

## Minute for Reconciliation – Bob’s Story

All children have heroes. As a child growing up in a minister’s home long before television my heroes were– would you believe it? – missionaries! We read their stories in our Sunday school papers and sometimes they came to our church to talk to us. Many of them worked in northern Canada. Their job was to tell Indian people about Jesus and build schools where they taught little children reading and arithmetic. We collected our pennies and we dreamed that someday we would go to those far-off places, places with evocative names like Bella Coola or – my favorite – God’s Lake Narrows. Who knows? Maybe a few of us would become missionaries too.

Some of those missionaries are *still* my heroes. Since then though we’ve learned that those missions in which the churches eagerly participated were part of a centuries-long exercise in social engineering based on the assumption that aboriginal people were inferior and that it was appropriate therefore to take control of land and resources away from them. The role of the residential schools would be - in the words of the head of the Department of Indian Affairs – “to take the Indian out of the child”. The result has been catastrophic. Today the evocative place names are Pikangikum and Attawapiskat.

After intense pressure from aboriginal organizations and the churches the government of Canada established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission whose task it would be to learn the truth of what had happened in the schools and to work toward healing. Since 2009 three commissioners have travelled the country meeting with survivors and their families, listening as with many tears they bravely told their stories of abuse and discrimination and encouraging them as they sought healing. Always large numbers of fellow citizens have been there to witness to their truth and to commit themselves to work for reconciliation.

Now it’s Vancouver’s turn to host the provincial meeting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The gathering will be held from September 18 – 21 at the Pacific Coliseum on the PNE grounds. Hundreds of survivors and their families will be coming from every part of the province to meet with the commissioners. Church members and other citizens will be there in the thousands to support them as they give their testimonies.

We think you’ll want to be there for some or all of the sessions. After all, they’re telling us the truth, truth that we need to hear in order that we and our nation may live. Maybe we should think of them as missionaries!

Robert Smith, Halfmoon Bay, BC  
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