"Journey of Reconciliation: Listening to Indigenous Elders" Sat. Apr. 9, 2016

Dr. Ray Silver Sn. from Sumas First Nation opened the event at Columbia Bible College (Clearbrook Rd, Abbotsford) at 9:20 am. Ray shared about his life growing up – a mixture of happier early years and unhappy experiences: he and his brothers were picked up as they walked home from the local school and taken to the Coqualeetza Residential School. When the school closed at the end of 1939 the pupils and staff were moved to (Port) Alberni Indian Residential School. Ray related being hungry all the time. The boys were experimented on to see how long they could go without food or water. Sometimes they managed to pick up discarded food thrown over the bank to the dump by the local store. When he was fourteen he was sent home on the ferry. When Ray asked where was his brother he was told he was following – in a box on the CPR from Vancouver! Ray later discovered his sibling had died of food poisoning – a few others had too. "If this is what school is all about I'll never go back." At 15 Ray tried to join the Merchant Navy – ended up working for the brick plant for 60 years. He taught himself to read, write, and learn math. Ray married and had 11 children. Today Ray talks to schools and universities promoting how important education is, and to have respect for Mother Earth. As a youngster Ray learnt to fish, trap and hunt. He passes on knowledge how to look after Mother Earth's 'blood vessels' – rivers and streams - and how Sumas First Nation was dependant on Sumas Lake for salmon, etc. The lake was drained in 1924 without consulting them and no compensation was given in return. The Sumas First Nation is concerned what is happening to their mountain – logging, loss of trap-lines – a quarry there now, and a private fenced property. Also, in Ray's lifetime the mighty Fraser River has become the 'muddy' Fraser!

Concluding their talk each speaker today was presented with a ceremonial blanket.

Patricia (Patti) Victor was the Session One speaker: **Patti belongs to Cheam First Nation, ordained Pastor at Chilliwack Native Pentecostal Church and University Siya:m at Trinity Western University.** Theme for the day was 'Listening' – not just with our ears, but 'listen' with our heart! Listen beyond words – allow God to take away the prejudices – way of thinking – relegate to past history, shared history - you have a history, through bias, - not complete - not true. Aboriginal World view – doesn't put into compartments – not just with people – environment, justice issues, healthcare, - think about what is impacting you where you live. Truth & Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action: for ordinary people, for churches, the law society, - we have an obligation as individuals to move forward and think beyond the surface – a willingness to look at issues – whether our church was part of the residential school system or not. Patti shared her personal story – good job, married, had kids. Then through circumstances beyond her control God came into her life and changed her for ever. First Nations were given a wrong picture of God – harm, neglect, abuse, violence in the home – that's not who God is. Patti discovered people can hear the gospel even through the history or bad experiences they've had. Aboriginals have a rightful place in the kingdom of God, no matter who they are and where they are at. Drums are not evil – God has given the drum as part of who they are – in her church there are often as many as 12 drummers on Sundays. Who did God create us to be, we do not need to be someone different in order to worship the Lord. Indigenous people feel "Am I going to be accepted in the kingdom of God – can I bring my drum?" Some Sundays someone brings a large drum and several people sit around and play it. The church has an average 70 in attendance. Patti spoke about God, environment, and spirituality: Calls to Action # 60 – amongst other things it calls us "to respect

Indigenous spirituality in its own right……" It is a foundation piece to begin this work of Reconciliation. Patti spoke of education: funding in schools, remote areas, "wasn't residential schools and the Sixties Scoop enough" Now they have to leave their families in remote areas to get a high school education in the city in order to return and help their communities. Stand up for justice – it needs others to join First Nations – enough is enough – this has to stop.

Reconciliation – getting to know each other – "we would prefer to know you (non-indigenous) as well, it is not one-sided, we don't need to be under a microscope". Patti asks that we have a reciprocal, cultural exchange – reconciliation is not just 'white' folk finding out about them, it is them finding out about us too. We must be inclusive – move beyond our fears – First Nations are not just about drums, feathers, regalia and pow-wows. See through the eyes of the First Nations – sit back and enjoy each other. Celebrate the diversity God has given us. "How First Nations address themselves is how you address them – listen – colour blindness is a form of racism – we don't treat a 5-year old like an 87-year old – likewise if people are from different cultures why would you treat them the same?"

Sometimes non-indigenous people feel ashamed, guilty – Indigenous too feel shame and don't know what to do about it. These feelings are not bad in themselves. We have to get to a place to do something about it. Patti spoke of stolen artifacts and sacred items in museums - returning them to their rightful place is part of reconciliation. So many things were done wrongly in the past, so we don't want to do more things wrong now. It will take some wrestling on non-indigenous part – "allow it to happen, allow God to lead you".

Every Indigenous Nation has a 'Creation' story given to their prophets. Patti finished her talk by sharing one such story and then invited questions coming out of session 1.

Q: how can we learn to just listen, how can we listen without forming opinions

A: it takes learning sometimes to just bite your tongue. We don't need to judge here. We all have a lens we see through. Also listen through the Holy Spirit.

Q "I'm afraid to go to your church – would you walk me through the Service so I'd feel comfortable"

A: "Every nation is welcome to come through our door. Any questions you have can be explained afterwards. Let go personal preferences – Your God is in that place. (They meet in the Evergreen Hall, Corbould Street, Chilliwack, Sunday from 11:00 am – 2:30 pm, including lunch). We start when we're ready, and we finish when we're done! Praising, fellowship, preaching, the Word, more fellowship, food, then go home after a greater relationship with God." Patti went on to say the church opened in 1996 and about 10 years ago a few street people started to appear at lunch time, they then saw that number grow – now many attend church, and Patti found her ministry has extended out to the streets of Chilliwack.

During each Session 30 minutes was set aside for Table Discussion.

After lunch Session 2 was presented by **Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Gwawaenuk First Nation, and "Reconciliation Canada".** Reconciliation is a Canadian issue. As he flew over Vancouver Island the day before he saw the "length and breadth of the communities, all races… we are all one… How we

treat one another is important….we can't just focus on ourselves…..The relationship with First Nations is broken, but it is not beyond repair. How do we start – that's the question….. We start with our histories, our truth's, recognise the influence the Government had – marginalizing First Nations. We (must) get on the 'train', stay on it for the rest of our lives and adopt Reconciliation as our core value, recognise we have to pursue it every day - ourselves, our families, the world about us. None of us escape trauma (in one form or another) – broken relationships, employment, etc. …must commit ourselves to the process of ongoing Reconciliation, driven by the notion we own it - it's a core value. Renew respectful relationships …… It is important we work hard to address all 94 Calls to Action. Approach reconciliation from a trajectory of the heart – create a society of compassionate, loving people." He spoke of cultural genocide, the 130 residential schools and over 150,000 who attended them in the 120 years. He urged us to educate ourselves, talk to our grandchildren, neighbours, people in the pews – we have to have this dialogue. "How to do it? Criss-cross Canada, every race, creed, rich society, boardrooms … It will start where you live! All my relations….Spend real time on this, nothing more powerful, pray over it……..See the world for what it is … How can we mitigate conditions and human suffering? Rich country like ours, we've allowed separation for far too long. It's down to 'me', I have the power to change these things. How do we engage? First Nation communities will invite you in to discuss our common humanity and values. We all love our children. In aboriginal communities we want the same, create a world that's equal, fair, just. What we want for ourselves is the same we want in our First Nation communities….to feed our families, and clean water…… Haven't resolved fundamental issues yet, gather us together, move forward in different ways – see the big picture, save the world, human family across the globe caring for each other and the environment. It starts with me, comes from my heart…Push forward real hard, find more ways together." Chief Joseph instructed us to turn and face our neighbour and share what reconciliation means to us. Afterwards we were invited to report back to the larger group. We were then encouraged to continue on this journey of reconciliation for as long as we live. "Think about how you might implement reconciliation, this is your plan, not the church's, not anyone else's – what can you do (towards your plan) tomorrow? Will you greet a homeless man 'Good morning sir', making him feel valued? Be compassionate and gentler towards others? What can you do or say (each day) that will make a difference? The church should really embrace reconciliation, it is an expression of love." A question and answer period followed:

Q: How can we keep the conversation going and not shut down? On Vancouver Island our neighbours have lorded over us for 150 years…never approached us, we have been on the sidelines….

A: We're going to write our history, broken, beautiful, sad….find a new way forward to reconciliation, dialogue the two communities – we've built Canada together, integrated with each other, not separate. Need to embrace core value of reconciliation and chip away at the wrongful assumptions we have about each other.

Q: Do First Nations participate in municipal/provincial/federal elections?

A: In the past the involvement was minimal but in the last one (2015 Federal Election) many Indigenous people became involved and made a difference – it was an awakening – it is important to be engaged. We will see more and more involvement in all levels of government.

Q: How do we reconcile Christianity and old culture? A: We all have the right to have freedom of religion - God is the same God in all of us. We need to have these deep discussions about faith.

Finally in answer to a question about the Indian Act (1876), Chief Joseph said "…it has legitimized racism. This is clearly wrong, and non-acceptable. We got into this mess together and the only way out is together. Everyone is watching Canada – 7 out of 11 agree cultural genocide took place. We can change this country." He then shared a story of encouragement: "….spent 11 years at St. Michael's Anglican Residential School (Alert Bay, B.C.). The first 2 years were brutal – could not speak English, beaten every day, constantly berated, was considered useless, (thinking) nobody cares for you that's why you are there, no-one loves you." For grads now there is excitement and hope, for him there was nowhere to go, no idea what his value and worth was. Alcoholism followed – how lonely it had been in residential school. He was logging and fishing for a while. Married – had 5 children, "won't be lonely again – no idea how to be a father – lost all of them, nice big house, several cars, was drunk always. A friend didn't like what I was doing, went fishing with him – Johnston Strait, had a dream, saw Vancouver Island and the universe, God said 'I love you and you are a part of this'." His life turned around. His advice: "Call on God to help us – we shall change this country. It starts with you."

Just before the Event concluded around 3:30 pm it was mentioned there is an:

<u>Indigenous Community Library</u> in town. "The Ray and Millie Silver Aboriginal Library" located at the Community Aboriginal Centre - 3277 Gladwin Road, Abbotsford. "Our library features Aboriginal books that range from children's literature to adult fiction and non-fiction books. <u>Everyone</u> is welcome to visit our library and borrow books."

(Phone: 604-859-1224. Open: Mon. – Fri. 8:00 am – 3:30 pm (closed 12:00 – 1 pm) Directions: driving west on South Fraser Way, turn right (north) on Gladwin, cross Maclure Rd, the road dips down and you'll see the library on your left in the dip.)

I plan on visiting very soon. Thanks for reading this Report.

Monica Gibson-Pugsley.