

Truth and Reconciliation— Open Hands (Part 3):

Reaching Out Through Relationships

As an organization and board members, we have committed ourselves to be active participants in Truth and Reconciliation for the Indigenous peoples of Canada. I want to invite our readers to join us in this journey of understanding the past wrongs and looking to the future with hope.

The word Eyē? Sqâ'lewen – pronounced Eye. Sh-KWAW-leh-win in the west coast Hul'q'umin'um' language refers to having a 'good heart, good mind, and good feelings.' This notion has essential meaning for Indigenous people of the west coast when they meet together, in groups, longhouses, and as a community. This reflects an inherent understanding of listening and learning.

Do this mindful exercise: take a minute and look at your hands. Put your palms down, now clench your hands into fists. Pause for a moment to take in what you are feeling and experiencing. Now open your hands and turn your palms up. Keep them open. Look at the posture of your hands. What is the difference between the two postures?

Our hands contain twenty-nine bones, twenty-nine joints, thirty arteries, thirty-four muscles, forty-eight nerves and at least one-hundred-twenty-three ligaments. While hands are intricate, they're also efficient. Hands allow us to type more than sixty words a minute, swing an axe, and pick up pennies that have fallen on the ground.

Remarkably, our hands do all these things by performing two simple acts: closing and opening. So, if hands reveal character, they do so through the simple act of closing and opening.

The open hand image represents being open to give and open to receive. **By living with open hands, we create space for engagement with others.** Opening our hearts shows understanding and empathy, whereas opening our minds is about new learning and growth, as discussed in parts 1 and 2 of this series.

I don't think it is enough to click "like" or share an article on social media.

Living with a posture of open hands expresses our understanding of an open heart and mind. This allows us to move physically and emotionally toward people in need and empathize with where they are at and their circumstances.

To respond to the injustices that people have felt, you've got to have personal relationships with hurting people. Our relational presence changes us and others.

Brander "Raven" McDonald, a friend and a Cree First Nations, stresses that the fractured relationships that resulted from the early approach to the Indigenous peoples occurred because of a lack of understanding about Indigenous people and their culture.

"Everything happens by relationships," Brander states. "Indigenous peoples, by nature, are group-oriented and traditionally hunted and gathered in groups and then came back to the larger group of families and extended families."

Brander believes that the bond of relationship is paramount to the reconciliation process today. We need to think long-term and relational to promote healing with the Indigenous people.

If you have a brother or sister, hurt somehow, what is the best way to respond to the hurt? Listening, reaching out a hand on the shoulder, and you do not even need to speak.

The residential schools dismantled Indigenous communities and relationships. We need to reach out, learn and listen. We need to recognize that relationships are the primary means of interaction with the Indigenous peoples.

Opening our hands is, in part, the practice of Eyē? Sqâ'lewen, having a good heart, good mind, and good feelings. It is also the practice of creating space for engagement with Indigenous people, our fellow human beings.

Thank you for joining us on this three part journey. We have important work to do in the Truth and Reconciliation process to understand and to take action.

Justice Murray Sinclair who headed the Truth and Reconciliation report concluded the presentation of the final report with these words:

“Achieving reconciliation is like climbing a mountain — we must proceed a step at a time. It will not always be easy. There will be storms, there will be obstacles, but we cannot allow ourselves to be daunted by the task because our goal is just and it is also necessary.”

May we take those first steps in our own lives to help in this healing process.

Here is an opportunity to be a part of the journey of healing. Visit the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website at <https://nctr.ca>. It is full of literature, events, reports, news and so much more. Dive in with an open heart, an open mind, and open hands.

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