

What Can I do?

The past few weeks have heightened our awareness of the atrocities Indigenous People have experienced in Canada. Stories of hurt and pain and loss. Each of us has been affected in some way by these stories and the news releases since the discovery of so many little bodies in Kamloops.

Some are shocked lamenting that they had no idea this happened and feel shame and guilt for not knowing. Others, aware that residential schools were bad, lament that they didn't realize how bad and others relive the trauma that they know to be true.

Whatever our response, each of us as Christians is heartbroken. Immediately the questions come to mind; what can we do? how can we help? We are a caring people; we see the wrong and feel powerless. It was so long ago!

Well let me tell you, I too have these questions but when I was listening to CBC I heard some ideas that made sense. I know they will seem simplistic but it has been a beginning for me. The interviewer suggested that settler people hear the stories and wonder what they can do and the guest said "get informed. Read the documents prepared for government, watch documentaries and listen to Indigenous people speak."

I know that when I went to Oshweken in 1993, I was totally ignorant about reserves or residential schools or really anything about Indigenous people. I was quite nervous because I didn't want to be offensive or for them to find out how little I knew. Truth is, I was welcomed into the community and over the years learned so much. Then we moved and on the Blood reserve I learned about the trauma of residential schools. I saw first-hand families struggling to care for their kids. I saw kids affected by prenatal exposure to alcohol and drugs. But I also saw people committed to healing. Community members reaching out to each other, telling their stories, speaking of hope, showing resilience and speaking of the importance of forgiveness.

Yes, amidst the trauma there is hope. But so much systemic racism still exists and each of us must learn and speak out from a place of knowledge. So I go back to the CBC – get informed and tell others. You can begin today by joining the parish in listening to the Doctrine of Discovery, you can read the Truth and Reconciliation document, you can go the Anglican Church of Canada website where you will find so many resources.

We can't erase the past but we can be part of the future of justice and reconciliation. It begins with you and me. Amen

Helen Wheeler