

Christian Perspectives: What we don't know can hurt

By Rev. Stephanie Pellow

We sometimes hear said, "What you don't know won't hurt you," but it may well be hurting someone else.

A little over a year ago, I wrote an article in this same space about the concluding phase of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). A lengthy report is now in print and 94 "Calls to Action" have been articulated by the Commission with the anticipation that the Canadian government and Canadian citizens will follow through with those recommendations.

We are still learning that the Residential School systems were and are not the full extent of abuses suffered by our Aboriginal peoples. Now we know how little regard has been paid to missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls compared to the attention given such crimes in the rest of the population.

More recently, we have heard and read news articles about a program now labeled "The Sixties Snatch" in which Aboriginal children were taken from homes deemed to be inadequate and adopted by white couples or families in the southern parts of our nation.

Once again, I do not think the average Canadian was aware that this so called "snatch," likely under some official name, was another part of the plan, along with residential schools, to assimilate our Aboriginal peoples into the general population - ironically just when the notion of Multiculturalism was beginning to take shape in our ideology.

As a young person who married in the 1960s, I remember discussing with my then fiancé that if we were not able to have children naturally we would likely opt to adopt a native child. We were naïve in assuming such a child would be an orphan. Now we know that many were not.

We were also naïve in thinking we could have helped such a child learn of his/her birth culture in a closed adoption system that did not allow contact between a child and their birth community. This did not become our family story, but it did for many Aboriginal children who have often remained in limbo between two or more cultures ever since.

The Christian churches that operated the residential schools funded by the government made their formal apologies some years ago but apologies only go so far in the process of repentance. Admitting wrongs have been done and crimes committed is the first step.

This is the step where we now find ourselves as a nation with regard to murdered and abused Aboriginal women and girls and those people who were adopted out of their communities in the 1960s. Once again, we need to go through the process of reconciliation.

Since the TRC, the churches that operated the residential schools have worked to contribute to the financial settlements offered to survivors of those schools. Those same churches have often facilitated the gatherings that allowed the TRC to hear the many, many stories of the survivors.

Assistance in and prayer for the Aboriginal communities is on-going. This process of restitution now needs to begin for the adopted children and the women and girls who have not received justice as well. Some day we may be able to turn the page on these negative aspects of our Canadian history and of our churches' history.

This is important to all Canadians and specifically for those who profess the Christian faith. The words of the prophet Micah instruct us: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8