

Bolton United Church hosts talk on reconciliation get guidance from Indigenous Reverend Nancy Best

By Rob Paul

On Friday evening, Bolton United Church hosted a community event over Zoom as part of their Let's Talk Seminar Series called 'How Can We Journey with our Indigenous Siblings Towards Healing?'

The talk was led by Reverend Nancy Best of Navan-Vars United Church, who is of Mohawk heritage and combines those teachings into her Christian faith.

The talk was organized by Bolton United's Minister Eleanor Scarlett as part of her efforts of continuing the conversation on truth and reconciliation for the Indigenous community in her congregation and the surrounding community.

'Following the discovery of the graves in Kamloops, I challenged my congregation to lament and not to act in wanting to do something, but to lament and to pray,' said Scarlett. 'Most of our congregants don't know to lament, but I think Bolton has understood and learned. I think tonight, Bolton, Palgrave, and all the rest who are with us are hoping that we will get some direction in where we go from here with how we move forward in healing.'

Given the atrocities that Indigenous people have suffered through throughout Canada's history, Best spoke candidly about the need to continue mourning the losses and the generational trauma the Indigenous community has dealt with stemming from the settler's arrival.

'I would suggest that we stay in lament,' said Best, 'As an Indigenous person speaking on behalf of the people planning our gathering, we are not ready to come out of lament. We have cancelled our meetings twice because they have been within days of uncovering graves of children. On our planning committee there are residential school survivors and there are Sixties Scoop people.'

'In the 60's, unfortunately it was decided it was better to take Indigenous children away from their families and their homes and their culture and have them adopted by white people. Just further continuance of the sacrilege of trying to crush and annihilate our culture. One of our group members was actually adopted by a couple in the Netherlands; not only did he grow up not knowing he was Indigenous, but he grew up not knowing he was Canadian. To hear these stories is incredibly painful and, to be honest, we're not ready to move on.'

Something Best made a point to highlight was that when these injustices are spotlighted in the moment there's support, but often it is people looking for a quick fix before moving on. She hopes going forward there is more thoughtfulness put into reconciliation efforts both by the government and non-Indigenous communities.

'I was quite horrified by how many non-Indigenous people wanted to jump up and make it better,' said Best. 'It can't be made better overnight, it's a process and it's a changing of hearts and of minds and of direction. We just don't feel the government is there yet and until people are educated in ways of how to help everybody move on. It's not just us, it's all of us as people and as Canadians that we all have to move on. That's why for us having the buffalo restored to unfenced places was the biggest thing that's been done for us in I don't how long.'

'That was brilliant, and I think that came from the conservationists and not the government. I have to also say that we have a huge sense of hope now that we have an Indigenous governor general (Mary May Simon) and we are so proud as a community of her. She's just so representative of the calmness and the careful consideration before she speaks, and she optimizes what we all strive to be. We think she's going to be the one who will do a lot of healing.'

One of the most important things non-Indigenous people can do in their truth and reconciliation efforts is to continue to educate

themselves on what Indigenous communities have gone through in Canada and educate others, particularly the youth, says Best.

?As far as action, I'd suggest reading Indigenous authors so that you hear our viewpoint and I would suggest reading Indigenous children's authors to your grandkids,? she said. ?In a practical sense, the United Church of Canada has a healing fund. With the healing fund, all the money goes to reconciliation projects and things that have come up as a result of Sixties Scoop and residential schools. The grants are decided by a committee of Indigenous people, so, it's money that is 100 per cent in Indigenous hands going to Indigenous people.?

Best also said it's important to support local causes to help those Indigenous who are struggling as a result of the generational trauma.

?The other things I encourage too is supporting your local Indigenous centre because the greatest number of Indigenous people do not live on reserves,? she said. ?Unfortunately, many of them live downtown in our cities and many of them are homeless and many of them are addicted?I speak about that from personal experience because my brother died in a shelter in downtown Ottawa. Read, educate yourself, but still, we are not quite ready to move ahead yet, but this is a good step for all of us.?