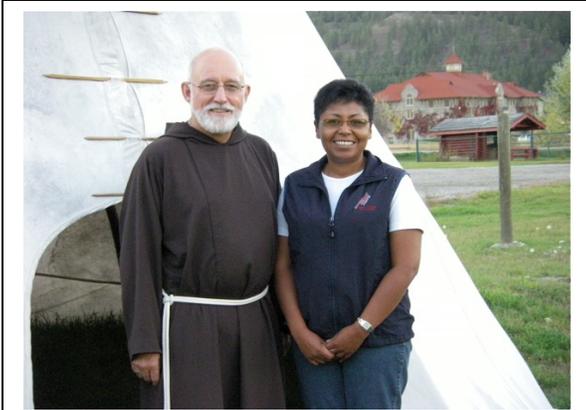


Newspaper article below and photo appeared in The (Cranbrook) Townsman, Tuesday, October 19, 2010



In the background of the St. Eugene Mission, St. Mary's Indian Band Chief Cheryl Casimer and (Bishop John Corriveau) Catholic bishop of the Nelson Diocese met in early October to formally lend their support to bring healing and reconciliation to the East Kootenay area. 'Returning to Spirit' is a series of workshops for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people dedicated to healing the Indian Residential School Legacy in Canada. The Kootenay Indian Residential

ROAD TO HEALING AND RECONCILIATION:
by Barry Coulter (barry@dailytownsman.com)

For the greater part of a century, the Government of Canada forced thousands of aboriginal children to be separated from their families and sent to residential schools. Although the last of these schools have been closed for years, their legacy has left scars on generations of aboriginal people and affected the relationship of First Nations with the rest of society.

Recently, the St. Mary's Band of the Ktunaxa First Nation and the local Catholic community has come together to bring a series of workshops to the East Kootenay, to address the effects of this history. "Returning to Spirit" is a series of community workshops designed to address the legacy of Canada's residential schools, with a focus on healing and reconciliation for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people.

Mary Richardson, a lay worker with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nelson, who is helping organize the Returning to Spirit workshops, said the program explores the process of creating possibilities for individuals and groups to consciously let go of past issues and empowering them to move forward. Richardson said one doesn't have had to gone to a residential school or have worked at one.

The residential school at St. Eugene - the Kootenay Indian Residential School - opened in 1910, and closed in 1970. Richardson said there are still "generational effects" from its 60 years of operation. "In recent years, since the federal government made an apology to aboriginal people, there has been a lot of stirring up of memories," Richardson said. She added that the Returning to Spirit workshops would tie in well with the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's ongoing public hearings - which are to learn the truth about what happened in the residential schools and to inform all Canadians.

The workshops fall into three parts. Part 1 is a five-day workshop for aboriginal people, Part 2 is geared for people in the religious community. "These workshops are about yourself, and the feelings you have over the issue," Richardson said. "The two groups get the same workshop, but a different conversation." Part 3 consists of a separate two-day workshop for each of the two groups, followed by both groups coming together for a final three-day workshop. Richardson said Parts 1 and 2 focus on healing and transforming oneself, Part 3 is about reconciliation.

The Returning to Spirit program was launched 10 years ago in the Northwest Territories, and has run more than 100 times since from B.C. to Ontario. Richardson herself attended Part 2 of a Returning to Spirit workshop in March, in St. Albert, Alberta. Richardson wrote of her experience: "We first took a look at how we become stuck in our past issues, and how they

play out in our present life, and how it affects our future ... For many of us, including myself, I don't believe we realize how much of the past mirrors our present lives, and how it does affect what happens in the future. "The process seems very simple as it is presented to you -however, it is very challenging, but also very healing. The most important aspect is that it creates a forum for reconciliation."

The Diocese of Nelson, which includes the East and West Kootenay, and the Ktunaxa First Nation have started the process of launching the program in the East Kootenay. A joint planning committee between the two groups was formed earlier this year, and most recently met in Cranbrook in early October, with Bishop John Corriveau and Chief Cheryl Casimer in attendance.

Richardson said the joint committee is hoping to hold the program in the fall of 2011. "But there's still a lot of background work to do, including getting access to funding and resources."

Indian Residential Schools were established in Canada in the late 1800s, and in 1920 the government forced aboriginal parents to send their children to these schools. The last residential school closed in 1996.

<http://www.dailytownsman.com/article/20101019/CRANBROOK0101/310199977/the-paths-to-reconciliation>