

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda, November 12th, 2017
Sermon for Heritage Sunday: Olinda and the Winds of War
Interim Minister the Rev. Fran Dearman

“Our leaders need to show the way, but no matter how many deals and agreements they make, it is in our daily conversations and interactions that our success as a nation in forging a better place, will ultimately be measured. It is what we say to and about each other in public and in private that we need to look at changing.”

—words of the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair,
Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

A short while ago I wandered out to the Heritage Village and Transport Museum, west of Kingsville, where the old Olinda General Store now stands. A very handsome structure. The museum staff told me it had taken three years to move the building, brick by brick, and re-establish the old General Store at the new site. They told me that when the crew re-assembled the bricks, they turned each one so that the weathered side of the brick faced inward, and a fresh un-weathered side of the brick would face outward—an old building made new again, seen in a new way.

I was struck with that notion of turning the bricks, of examining each portion carefully, mindfully, as the team re-built the whole. Three years in the doing. Such a task surely brings stewardship into the realm of a spiritual practice.

Such attentive mindfulness, calls to mind for me a way of appreciating heritage, brick by brick, tapping to test for true-ness, re-assembling along the straight line of the plumb-bob, looking to see what in our heritage is useful, helpful, and compelling.

We look to our past, in part, for a guide to the future. Not least of this, is that this congregation cherishes the memory of its founder, “Big Mike” Fox, as a person who lived in right relationship with First Nations, as best he could.

We read in Louise Foulds’ histories how the Olinda folks had been engaging Universalism and its generous, inclusive spirit for twenty years before the congregation was established on November 10th, 1880, and the church structure built the next year.

We read that the land this church was built on was acquired by Michael Fox as part of the wage for his labour in the land survey, and that Big Mike Fox gave land for the Chippewa burial

ground on the Fourth Concession, that Big Mike Fox remained in close relationship with the Chippewa during his lifetime.

I seem to recall, perhaps from reading something at the Transport Museum, or in Louise Foulds' histories of Olinda, that there were two men named Michael Fox, uncle and nephew, and that Fox was originally Fuchs, when that family came up from Pennsylvania.

[Author's note: Phillip Fox aka Fuchs, emigrates 1772 from Germany via Pennsylvania, settles at Sandwich near Windsor, ten children of which eight are sons; Phillip's third son is Michael Fox, (1784-1858), married Elizabeth Wigle, 1803 acquired Lot#20 on 4th Concession as part of Survey team; Michael G. Fox, his nephew, Phillip's grandson, aka "Big Mike" Fox (1806-1894) acquires that land from his uncle, 1840 donates land for the Chippewa Burial Ground on the Fourth Concession, 1860's pursues pamphlets on Universalism, 1880 founds Universalist church at Olinda, donates land for the church building.]

I often choose to drive down the Fourth Concession past the Chippewa Burial Ground just to see that big granite stone on the well-mowed plot there, fenced off with the same black piping that we see in the Graceland Cemetery across the street here. I feel glad to see the Chippewa name remembered there. I feel glad to be associated with people who showed respect.

We live in interesting times. Prophetic voice is one of the intangibles by which one measures a minister. Prophetic voice invites us to lift up our heads and listen. Listen, have ears to hear, and seek understanding. And then, act.

If a colleague were to ask me, where in Canada is the need for prophetic voice? I would lift up the need for engagement and reconciliation with First Nations. Almost two full generations have passed since Canadians began to face up to the scandal of Residential Schools and the scandal of the Indian Act. Canada's policies regarding aboriginal peoples were named by some at the United Nations as similar to Apartheid policies in South Africa, as even genocidal.

I first became mindfully aware of First Nations issues in the nineteen-sixties, when I attended classes at the University of Victoria. Mohawk activist Kahn-Tineta Horn [b. 1940] came to speak there. I believe that would have been January of 1968. She was a powerful speaker, voicing ideas I had scarcely heard before, or had ears to listen.

I am glad to have lived long enough to see some progress in repairing the relationship with First Nations; much is still unclear; much remains to be done.

As the three founding nations—First Nations, French and British—work to repair their relationships, I see both progress and an abiding fear—especially around land claims and reparations. Change makes us nervous; and change has been coming apace. There are a lot of unknown unknowns out there. My sense is that the work will be done, and it will be done brick

by brick, case by case. Let us pause for a moment and just hold that nervousness, that fear of change, just hold it steady for a moment.

As a Canadian, I feel great shame for the harms done in the scandals of the Residential Schools systems, and the negative impact of the Indian Act on aboriginal communities. As a person who walks around wearing a white face, I know that this appearance gives me an advantage in life.

[Author's Note: While "White Supremacy" may be experienced as a provocative phrase in Canada, one need merely take note of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Indian Act, arrest statistics in large cities, and incarceration rates in Canadian prisons, to be aware that appearing white has carried and continues to carry privilege in Canadian society.]

As a Universalist and Unitarian I feel glad that our UU churches were so few in number that we never got sucked into institutional complicity in the Indian Act's pattern of intentional cultural destruction. I feel glad that some of my colleagues in UU ministry have put significant effort into following the progress of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and sharing the Commission's learnings with our congregations.

Much has been said, and will continue to be said, about collective guilt and shared responsibility. The argument was much debated in the aftermath of the Jewish holocaust and other genocides during the Second World War. The argument continues. I personally had no intentional hand in the injustices of a century; still, I am part of the body politic of Canada. The Canadian government, as a governing body, permitted these wrongs, instigated them; the Canadian government is the appropriate agency to address and redress the harms done, and restore justice.

As a citizen of the body politic, I feel called to remind my government of its obligations to repair relationship. As a private person I feel no less called to pay attention and conduct myself in daily life so as to be part of repairing relationship, brick by brick.

What would that look like?

A short while ago, one of our neighbours, the Anglican Church of St. John the Evangelist, in Leamington, offered the Kairos Canada "Blanket Exercise"; participants read aloud a narrative from various perspectives around the erosion of First Nations lands, territories, culture, and economies. Then there is time to think, time to feel, time to share statements of personal experience. I have attended such events previously, and I chose to attend this event in Leamington. I found it very interesting. Do-able. Not too scary. Not demonizing. They've had some practice with it; the process is a clear, simple, respectful, or so I have found it.

Elders attended from Walpole Island, the Oneida Nation, and the Caldwell Nation; I found I had much to learn from them, and was glad we had that opportunity to meet and share time and space. I found it meaningful, and healing. Low and slow. Time to listen, time to share.

If you see such an event offered again, I would encourage you to consider attending a Blanket Exercise. I would encourage you to consider how else one might learn more, to take some small step towards the work of reconciliation.

What might that look like? Watch TV. There's an Aboriginal television network out there. My mother and I like to watch Arctic Air. We like Adam Beach a lot.

Read a book. There is a growing literature out there, from the re-issue of "Wacousta"—an early novel about Pontiac's War—to a "Native American History for Dummies". First Nations history is now a genre in literature. The Leamington Library, including the reference section, has many relevant holdings, especially around changes of land use in local areas.

The Olinda Social Responsibility Committee asked me to look into the matter of "honour statements"—the words by which many organizations, including many Unitarian Universalist congregations, now choose to begin their gatherings with words of recognition of First Nations. Some of my colleagues were pulling a list together of these honour statements. We'll look closer at that later on.

[Author's Note: See appendix for the full text of territorial acknowledgement statements collected in October 2017 from UU congregations.]

What do I know about Canada's history with First Peoples, First Nations, here in Southwest Ontario, especially here in Essex County where the founders of the Olinda Universalist Church made their homes? What was the history that the Olinda founders stepped in to, about Essex County's history of relationship with the First Nations? If I were out west, where I grew up, on the coast, I'd know a lot. Here, not so much.

I know what I've picked up in the past year, hanging out at various museums and libraries, and listening to other people's stories. And I'm sure the answer is much more complex than I think it is but I'll make a try, and maybe you can correct my misunderstandings.

I know that war, from time to time, has been part of it; I need only look at the names on the wall at Dieppe Park to see that.

I know that from time to time you folks here ask the folks at the Caldwell Nation to visit and share their thoughts.

I know that geography shapes how history works in Essex County: the Ice Age laid down a bridge of gravel above the marshes; the high ground became the First Nations paths along the high ground from Niagara to Detroit; the paths were overlaid with the Military Road and the Talbot Trail.

I know the historians for Point Pelee National Park tell me there might have been human settlement on Point Pelee possibly several thousand years ago; they tell me, the archaeological record shows seasonal native settlement as early as the year 600 of the Common Era, and intense pre-contact occupation 700-900 CE.

I know some historians tell me the French-Indian wars could be seen as a world war in their own right—empires fighting proxy wars over disputed lands far away. If we hold the whole of Lake Erie in one glance, with Essex County at the western end of it and Niagara to the east, we can see a succession of military and trade ventures that defined how folks lived.

1608 Champlain at Quebec.

1701 the Great Peace of Montreal, and the western lands open up to the fur trade

1754-63 French and Indian War

1759 Wolfe and Montcalm meet at the Plains of Abraham, Quebec City

1763 Pontiac's War. Chief Pontiac lays siege to Fort Detroit.

1763 attack on Lt. Cuyler's relief detachment at the Pt. Pelee portage

1764 Quebec Act

1766 American Revolution

1783 the Treaty of Paris ends the American Revolution; Britain cedes aboriginal lands to the United States, betraying Britain's aboriginal allies. We see here a continuing pattern—purchasing land from folks who do not “own” it or hold it as their territory, selling and ceding land that is not one's to give.

1812-15 War of 1812. Does anyone really understand the War of 1812? Please tell me.

Big Mike would have been a six year old child in 1812, and his uncle was 28. (Much of the British military resource would have been Rangers, and of British, First Nations, and mixed race composition. I cannot help but wonder if they camped out at the Fourth Concession along the way to Detroit....)

1814 Battle of the Longwoods. Also Known as Route 2. Why not stop some day and check out the historic markers along the way.

On conclusion of the war of 1812, the Ranger's General Caldwell settles Chippewa people on land at Point Pelee, as thanks for their participation in the War of 1812. The thanks of the Canadian government grows thin after a hundred years: land at Point Pelee has been forcibly transferred several times, with significant changes in patterns of land use. For the Caldwell Nation, this is an ongoing issue.

1837 Uprisings in Upper and Lower Canada; Big Mike Fox would have been 31 years of age.

About 1840 donation of land for Chippewa Burial Ground on Concession 4. A First Nations Ranger who had been in his teens or twenties in 1814 would have been in his 40's or 50's about this time....

This is some of the history that Michael "Big Mike" Fox, his family, and his neighbours held in their hearts, as they read those pamphlets from Boston about universal salvation, universal worth and dignity.....

We shape our cultures around how we make our living.

Hunter gatherers dwell in a Carolinian forest. The fur trade accelerates the hunting part of that scenario; aboriginal populations and Europeans become partners in an economic enterprise that spanned oceans. The fur trade declined; land is put to other use.

This is where Olinda, as our founders knew it, arises: cutting down the forest to smelt bog iron; cutting down the forest to drain the land and put the land under the plough.

Farms and orchards. Industrialization. Urbanization.

The 1920's accelerates the impact of the Indian Act on aboriginal populations: land once held in reserve for the use of the First Peoples is re-appropriated, First Peoples are re-located to suit the strategic needs of government. First Peoples are seen as a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. This reduction of people to an instrument of someone else's will is not just, is not how we respect worth and dignity.

It matters. It matters that we tap the old mortar off the bricks and set them up again with clarity and fresh understanding. It matters that we listen, that we pay attention. It matters that each of us brings our best selves to our everyday relationship.

The conversation continues.

Nineteen or more of approximately thirty-five congregations in the Canadian Unitarian Council have chosen to generate "honour statements" vis à vis First Peoples traditional territories.

How have our sister congregations expressed their response in these statements? Certain key words and phrases recur: "un-ceded traditional territory"; the name of a particular treaty (Essex County lies within Treaty 2 lands); words about relationship, words of gratitude, thanks, acknowledgement, and stewardship; and the phrase, "We are all Treaty People".

[Appended please find the summary of CUC Territorial Acknowledgements, gathered from various UU congregations in Canada during October 2017.]

In conclusion, I have attempted to address my own ignorance of how history has played out in Essex County. I have attempted to get a sense of the historic background that might have been

part of how the Olinda founders of 1880 and their spiritual descendants might have understood the time and place they lived in.

No doubt I have not understood the half of it; I look forward to hearing from you all. What would you have thought was important to include? Please, do share your thoughts with me, over coffee or later. I would like to hear.

Part of our Heritage is the stories and understandings that are passed along to us.

May you hear the prophetic voice that will speak most meaningfully to you, one day at a time, brick by brick.

May it be so.

With thanks to Peter Scales, second reader, and to various ministerial colleagues who shared honour statements used by the congregations they serve.

APPENDIX: Some Canadian Unitarian Universalist Territorial Acknowledgements, gathered by UU Ministers of Canada colleagues, October 2017. (NB: This list is not complete. E.g., the First Unitarian Church of Victoria routinely opens their service with a brief territorial acknowledgement, but that happens not to be included here.)

British Columbia

We meet on the unceded traditional land of the Qayqayt First Nation.
Beacon Unitarian Church, Coquitlam

We gather on the unceded traditional territory of the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Coast Salish peoples. (Projected on a slide).
North Shore Unitarian Church, Vancouver

We are gathered today on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded Indigenous territories of the Secwepmc People, who are a Nation made up of 17 bands.
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Kamloops

We acknowledge that we are meeting on the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.
Comox Valley Unitarian Fellowship

We would like to begin by gratefully acknowledging that the land on which we gather in community this morning is the unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) Peoples. We seek a new relationship with the Original Peoples of this land, one based in honour and deep respect.

May we be good neighbours to one another, good stewards to our planet, and good ancestors to all of our children.

Kelowna Unitarians

Alberta

Spoken: We acknowledge that we meet on Treaty 7 Traditional land and Metis Nation Region 3 - and that we are all treaty people.

Printed in Order of Service: With gratitude, we meet on Treaty 7 territory, traditional lands of the Siksika, Kainai (Blackfoot), Piikani, Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee) and Nakoda (Stoney) Nations .
Unitarian Church of Calgary

We gather with gratitude this morning on Treaty Six land. A treaty is an inheritance, a responsibility, and a relationship. May we be good neighbours to one another, good stewards to our planet, and good ancestors to all of our children. (We do not use these words every week for fear they will become stale and rote if we do, but we use them at least twice a month as they fit into the rest of our welcoming words introduction. The response has been entirely positive.)
Unitarian Church of Edmonton, shared orally approximately twice a month

Saskatchewan

We gather with gratitude this morning on Treaty Six and Metis territory. A treaty is an inheritance, a responsibility, and a relationship. May we be good neighbours to one another, good stewards to our planet, and good ancestors to all of our children.

Saskatoon Unitarians

Ontario

“We acknowledge that where we meet is the land and territory of the Anishnaabeg people, and that we gather with gratitude to our Mississauga neighbours.

We say “meegwetch” to thank them and other Aboriginal peoples for taking care of this land from time immemorial and for sharing this land with those of us who are newcomers.

Out of that gratitude, we are called to treat the land, its plants, animals, stories, and its Peoples with honour and respect. We are all Treaty people.”

Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough (in process of revising)

To build respectful relationships between Indigenous peoples and Settlers and to practice gratitude, we at Neighbourhood Unitarian Universalist Congregation acknowledge the traditional land and territories of the Wendat, the Anishinaabe, Mississauga, the Haudenosaunee, and the Ojibway/Chippewa nations. The treaty that was signed for this particular parcel of land is collectively referred to as the Toronto Purchase and applies to lands east of Brown's Line to Woodbine Avenue and north to Newmarket. We also recognize the continuing/enduring presence of Indigenous peoples on this land.

Neighbourhood Unitarian Universalist Congregation (adapted each week by the person giving the acknowledgement)

As we begin our service, we acknowledge that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron (Neutral), and Wendat peoples. May we live into our aspirations for justice and reconciliation among all peoples.

London Unitarian Fellowship

First sentence: We begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. (language requested by the Mississaugas)

Second sentence, adapted by person giving the acknowledgement: We honour their legacy of caring for this land and seek a relationship of mutual respect.

Unitarian Congregation in Mississauga

We begin by acknowledging that First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe Mississauga, the Haudenosaunee, Ojibway/Chippewa, Huron-Wendat and Métis peoples. This territory is covered by Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt agreement as well as the Upper Canada Treaties. May we renew our commitment to help heal the wounds of our past and our present, and build a shared future on this land marked by true equality, peace, and respect.

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto

We acknowledge that we meet together today on unceded Algonquin Territory. We acknowledge with gratitude the wampum belt vision of two peoples sharing the land each in their own way.

We give thanks for the earth, and for all the living creatures who share it with us.

First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

We are on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron or Neutral people, these lands that are now the City of Guelph. We honour the original ancestors on this land, and also offer respect to our Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Metis neighbours. We strive to be accountable by acknowledging this history and cultivating respect in our relationships with our indigenous neighbours and the land.

Unitarian Congregation of Guelph

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of Rice Lake, Mud Lake, Lake Scugog and Alderville who are guided by Anishnabe traditions and values. This territory is covered by the Williams Treaty of 1923.

OR

We acknowledge that this land where we are meeting today is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation.

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Durham (used at discretion of service leader)

Quebec

Let us be reminded on this day that we are standing on ancestral, traditional lands of the First Nations. At the time of first European contact, this land, the village of Osheaga, was first home to the St. Lawrence Iroquois and then home to the Mohawk who were the “Keepers of the Eastern Door”. May we acknowledge that it is on these ancestral lands that we work, live and play, on whose territory we stand.

Unitarian Church of Montreal

PEI

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional and unceded territory of the Abegweit Mi’kmaq First Nation.

Unitarian Fellowship of PEI

Other Resources and Wordings:

1) Resources on how to do Land Acknowledgements:

a) <http://www.lspirg.org/knowtheland/>

b) <http://mncfn.ca/media-communications/treaty-lands-and-territory-recognition-statements/>

2) A possible ending of a Land Acknowledgement: “We honour that these Nations of people have been living on, working on, and caring for this place from time immemorial and continue to do so today.”

3) An article raising questions about land acknowledgement:

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/canadas-impossible-acknowledgment>

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Many books on the topic are available through the Essex County Public Library system. See 970.00497, including:

Thomas King, “The Inconvenient Indian: A curious Account of Native People in North America”, 2012.

Dorothy Lippert and Stephen J. Spignesi, “Native American History for Dummies”, 2008.

Dwight Jon Zimmerman, “Tecumseh: Shooting Star of the Shawnee”, Sterling publishing, NY 2010. Accessible to both youth and adult readers, with helpful timeline, glossary, bibliography, image credits, and index. Tecumseh

Kairos’ Blanket Exercise, 4th edition. See www.KAIROSblanketexercise.org. With thanks to St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church for hosting a blanket exercise event in Leamington, November 2nd, 2017.

For a fictional treatment exploring West Coast Canadian Culture and Coast Salish spirituality, I enjoy and admire the detective series created by Stanley Evans, a long time Victoria UU. Evans’ series of mystery/crime fiction novels features detective Silas Seaweed, a Coast Salish who is an investigator with the Victoria Police Department. Published by TouchWood Editions, the series includes: Seaweed on the Street (2005); Seaweed on Ice (2006); Seaweed Under Water (2007), received the *Monday Magazine* Best Novel of 2007 award; Seaweed on the Rocks (2008); Seaweed in the Soup (2009); Seaweed in the Mythworld (2011).

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