

Manitou Conference Minute for Right Relations:



Righting & Re-Writing The Basis of Union and the United Church Crest

A poignant, historical moment at GC41 was the moment of the vote on the proposal for changes to the Basis of Union (documents of merger) and the Crest. When Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches merged in 1925 to create the United Church, there was also a fourth party - our Aboriginal churches. While our Aboriginal family became partners and continued to build with us a United Church ministry, they were not included in the United Church's original Basis of Union or incorporated into the symbolism of the crest.

The 41st GC showed overwhelming support to have statements of inclusion put into the Basis of Union as well as to add the four Aboriginal colors of black, red, white and yellow into the crest. And the words written in Mohawk "Akwe Nia'Tetewá:neren", meaning "all my relations", were included on the crest's edge.

Yet "change" does not capture what really took place. And I didn't get the impact of it until the Moderator stopped us right before the vote and asked the assembly to reflect on what was about to happen...it silenced the room...not the flutter of a page, not a whispered conversation, only stillness. The room was heavy with the weight of righting history at that moment.

This vote was about more than a few "changes" to some wording and symbolism. It was about acknowledgement of a people and a land; about accounting for a history of mistakes and superiority; it was about recognition, welcoming and healing. A moment of inclusion, long overdue, finally brought into being; finally creating, in full, the 1925 circle. This vote was very emotional – it brought tears to my eyes and some of our Aboriginal family, who were present, openly wept.

We shared intimately with our Aboriginal family that week hearing their stories, prayers and music often in one of several Aboriginal languages; and together we praised and gave thanks to our Creator.

By Brenda McLay, Delegate to General Council 41