

Niigaaanibatowaad

FrontRunners



—— Study Guide ——

Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners
Study Guide

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Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners

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Introduction

A Word from the Writers

Hi, our names are Dixie Shilling and Adele Finney. We live about 30 kilometres from one another in south central Ontario—Dixie, an Aboriginal woman, on Curve Lake Reserve and Adele, a non-Aboriginal woman, in Peterborough. The Anglican, Presbyterian, and United Churches contracted us to write a discussion guide for the DVD *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners*. We watched it together, met in each other's homes, talked on the phone and over tea, facilitated focus groups to help us learn how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people respond to the film, and wrote this guide together.

During this time, we have met some of each other's family members and told each other stories. We are becoming friends. That is part of what watching and talking about *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners* is about. When you meet and talk in a group setting, you will also experience the beginnings of friendship.

The Anglican, Presbyterian, and United Churches' hope, in supporting the work of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is that there will be no church members who say, "I never knew," and no residential school survivors who have not had a chance to tell their story. This DVD and study guide are one way the churches are raising awareness, both about residential schools and about how the churches are responding and encouraging the building of right relations.

The DVD and Related Productions

Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners (pronounced Nih-gahn-ee-BAHT-oh-wadt: Frunt-Ruhn-erz) is a memory play narrated by the main character, Thomas, an Aboriginal residential school survivor now in his 50s. He has been invited by the organizers of the 1999 Pan Am Games to finish a run with the Games' torch that abruptly ended 400 metres too early in 1967. The invitation revives memories and finally, after a painful confrontation, he realizes that finishing the run is the first step on the path of healing.

This 46-minute DVD, a filmed, shortened version of the play, is based on true stories told to playwright and filmmaker Laura Robinson by the 1967 Pan Am Games torchrunners. *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners* premiered on APTN in November 2007 and screened at the 2007 Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival.

For further information about the producers, director, actors, and film, please visit the National Film Board's website (www3.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/index.php?id=56288). A trailer is available online. Go to the Buffalo Gal Pictures website (www.buffalogalpictures.mb.ca/production/television/front_runners) or select "Frontrunners" under Subscriptions on the United Church's YouTube channel (www.youtube.ca/unitedchurchofcanada).

You can order a copy of the play from Brucedale Press (www.bmts.com/~brucedale). Keep in mind that groups wishing to perform the play would need the playwright's permission and, if they charge for the performance, pay a performance fee.

Our Experience in Focus Groups

Watching the DVD *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners* evokes strong feelings including shame, remorse, anger, anxiety, humour, and hope. It inspires many questions.

Each focus group has been different. In the sharing circles, employees of residential schools spoke of their experiences and feelings. Aboriginal communities heard survivors' stories and learned names of residential school survivors whom they had not known had attended the schools. After understanding what an evil teacher can be like, teenaged Aboriginal students thanked their language and Traditional teachers. Trying to make sense of the painful legacy of residential schools, non-Aboriginal participants asked many questions about history, policy, and responsibility. Some people walked away from the circle and returned. We learned at one focus group that an Aboriginal community was building a memorial to residential school survivors alongside their veterans' war cenotaph.

Thanks

We thank the Curve Lake, Shawanaga, and Wasauksing First Nations, members and young adult allies of St. John's Anglican Church, and the Truth and Reconciliation Support Group in Peterborough for their hospitality, hearts, and words.

Facilitating a Discussion

We recommend working with a co-facilitator to plan and lead a discussion group about *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners*. We cannot say how much we have learned from and supported each other as we planned, prepared, led, and debriefed group screenings and discussions. As an Aboriginal woman and a non-Aboriginal woman, we have also modelled relationship within the group. Wherever possible, if you can have co-facilitators who are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, it is certainly worth trying.

Putting this guide together has been an ecumenical project—between the writers, among staff of the Anglican, Presbyterian, and United Churches, and in focus groups. As you gather a group to watch *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners*, consider planning the discussion with a neighbouring church or following up with ecumenical action.

For this discussion, listening and speaking from the heart are what is most important, so please don't take notes or use a recording device or flip chart.

Preparing for a Fruitful Discussion

1. *Provide information to participants on content of the DVD before they view it.* The first paragraph under The DVD and Related Productions (p. 4) is a brief description of the content. Announcements, advertising, and personal invitations to a discussion group should include a note that the DVD has scenes of implied physical and sexual abuse and may not be suitable for children under 14.
2. *Have the correct equipment available and in working order.* You will need either a large screen television with DVD-playing capability or attached DVD player, or a computer connected to a projector that will project onto a large screen or light-coloured wall, and speakers. All but one of our focus groups grappled with technical difficulties, so setting up the equipment and practising using it is *essential*. Having a "techie" available to set up and start the DVD is the best solution.
3. *Have sacred medicines available for an Aboriginal or mixed Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal group if participants express a need for them.* For Aboriginal facilitators or participating Elders: Whenever you smudge or use a sacred medicine, please provide an explanation or teaching of what you are doing. For a smudge you can tell everyone that sweetgrass or sage—whatever you are using—is a sacred medicine used to cleanse our minds, hearts, and spirit, and that reflective jewellery or glasses must be removed because they can reflect the good spirit away from you. Explain that you use the smoke as if it were soap and water. Scrub your hands and splash your face so your mouth will speak good things. Splash your ears so you will hear good things, and splash your head so your mind will be clean and open. Splash your heart so you will be respectful. You can explain that people are not required to take part in the smudge but can pass by if they wish.
4. *Explain the use of the circle and feather (or rock) for speaking.* We refer to the feather as a "talking feather" and it is used as a sign of respect. The feather comes from the Eagle who acts as a messenger from the Great Spirit. Therefore when you are holding a feather you have the ability to be a messenger. Only the person holding the feather is to talk, thus people are not talking on top of each other. Everyone's opinion is valuable, no matter what the person is saying, and we must listen with respect.

Practice varies among Aboriginal peoples as to which way the feather moves around the circle. Among the Ojibway and Cree the feather moves to the left; you begin with one person and move to the person on the left when handing over the feather. You speak while holding the feather and *each participant is given as long a time as needed to say what they intend to say without interruption*. Each person must pick up the feather even if all they wish to say is "I pass."

5. *A multitude of emotions expressed by participants may require additional pastoral support.*¹ The task of facilitators showing the film in a group is to provide a safe place for people to respectfully name and listen to responses, questions, fears, and hopes for starting a journey through shame and anger to hope. It is impossible to say what might happen in a particular group, as so much depends on what knowledge and experience of residential schools and of racism and its dynamics each person brings to the circle.
6. *Answer questions about the history of residential schools and government policy, and the churches' responses, and direct participants to further resources.* While facilitators need to prepare themselves by watching the film beforehand, reflecting on it, and considering this guide, they do not need to have all the answers. Please see *The Indian Residential School System: A Brief Historical Overview* (p. 14) and the other further information and resources at the back of the study guide.
7. *Organize additional sessions if the group feels the need.* We strongly suggest that viewing and discussing this film be one in a series of learning events, so there will be time and space to reflect further, learn more, or take action. Follow-up questions on page 9 may provide the basis for a second viewing and discussion of *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners*. Also see *Suggestions for Further Action* (p. 17) for possibilities.
8. *Understand, view, and discuss the story as a ministry of reconciliation and "frontrunning."* In 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, Paul encourages the Corinthians to understand themselves as ministers and messengers of reconciliation:

God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...has given us the ministry of reconciliation...entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making [an] appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Feeling, naming, and hearing the difficult truths of residential schools are first steps toward renewed relations and are part of the ministry of reconciliation. So are critical analysis and "living the apology" through friendship and solidarity. Church members who participate in honest sharing, thoughtful listening, and a change in behaviour open a path for their broader communities to do the same during the work of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Gathering

We suggest the following format for watching and discussing *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners*; you will need 2½–3 hours. Have ready for the discussion:

Non-Aboriginal groups:

- DVD and previously prepared and tested equipment to view it
- Copies for each participant of *Stones* (p. 10), *A Response from Turtle Island First Nation, 2008* (pp. 11–12), and *Remembering the Children Prayer* (p. 13). Pass them out separately at the appropriate time in the discussion.
- Talking stone
- Refreshments

¹ The subject matter of the DVD may "trigger" reactions for some viewers (i.e., they may suffer trauma caused by remembering or reliving past abuse). A National Indian Residential School Crisis Line (1-866-925-4419) has been set up by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to provide support for former residential school students to access emotional and crisis referral services. The crisis line also offers information on how to get other health supports from the Health Canada Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program.

FOR FACILITATORS

Groups with Aboriginal Elder present:

- DVD and previously prepared and tested equipment to view it
- Sacred medicines (optional)
- Talking feather
- Refreshments
- Copies for each participant of Remembering the Children Prayer (p. 13)

You may wish to have copies available after the discussion of *The Indian Residential School System: A Brief Historical Overview of* (p. 14) and/or *Resources for Further Learning about Indian Residential Schools* (p. 16).

Open the Circle—15 to 30 minutes

OPENING PRAYER by Elder, priest, minister, or facilitator:

For groups with an Aboriginal Elder present:

- Smudging with explanation (optional, see *Preparing for a Fruitful Discussion*, note 3, p. 6)

INTRODUCTIONS in a circle of chairs:

Facilitators introduce themselves and give an overview of the evening.

For non-Aboriginal groups and groups without a “talking feather”:

- Stones may be used to create an atmosphere of respect and listening. Hand the “talking stone” around the circle while reading *Stones* (p. 10) aloud.

All groups:

- A facilitator introduces the circle (see *Preparing for a Fruitful Discussion*, note 4, p. 6) and the “talking stone” or “talking feather” that will indicate whose turn it is to speak.
- Participants can practise using the circle by passing the stone or feather around the circle, introducing themselves, and sharing one thing they want the group to know about them.

Watch the DVD—46 minutes

When everyone has had a chance to talk and introduce themselves, arrange the chairs for good viewing and watch the DVD *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners*.

Intermission—15 minutes

After watching the DVD have an intermission with snacks, tea and coffee, and water or juice. Give participants time to mingle and talk, or to sit quietly. Rearrange the chairs into a circle.

Discuss—60 minutes (for 2½-hour gathering) to 95 minutes (for 3-hour gathering)

Ask the following questions, passing the feather or stone around the circle after each question for participants to respond. The first two questions give participants an opportunity to express their feelings and raise questions:

1. What feelings did you experience while watching *Niigaanibatowaad: FrontRunners*?
2. What questions arose for you while watching the DVD?

FOR FACILITATORS

For non-Aboriginal or mostly non-Aboriginal groups:

After the first two questions, pass out copies of *A Response* from Turtle Island First Nation, 2008 (pp. 11–12) to all the participants. Explain that First Nations people have given permission to share their responses to the film. Names have been changed. Ask participants in the circle to take on one of the reading roles, and after all roles are assigned, ask them to read it out loud, like a play, taking as much time as they need. At the end of the reading, allow the group to be quiet for a moment before asking these next questions:

3. You have just spoken in a different voice from within a different community. What was that like?
4. What does this experience tell you about how you interpret what you see and hear about Aboriginal communities and people?

For Aboriginal or mostly Aboriginal groups:

Our experience in Aboriginal focus groups suggests that questions 1 and 2 offer participants a way to talk about the strong feelings and memories the film evokes, and that the circle provides a way to talk with one another. No further questions have been necessary.

Close the Circle—10 to 15 minutes

CLOSING WORDS—To give the participants opportunity to summarize their experience of the discussion, ask:

- What has your heart told you in this circle?
- What is our next step forward? (*optional*)

CLOSING PRAYER—Pass out copies of *Remembering the Children Prayer* (p. 12) and ask participants to pray it aloud, together, to close the circle.

Follow-up Questions for a Second Viewing and Further Discussion (Optional)

- Of the six characters in the play, which one did you most like? Why?
- Which character did you most dislike? Why?
- What might God be saying to you through these two characters?

Some people (mostly non-Aboriginal) who have viewed *Niigaanibatowaad: Frontrunners* in focus groups have been arrested or overwhelmed by the personal stories of Thomas, Michael, and Rose, and their relationship with the residential school principal. But there is a wider, societal context in which their personal stories take place (1967–99), which continues to the present day. The following questions may help name some of the structural, cultural, and environmental roots:

- What are the elements in the dominant Canadian culture that created this story? Are they still present today?
- What might it mean to be a “frontrunner” in the social, spiritual, and political contexts in which we find ourselves?

Stones

An introductory responsive reading before using a “talking stone.” A talking stone may be used in the circle by non-Aboriginal groups or groups meeting without a talking feather.

Facilitator: This stone comes from (*name of river, First Nation, residential school, or place from which the stone was gathered*).

Participants: It is part of the Earth, formed by the Creator, just as we are.

Facilitator: Jesus said stones would cry out if humans remained silent.

Participants: We will listen to our hearts and speak from them.

Facilitator: Stones like this have marked graves.

Participants: Jesus rose out of death into a new life and the stone was rolled away from his grave.

Facilitator: Stones like these mark paths for those who journey.

Participants: This stone in our hands will mark the way we journey toward right relationships.

Facilitator: Like words and broken trust, stones can be used to break apart, hurt, and injure.

Participants: In our hands this stone will be a sign of the strength of what we can build together.

This liturgy draws from the following passages of scripture:

Genesis 1:1: In the beginning... God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void.

Luke 19:39–40: Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Matthew 27:59–60: So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock.

Joshua 4:3: “Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan...and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.”

Jeremiah 31:21: Set up road markers for yourself, make yourself guideposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went.

1 Peter 2:4–5: Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...

A Response from Turtle Island First Nation, 2008

Turtle Island is the translation of the term for the continent of North America in many Aboriginal languages. First Nations people have given permission to share their responses to the film. Names have been changed. If your group is primarily non-Aboriginal, read the following dialogue aloud, like a play, dividing the roles among participants in the circle.

Readers (*All from Turtle Island First Nation, except Albert*):

Elder Shirley, Chief Joe's aunt
Chief Joe
Patsy, Chief Joe's wife
Violet, residential school survivor, sister to Lance and Ralph
Lance, residential school survivor, older brother to Violet and Ralph
Ralph, residential school survivor, younger brother to Violet and Lance
Albert, from a neighbouring First Nation
Nancy
Cathy
Elder Bob

- Facilitator: What feelings did you experience while you were watching the DVD?
- Elder Shirley: It was hard, sad. My uncle had four girls in a school. Three died; only one came home. They said they died from TB, but my grandparents didn't believe that. It leaves hatred in you. I can feel the hurt inside. They pretended they were God's servants.
- Chief Joe: The first time I watched it I had mixed feelings: the joy of runners competing, along with frustration and anger in oneself, especially about Rose. It's still ongoing; we're still wards of the Department of Indian Affairs. I can get very emotional and angry that children were taken away and abused. I had two brothers and two sisters who attended residential school; they haven't returned to the reserve and they didn't speak about their experiences.
- Patsy: It brings up memories of being the only Indian family in a White town. We had to prove ourselves.
- Violet: (*Shakes her head*) I pass.
- Lance: I was told I was going for ice cream, put on a bus, and taken to residential school. I was given a bath and a change of clothes. I was 10 years away from my family. My sister Violet came later but we weren't allowed to see or talk to each other. We ate and dressed well in my family before I left. Ten years later my parents were alcoholics. The alcohol hid pain and anger. I'm ashamed to not live in my home reserve. So much was taken away. I don't go to church, but the Spirit was there with me through residential school and prison. I am stronger than 26 years ago. I can talk now to groups. I need to be institutionalized every so often to get my head straight.
- Ralph: I pass.
- Albert: My great-grandfather was a marathon runner with Tom Longboat in the Boston Marathon. In 1907 they knew residential schools were failing. It took them 60 more years to close them down.
- Nancy: I remember when the children were taken to residential school. They came for Violet at Indian Day School and took her away from our class. It left a little void in each of us. This stirs up so many emotions—is that good or bad?

FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Cathy: I feel like I can't say anything. My mother was Indian. My father was White, so we had to move off the reserve. When I moved into town they said, "You're mother's a dirty Indian and you're a dirty Indian, too." It almost makes me hate...how people have the right to think they were better.
- Elder Bob: My father, who went to residential school, never talked about it. He got his Grade 3, came home, and taught school.
- Chief Joe: Survivors are the ones who have the questions. What can we do? How can we repair the hurt? It all comes back, right here for them, listening. Even an apology is aspirin. It's an ongoing process; it doesn't cure the pain. It's a deep wound. Even discussing the issues, looking in the mirror, brings it back. Each person has a different way of healing. It reminds me of the treatment of Indian veterans when they came back after defending and volunteering for their country. They couldn't go in the front doors of the Legions. There was a big reception for them in the First Nations. Residential school students never had a celebration when they returned.
- Lance: I was Number 39 for 10 years in residential school. I didn't have a name. None of the prisons I was in ever came close to residential school. Survivors want to forget. I settled for \$180,000. The disability program clawed back \$80,000 of it. Elders tell us we're sick. I know I'm sick. I need to talk to someone about my sickness. I can't go back to the reserve; I don't feel anything there.
- Ralph: I've never made it home. Residential school. Children's Aid. Jail.
- Violet: The only reason I stayed on reserve was because I married into the reserve.
- Albert: Why did it all happen? White is right. It's still happening. Why does it take so long to learn from mistakes? The public school system has failed children in not telling them of the contribution of Aboriginal people.
- Nancy: How can we make Turtle Island "home" for Lance, Violet, and Ralph?



Remembering the Children Prayer

(written for the national Aboriginal and church leaders' tour in March 2008)

God of our Ancestors,
who holds the spirits of our grandmothers and grandfathers
and the spirits of our grandchildren,

Remembering the Children,
we now pledge ourselves to speak the Truth,
and with our hearts and our souls
to act upon the Truth we have heard
 of the injustices lived, of the sufferings inflicted,
 of the tears cried, of the misguided intentions imposed,
 and of the power of prejudice and racism
which were allowed to smother the sounds and laughter of
the forgotten children.

Hear our cries of lament
for what was allowed to happen, and for what will never be.

In speaking and hearing and acting upon the Truth
may we as individuals and as a nation
meet the hope of a new beginning.

Great Creator God
who desires that all creation live in harmony and peace,

Remembering the Children
we dare to dream of a Path of Reconciliation
 where apology from the heart leads to healing of the heart
 and the chance of restoring the circle,
 where justice walks with all,
 where respect leads to true partnership,
 where the power to change comes from each heart.

Hear our prayer of hope,
and guide this country of Canada
on a new and different path.
Amen.

The Indian Residential School System: A Brief Historical Overview

The practice of removing Aboriginal children from their homes and sending them to Indian Residential School began as early as 1820. Various Roman Catholic entities, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the Methodists and Presbyterians were all involved in establishing schools for Aboriginal children. They saw the education, “civilizing,” and conversion of Native children as important missionary work. The Methodists in particular held to the principle of free public schooling as the birthright of every citizen.

As settlement expansion and nation building intensified, colonizing settlers began to view Aboriginal peoples as a “problem”—an obstacle to acquiring land and resources and to the spread of “civilization.” In 1842, the Bagot Commission recommended farm-based boarding schools as a means of assimilation. In 1879, an official government delegation visited the United States to see how they were handling the “Indian problem.” The resulting Davin Report’s recommendation was adopted: that residential industrial schools be implemented in Canada as a policy of “aggressive civilization.” In 1892 an Order in Council officially established Canada’s Indian Residential School system. School attendance of Native children up to age 15 became compulsory in 1920. The acceptance of Métis children to residential schools was largely a “grey” policy area and an operational decision of the churches.

With rare exceptions, the churches accepted the national policy of forced assimilation. They entered into contracts with the federal government to operate the schools with per capita grants for status Indians and Inuit. This arrangement prevailed until 1957. The churches regularly complained that funding was inadequate and was considerably less than that dedicated to the education of non-Aboriginal children.

Between 1820 and 1969, the Anglican Church administered about three dozen Indian residential schools. The Methodist and Presbyterian churches had been establishing schools since 1849. In 1925, the new United Church of Canada (composed of the Methodist, Congregational, and many Presbyterian churches) assumed responsibility for a dozen or so institutions. The remaining Presbyterian Church in Canada retained operation of two schools. About 70 percent of the schools were operated by Roman Catholic orders or dioceses. In 1948 there were a total of 72 residential schools housing 9,368 students.

The Indian Residential Schools were part of a system that was underfunded, isolated, and influenced by cultural assumptions of the day. Children were forbidden to speak their own languages and were not taught the traditions and culture of their home Nations. It was not uncommon for children to be away from their families and villages for years. Many suffered physical, emotional, and intellectual deprivation, as well as physical and sexual abuse. The death rate was high in the early 1900s, due largely to tuberculosis and other epidemics.

Most of the students recall their school experiences with pain and anger, though some have fond memories, and still others speak positively of their education. However, the high rates of violence, alcoholism, crime, incarceration, unemployment, sexual abuse, post-traumatic stress, depression, and suicide within Aboriginal communities and subsequent generations are often attributed to the “residential school legacy.” Also, the legacy significantly crippled the ability of First Nations people to act as loving and adequate parents, leading to the 1960s and 1970s “scoop”—another mass removal of Aboriginal children for foster care and adoption into mostly non-Aboriginal homes.

Soon after the residential school system was established in 1892, a few prophetic voices began to claim that the schools were failing spiritually, academically, and vocationally. Those voices grew stronger during World War II, and led to most church involvement ending in 1969. The last government-operated Indian Residential School was closed in 1996, in the same year that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples revealed the harmful structural elements of the institutional culture. An estimated 80,000 former residential school students were still alive in 2005.

Ecumenical Steps Taken toward Restoring Right Relationship

Since the 1960s, the Anglican, Presbyterian, and United Churches have worked within their governance and membership, and together, to face their complicity in the residential school legacy and to move toward restoring right relationships with Aboriginal peoples.

On June 21, 2007, representatives of Canadian church organizations marked the 20th anniversary of the signing of “A New Covenant: Towards the Constitutional Recognition and Protection of Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada” (http://home.istar.ca/~arc/english/new_cov_e.html) and renewed their commitment to it. The covenant, originally signed in 1987, pledges the church organizations to support Aboriginal peoples in Canada in their struggle for justice and self-determination. Other significant ecumenical steps include these:

- Churches were specifically named in the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/rcc-eng.asp) for their role in advocacy and healing, and for having the greatest potential to foster awareness and understanding in realizing a renewed relationship with Aboriginal peoples.
- Churches have individually offered formal apologies (www.rememberingthechildren.ca/partners/documents/ApologiesfromChurches.pdf) to Aboriginal peoples for the harm caused by the system of Indian Residential Schools in which churches were complicit.
- In 2001, the churches collected over 50,000 signatures on the Jubilee Petition on Aboriginal Land Rights calling on the Prime Minister of Canada to “act immediately to establish a truly independent commission with the mandate to implement Aboriginal land, treaty and inherent rights.”
- In 2002, the churches worked with the Native Women’s Association of Canada to launch the Sisters in Spirit campaign (www.nwac-hq.org/en/background.html) to draw attention to the issue of violence against Aboriginal women in Canada.
- In 2003, churches joined to raise awareness and express opposition to the First Nations Governance Act (Bill C-7) (www.parl.gc.ca/common/bills_ls.asp?Parl=37&Ses=2&Is=c7), which threatened to unilaterally impose legislation that would affect Aboriginal rights.
- Churches united in 2006 to support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html) through petitions and presentations, in the face of the opposition of the Canadian government, and continue to press for its adoption by Canada.
- In 2007, the churches were signatory to the court-approved Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca) negotiated between legal counsel for former students, the churches, the Government of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations, and other Aboriginal organizations.
- In 2007, the Anglican, United, and Presbyterian Churches with some Roman Catholic representation formed an Ecumenical Working Group on Residential Schools. They urged the government to offer an apology sooner rather than later. On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, made a Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools, on behalf of the Government of Canada (www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo).

The Ecumenical Working Group has also protested the federal Heritage cuts to funding the restoration of Aboriginal languages, and the inadequate funding of Aboriginal education today. It has also supported the campaign of the Assembly of First Nations to Make Poverty History and the enactment of the Kelowna Accord.

The group is actively preparing congregations and all Canadians for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (www.trc-cvr.ca) established on June 1, 2008, as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. It hosted the Remembering the Children national Aboriginal and church leaders’ tour in March 2008 (www.rememberingthechildren.ca), and continues to plan for participation in the national and community-based events.

Resources for Further Learning about Indian Residential Schools

Churches' Residential Schools Pages

The Anglican Church of Canada (www2.anglican.ca/rs)

The Presbyterian Church in Canada (www.presbyterian.ca/ministry/justice/healing)

The United Church of Canada (www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools)

Remembering the Children: An Aboriginal and Church Leaders' Tour to Prepare for Truth and Reconciliation (www.rememberingthechildren.ca)

Recommended Books

Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008).

Miller, J.R., *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

Milloy, John S., *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1999).

Study Guides

The Anglican Church of Canada

A New Agape: The Resource Binder provides stories and ideas as tools to help in the process of righting relations between First Nations Anglicans and the rest of the church. (www2.anglican.ca/im/newagape)

The Presbyterian Church in Canada

The Healing and Reconciliation Liturgical Kit contains educational and worship resources: sermon illustrations, liturgy, and bulletin inserts. (www.presbyterian.ca/webfm_send/609)

The United Church of Canada

Toward Justice and Right Relationship: A Beginning is a study guide and video/DVD for church groups to explore the legacy of residential schools and forge new relationships with First Nations peoples. Order from UCRD (www.united-church.ca/sales/ucrd/order or 1-800-288-7365).

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

In Peace and Friendship: A New Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples is meant for group learning about the spirit and intent of treaties and the original hopes for Aboriginal–newcomer relations. Order from KAIROS (www.kairoscanada.org/en/publications/order-form or 1-877-403-8933 ext. 221).

Suggestions for Further Action

- Learn about the history of the land on which you live and work. Whose land is it? Is it under treaty and/or claim? Visit the National Association of Friendship Centres website (www.nafc-aboriginal.com) to see if there's a Native Friendship Centre near you. Learn about the issues in your area and consider advocating with your MP.
- Look for alternative news sources and learn to listen with a different ear. Web links on the KAIROS site are one place to start (www.kairoscanada.org/en/solidarity/aboriginal-rights/links-indigenous); another is joining the KAIROS Indigenous rights list—to sign up, contact Ed Bianchi, KAIROS Aboriginal Rights Program Coordinator (ebianchi@kairoscanada.org).
- There are a number of sources for films such as *FrontRunners*—consider holding a film festival. The National Film Board has an excellent selection of films on Aboriginal rights and cultures (www3.nfb.ca/sections/educational-resources); and the United Church's Audio Visual Education Library (AVEL) outlets (www.united-church.ca/contact/avel) are an affordable source of videos that have been cleared for public performance. For a First Nations videography, go to the United Church Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario website (www.mnwo.united-church.ca) and click on the AVEL icon.
- Form an Aboriginal rights group. Regardless of your background, you can help support a renewed, right relationship between First Peoples and newcomers. KAIROS has a cross-Canada network of such groups (www.kairoscanada.org/en/solidarity/aboriginal-rights/action-aboriginal-rights).

Additional Information for United Church Audiences

- *The Healing Fund* (www.united-church.ca/funding/healing): This fund was established in 1994 to support innovative, effective healing programs in Aboriginal communities to help address the impacts of residential schools. See the website for criteria, a listing of approved projects, an application form, and how to make donations. About \$350,000 is distributed each year at two meetings of the Healing Fund Council.
- *Justice and Reconciliation Fund* (www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/relationships/fund): This fund was established in 2000 to support projects initiated largely by church bodies that foster dialogue, reconciliation, and relationship-building between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. See the website for criteria, the application process, and sample projects. Up to \$75,000 is distributed each year as applications are received.
- *Living into Right Relations Covenant Groups*: In May 2008, 88 participants, equal numbers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples from each of the 13 Conferences, gathered at Pinawa, Manitoba, to explore what is needed to begin to understand each other and to work toward living in harmony together on Turtle Island. They covenanted to walk together for the next five years, during the same time period as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Call your local Conference office to learn what the Living into Right Relations group is doing in your region.
- *Residential Schools Steering Committee and Staff*: The Executive of the General Council created the Residential Schools Steering Committee in June 1998. The committee's role is to "coordinate all aspects of the issues related to residential schools, including the legal, pastoral, communications, alternate resolution possibilities and healing initiatives, and financial planning." The committee is made up of representatives from each of the B.C. Native Ministries Council, the All Native Circle Conference, and Ontario/Quebec independent Aboriginal congregations, as well as the Moderator, the General Secretary, a member of the Executive of the General Council Office, and staff. Steering committee staff may be contacted at irs@united-church.ca.
- *Residential Schools Update Newsletter* (www.united-church.ca/communications/newsletters/residentialschools): The Residential Schools Steering Committee publishes a quarterly newsletter to update United Church audiences on the ongoing efforts to respond to the legacy of residential schools and to build right relations.
- *Aboriginal Ministries Circle*: In January 2009, the Aboriginal Ministries Circle was established. The Circle's role is to work in partnership with the United Church toward the Aboriginal peoples' vision of spiritual healing, stewardship, and economic well-being. The Circle's vision of community extends beyond the church to building on the gifts and contributions of their people and building the capacity of the Aboriginal pastoral charges, presbyteries, and Conference so they can minister to the people. This work will also help the United Church to move toward understanding Aboriginal spirituality and community.
National Aboriginal Spiritual Gatherings to take place at least every three years will provide an opportunity to share and nurture the vision of the Aboriginal Ministries Circle. The Aboriginal Council will be a decision making body taking direction from the National Aboriginal Spiritual Gatherings and will send work to the Executive of the General Council. Staff will be employed for the Circle and will reflect the values inherent in the Seven Sacred Teachings.

United Church Print Resources

The following are available from UCRD (www.united-church.ca/sales/ucrd).

- Towards Justice and Right Relationship: A Beginning (with DVD)
- That All May Be One: A Resource for Educating toward Racial Justice
- Ending Racial Harassment: Creating Healthy Congregations
- Circle and Cross: Dialogue Planning Tool