people who mentioned the thought follows the item in parentheses.

1. What strengths, assets and resources could St Mark's offer in reconciliation efforts?

- Fairly young, energetic congregation
- Comparatively financially stable (both as a congregation and individual members)
- Building/space to share / utilize in the wider community or offered to groups who might need a gathering place; great facility for hosting events and workshops (3)
- One of our strengths is a relatively active and interested volunteer base; members often willing to donate time and skills (3)
- We have a reasonably well-informed community.
- There is a history of willingness to give financially to meaningful causes especially within our community; the congregation has a great heart and passion for easing suffering in the world; caring and generous (3)
- We have a youth group that might be encouraged in this direction.
- We have a Sunday School that might find ways to incorporate an indigenous perspective.
- We have a sign that might publicize relevant events and ideas.
- A community garden that might in part grow traditional "medicines".
- A strong and diverse set of gifts and talents – music, arts, craftsmanship.... (2)
- Once a goal is set, our congregation has exhibited strength in often being able to achieve the goal, but there needs to be a large majority of support behind the goal.
- Strong ties to LUM (volunteers and financial contributions) (2)
- Existing connections with Epiphany Indigenous Anglican Church; contributions to programs that support Indigenous people
- Well connected ecumenically; works well on common initiative with other church (2)

2. How could we leverage those strengths?

- Open our doors to additional community events and engagement
- Consider programming in cooperation with other Lutheran churches and even other denominations; seek partnerships with other churches for a collective action plan; include the people who attended Jim Thunder's events who are not

St Mark's members; are many other denominations and groups currently investigating ways to meet reconciliation goals. It would be beneficial to work cooperatively with others outside of ourselves (4)

- Foster intentional relationships with community groups offering existing reconciliation services and programs rather than reinventing the wheel
- Gain concrete endorsement of the Reconciliation Initiative from council
- Extensive promotion/recruitment of congregational members to create a team of volunteers to oversee the development (specifics) and implementation of the action plan .
- Consider using LUM as a focal point/ bridge to start an initiative.
- Consider a long -term commitment/involvement in Epiphany Indigenous programs as part of an action plan or consider consulting with Pastor Vince Solomon on a recommended action plan.

3. What challenges would St Mark's encounter in pursuing reconciliation efforts?]

- Finding the energy and willingness to pursue reconciliation as a church wide priority
- St Mark's largely functions outside the demographic and locale of the Indigenous community
- The possible perception that reconciliation could erode our own church practice, belief and identity. Education and information along with transparency should be considered when integrating new practices or activities.
- Loss of financial stability
- Indifference / apathy / non-engagement / misunderstanding
- Inability or unwillingness to accept our racism. I'm not talking about the ugly, hateful racism we see in the media, but the 'I'm a nice person so I can't be racist' racism that is present in all of us and so hard to admit to
- Volunteer burnout.
- Complexity and enormity of issue.
- Members/council may be more focused on establishing relationships and processes with a new minister; this initiative could be seen as distracting.
- Lack of motivation or getting the congregation to accept some responsibility for the issue instead of seeing it as someone else's responsibility, such as the government

4. How could be mitigate those challenges?

- Focus on smaller, more easily accomplished goals and projects; be realistic with the projects we consider as far as resources required; consider a plan that is not

too ambitious, maybe involving stages that are dependent on prior stage succeeding. However, avoid a plan that seems like tokenism. (3)

- Continued education and opportunity to engage directly with Indigenous people and their activities; education and information along with transparency should be considered when integrating new practices or activities; first we must continue to focus on truth and educate ourselves; provide education at many congregational levels (adult, young adult, youth, Sunday School etc) about racism and reconciliation; More education/temple talks on our statement made each Sunday, that "we strive to follow Christ's example of reconciliation and care" (5)
- Lots of affirming moments of that IS God rather than just identifying what is not of God.
- Positive reinforcement and grace filled teachings.
- Community events and open doors.
- Invite the involvement and support of the new pastor who has shown she is interested in issues of social justice; include a role for Pastor in advocating an action plan (2)
- Seek broader participation from the Synod churches/other organizations.

5. The St Mark's mission statement is that we are to be God's hands and feet in the world. In terms of reconciliation, what might that look like?

- We are to take an active role in helping and healing where we find and understand the need to be. Reconciliation efforts can be complicated but the process that has been ongoing at St. Mark's is a healthy one. Collecting information and communicating with indigenous leaders and communities are important steps toward taking action. Taking action in reconciling needs to be purposeful, informed and cooperative.
- Work together, collaboratively with communities
- Integrating reconciliation in our usual church activities
- Showing our concern for the plight of many Indigenous people by taking concrete actions to attempt to improve their welfare.
- 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself' says to me that we need to consider why Indigenous people do not enjoy equitable access to all the things we take for granted (like clean drinking water) and then do something about it

6. What ideas do you have for activities that would help St Mark's participate in efforts to work toward reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours?

- encourage participation in circles of reconciliation for members (2)

- review of theological/liturgical practices - work with knowledge experts like James Thunder on better understanding problematic practices and decolonization (2)
- educational programming on reconciliation through sunday school, confirmation, and/or youth group (2)
- review of the calls to action - during the 94 in 94 play/show a set each week before/during the service; deeper session exploring each of the 94 calls, how they may be applicable to each of us (3)
- regular funding of reconciliation and culture revitalization projects: reconciliation thunder, circles of reconciliation, other initiatives or programs?
- is there a need for meeting / hall space for projects? offer of space rent-free?
- are there projects we might be able to support re: the Kapyong development? could be opportunities because of close proximity in the community
- are there further opportunities through our connection with the Urban? (2)
- continuing to find ways to inform and educate our community by listening to indigenous voices, Kairos Blanket Exercise (3)
- find out about events and activities that are happening in the indigenous community and find appropriate and meaningful ways to involve and integrate ourselves as helpers, participants or observers; visibly participating in each others community as a comfortable and normal occurrence is the long term goal.
- Education, education, education; read and discuss books and films; discuss the information provided by Jim Thunder (3)
- Start a book club that reads and discusses Indigenous literature and stories
- Research Indigenous organization for possible connection
- Frankly and respectfully discuss colonialism, white privilege and racism (2)
- Learn about local Indigenous history ie: Rooster Town (2)
- Recognize our limitations (we are a small church with big hearts but we have limited resources)
- Stay away from an advocacy role. There are already hundreds of advocacy organizations and initiatives. We would just be lost in the crowd.
- Focus on something small but practical that will contribute to some sort of betterment for the indigenous youth that can help them today and not 100 years from now; pick a small project that may provide some immediate help to indigenous youth in the spirit of reconciliation.
- sponsor a driver training initiative where we subsidize driver training courses for a handful of youth looking to get their driver's licence; (or support Citizens Bridge, a North End initiative that does just that)
- work with the St. Mark's youth group to partner with an indigenous youth group and include them in our activities

- Invite members of the indigenous community to participate in services, presentations and writing for newsletters (sharing stories, insights)
- I agree with Justice Sinclair that education is key to getting us out of this mess. With that in mind, working to develop an adult education program through LUM
- Develop a scholarship fund/program for an Indigenous student
- Fund a counsellor position for Epiphany Indigenous Church's program
- Sponsor a sharing circle leader position for LUM
- Support one of the many existing community organizations that provide support to young Indigenous people to complete their education (ie. Community Education Development Association (CEDA), Merchants Corner, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc. etc); No need to reinvent the wheel