

**“Steps to reconciliation” by Harold Loewen October 22, 2017**

**I will be sharing some thoughts and experiences that I have had after working for many years.**

**When you sit in a coffee shop and the topic of 1st nations comes up there are long streams of complaints with negative statements that our taxes are supporting the first nation people and they should get on board with the rest of society and carry their own weight . The anger that is directed at the indigenous community is very real.**

**Our own feelings may also be in conflict. So how do we take the step from being politically correct to having our feelings in line with what we know is right?**

**luke 4: 18 -20 tells us what is right, we realize that the situation we are in in canada is similiar to many situations that occurred in the past and will continue to occur in the future. (read )**

**Jesus proclaimed in verse 18 to 20 that with the coming of Jesus, the time to preach good news to the poor and to support those that are exploited and free them from oppression is NOW.**

**The only way I know to make this happen is by connecting with one another, to experience the humanity in each other. In my experience how i have been able to work through this is by having a work environment with a number of first nation youth , families and coworkers. The interaction with each other creates the connection.**

**Sharing some of the pain, the situations that youth, families go through has helped me to be understanding of children and families in poverty. I have often had relationships where i am not conscience about someone being first nation or not first nation. I stated this to one of my first nation coworkers and he said he was always aware of being first nation. This is due to the prejudice that is often directed at first nations people.**

**i.e. a freind of ours is a first nations lawyer from tronto. A very visable first nations individual and went to a store in Saskatoon and was being watched continually. He was in a store wanting to buy a TV and they asked him to leave stating he could not afford anything in the store. He argued and finally just walked out. He was not used to the level of intolerance to first nations in Saskatchewan.**

**One of the trainings i was in a few years ago was called touchstones of hope. A training to promote reconciliation between native and non native poeple. The trainers Diane and Bonnie Musqua are children of parents that went to residential schools. The trainers talked about the anger and distrust indigenous people have of the rest of society.**

**The training included first nation and non first nation staff. One of the key parts of the**

**training was a discussion on the need for first nations people to forgive when they encounter discrimination/ racism and not to be triggered. To see these situations as a way to create positive connections with non native people in the community. In doing the training the non first nations staff began to understand what discrimination/ racism is and how rampant it is in saskatchewan.**

**ie Bonnie tells a story of how she used to react when a police officer would stop her for no reason at all. She would ask if it was because of the color of her skin and call him a racist and give the officer a hard time. Now she talks to the officer respectfully even if encountering racist comments, and treats each interaction as an opportunity for reconciliation.**

### **I am Presently doing a term at Egadz over seeing programs**

Egadz Youth Center is a program that is very effective in responding to poverty and providing the supports needed to have each youth/mom to move out of poverty and become a contributing citizen.

Egadz works with 80%- 90% First Nation youth/adults, What sets Egadz apart is the commitment to those served. The youth committees giving the youth a voice.

Egadz works with the youth/parents of those needing extra support. The poor – living in poverty for several generations. The kids that are living in unsafe housing, those that have been sexually exploited

i.e. I stepped outside recently and one of the youth that is often in the drop In center and is always full of energy, she lives with her grandma in the hood, was sitting outside on the pavement crying.. I asked what was wrong and she said she was raped last night. Not only does she have to deal with issues of addiction in her family but now the trauma of rape..

. The EGADZ approach is to provide the support we would give to our children but also have expectations that we have for our own children. When youth have addictions they are challenged to go to treatment and supported in attending treatment centers. The youth may relapse to old behaviors, but with acceptance a lot of support and unconditional love many of the youth are able to start over again, forgive themselves and begin to see a future for themselves.

**An example of what occurs is: we had a 19-year old in one of our homes caring for a baby( she was a very good mom)and we asked her to be on our runaway committee. Reason being that she had the most runs of anyone when she was 14 , 15 years old.**

**She went through the training with all the agencies, (police , social services, health }and started to connect with youth that runaway and give them an ear and advice on how to stop running. She was doing very well until Her gang connected boyfriend came out of jail and in 3 weeks she relapsed again using drugs left the EGADZ My Home had her child**

**apprehended and she was gone with her abusive boyfriend. 2 months later she ended up in a hospital barely escaping with her life, egadz was called and on being released from the hospital she came back to her My Home. She is starting over in a home where she is not judged for her relapse. She is taking the steps to again build up the trust with herself and those around her. It is a very humbling, but she is living a disciplined life to regain custody of her child and live a healthy life.**

Where the moms/young people have the supports needed they can move out of generations of poverty & oppression. A number of these youth are in university and polytec.

**i.e. many of the youth in the drop in center and in the homes have grown up in poverty. One youth said “We don’t get nice houses in the hood, we don’t have dishwashers or regular meals. We can’t just go to the fridge to eat nice meals.” Another youth was very appreciative of living in a home that fits into a community, a home that is very nice.**

**As part of reviewing if youth in EGADZ are getting what they require** i have been doing a lot of interviews with children in the last few months and youth have told me many stories about how they are trying to take a different path than that of their siblings or parents, addictions are often the biggest issues in the families.

**A lot of the present poverty the anger of first nation towards non first nation the discrimination against first nation in saskatchewan is a result of :**

Disrespect for the culture - evidence of this is non natives continuing to making decisions for first nations people. Some of the decisions were :

setting up Residential schools -

adopting out first nation children in the 60s scoop -

Presently in Saskatchewan we are placing many indigenous little children under 12 in 10 bed group homes, it is supposed to be short term placements but many turn into longer term placements- the placements in group homes for babies causes attachment disorder

Many older children are still being placed in protective group homes. Information out of the Casey institute indicates how long term placement in highly structured homes is damaging to youth. It a preparation to be successful in jail. Control on the outside does not create internal change.

First nations do have input on how children are managed off reserve .The non native community continues to proscribe what happens to first nations in care or custody ( 80-85% are first nation in care from 13% of the population, in custody we have 76% first nations)

The first nation community has not been part of the process, minimal input of problem solving.

Provincially My experience is that the bureaucrats make decisions on how to respond to situations based on their own upper middle class value systems. There is no consistent strategy in place. The bureaucrats/ politicians continue on the same path that was started on 150 years ago and do not have the insight and information necessary to respond to the generational disrespect and subsequent poverty prevalent in saskatchewan first nations

### **What is the Role of the church in regards to indigenous people?**

**There is a lot of distrust/ anger between the indigenous people and the rest of the community.**

The church can have a major impact in the present situation , the church can help set the stage for communication, for reconciliation. The church was the arm of the government carrying out the residential school policy. The church can be at the forefront in making long term change, and change the direction of our communities

By connecting with a First Nations community, set up relationships build up trust so we see each other as equal human beings loved by the same God.

This is already happening by MCC setting up a meeting with muskeg lake, and the PA music festival etc. to set up situations that support interaction

An example of a group that met and was successful for a while was the Loaves & fishes meeting between a group from the osler area and Pine House. It was a respectful meeting with one side bringing bread and the other group brought fish. It went on for a few years. A group of people got to know each other and enjoy each others company in addition to trading produce

Church members could meet with an Elders and ask the Elders what is needed.. There is a retired Elder living in Martensville, Mary Lee maybe meet with her and ask her what steps the people in churches could take to create connections/ relationships between first nation and non first nation peoples.

or connect with northern community leaders and ask how we can create a connection between a first nations community and a church

The church support could influence the peoples in saskatchewan to address the discrimination, the oppression. Through relationships, the human connections with one another, starts the process of reconciliation.

The churches can help set the stage for communication. The human connection, humour, laughing together will create the love for one another that will break down the barriers between people. The time to connect with first nations brothers and sister and to counter discrimination/ oppression is NOW