

ANARC – Toward Healing and Reconciliation

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In 2009, at the request of the Archbishop of Regina, our ANARC (Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Relations Community) began. A hired facilitator and a three-member appointed team began gathering bi-weekly to build relationships and to develop a vision. On the advice of an Indigenous Elder, we held a traditional feast and pipe ceremony, and two members committed themselves to a series of fasts to support the team's vision-seeking.

To root our vision in the past, we reviewed the very positive history of Indigenous ministry in our archdiocese. To root it in the local setting, we undertook a demographic study focussing on economic, educational, health and cultural issues. We compiled a list of over 50 organizations and groups throughout the city involved with Indigenous people and began to have regular contact with about a dozen of these.

Our Vision

The vision that emerged centred on facilitating relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people journeying together inter-culturally, rooting ourselves in truth, justice, love and humility. We saw our community as the dawning of Good News in the face of so much in our history that had been less than Good News. Currently, we are at the tender, beginning stages of building a strong foundation on the rock of justice and compassion, with the focus on healing and reconciliation.

In order for any community to be vibrant and alive, relationships have to be strong. It has become clear that in order for reconciliation and right relationships to happen between peoples, they need to come together to get to know, and to learn from, one another.

Many of the people in our community have lived through the painful experiences of residential schools or have been affected inter-generationally. Building relationships of trust and reconciliation has been important. It takes a lot of time to nurture the kind of trust that is the foundation of all good relationship.

Ceremony and Presence

In our experience, the resurgence of Indigenous ceremonies is one of the strongest signs of the dawning of this new era of Good News. Indigenous and Christian ceremonies alike give us opportunities to address life's struggles, difficulties and questions, many in relation to faith and spirituality, and to heal. Indigenous Elders working with us have consistently stressed that the best way to get to know Indigenous people is to participate in their ceremonies.

Coming together in ceremony and to address common personal and social concerns, we are discovering the importance of simply being present to one another. People often underestimate the value of presence but we are finding that it is making a powerful difference in our lives. In listening and being present to one another, more and more members of our community have begun to open up about painful experiences in our lives. We have entered into a healing journey together.

Cross-Cultural Life-Sharing

This healing journey is a cross-cultural undertaking. We are getting to know one another's Indigenous and/or Christian ways of understanding and doing things. Our goal is to become equally at home with these ways and the rapidly changing ways of contemporary mainstream culture.

Our gatherings are primarily in the city, and include both traditional Indigenous and Christian events as well as secular events. However, because our urban Indigenous members tend to stay connected to the reserves they come from, or to other reserves in the surrounding area, we often also travel there together to attend different ceremonies and events.

At the heart of our community are our monthly potlucks and sharing circles, where cross-cultural relationships are slowly growing. When families are struggling to negotiate personal and systemic challenges, they can count on one another for support. One young mother seeking to have her children returned to the family home said she never realized how many friends she had in the community.

Members who had never accompanied anyone through such challenges commented on how their eyes were being opened to the ongoing struggles that exist because of our history of residential schools. Another woman said that it is only in the circle that she feels safe to really share her feelings and open up. These are powerful testimonies to the gift that cross-cultural relationship brings.

Our Future

As we move forward, we continue to encourage more people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to become involved, inviting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Elders to work with us.

We have evolved to the point where the original appointed team is morphing toward a new leadership model, the community taking responsibility for itself, its leadership a shared intercultural undertaking. The position of the hired facilitator, fostering the ongoing development of the community, its vision, and its leadership, remains essential and itself seems destined to evolve toward being an intercultural co-facilitation position.

The work of facing the truth and seeking reconciliation and healing is not easy. Without the facilitator's constant invitations, reminders, and encouragement to continue, ANARC could still lose its momentum. Reconciliation requires a full and ongoing commitment. It is clearly going to be a marathon not a sprint!