

Church to host virtual talk on Indigenous reconciliation

By Rob Paul

This Friday the Bolton United Church will host a virtual talk called "Journeying with our Indigenous Siblings Towards Healing," as part of its Let's Talk Seminar Series.

The guest speaker for the seminar will be Reverend Nancy Best of the United Church of Canada, who is of Mohawk descent.

The talk has been months in the making for Bolton United as Minister Eleanor Scarlett has made it a priority to work with her congregation in educating themselves and continuing the conversation on Truth and Reconciliation on the path to helping the Indigenous community in Canada heal.

"As Canadians and descendants of the settlers, one of the things I noticed as a later immigrant 50 years in this country is that when things like this happen the Europeans descendants want to do something," said Scarlett. "So, this time around, I've challenged them to learn to lament, to learn to hold the pain, to learn to stay with it, and to learn about the events that created these things to happen.

"Through sermons and teachings and talks with individuals, they've begun to grow and ask when do we leave the lamentation and look for the hope? That's how I know they're doing great. So, now my advice to them is that we do not take the leadership, we ask our Indigenous partners to tell us what they want us to do and how can we be of support to them, and so this is why Reverend Nancy Best is coming to us on Friday to share with us how we can accompany them on the journey towards healing and reconciliation."

The beginning of the process in learning about the Indigenous struggle for Bolton United came when, earlier this year in May, Canada mourned as the graves of 215 children were found on the premises of a former residential school.

"At the very beginning when they found the 215 graves in Kamloops, we put up orange ribbons for every one onto a Wall of Remembrance," Scarlett said. "We hung the ribbons and put shoes on our steps because it's been our goal to bring these issues to light in the community."

Through learning and listening, the congregation at Bolton United wants to do what they can to help in reconciliation and Scarlett believes that starts with connecting with Indigenous leaders and hearing their thoughts on the best way to go about it.

"I'm not sure what Reverend Nancy is going to tell us about how we can accompany them and support them, but what we're hoping is to come out of this is the best way that we can walk together with them hand in hand into and through our pain and reconciliation for our Indigenous siblings," she said.

Scarlett has made it a point to preach to her congregation that it's okay to not have all the answers as long as they're willing to learn from those who are most affected by Canada's history of marginalization against the Indigenous community.

"It's about listening and hearing, and this is why we want to do this," she said. "One of the things we did was a collaboration between Bolton and Palgrave, and it was a book study into learning more about the Indigenous people and their way of life and their hopes and dreams for a better world. After the book study, we wanted to journey to the next phase with this talk. I'm African-Canadian and it's my hope that my congregation will begin to understand that it's not always about taking leadership in how to make things happen, but to allow the other communities to invite them into the journey of healing and reconciliation."

Though the pandemic has changed the format of the seminar series, it has allowed Scarlett and Bolton United to connect with guest speakers like Best that may have otherwise not been able to speak with the community on key issues.

"For the last three years we've been doing one of these talks on every month on the third Friday of the month," said Scarlett. "Prior

to COVID, we would do them in person with a free meal. People would come in and eat because the whole idea of it was really for the church to meet the community and for the community to meet the church.

?When COVID came, we moved online so for the first half an hour people finish up their dinner and chat until the guest speaker arrives. We've been fortunate to have people from across the country come to be our guest speakers because we're online with COVID.?

These seminars began a handful of years ago when Scarlett wanted the church to connect with the community while tackling tougher, but richer topics as a congregation to provide a broader outlook on the world.

?I'm actually a trained interim minister and what that means is that my task is to look beyond what's happening in the pews and look at what's happening in the wider community to help the congregations that I serve to become more aware and more conscious that it's not just about the people in the pews, but it's about the wider community,? she said. ?When I came to Bolton, one of the things I recognized was a great group of people, but other people within Bolton were not a part of it.

?So, through different conversations with the congregation was that if we have a dinner opened up to the community, we can have talks on different topics. We've done talks on naturopaths, climate change, and other topics that will affect families. With the talks we try to capture things happening beyond the community, like in light of George Floyd's murder in the U.S. and the rise of Black Lives Matter, we had someone come in to talk about what it's like being black in Canada. It's been a way to bring in speakers on various topics of interest while also providing a meal and a community feel where people can socialize. It's not just about the work we're doing, but to remind people the church is not just the building, it's the people and we need to be active within the community.?

To attend the Let's Talk Seminar: Journeying with our Indigenous Siblings Towards Healing on Zoom hosted Bolton United Church this Friday, visit www.boltonunitedchurch.net.