

The Road to Warm Springs

The National Consultation on Indigenous Anglican Self-Determination
Anglican Church of Canada
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Transcript: Ministry Moment from Esther Wesley,
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*More information including a video of this Ministry Moment at
www.anglican.ca/roadtowarmsprings*

When I heard about this conference and I was invited and I was told I was invited, I said “why?” I was told, “you can just come and listen.” That’s when I said “okay, that I was going to listen. Just sit back and listen.”

My ministry work, it’s been such an amazing. I’ve led such an amazing life in coordinating the Healing Fund. To begin with, when I got hired as a coordinator for the Healing Fund, I wasn’t looking for work. I really was not looking for a job. I had just recently retired from classroom. I was going to just look for something easier to do. Well, it didn’t work that way but I just think of it, it’s been such a blessing. The Healing Fund began, the Anglican Church of Canada Healing Fund began in 1992. 2017 has been 25 years. As of spring 2017, we’ve hit just a bit over eight-million-dollar mark.

We’ve funded 705 projects across the country. I always think Anglicans have just been amazing because it’s the Anglicans that support this project. It’s the Anglicans across the country that support this work. This work has taken me all over the place. I’ve got to learn so much about all sorts of things both urban and indigenous communities across the country, including the Arctic. This work has led me to attend and be part of a variety of traditional ceremonies, long houses, big houses in BC where other— let’s put it this way, where white clergy cannot be invited because I’m indigenous and even though I work for the church and these are traditional ceremonies, I have been able to go in there. I have been invited to be part of those ceremonies. It’s just been amazingly interesting to be part of that, the healing program. Yet, bring part of the church in these traditional ceremonies where no other non-aboriginal, non-indigenous clergy would be ever invited.

The other thing too is from that ceremonies, the community ceremonies to all sorts of ceremonies that I’ve been part of, whether it is going into sweat lodge with people, it’s just

been an amazing life. To walk in the streets in the large urban centers with street workers, being part walking, I've walked several days with street workers in different parts of the city, whether it's Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria. I've accompanied people working with fentanyl crisis, fentanyl overdoses. That's what I mean it's been such an interesting life to be part of this work. Suicides in the communities. To be working with young people with children all over the country in different communities, it's just been such a blessing to learn as to what's happening in communities across the country.

With the Healing Fund—I admire you people that come up and don't have to write anything down. I've got to write things down to remember it. I don't have the memory of just in here. Anyways, the Healing Fund has—I've tried to—I'm still working on finishing up looking at the Healing Fund. What has the church supported throughout the 25 years? I started about a year ago looking at projects, doing an analysis on the projects as to what we have covered. Trying to break them down into dollar value as far as the funds are concerned, the finances are concerned. We've covered a lot of youth and children's projects across the country. Indian Residential Schools, reunions and gatherings where they gather to renew friendships because those are their families when they were young. We've done, that several of them, across the country.

We've done, supported memorials, commemoration projects in different parts of the country. We've done resource development including communities where they're doing their hymnals, bible translation projects. We've covered those. I also mentioned the homeless. We've covered all those different projects where the homeless people, the youth on the streets are learning their cultural background, their identity. Going for treatments at addiction centers, counseling, whether it's one on one counseling, group counseling, family counseling, community family programs, suicide, suicide prevention, suicide intervention and postvention, training programs for counselors, training programs for parenting courses, language training, and all sorts of other what I call community capacity building across the country.

We've done funded projects on what I call knowledge building, whether it is a Residential School impact, impacts of the Residential School, learning history of the community, learning their history of Nations, even just doing a history background on their own communities. We've also supported TRC when people were going to TRC events or ADR, which ADR was Alternative Dispute Resolution Program before the ADR came in. We've supported women's gathering, specifically women that are geared and focused for women and children. We've also done projects that are specifically for men, men and parenting, men as parents, single parents. We've also done the offenders, the ex-offenders programs as they re-enter the communities. These are all aboriginal people that I'm talking about across the country.

We've also done programs where community churches and traditional, I would say traditional elders are coming together to come and learn from each other. It's just been an amazing journey to get to meet so many people across the country from different cultural backgrounds, different languages, different beliefs. It's been amazing. When I think about this, how blessed my life has been to do this ministry. I can't begin to express the depth of what I have learned from people.

What I have found also is even though the funds the church has been providing is not, I mean you know it's not a lot. In some places the further north you go, the less it seems because of the cost. The community people are so resourceful and so creative. You give them a little bit of resource and they just stretch it. They add things to it that what I find that urban people would never even think of doing things the way they do in their resourceful because they're used to having, Many communities are used to having so little. Yes, our people I will say are very resourceful and very, very creative in their healing work.

At the very beginning when I started, I met a lot of anger, a lot of angry people, residential school survivors. You could go in a room, identify yourself, and who you're working for and somebody would be yelling. That's how much anger there was. Over time, I have noticed how that has changed, really changed. TRC events have really made that difference where people were able to come together and speak about their experiences. I don't see that much anger anymore in different communities. In the time that they had to tell their stories and that their stories were affirmed by the public, it has really helped and just in the sense of the anger that I had seen before. It doesn't mean that there isn't any more anger. There is both sides, both non-indigenous and indigenous.

I still meet a lot of, I would say anger with non-indigenous people that said, "okay this happened long time ago. Tell your people to get over it." There is still very much—that's still prevalent to this day, especially in churches. That's what I've found. What I always try to do is bring up: it's been studied by psychologists, by doctors about trauma. Read about trauma. Learn about trauma and then you will understand where the people have come from. The years as children that they were traumatized.

This covers a little bit of the work of the Healing Fund. There's been a lot of gatherings, gatherings that are either just community, whether it's regional or national. We've also funded a couple of international because of children, people that are involved in child and family services.

It covers a wide variety of things. It really covers a wide variety of things. Someday I'll write it. Some day. Now I've almost come to the end of this. I told Michael and the Primate I am going to retire very soon. Somebody can take over. Somebody can come and learn what I'm talking about, the rich knowledge, the rich culture of peoples in our country. Thank you.