

## Truth & Reconciliation Doorways

How can I contribute to the process of truth and reconciliation with Indigenous People in Canada? What do I need to learn? What do I need to do? These are the kinds of questions a lot of us at BMC are asking, and the answers are not always clear.

Each year, people at BMC pass through a variety of doorways ~ passages that provide some next steps in working towards truth and reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours. This year, the BMC Truth & Reconciliation Working Group has put together another series of seven doorways for people in our congregation. These seven doorways provide a range of experiences in *learning* and *doing* that will help us in this important work.

What if everyone in our church decided, in the next year, to go through at least one of these doorways? Let's find out.

### Doorway 1: Support the Grand River Water Walk

The All Nations Grand River Water Walk is an Anishinaabe ceremony of love and prayer for Nibi (water) along the entire length of the Grand River. This annual ceremony is open to people of all nations. This year the water walk will take place from September 21 – 26. There are many ways that you can support this water walk:

- Preparing the fundraising dinner: Men are invited to help with cooking and set up for the annual water walk fundraising dinner at Stirling Avenue Mennonite church. This year the dinner will be held on May 3. Do you have some time available on this day?
- Participating in a monthly water ceremony: You are invited to take part in any of the monthly water ceremonies that are held along the Grand River. Ceremonies take place at 8 AM on a Saturday morning at the Otterbein canoe launch near the end of Ottawa Street.
- Monitoring the on-line fundraising auction in August: You can support this important fundraiser by posting a donation and/or bidding. Past offerings have included handmade and purchased items, as well as services like massage, catered meals, and grass-cutting.
- Cooking a meal for the water walkers: Last year people from BMC cooked, delivered and enjoyed an end-of-day feast with water walkers. And what a wonderful feast it was! Can you help us make this a BMC tradition?
- Walking: You can participate for a day or more as a community walker in the water walk. There will be a short training session to learn the protocols of water walking.

#### ***To knock on this door:***

*Put your name beside any options on the attached sign-up sheet that you would like to consider. We will contact you to provide more detailed information to help you take the next steps. You can also sign up by phoning the church office (519-648-2501) on Tuesday or Thursday.*

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### Doorway 2: Participate in a book study group

This year we will be sponsoring two book studies of works by Indigenous authors.

1. *North Wind Man*, by Clarence Cachagee and Seth Ratzlaff

*Back Cover Blurb:* Clarence Cachagee courageously shares his lifelong healing journey and path to becoming a helper. After being raised in foster care by a Mennonite family, and having struggled with addictions and homelessness, Cachagee faces his trauma and finds himself by connecting with his Indigenous culture and accepting the support of community. Weaving in the voices of social workers and family, the book includes words from his late father, Abby, who recorded his experience in Canada's Residential School System. This memoir is co-authored in a spirit of friendship, equality and respect by Seth Ratzlaff.

This book study will take place on Tuesday, May 13. We will begin with a pot luck at 5 PM, and move into discussion of the book while we are eating. Both Clarence and Seth will be able to join us for this event.

2. *Valley of the Birdtail: An Indian Reserve, A White Town, And The Road To Reconciliation*, by Andrew Stobo Sniderman and Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii)

*Back Cover Blurb:* Divided by a beautiful valley and 150 years of racism, the town of Rossburn and the Waywayseecappo Indian reserve have been neighbours nearly as long as Canada has been a country. The story of these communities reflects much of what has gone wrong in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. It also offers, in the end, an uncommon measure of hope. This book follows generations of two families, one Indigenous and one white, weaving their lives into the larger story of Canada. This book is about how two communities became separate and unequal – and what it means for the rest of us.

There is a group of interfaith people in the region who are planning to bring the authors of *Valley of the Birdtail* to the Waterloo Region in the fall. We will plan to have a BMC book study of this book in the fall, and will participate in the larger gathering with the authors if it happens.

#### ***To knock on this door:***

*Sign up for the book study of North Wind Man on the clipboard across from the mailboxes. If you are interested in studying Valley of the Birdtail, sign your name on the attached sign-up sheet. We will contact you to provide more detailed information to help you take the next steps. You can also sign up by phoning the church office (519-648-2501) on Tuesday or Thursday.*

## **Truth & Reconciliation Doorways**

### **Doorway 3: Indigenous Songs in Voices Together**

There are a whole bunch of Indigenous songs in our hymnbook, *Voices Together*. Join a group of music lovers at BMC, who will learn about these songs, find ways to sing, drum and accompany them, and help bring Indigenous music into our musical life at church.

#### **To Knock On This Door:**

*Put your name beside this option on the attached sign-up sheet. We will contact you to provide more detailed information and find out more about how you would like to participate. You can also sign up by phoning the church office (519-648-2501) on Tuesday or Thursday.*

### **Doorway 4: Downtown Kitchener Indigenous Art Walk**

Have you ever noticed the Indigenous art that is located throughout downtown Kitchener? Join a group of folks from BMC, along with a trusted and knowledgeable guide, for an afternoon of artistic exploration. Find out where this art is located and participate in lively conversation about the shades of meaning in these works. Finish the afternoon with the fellowship of a backyard barbecue at a downtown Kitchener household.

#### **To Knock On This Door:**

*Put your name beside this option on the attached sign-up sheet. We will contact you to provide more detailed information about this option as plans come together. You can also sign up by phoning the church office (519-648-2501) on Tuesday or Thursday.*

### **Doorway 5: Living Into Right Relations Newsletter Challenge**

A lot of people say that they don't have many connections to local Indigenous people. Our church receives a monthly newsletter called "Living Into Right Relations" that contains all kinds of information about events and opportunities for people to connect with local Indigenous folks, events and organizations. Our working group plans to provide this newsletter each month to all members of the congregation.

The idea of the *Living Into Right Relations Monthly Challenge* is for a group of people to commit themselves to trying at least one thing from the newsletter each month or two. This group would gather occasionally to talk about what they have done and what they have learned, and perhaps share some of these connections with the church.

#### **To Knock On This Door:**

*Put your name beside this option on the attached sign-up sheet. We will contact you to set up an initial meeting of participants, at which time we can further shape the nature of this challenge. You can also sign up by phoning the church office (519-648-2501) on Tuesday or Thursday.*

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### **Doorway 6: A Walk Towards Truth**

*A Walk Towards Truth* is a reflective fundraising walk on behalf of Indigenous survivors, families and communities. You are invited to walk for the children who, by no choice of their own, were forced into residential schools and stripped of everything they once knew. We especially encourage families with children to consider participating in this walk. What better way to learn about Canada's history of residential schools than in this meaningful, embodied commitment towards understanding.

This walk will begin at 9 AM on Saturday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford. This is where the Mohawk Institute Residential School operated from 1831 to 1970. The opening will include reflections from a residential school Survivor. Walkers will continue approximately 19 km to Six Nations, the home of many children who went to this school. The walk is symbolic of the journey children would have taken when escaping the residential school to return to their families. The event will conclude with closing reflections and sharing at Chiefswood Park.

Participants will be supported in many ways before, throughout and after this walk. Shuttle transportation is available for those who cannot finish the entire walk. During the week before walking, participants will join in a zoom call with Mary Anne Caibaiosai, the elder sponsoring the walk, to as a point of orientation. In the week following the event, Mary Anne will help walkers debrief in a similar fashion.

There is a registration fee for individuals or families. People are invited to do additional fundraising around this event, with all proceeds going towards an organization that supports Indigenous youth.

#### **To Knock On This Door:**

*Put your name beside this option on the attached sign-up sheet if you are interested in exploring this option further. We will contact with registration, fundraising and carpooling details, as they become available. You can also sign up by phoning the church office (519-648-2501) on Tuesday or Thursday.*

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### Doorway 7: Strawberry Communion

You're warmly invited to join a Strawberry Thanksgiving & Communion on Saturday, June 14, 2025, from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate.

The Strawberry Thanksgiving & Communion event was inspired and is led by Adrian Jacobs, Ganosono of the Turtle Clan Cayuga Nation, and Senior Leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. For nearly two decades, Adrian has been inviting non-Indigenous Christians in the Haldimand Tract to have meaningful conversations and take real actions together in their churches to help repair relationships and move towards reconciliation. This journey he calls the Spiritual Covenant – choosing to acknowledge Indigenous jurisdiction over lands and paying an annual token lease payment. But it's more than just money—it's about a heartfelt transformation through collective participation.

Last July, more than 160 people from 11 different Christian denominations came together at Six Nations Polytechnic. They celebrated communion, learned about the Spiritual Covenant, shared ideas, and committed to taking action. Participants also enjoyed a lunch with strawberries, which are the first fruit to ripen and a special gift from the Creator in Haudenosaunee culture.

This year, Adrian has the support of a planning team from Mennonite, Christian Reformed, United, and Lutheran churches and organizations. Why not join a contingent of BMC members to learn more about this spiritual covenant and how we might engage with our neighbours at Six Nations in a spirit of truth and reconciliation.

#### **To Knock On This Door:**

*Put your name beside this option on the attached sign-up sheet if you are interested in being part of Strawberry Thanksgiving and Communion. We will be able to direct you to more information about what Adrian Jacobs is proposing and contact you with registration and possible carpooling details, as they become available. You can also sign up by phoning the church office (519-648-2501) on Tuesday or Thursday.*

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Let's go open some doors