



Mission Matters !!

*A newsheet connecting the North Bay & Area Mission Cluster
with United Church people of faith
Issue #1 – May 2020*

GREETINGS ... The North Bay & Area UC Mission Cluster believe that “participating in God’s mission is to bring new life, health and healing to all of creation—to people, the earth, and to other institutions and social structures.” (D.Marshall, EXCHANGE, 1997)

We have chosen 3 areas for study & action: Systemic Racism, including reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; the Climate Crisis; and Mental Health and Wellness. In this first issue of “Mission Matters,” our focus is solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en.

– Teresa Jones, on behalf of the Cluster

WHY WET’SUWET’EN SOLIDARITY

MATTERS! ... Only two months ago, here in the North Bay area, many of us rallied in support of the hereditary chiefs of the Wet’suwet’en First Nation. They are resisting the Coastal GasLink pipeline, just as many of us, for years, resisted the Energy East pipeline. More solidarity events were planned, with the support of this Mission Cluster (along with many other regional and national faith groups) when a pandemic intervened.

Why would we do this? The Wet’suwet’en themselves are not of one mind: many elected chiefs support the pipeline while the hereditary chiefs are firmly against it. Furthermore, the currently disputed pipeline is on the other side of the country.

It is because of our faith. The United Church of Canada has twice told our Indigenous brothers and sisters that we are sorry. We apologized for being blind to their spirituality in 1986; and we apologized for the Indian Residential Schools in 1998. Both times we admitted that we had been wrong. In the first case, we did not understand or cherish their deep respect for the sacredness of Mother Earth. In the second, we colluded with the federal government’s efforts to assimilate Indigenous children; in effect, to sever the connection to their land that makes them passionately defend it.

But we have repented. Publicly. Twice. Repentance means turning around. So we wrote the promise “to live with respect in Creation” into our creed, we paid compensation for the residential schools, and we began to work on healing from our arrogance by studying and listening.

Our public presence at solidarity events flows from that repentance. We now understand that we are obligated to stand with the Wet’suwet’en when they defend the Morice River against a pipeline, just as we defended Trout Lake. We also understand more clearly that we are all treaty people. The treaty in question here is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which demands “free, prior and informed consent” in matters affecting them. The UCC has both approved this declaration, and agreed to integrate it into the fabric of our being. The Wet’suwet’en have not consented to the CGL pipeline; in fact, they need time to come to consensus as a nation before any decision about it can be made. We support their right to take the time they require.

There is one more crucial piece to the history we share with the Wet’suwet’en and other First Nations. These recent wide-spread solidarity events ended when a pandemic drove us into the safety of our homes. In some church-run residential schools, Indigenous children died from a much earlier epidemic, tuberculosis. They were taken from their homes and did not return. We — as Christians — cannot be silent while Coastal GasLink continues to send construction workers from other parts of Canada and the world, into Wet’suwet’en territory. In a pandemic, it risks the health of all concerned. We live in Northern Ontario, far away. But we are members of the United Church of Canada. We have to listen and learn and speak up. Because we have promised — twice — that we would do better. ✦

– Donna Sinclair, North Bay

For more information and suggestions for action, check out the resource-filled tool kit at:
<https://unistoten.camp/supportertoolkit2020/>