

May 21-24, 1998, Red River Exhibition, Winnipeg

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Walter Brueggemann once wrote, "ministry is consumed by the daily round of busyness that cannot be ignored; perhaps the daily pressure may be reduced but it cannot be ignored. Second, the ministry most often exists in congregations that are bourgeois, if not downright obdurate and in which there is no special openness to or support of prophetic ministry . . . Rather, prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in light of God's freedom and God's will for justice."¹ In this milieu, the Justice Committee has met twice! A number of task groups have been keenly working on the following justice issues.

Residential Schools Task Group

The Healing Fund: This has been our main concern over the Conference year. With the help of former Residential School students, our members have continued to make presentations in response to a variety of requests. Each presentation has been made on the understanding that the congregation would offer its people the opportunity to give to The Healing Fund. We know that a number of congregations have planned their own presentations, and we believe use has been made of the videos distributed at Conference a year ago. We draw to the attention of all that the Conference Executive has recommended that if we are to meet our goal of \$100,000, the average giving per congregation would have to be \$585.

Places where we have made presentations this past year: Pine Falls, Winnipeg UCW Gathering, Westworth UCW (Winnipeg), Thompson, Assiniboine Presbytery, Immanuel (Winnipeg), Meadowood (Winnipeg), Anola, Fort Frances (Ontario), Roland, Sturgeon Creek (Winnipeg),

¹ The Prophetic Imagination by Walter Brueggemann, 1978, pg. 110 and 112.

Norwood (Winnipeg), Atlantic-Garden City (Winnipeg), Stony Mountain.

Giving totals for The Healing Fund as of February 28, 1998 are \$48,761 from our Conference and \$571,855 nationally.

\$350 million Federal Government Fund: In January 1998, the federal government, with considerable ceremony, and with several Aboriginal leaders present, made a "Statement of Reconciliation", which appears to be an apology for past wrongs and discrimination against Aboriginal people. At the same time, it was announced that a fund of \$350 million would be provided to allow treatment and counselling for victims of abuse in Residential Schools. While our Task Group welcomes this long-delayed action by the government, we believe it does not release the church from its responsibility to respond to needs of those still suffering the effects of their experiences in Residential Schools which we administered.

General Council, August 1997: Action re Residential Schools: General Council passed a motion which included the following: "(3) *(We) express our deep regret and sorrow to the First Nations of Canada for the injustices that were done and for the role of The United Church of Canada in the Native Residential School System, and as part of our expression (we will) write an open letter to the First Nations of Canada;* (4) *continue dialogue and consultation with the First Nations of Canada in order to consider appropriate means to express our repentance and to take further steps along the healing path and towards reconciliation;* (5) *urge individuals, congregations, Presbyteries/Districts/Conferences and Divisions and the Ethnic Ministries Council to learn directly from Native persons about their experiences in Residential Schools and/or to study resources such as those provided by The Healing Fund.*"

Preparing for the Federal Election, June 1997: Some members of the Task Group helped prepare one of the pamphlets issued by our Conference before the election. It was entitled "Relations with Aboriginal Communities",

and drew attention to the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996*.

Offer of Help: We continue to offer help in planning and carrying out presentations on Residential Schools and The Healing Fund. Requests can be made through our staff support person, Roger Coll.

*Respectfully submitted,
Doug McMurtry*

Sexism Committee

It was 1988 and they continued to work, their needles flashing, their work taking form. Stitch by stitch, block by block, a pattern emerging that moved with energy from a new beginning. As news of this work and art began to spread, others joined with their efforts. New ideas, new questions and varied handiwork added to the original concept, evolving into a tapestry of unique texture and shape. The energy of the community continues...

Your committee, consisting of Caryn Douglas, David Illman-White, Ellie Stebner, Deborah Vitt, Bill Doyle and Lynda Trono have met five times in this past year. With David's arrival we now feel more representative of the Conference as a whole. Our evening meetings find us at the home of Caryn, Peter and Tobin, who spoil us with dinner and hospitality. These informal gatherings enable this committee to dine in comfort, laugh a lot and do our work at the same time. Thanks Caryn!

Planning continues for the National Decade gathering, "Daring Hope". Over the past year we have acted as a liaison between two Aboriginal women and the National Planning Committee as they work together in the facilitation of one of the workshops. "Women relating across cultural lines" is the topic and we encourage all who are attending "Daring Hope" to find their way to this workshop. The Sexism Committee has participated in various fundraising activities to establish a

travel bursary fund for those who require financial assistance in attending "Daring Hope". It is not too late to register or to request financial assistance from the committee.

In November of this past year we were pleased to host Juliet Huntley of the Women's Desk of the Division of Mission in Canada. Juliet spent a weekend in 3 Presbyteries: Selkirk, Agassiz and Winnipeg, sharing her passion for the Decade and hearing about ours. It was an important time of naming the ongoing issues and looking beyond 1998. The achievement of the Decade will take us into the next century as we continue to do the work of visioning, education, action and monitoring of the United Church's commitment to the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

Our committee strongly recommends the current Lenten Study booklet, *Roll Away the Stone*, edited by Caryn Douglas and Ted Dodd. The stories for this book were generated at an event held in June 1997 and was facilitated by both Caryn and Ted. The Sexism Committee is aware of the great investment of time and energy by all participants and would like to express our thanks to all involved.

Early in this year our committee met Conference President Allan Saunders to share ideas and thoughts about how best to weave the goals of the Decade into the 1998 Annual Meeting. From this meeting, we agreed to share minutes and work as closely as possible as each committee shared in the vision of the Decade. During his time as President, Allan travelled this Conference sharing stories and songs. Allan consistently lifted up the importance of the use of inclusive language, the importance of naming sexism in our churches and communities, and the importance of recognizing violence against women. Thank you Allan!