

God Loves ALL Creation

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Paul, in his letter to churches in southern Galatia, states in Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." This wonderful proclamation of inclusivity needs to be heard. This statement rings true for us here, today. In these times of racial awareness and acknowledgement of discrimination, it is time for us to focus on our common humanity and look for ways we can love our neighbours instead of fearing them, or talking about us and Indigenous peoples have a saying,

All My Relations. The Indigenous contribution to the church is honoured by the Mohawk phrase "Akwe Nia'Tetewá:neren" (aw gway-- nyah day day waw-- nay renh) —all my relations—on the crest. The four colours of the Medicine Wheel, yellow, red, black, and white, and the Mohawk words have been incorporated in the United Church crest since 2012. Indigenous spirituality, leadership, and participation are vital to the church's life.

What this says to me is that we are all united. It goes further than Paul's teaching and evangelism. Paul was speaking about people. All my relations include all living things: people, creatures in the water, those that fly in the air, everything that creeps and crawls and slithers on the ground. We all have a place in God's great creation. I was taught it is like creation is 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 how we work toward justice and reconciliation? Like the paraphrase of Psalm 106 says, "Joyful are those who observe justice, who work for right relations at all times." We are educating ourselves about culture, racism, and reconciliation. Some of us might bristle at what feels at times like awkward terminology – reconciliation, right relations – are these just trendy words or do we really mean it?

I was moved by a book entitled "Seven Fallen Feathers" by Tanya TALEGA about how cases of 7 indigenous high school students who went missing, and the system abandoned them including policing.

I know that some of you, like me, are fans of Richard Wagamese – I really enjoyed his book, "Medicine Walk" about a journey of forgiveness and healing. Indigenous art, books, attending events like pow wows, we already engage, we need to continue this work of listening to those voices that call us to see All My Relations.

Donate to local Indigenous organizations such as healing and friendship centres. We can also support urban Indigenous people through Indigenous community centres and programs. We can contribute individually or collectively to the 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.

Have a Heart Day is on Tuesday, Valentine's Day. I invite you to sign a card, one to the Prime Minister and one to your local MP after worship while you enjoy some treats and conversation. We need to pay attention, and hold prayerfully the victims and families when we hear on the news about more unmarked graves of indigenous children who died in Residential Schools. We are not doing nothing, we are paying attention, and we are praying, and perhaps we will find ways to offer our support.

We say thank you, or Meegwetch (the Ojibwe term for "thank you") for the Indigenous people of our community and their profound contributions to our common life together. We are on a journey, probably only the beginning of that journey, towards mending the broken relationships. May we hear Paul's call to see all as one, not meaning that we are all the same – we are very diverse. But we are ALL God's beloved children. We are all part of Creation that the Creator loves so much. Thanks be to God.