

Seven years ago, when I introduced myself to an elderly survivor of the Port Alberni Indian Residential School he said, "I've been wanting to talk to you for a long time." I had never met him before. I wasn't even born when he was in Residential School so what did he mean by saying he had been waiting a long time to talk to me?

We had gathered at a Dispute Resolution hearing to listen to this man's painful story of great loss: loss of family, of community, of language and culture, of safety and innocence as a result of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse he experienced during his childhood at the school. As his story unfolded, I began to understand the meaning behind his words. He had been waiting his whole life to ask the United Church of Canada why he had suffered in a school run by people of God. I was the face of the United Church that day.

It's estimated that there are 80,000 survivors of Indian Residential School still living today. Many of them have also been waiting a long time to tell us their stories about Residential School. It's an important step in their healing journey and in ours.

As members of the United Church of Canada in B.C., we have the privilege and responsibility to be the face of the United Church to the survivors who will tell their stories about Residential School when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gathers at the PNE in Vancouver this September. It won't be easy for the survivors to tell their stories because the memories are filled with so much pain and shame. It won't be easy to hear these stories but it is so important for us to be there and bear witness to the truth.

Seven years ago I witnessed the miracle of Jesus' promise that "the truth will set us free." This gracious elder who had been waiting a long time, told us his truth and when he had finished speaking he said he felt as if a huge burden had been lifted off his shoulders. All of us could feel it and see the difference in him. It was a taste of the healing and reconciliation for which we all yearn and need as a result of this tragic episode in Canadian history.

Please attend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gathering in Vancouver, Sept. 18-21. And please pray for all participants before, during and after the hearings.

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