

Minute for Right Relations
May 2022

This month's Minute for Right Relations has been written by Catherine Somerville, Minister at St. Stephen's on the Hill in Sudbury. She recently received a valuable teaching from a member of her community of faith and shared it with us. The Right Relations Team is grateful for her willingness to share this with us.

Last week, I received a teaching from Tom, a member of our community of faith. Tom is Cree. He asked me if I shake people's hands.

"Yes, I do."

"How do you do that?", he asked.

"Well, I never thought about it. I guess I reach out my hand and shake, two or three times. I like a firm handshake."

Here is Tom's lesson. A firm handshake offered to a First Nations person can be seen as threatening. Think back to the days of residential school and the sixties scoop. Someone in authority would come in, introduce themselves, shake hands and then say that they were taking a family's children away.

In First Nations culture, a handshake is gentler, without any presumption of authority. Indigenous people shake hands to build relationships, not to take anything away.

When we are able to shake hands again, post-pandemic, you may want to think about how you approach someone, and how you shake someone's hand. May our gestures of welcome be comfortable enough for all people, building strong and lasting connections, one with another.

Submitted by Catherine Somerville, on behalf of Living in Right Relations, CSRC

Catherine has served in ministry for 35 years, now working very part-time, back at St. Stephen's on the Hill in Sudbury, serving as their new/old minister. (She served in a call there from 1992 to 2004, and in an appointment since 2021.) Catherine thinks that one of the best things about ministry is being able to have good conversations about things that matter with people like Tom, the man who offered me the teaching about hand shakes. It is a gift to be able to receive a little bit of wisdom from wise folks every day.