

Prayer breakfast hears about reconciliation with Aboriginal children

By Bill Rea

For more than a century, First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were placed in residential schools, often against their parents' wishes.

Canada's national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been created to try and clean up the results of those times. Rev. Riscylla Shaw of Christ Church Anglican in Bolton offered some information on the commission as she addressed the eight annual Mayor's Prayer Breakfast recently.

Shaw said more than 150,000 of these children were taken from their homes in an effort to eliminate parental involvement in their spiritual development. There were more than 130 of these schools across the country. The last one was closed in the mid-1990s.

'It was the law,' she said. 'They had to attend.'

She also pointed out these schools had a profound effect on relations between Aboriginals and the rest of Canadians, adding it will take several generations to reconcile.

Shaw said she was inspired by Desmond Tutu, who after Apartheid ended in South Africa, worked to find out how it had happened. Similar efforts have been going on in Canada.

There's a personal connection to this for Shaw. She said her maternal grandfather was a Métis. As well, the Anglican Church was one of four denominations that ran these schools, so she thought the problems were partly hers to sort out.

'I felt called to be involved,' she said, adding she wanted to listen and hear the testimonies, pointing out there's nothing worse than having someone work themselves up to tell their story, and having no one to hear it.

There have been seven sessions held across Canada since June 2010, and Shaw said she's attended them all. They have had focuses on knowing love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility and truth.

'It sounds a bit like the teachings of Jesus,' she observed.

Shaw observed that it's hard to find reconciliation while in conflict, but there might be a deeper place of reconciliation in awareness, despite the differences. She added it depends purely on the nature of God, 'who loves both the just and the unjust.'

'The nature of God is love,' she added.

As to how this happened, Shaw said it was part of European expansion, with settlers and colonialism, which led to the imposition of structures like domination and subjugation. The objective was always the acquisition of territory and resources.

During the 15th century, there were Papal Bulls issued that gave explorers legal claims to lands that were inhabited by non-Christians. Also known as the Doctrine of Discovery, the idea was inhabitants of these lands could convert and be spared. If they didn't they could be enslaved or killed.

Shaw said there are signs of hope, pointing out seeking truth and reconciliation is a journey.

'Reconciliation is really hard work,' she added.



Mayor Allan Thompson welcomed everyone to his first Mayor's Prayer Breakfast.



Amy McLean provided the music at the Prayer Breakfast.



Rev. Riscylla Shaw of Christ Church Anglican in Bolton offered some information on Canada's national Truth and Reconciliation Commission.