



A Re-Awakening for our Country

This summer we are slowly shifting away from the isolation we experienced as a country under lockdown for over a year. Slowly we are returning to our work, our communities, our social connections. This should be a time of joy and celebration. Instead, we are in a period of deep mourning. The ongoing discovery of thousands of unmarked graves on residential school grounds points to widespread genocide that has gone on for decades against our Indigenous brothers and sisters. As an editorial team for the Disability Concerns newsletter, we have chosen to pause and acknowledge the devastating reality of the residential school system in Canada. Join us as we lament the loss of so many innocent lives.

—The Disability Concerns Canada Editorial Team

DON'T MISS OUR NEXT ISSUE: FALL 2021

Our next issue will focus on Classis Alberta North - Elly VanAlten and Linda Rosendal will share about their work in this part of Canada and what makes it unique!



We Are All God's Children

The news of the bodies of children buried in unmarked graves at residential schools has had a profound effect on me. Growing up in a part of Ontario that was not close to any Indigenous reservations and in a community, church, and school system that was largely comprised of people of Caucasian descent, meant that I had little contact with Indigenous people or what they suffered through. It wasn't until I moved to Alberta that I first even heard about residential schools, and what I did learn was very limited. So, what I have learned from the media recently about colonialism and how Indigenous people were and continue to be treated is very disturbing to me. It has also brought to my mind that persons with disabilities have a lot in common with Indigenous people in terms of how they are treated.

What do we have in common? First of all, many people make assumptions about both of us. They assume that persons with disabilities aren't able to do many things that they actually are able to do (with some help or flexibility). We call this ableism. Some also make ugly assumptions that most Indigenous men are drug and alcohol abusers and that Indigenous women will perform sex acts for any man who is willing to pay the price. When an Indigenous woman presented herself at a hospital in Montreal recently complaining of severe pain, staff were overheard saying "she's just an Indian and wants drugs." This dear soul died shortly after from the medical condition that caused her pain. It was never investigated.

Persons with disabilities have encountered similar experiences when looking for ways to better control their pain, and it often has nothing to do with a desire for drugs. And, when a person has both Indigenous heritage and lives with

disabilities as well, the resulting discrimination can be even exponentially higher. Many people look at both groups and all they see are persons who are not supposedly perfect like they are, and therefore do not have value. They totally fail to acknowledge that every human being is made in the image of God and is loved by Him.

To confirm that my thinking was on the right track, I spent some time with [Pastor Harold Roscher](#) who heads up the [Native Healing Center in Edmonton](#). Harold was born into a Cree family and was adopted as a child by a Dutch, Christian Reformed family. He is multilingual—he speaks Dutch, English, and Cree. He is dark-skinned and often experienced racism as a child because of the colour of his skin. Well into his adulthood, he felt urged to investigate his Cree heritage, which led him to going to seminary, so that he could minister to the many needs he perceived among his native people. This led to the formation of the Native Healing Center, a place where Indigenous people can share their pain and hopefully heal from it, practice aspects of their culture that are meaningful to them, share their favourite Indigenous foods, and best of all, feel totally accepted. Harold confirmed for me that I was right on track in terms of what persons with disabilities and Indigenous people have in common.

The next time you meet an Indigenous person, strike up a conversation with them. Know that we all have our stories to tell, and in sharing them with each other we can learn from each other, especially how to treat each other with the respect we all deserve. Best of all, this may prove to be an opportunity for healing for someone who has experienced immense abuse and grief in their life. Remember, we are all God's children.

[\(Follow the Native Healing Centre on Facebook\)](#)



CONNECTING WITH OUR REGIONAL ADVOCATES

Introducing Caroline Short

Our journey across Canada takes us to Classis BC North-West for a lovely discussion with regional advocate Caroline Short.

Caroline, who is passionate about sowing seeds of disability awareness and advocacy that are carried forward by others to make a difference, has been a regional advocate for approximately eight years.

Her classis is spread over a large geographic area divided into three regions that represent a range of urban, suburban, and rural communities. The three regions consist of five churches on Vancouver Island, nine in the Lower Mainland, and five in the North-Central part of BC.

This geographical distance is one of her biggest challenges. “The distance in the classis means I can’t visit most of the churches and it is difficult to build relationships with churches.”

As a result, awareness can be hard to come by. “I’ve been grateful for opportunities to visit classis meetings, but it seems not all churches are aware of the ways Disability Concerns can support their church to be a place where everybody belongs and everybody serves.”

However, out of this challenge she sees hope and a deep potential for growth through 1Life, a joint initiative between Classis BC North-West and Classis BC South-East. The initiative coordinates and curates a curriculum of learning events that serve BC churches.

“This initiative will help me reach more people and churches with Disability Concerns resources. I am excited for the openness and vision that the leadership team at 1Life has for equipping BC CRC churches and that they are making a place for Disability Concerns.”

When asked how we as a Disability Concerns community can further support her, she doesn’t hesitate. “Prayers for new opportunities and connections would be appreciated.”

One thing Caroline feels is critical for people to consider is the diversity of disability. It’s easy to think there are no people in your church community who live with disabilities, but she advises everyone to rethink this.

“Disability is a very diverse experience and there are many different kinds of disability—some lifelong and some temporary, some visible and some invisible.”

“Disability is part of life and we ought not be ashamed or afraid of it,” she adds. “When we talk and listen to each other and make changes (big and small!) we can build a church where everybody belongs and everybody serves.”

More information about the 1Life initiative can be found at <https://crc1life.ca/>



OH CANADA, A LAMENT

A Season of Lament

Since May, what Indigenous people had been saying for decades became known all across Canada and could no longer be denied: a horrifically large number of mass graves belonging to Indigenous children have been found at residential schools across the country. Since then, we continue to receive ongoing updates of more graves found at other residential schools. Country-wide, we sit in mourning, confronted by the excruciating reality and the tangible proof of the long-term genocide inflicted against Indigenous people.

As a denomination, as a faith community, as individuals, how do we respond to these atrocities?

As an editorial team, when we reflected on our summer issue, we all noted the deep sense of grief we had been sitting with individually since the end of May. Therefore, as a team, we chose to offer a response to this horrific situation by each offering our own lament. Following our lament, you will find resources, some specific to the denomination and other important resources to help with your own journey.

Lament 1 by Jenna Hoff

O Lord,

The juxtaposition of pain and privilege, of brokenness against an illusion of wholeness, haunts us.

You called us to lives of love—you modelled this by surrendering your very life. And yet, hate became our story.

It crushed—and still crushes—precious lives. Many stagger under the weight of generations of injustice, abuse, and maltreatment. Many others swagger from the benefits systemic racism has handed them.

This too applies to ableism* and many other ways humans categorize one above another.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Weed out the judgement, superiority, pride, self-advancement, and social climbing that contribute to an inequitable, unjust world and give us hearts of empathy, love, gentleness, humility, and compassion.

* **Ableism:** discrimination against people with disabilities based on the notion they are inferior to people with typical abilities.

Lament 2 by Elly VanAlten

Oh Lord, how could this happen in the country so many of us love? How could this happen at the bidding of a government that claims to serve the people of this country? How could this happen at the hands of people who claim you as Lord, just as I do? How could this happen to people who are made in your image, just as all people are?

Lord, my heart cries out at the horrors that were inflicted on Indigenous children for so many years at the residential schools, and that has and continues to impact Indigenous people to this day. “Sorry” will never erase the pain and suffering the families experienced as a result of children’s attendance at these schools. Some of them will never recover from the physical, emotional and sexual abuse they suffered there. Lord, I pray that you will put your healing hand on them, so that they know that you love them and consider them your children. Help us who offer this prayer to hear their stories, to be open to walking with them in their painful journey, and to love them and encourage them along the way. Amen.

Lament 3 by Becky Jones

Creator God,

How do I sit with this sadness? I sit with you beside me, holding my sadness.

I sit on the ground, staring at the earth, reminded of all the young children who lost their lives at the hands of those who called themselves your followers. The children lie in the ground, their families grieving their loss, and there has been no justice for these families.

How do I sit, doing nothing, not knowing how to move, how to identify with a faith that allowed the broken the bodies of ones so young, leaving them lost to their families?

Creator God, you must have wept and indeed still weep, for them and their families. We did not see you crying. Now we join you.

You were the one who wept when so many of us sat, doing nothing. No longer.

Teach us how to move forward, how to stand up, how to share in this deep sadness and how to stand with the people and families that have suffered so much loss.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Search Me, O God](#)

In addition to being the co-editor of our newsletter, Jenna Hoff is a contributor to *The Banner*. She recently wrote this article which calls us all to bring ourselves before God and take a careful look at our own hearts, attitudes, and beliefs.

[Do Justice: A Call to Prayer and Action](#)

The Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation has asked all people in Canada to "acquaint themselves" with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [Calls to Action and final report\(s\)](#). CRC ministries, through our Justice and Reconciliation team, will continue the long journey of reconciliation in commitments to the Calls to Action.

[Hearts exchanged](#)

Do you want to grow in your reconciliation journey in a robust and appreciative way? Hearts Exchanged is now recruiting participants from across Canada to join other Reformed Christians in this learning and action journey. [Learn more in this quick five minute video.](#)

[Spirit Bear's Guide to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action](#)

This is a great way to introduce kids to the truths found in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

For further information, we encourage you to check out [Indigenous Ministries | CRCNA](#).



DISABILITY CONCERNS MINISTRY UPDATE

Disability Concerns Leadership Training Event 2021

This summer brings so much joy and anticipation for the coming year. We are finally able to start reconnecting with friends and family, travel, and consider the reality of what life after a pandemic that shut down our world may look like. For the Disability Concerns ministry, the pandemic offered us a learning opportunity in how we could provide connection and support in an online environment. While we are excited to be able to meet with our communities in person again, offering connections online will definitely continue as we have seen our disability community grow as a result of shifting online this year.

As a ministry, we are looking forward to our leadership training event that will be happening in just a few days: August 11 and 12. As we did last year, we will be hosting this event entirely online. For two days (from 11 am to 2 pm Eastern), our community will come together to explore the conversation: who's missing in my church? This year,

we will engage in ongoing conversations about developing church communities that create accessible spaces for millennials and Gen Z. This generation has grown up with an education system that understands and responds to their needs, but this has not been the case in our churches.

We are excited to hear from our keynote speaker Zoie Sheets, on Wednesday. Zoie is a disabled scholar, speaker, and consultant focused on expanding holistic accessibility and combating ableism. Her areas of expertise include health care, higher education, and faith spaces. She will be speaking about the experience of Gen Z living with a disability and their experience with the church. Anna Radcliffe and Ruth Langkamp will be co-leading the conversation on Thursday. Anna Radcliffe is coordinator for Next Generation Engagement for the Reformed Church in America and Ruth serves as the Next Generation program specialist. Their discussion will focus on insights into what the church needs to do to welcome the presence of younger generations. We will also be hosting a panel discussion each day.

To find out more about the event, including how to register, please be sure to visit our website: <https://bit.ly/whosmissinginmychurch>



DONATE NOW

Thank You for Your Support!

Without monetary support for Disability Concerns, we wouldn't be able to share these stories. To help us make sure that "everybody belongs, everybody serves," would you please consider praying for us and making a financial contribution? It's quick, it's easy, and it's a gracious and beautiful act of obedience.

You can donate to the ongoing work of Disability Concerns at the CRCNA here.

[Donate via the CRCNA](#)

You can donate to the ongoing work of Disability Concerns at the RCA here.

[Donate via the RCA](#)