

## ***Courage to Be and Ally***

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church  
June 19, 2022 – Indigenous People's Sunday  
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

### **Galatians 3:26 – 29**

You are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise.<sup>1</sup>

Paul, in his letter to churches in today's passage from Galatians talks about a radical new vision of unity:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

Doesn't this vision of community ever ring true for us here, today, as our culture is daily acknowledging racial discrimination. We talk weekly here in worship about God's kingdom vision, a vision of common humanity, a connectedness in Creation. It is not a fairy tale; it is a calling to all of us to radically love our neighbours instead of fearing them, or talking about “us” and “them.”

Today we are reminded of the richness of Indigenous spirituality, the stories, the teachings that, quite honestly, our church did not respect when European Christians were immigrants on this inhabited land. As we seek the unity that Paul describes, we must first listen – listen for the voices that have for decades been ignored, listen to the stories about the system that European Christianity created, most powerfully symbolized by residential schools and the unimaginable grief as we hear about children buried in unmarked graves. I think that we all know that racism is around us, and in us – yes, even church people.

The call of Paul, and ultimately Christ, to unity and unconditional love is our core teaching in Christianity – to teach our children and grandchildren and our Sunday school children that we are all one, united in our love and faithfulness as followers of the teachings of Christ. We are all beloved children of the Creator. Indigenous peoples have a saying, *All My Relations*. The Indigenous contribution to the church is honoured by the Mohawk phrase “Akwe Nia'Tetewá:neren” – all my relations – on the crest. The four colours of the Medicine Wheel, yellow, red, black, and white, and the Mohawk words have been included in the United Church crest since 2012. Indigenous spirituality, leadership, and participation are vital to the church's life.

That teaching goes further than Paul's, though. Paul was speaking about people – granted he envisioned God's dream of radical unity for all people – and sometimes people who had very different experiences, spirituality, opinions. But “All My Relations” calls us to include all living things as part of the Creator's Vision: people, creatures in the water, those that fly in the air, everything that creeps and crawls and slithers on the

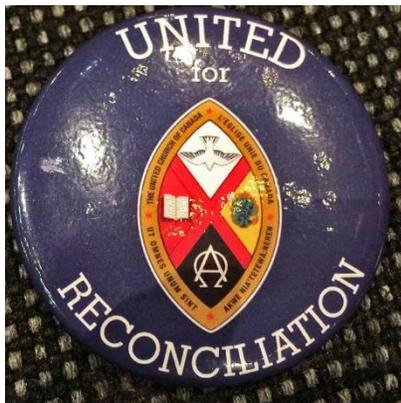
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<sup>1</sup> Focus Scripture, Galatians 3: 26-29, Common English Bible

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 3:28 Ibid

ground. We all have a place in God's great creation. One way to look at it is Creation as a giant spider's web; if you pluck at one thread, the vibrations are felt throughout the whole web. It's like the ripples that spread out when a pebble is thrown into or skipped in water.

So, this work of reconciliation, working for justice – how do we do this? Psalm 106 paraphrased, says, "Joyful are those who observe justice, who work for right relations at all times."



<sup>3</sup> We already Acknowledge the land on which we meet, that we are part of the Robinson Huron Treaty here in Sudbury. We recognize that there are some areas, like on Manitoulin Island, called unceded Territory – meaning that no Treaty was made there.

And let us educate ourselves about culture, racism, and reconciliation. Have you read books by Indigenous authors, found books for your children and grandchildren? Here at St. Andrew's, we have been reading wonderful books by Richard Wagamese, and one of the most powerful books I've read was "Seven Fallen Feathers" by

Tanya Talaga. Murray Sinclair said to a gathering of United Church leaders that the key to our work is to "show up."

Marian (from the St. Andrew's Community of Faith) and I attended the powerful exhibit last week, "A Man of Conscience." It featured the Health Officer for the Federal Government in Canada, Peter Henderson Bryce, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dr. Bryce then spoke out about the horrific health realities faced by children in residential schools.

Marian and I brought our tobacco ties and offered them in love and gratitude to the sacred fire outside the exhibit. We were invited to walk counter-clockwise around the Fire, to offer the tobacco with our left hand, because it is closest to our hearts. Educating ourselves about those details when we "show up", they seem small, but they matter.

Would you like to join with me looking for pow wows that we can attend, showing up as "allies", and appreciating the power of the dance and the splendour of regalia? There are so many ways to "show up" – celebrating Indigenous art, writing, music, and artwork. We can seek opportunities to partner with the Friendship Centre down the road.

Consider donating to our United Church of Canada's Healing Fund, which directly supports projects led by Indigenous church members and others in their communities. The Healing Fund promotes healing initiatives for survivors of the residential school system and initiatives that address ongoing intergenerational impacts. Indigenous communities can apply for a grant of up to \$15,000 toward programs centred on cultural, healing, and language projects. The Healing Programs Working Group, made up of representatives from diverse Indigenous communities across the country, determines the fund's criteria and evaluates applications.

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<sup>3</sup> "United for Reconciliation" graphic from [kamloopsunited.ca](http://kamloopsunited.ca)

So, today on Indigenous Day of Prayer, let us give thanks for the Indigenous people of our communities and their profound contributions to our common life together. Let us all, individually and collectively, seek out ways to work for reconciliation and justice. Let us be the beloved children of God, and love our neighbours – yes, all of them. Worldwide, people represent the colours of the medicine wheel, shades and combinations of yellow, red, black, and white, and also brown. We are all Creator's beloved children. Thanks be to God.

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