

Welcome and Invocation:

Thank you all for coming. I am very excited to be gathering here with you today. Before we begin this morning, I want to start by orienting ourselves and our discussion, reminding us all of why we gather and what we share. In the middle of this circle I have placed a few objects that are simple visual reminders of things that are important to us. As we speak to each other, and as we listen to each other, looking at these objects will help us remember some of our core beliefs that should influence how we speak and how we listen.

In this circle we have a bible to remind us that we gather as Jesus-followers and we gather in his spirit of humility, love and radical welcome. We have a map of this area to remind us that where we gather, and that we gather in a place with a history, some of which we know some of which we do not, and that we are not independent of this history. We also have some dirt from this property to remind us that we, like all people, are people that come from land, are connected to the earth, and that we forget our connection to the earth where we live are our own peril. To forget or ignore our connection to creation and the earth that gives us life is to live in a place of dangerous ignorance. Let us pray that all we do around this circle is influenced by our connection to those things that are represented by the objects in this middle.

Goals and format:

So what are we doing here today and over these six weeks? I am sure that many of you are wondering exactly this, so I thought I would begin our class this week with a discussion of the goals and format for these classes.

First I see my role here as facilitator. I have spent a lot of time reading and educating myself over the last few years, but my primary role here will not be to give to you “lecture style” information that I have gathered. My plan is to provide structure, space, and stimulus to spark conversation with each other.

For example, let me describe how this class will work. I am going to start by providing us with some material to start thinking about and discussing. Then I am going to invite you to take some time to reflect on what I’ve shared. Just 60 seconds to jot down some thoughts. Then I will invite you to share some of what you’ve written with a neighbour, again taking just one or two minutes, and then there will be a brief opportunity for 3-4 people to share with the whole group. This pattern of reflection and sharing will be repeated several times over the course of the morning as we move through different material.

The belief behind this structure is that we are here to learn with each other and from each other. We represent a wide range of experiences and opinions and we are at our best when we can hear these perspectives, especially in the context of our relationships with each other.

I have two overarching goals for these classes. First I hope that we all learn something about other people, about Canadian history and current Canadian realities. I hope that we come away from these classes knowing more facts about the current and historical experiences of indigenous peoples in Canada. There are many good-hearted and well-intentioned people who have very un-informed views and when we do not know the reality of other people’s lived experience, their personal history, our good-intentions cannot prevent us from having harmful opinions and from acting on misinformation.

Second I hope that we learn about each other and ourselves, through vulnerability and self-awareness. We need to admit that many of the things we will be talking about will be hard to hear. We need to admit that we will learn things that might be uncomfortable. We might learn things that threaten some of the comfort of our lives. Because of this we need to do a good job

at being self aware. It is an almost universal human trait that when we are presented with information that we perceive as challenging or threatening our first response is to be defensive. The problem is that when we get defensive we tell ourselves that our responses to the challenging information is not related to our unacknowledged feelings of fear, uncertainty and anxiety. We tell ourselves that we are not being defensive, we are merely logically responding to the material we have been presented. All this is to say, one of the major priorities for this class will be to provide space to be honest with ourselves and each other about how we feel about what we are learning. I don't believe that we will do a good job at allowing important parts of other people's stories to unsettle us and move us towards a more truthful and just future if we don't work at being honest with our feelings and allow for the change that might come through vulnerable sharing with others. Some of the most useful and beneficial things to admit and to share are things like: I don't like this; this makes me feel uncomfortable; when I hear these things I get worried about what it might mean for me or my family, etc.

If I have one overarching idea guiding me in these classes it is this: there is no downside to justice. Although it is not pleasant to go over the dark sins of history and the present day, and it is much less pleasant, of course, to live through these things, everyone benefits from justice. People who live under unjust systems and experience the legacy of unjust history certainly benefit from justice. But I believe that the gospel tells us that those who benefit from injustice do not truly benefit, that the comforts that come from living in unjust systems are actually poisoned. Jim Wallis, founder and leader of Sojourners in the US, says this about the history and legacy of racial injustice in the US. He says that working towards racial justice frees people at both ends of the chain. So this is one of my most central thoughts in all of the material and conversation we will cover. I do not believe that we are embarking on a journey just because we may or may not have obligations to right historical wrongs. I believe that everyone benefits from removing unjust systems, institutions, attitudes and beliefs. I believe that both Canada and the church, as well as indigenous people, would benefit from justice.

Has everyone been to the reconciliation page on the church website? Lee and I have set up a page there to provide participants with a schedule of classes and give a description of the material covered each week. If you miss a week you can go there to find the readings and listen to the recording. In case not everyone has been to that page here is a quick overview of the six weeks.

In the first week, today, we are going to go over a bit of Canadian history and discuss together some of the broad strokes of what I see as the twin issues of illegality and immorality in the relations between indigenous and settler people in Canada. In week two we are going to explore the explicit and implicit beliefs that churches and Christians have participated in and perpetuated that have contributed to some of the unhealthy relationships in this country. This is the primary focus of the book we are reading. If you haven't had a chance to read it yet, the specific focus of *Yours, mine, ours*, is the history, impact, and present manifestation of a specific christian doctrine that facilitated the colonization of Canada. In week three we will watch the documentary Reserve 107, which chronicles the journey of Lutheran and Mennonite settlers in Saskatchewan in relation to the Young Chippewan Band and the land of Stony Knoll. In week four, Frank Sawatsky will bring our focus closer to home with discussions of settlement, land use and indigenous relations here in Delta and at Cedar Park. In week 5 Bridget Findlay will lead us, and we will hopefully begin to learn about how to listen and start a conversation with representatives from local indigenous groups. And in week 6 I will lead us again as we reflect, review, and rehash all that we have covered and ask ourselves what it all means, and what, if anything, should happen next. There is a lot to cover, and the plan as I have laid out, is very optimistic. But I don't think that we can jump to starting conversations without doing some self-

education and self-reflection, and I don't think we can jump to discussions about actions and responses without learning how to listen and be in conversation with indigenous people.

Does anyone have any questions at this point? So far we have just covered how the classes will work, and some of the broad goals for these gatherings. Just before I begin introducing some of the material for today's class, I want to take some time for a first reflection and sharing. So if you all have something to write with, I want you to take 60 seconds and jot down a few words about why you are here and what you hope to gain from these classes. What is it you want to learn? What is it you want to see come out of this time? How does this relate to what I have just shared? When I tell you time is up, I want you to share with a neighbour. Our 60 seconds begins now.

Background

It is important, I think, that we do some basic reading and learning together. It is important that we start at the start. And the start of our discussions here begin with some basic questions of language and history. These are the questions of what has happened and who was involved.

Names

Although we might not all recognize it, or we don't recognize it all the time, the terms we use for things and for people are highly political. By political what I mean is that how we refer to ourselves and others influences how we see ourselves and others, and also the terms that we use have histories. Our names for ourselves and for others have origins and have a legacy that we may not be entirely aware of. For example we would all probably agree that nigger is a label that has a significant historical, and I would say political, weight to it. It is a term with a negative origin and its current usage cannot be divorced from that history. But it's also interesting that some people who find it derogatory when used by others, will use it themselves.

I have some copies here of a short piece by a Metis writer, Chelsea Vowel, that is an interesting and useful introduction to these issues. I've asked Rhonda to read a short selection to give us some of the highlights. I wrote to Chelsea Vowel and specifically asked if we could make copies of this chapter from her book to use in this class, and she said yes. Rhonda is going to read for us some highlights from this chapter and you can follow along in your copy.

Questions

1. Did you learn anything new?
2. Does it matter what we call each other?
3. What do you think we should call people who are not indigenous?

Illegality

1. Breaking of treaties
2. Not making treaties
3. Underfunding of children on reserve - Cindy Blackstock Human Rights Tribunal victory

Immorality: you can do legal things that are wrong

1. Residential schools
2. Sixties scoop - current child welfare: 50% of kids in care are Indigenous, while only <3% of the population
3. High Arctic Relocation