

Final Submission: Ipperwash Inquiry
Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
Kitchener, Ontario
Submitted by Rick C. Bauman
Program Director
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There is a hymn, popular in many Mennonite churches, entitled “O healing River”. It is a powerful expression of the deeply-held hope that violence and injustice will not reign in this world, but that a healing river of life will instead bring soothing relief to a pain-parched land. Every time we sing it, I cannot help thinking of the most memorable time ever being part of singing this hymn, the time it was sung on the sands of the Ipperwash Beach. One of the lines asks that the healing river “wash the blood, from off of the sand”, and what sand in the recent history of our communities, is more blood-soaked than the sands where Dudley George lost his life in a tragic night of deadly violence.

But the afternoon we sang on the beach, the sand was already blood soaked. We were there to explore possible violence reduction work with a partner agency, Christian Peacemaker Teams. But we were there because the violence had already happened, and the blood had already been spilled by an OPP bullet.

And since that fatal shot was fired by Officer Deane, enormous amounts of energy and scrutiny have been focused on the actions of the *police* that lead to Dudley George’s death. Today, over 10 years later I read through the dozens of pages of material generated by the OPP through this Inquiry to illustrate how they have changed over this decade, how they have developed ARTs and MELTs and Regional Aboriginal Liaison Councils, and how they employ GAFs and Native Awareness Training and have even been given the responsibility for a drum placed in their care. Also today, I watch the accusations and counter accusations about OPP actions and failures to act during the Six Nations occupation of lands of the recently-named Douglas Creek Estates at Caledonia. One could conclude from the OPP actions at Caledonia, and their list of changes and learnings since Ipperwash, that they had learned and that they had changed. How else do we explain their restraint in the now infamous incidents of fights and alleged assaults on Friday nights in Caledonia? On the other hand one could conclude very little at all has changed based on many accounts of the early morning raid on April 20 that included pepper spray and physical violence.

I am suggesting that for the purposes of this submission it doesn’t matter. Of course I want to know that my province has the finest police services in the land, and I would be proud to describe them as the best anywhere in dealing with issues involving First Nations. But this should never have been a policing matter. The fact that it was suggests a failure in us as communities. That we were gathered on the beach to sing “O healing

river” after the blood had soaked the sand, made it all the clearer that for this most important of engagements, we who wanted to be Peacemakers, were tragically late.

And of course it would also be easy to shift our sights from the police, to another locus of power in our society...to say that if it is not a failure in how we police this land, it is a failure in how it is governed. And again of course, we would want our federal government to swiftly and justly bring settlement to the many outstanding claims on lands and resources that so often, as they did at Azhoodana lead to conflict, confrontation and violence. But again, we would say it is too easy to expect national leaders to act to resolve these longstanding vestiges of the unresolved relationships between Newcomers and the First peoples who welcomed us here.

So can I honestly blame the community for what happened on Sept. 6, and is it really up to them to change in order to avoid future tragedies like this one? There were some very wise and worthwhile recommendations that recently came directly out of the very community where this shooting occurred, from a Public meeting held earlier this summer at the Thedford Arena a few miles from here. This by the way, is the same arena that saw over 800 local community members gathered in the days just after the shooting, displaying a decidedly different face. In the fall of '95 fear and anger created a very hostile and tense setting as the community discussed how it could move on with its life in the aftermath of such upset.

Now, eleven years later, there emerge from these community people some calm and thoughtful suggestions. It is worth noting that 6 of the 8 recommendations made to the Inquiry that evening had to do with actions and policies of the police. Many of them, I am happy to say are already, or are in the process of being implemented by the OPP, requests for things like the mandatory preservation of officers' notes, far stronger use of Aboriginal officers to police aboriginal communities, and the need to communicate effectively with the whole community during a critical incident.

A seventh recommendation, directed to our federal government was the oft-repeated and still true need for timely settlement of outstanding claims. But the last had to do with all of us, the un-uniformed, civilian population of Ontario. It was simply entitled “education”; not very new or startling. In it they make a fairly standard call for all of us to be educated “about the historical basis for land claims” in this country. But it is in the general notes of the meeting following the recommendations that I think we should look for direction. We are told that

*“others stepped forward to note that they and their families had always enjoyed **good relations** with local First Nations people. One man described his family having lived, peacefully, adjacent to Stoney Point for six generations.” [emphasis mine]*

And this is not to say that if all the folks near Ipperwash had been friendly, the shooting would never have happened. That is far too simplistic. Nor can we blame the incident on

even the most virulent of attitudes held by other of the Stoney Point community's neighbours.

The key that I think is being identified here is the simple truth that our governments, and yes even our police are in fact reflections of us and of our attitudes toward First people. Until we as a newcomer community make two fundamental changes, relations with First Peoples will be strained, volatile and at times violent.

The first change, as suggested by the good people at the Thedford arena is the essential relearning of the history of our being welcomed to this land. What are the principles of understanding land, and of people belonging to land rather than land to the people? What is the meaning of treaty, in Hebrew the same word as "covenant", when land is not a commodity that can be owned or sold? What does it mean to be side by side on the same land when our understandings of sharing the land versus exclusive use of the land are so widely different?

But education is not by itself adequate. I think the people at Thedford who stepped forward to describe their "good relations" with people at Stoney Point are very close to the second change we need to achieve. Education without relationships is not enough, though neither is it adequate to be in friendly relationships without bothering to gain a realistic understanding of Aboriginal social and political history.

What we are proposing is a thoroughgoing effort to re-build or in many cases simply build strong, honest, informed relationships with First people who are our neighbours. For us in the Christian faith community, this grows heavily out of our commitment to justice, but it has many roots throughout our community. Newcomers to Turtle Island, this is our work! It is not good enough to wait and hope that First Nation people will seek us out, speak to us, educate us and ask to be our friends. There has been too much broken trust for that. No, we will need to own this work.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Earlier I mentioned Caledonia, now a nationally recognized place name, only less infamous than Ipperwash and Oka because there was no loss of life on this 40 acre parcel on the edge of Six Nations. This parcel is one tiny sliver of a huge tract of land stretching for six miles on either side of the majestic Grand River that was granted to the Six Nations by the British crown in 1784. It was compensation for their major land losses in what is now upstate New York, lost after they and the British were defeated by the Americans in the war of independence. Let me read an excerpt from a statement to our Mennonite constituency we prepared a few weeks ago.

For many Mennonites in Ontario, those of the Swiss German immigration via Pennsylvania, their arrival here in Ontario closely followed the Crown commitment of the Haldimand Grant to Six Nations. In fact there is at least one case of early Mennonite settlers raising extra money to settle an outstanding debt to Six Nations that they became aware of after assuming they were purchasing mortgage-free land in the Grand River valley near present day Waterloo. We would like to think there continues to be in our communities, a strong commitment to being good neighbours with those who welcomed us here.

*There are approximately 25 congregations from the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Church, all part of the MCC Ontario constituency, whose meetinghouses are located in the historic Haldimand tract. This does not mean all these churches are on land claimed by Six Nations. But we believe it does create for us as a peace church, a call to better understand Grand River valley settlement history, particularly as it creates a strong case for Six Nations' legitimate claim to land and/or compensation. As people who want to live as good neighbours, **we believe it is important to understand and respect the efforts of the Six Nations community to achieve a settlement that is just and timely, and that contributes to the long term health and viability of their community.***

So, in order to act on this intention, MCC Ontario will be hiring a staff person whose work will be the encouraging, nurturing, building of relationships between those 25 churches, our churches, and the Six Nations neighbours who welcomed them to the Valley. We hope to include non-Mennonite churches too, as well as others who are not part of the Christian faith community, but who share a commitment to creating informed, fair, open relationships. This will not be easy or automatic. There is a lot on the line, with municipalities wanting to build bridges across the river, private developers wanting to build houses and industry in the river valley. All this while Six Nations needs to assert themselves in the creation of a solid land and economic base for their future. Tough, cheque-book decisions need to be made which will require discussion and negotiation that are built on strong working relationships. We believe it is in part our responsibility to help develop those strong relationships. And we are prepared to invest some time. Not months, but years. We hope many will join us.

We are slow starting, and there is no recipe to follow. And more importantly no guarantee of success. But the alternatives to the building of good relationships seem clear; more misunderstanding, more confrontation, more violence. I am hopeful that we can do better than that. **We believe that only when local, community-to-community relationships are healthy, will policing relationships move to where we need them to be, and will land claims be settled in ways that all parties can accept and even celebrate.** Building these local communities of understanding is vital to the large scale structural changes we require.

I do not want to suggest that there are not already good, respectful relations in the Grand Valley, or here in the communities of Stoney, Kettle, Thedford, Forest, Sarnia. There are, and I have observed some of them. But clearly we need to do more. When communities know, understand and trust each other, they will not need to so quickly depend on the “professionals” from police departments and federal ministries to step in to resolve local issues. Of course this is not to say these groups can abdicate their duties, especially the settlement of outstanding claims, but rather that communities with confidence in their relationships can take back the responsibilities to work out many of their issues and concerns locally and successfully.

As communities we will only be ready for this when we commit to the building of genuine relationships even when the barriers to these relationships look daunting. It is precisely then that we need to act.

Appendix A

Introductory Remarks from MCC Ontario Consultation at Zurich Mennonite Church for Part II of the Ipperwash Inquiry, Jan 14/05

I grew up in SW Ontario, just over an hour from the beaches that have come to be known as Ipperwash, never knowing that someone else called the land Aushoodana, never knowing that the little military base was once home to a community that was forced out so my country could train for war, never knowing that many promises had been made to return the land to its original owners.

In my work as MCC's "Native Concerns Staff" in the mid nineties, I had just returned from Labrador, where militarization of Aboriginal lands was public issue number one, and within a few weeks of returning to Ontario while wandering at a pow wow I met a Stoney Point member whose car hood was covered with maps and research studies. Within an hour I was introduced to a new history of Lake Huron shores. I was shocked.

The role of MCC Native Concerns in Ontario included solidarity work with Aboriginal groups under pressure from outside forces, as well as doing public education. As staff, I could not do any education without a much deeper understanding. I began visiting the community and meeting the people who had returned from Korea to find their houses gone, who had worked for over a decade to have their access to the land re instated. I was walked through dunes and forests along the edges of this lost land, told about areas contaminated by unexploded ordnance [which I assumed was a post-Vietnam problem], and reminded constantly of the dream of this scattered community, to go home.

Then I got the news that they did go home. A small group had opened a fence off highway 21 and gone home. Now when I went to visit, I was taken along the stunning beach, I was walked right alongside the mortar testing ranges, and given a tour of the secluded campground reserved for ranking officers. There was a joy in this group. And why not...they had come home.

It was time my broader MCC community learned the stories they did not know. So we invited Stoney Pt speakers to our gatherings and meetings. And we arranged for groups of our people to come, to this contested, occupied place, to hear land stories, stories they were not used to hearing from their nearby neighbours.

As the group entrenched their occupation, I began to get requests for support - so we began helping to get building materials to the community for winterizing cabins. Volunteers came to raise walls and put in windows. Then a plan emerged for the Stoney Pointers to walk to Ottawa as a call for the federal gov. to act on the land return promise. From our home in Shakespeare, to the basement of Mennonite churches in Kitchener and Stouffville, these walkers met MCC people who provided suppers, shelter, and encouragement in response to the stories...stories most of course had never heard.

So by Sept of 1995 this unknown community of strangers on the Huron shore had ceased to be unknown to us. Their stories and dreams had been shared with us. We had begun to become neighbours.

The radio report on Sept. 7 came while I was helping my young son get his shoes on for his first day of school. I wept.

The next days were a mix of simply being at the funeral with a small group of our constituents to be caring neighbours, and long discussions about how we, who now were not strangers, but neighbours, could offer anything more that would be helpful.

Tensions were very high. We realized only after watching the late news that we had been the only non-Native people at the funeral. How could we act responsibly with the fact that we had a relationship with a community that now was surrounded by heavily armed police and neighbours whose anger and mistrust were nearly explosive. What was the role of a Christian faith community when the threat of more violence was on every mind?

From their Chicago headquarters, we got a call from CPT wondering if they should come to set up their violence reduction presence...but they were unknowns to the community...it was we locals who had the responsibility of having knowledge, and relationship. So continued the discussions of how we could contribute to reduced tension, how we might reduce the likelihood of more violence, how we might convey to the people of Stoney, barricaded in fear from the neighbours they used to shop and play ball with, that there were some in the community who wished them no harm and wanted to continue, in spite of the tragedy, to be in a relationship with them.

My next days, along with a rotating supportive group of MCC volunteers, were spent camped out in the Kettle Point United church attempting to be a calming, observing, presence in conversation with many parties, hoping for and calling for non-violent resolution. These days were also filled with discussions with local emerging Stoney leaders [I am still honoured and humbled that I was welcomed into the Base in these days fraught with fear and mistrust] Talk gradually turned to the idea of an Observer Team of volunteers trained to be present in a visible and unaligned way, and to document any activities of concern. We talked also with local police to see whether we could have some measure of acceptance from them. From one Stoney leader we heard, "Do your Observer Team thing...they are your police so you should be watching them!"

From here the story grows far beyond MCC to you who responded. It becomes your story. It grew to include local pastors and church people who believed we needed to be there the day the SIU began its investigation. It grew to include more church people who were willing to be trained, to be ready to act as they could to diffuse tension and prevent further violence. It grew to include quilters who sat across from Stoney Point women in friendship. It grew and today we want to hear how.

By Rick Cober Bauman

Appendix B

Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
DRAFT Job Description
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
July 28, 2006
Community Liaison

Synopsis : This person will explore, develop and implement creative initiatives to build and strengthen relationships among Six Nations people and their neighbours in the Grand River valley, with area partners and our constituent churches and individuals.

Qualifications:

- Essential -
- Ability to problem solve and respond effectively to complex and deeply rooted social conflict
 - Strong relational skills
 - Demonstrated ability to work effectively with groups which are highly diverse religiously, culturally and historically.
 - Creativity, innovation and ability to work collaboratively with partners, co-workers and MCCO constituents
 - Strong communication skills, including listening actively, speaking articulately in large and small groups, and writing for media and non-media purposes
 - Ability to plan and vision strategically, using good judgment and considering all stake holders
 - Knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal communities and their history, both urban and First Nation.

Asset: Previous cross-cultural experience

Assignment Description: Just over 200 years ago Mennonite settlers arrived in the Grand River Valley, and took up farming on land that had been granted by the British Crown to the Six Nations. Very few relationships between these groups have continued, and the efforts by Six Nations leaders to settle longstanding land disputes in the valley make it critical that Grand River valley residents build bridges of understanding and communication with the Six Nations community. We intend to contribute to building a community of understanding at least among our constituents and other churches to help make the resolution of land issues a peaceful and just process.

This person will take the lead in helping this process happen, and will be accountable to the Aboriginal Neighbours Program Coordinator.

Duties:

- Initial:
- Develop a trusted presence with both Confederacy and Elected Council [including its Lands and Resources Dept.] at Six Nations, as well as with surrounding non-aboriginal municipalities and constituents.
 - Develop working relationships with area constituent and non-constituent churches, other relevant denominational staff [Hamilton Conference of United Church, Hamilton Diocese

- of Catholic Church] regional clergy associations (Brantford, Caledonia, Hagersville, Cambridge, Kitchener)
- Develop working relationships with Hamilton urban aboriginal groups through the Branches of Native Development Committee of Hamilton Regional Friendship Centre
 - Gain strong knowledge of social history of Grand River communities especially in terms of Six Nations treaties and their interactions with Mennonites and other settlers
 - Gather, assess and make available relevant print and electronic resources which can help provide background and education around the land issues and groups involved

Ongoing –

- In consultation with partners above, especially those at Six Nations, to plan and implement activities, events and communication that build and strengthen broader community relationships with Six Nations
- Connect regularly to constituency and broader community through the Welcome Inn, Aboriginal Neighbours Newsletter, the Congregational Rep. Mailings, Tidings, the MCCO web-site and media releases making use of resources produced by and with stakeholder communities
- Be available as a resource to area individuals, churches, municipalities, community groups, schools [eg. Emmanuel Bible College] interested in connecting with and learning about Six Nations history and land issues
- Contribute where invited to healing and reconciliation processes involving Six Nations and the broader community
- Advocate where necessary with KAIROS, and other NGO's around land and water issues at Six Nations.
- Will work collaboratively with MCC Ontario Program Coordinators, and connect with appropriate MCC Networks.
- Develop and work closely with a diverse MCC Ontario Southern Aboriginal Neighbours Reference Group
- Compile one annual Aboriginal Neighbours Newsletter; "All Our Neighbours".

This position will be located in The Welcome Inn, in the north end of Hamilton in an MCC O partnership with their intentional outreach into community and regional faith-based justice work.