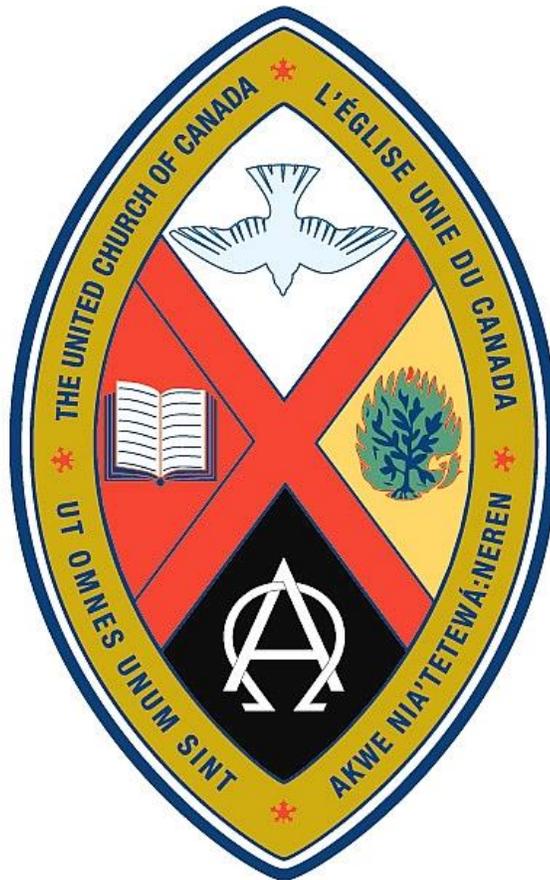


BRIEF
PREPARED FOR
THE GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN
BY
SASKATCHEWAN CONFERENCE
OF
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA



November 2015/ November 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 1

The United Church of Canada 1

Faith Rationale 2

Resources Revenue Sharing.....4

Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.....5

Free Vision Dental, Hearing and Pharmacare for Seniors.....9

National Aboriginal Day.....10

Saskatchewan Anti Poverty Act.....11

Appendix 1: 2015 Original Proposals 12

Appendix 2: 2016 Original Proposal.....20

Appendix 3: Presbytery Map of Saskatchewan 21

INTRODUCTION

This brief of Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada is based on proposals passed at the 2015 and 2016 Annual Meetings of Saskatchewan Conference, held in Lanigan, May 28 to May 31, 2015, and in Regina June 2 to June 5, 2016. The text of proposals adopted by Annual Meeting delegates is appended to this brief. This brief was reviewed and approved by Conference Executive at its meetings of November 6, 2015 and November 4, 2016

This brief deals with the following Conference proposals:

- Resource Revenue Sharing
- Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
- Free vision, Dental, Hearing, and Pharmacare for Seniors
- National Aboriginal Day Statutory Holiday in Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Anti Poverty Act

We appreciate the opportunity to share the concerns and views of our Conference and its delegates with representatives of the Government of Saskatchewan and the Opposition. This introduction describes the governance of The United Church of Canada and our faith rationale for addressing issues with government.

The United Church of Canada

The United Church of Canada was formed in 1925 following an Act of Canadian Parliament through a union of Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches across the country. The Evangelical United Brethren joined this union in 1968. Today in Saskatchewan, the United Church has 36,186 members¹ and many thousand more adherents in 265 churches which serve all over Saskatchewan. Statistics Canada tells us that 19.5% of Saskatchewan individuals claim United Church affiliation, a significant portion of our population².

The United Church is governed by a series of courts. The basic unit is the Pastoral Charge which consists of one or more congregations. The next court, reflecting a wider jurisdiction, is the Presbytery, which has oversight of all pastoral charges and ministry personnel in a region. Members of Presbytery include the ministers in that region, and a larger number of lay representatives from the pastoral charges. The conference has oversight of seven presbyteries, and again is comprised of all the ministers in that

¹ Yearbook and Directory: 2013, The United Church Of Canada

² <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/rel/tables/provs/sasktop.cfm>

region, and a larger number of lay representatives. The boundaries of Saskatchewan Conference correspond almost exactly with the provincial boundaries. Saskatchewan Conference meets annually, with about two hundred and fifty voting delegates in attendance.

General Council, the national court which meets triennially, consists of equal numbers of ministry personnel commissioners and lay commissioners, elected by the 13 Conferences.

The crest that is on the cover of this document is the product of the meeting of our 41st General Council held in August of 2012. With this updated symbolism, "The United Church of Canada acknowledged the presence and spirituality of Aboriginal peoples in the United Church by revising the church's crest. The crest changes include incorporating the four colours of the Aboriginal medicine wheel (yellow as a symbol of life and Asian people, black as a symbol of the south and dark-skinned people of the world, red as a symbol of the west and Aboriginal peoples, and white as the colour of the north and white-skinned people) and adding the Mohawk phrase "Akwe Nia'Tetewá:neren" [aw gway-- nyah day day waw-- nay renh], which means 'All my relations.'"³

Faith Rationale

The United Church of Canada has a long history of involvement in societal issues. It is our conviction that faith is public as well as private, social as well as personal, corporate as well as individual. Since political, economic and environmental policies can have great consequences for both individuals and society, they should be subject to critical ethical scrutiny.

While Government represents and is accountable to the whole community, it has a special responsibility to listen to those who are marginalized by race, ethnic origin, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender or any number of other factors that can cause groups or individuals to be ignored and disenfranchised by mainstream society. Our faith perspective calls us to raise concerns about such marginalization with the government of the day. Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada has presented a formal brief to the government of the province since the early 1970s.

As members of The United Church of Canada, we believe that our faith requires that we seek the common good. As the Old Testament prophets Amos and Micah reminded their rulers of the social and economic injustice of their day, we too are called to this task. We remember that the God of the Bible shows a special concern for the poor and that the Reign of God, which Jesus called would prevent excessive accumulation of wealth at the expense of human and environmental needs. It is this prophetic

³ <http://www.united-church.ca/history/crest>

role that places us, at times, in a minority position together with others working for a just, equitable and compassionate society.

Our faith calls us to care for one another and for the rest of creation. We believe this to be the essential message of scripture and of Christian tradition. We would hope that government shares our desire to help shape our society so that it is more closely in tune with what God would want for this world. Out of this perspective is born our vision of what society could be.

The following is "A New Creed of The United Church:

*We are not alone,
we live in God's world.*

*We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.*

We trust in God.

*We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.*

*In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.*

*We are not alone.
Thanks be to God."*

Resource Revenue Sharing

The Prophet Isaiah tells us that as people of faith we are called to loose the bonds of injustice (58:6). In our context this involves working toward justice and right relations with Indigenous peoples.

Treaties were covenants to allow both First Nations and settler communities to dwell together in peace and harmony and live off the fruits of the land. In sharing the land with new people, First Nations always believed that the treaties were only about using the land to the “depth of the plough” or surface rights. Therefore the issue of resource revenues, both surface and sub-surface remains an ongoing issue.

In 1930, the federal government transferred control of natural resources to the western provinces through the Natural Resources Transfer Act. That means that equitable sharing of resources is now in the hands of the provincial government.

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that in dealing with the treaties, governments should be liberal in their interpretations. For example, the written documents should not be understood as the final determinant, but that First Nations oral interpretation of the treaties must be fully considered.

First Nations people have suffered and continue to suffer negative social and economic consequences due to colonial oppression. They have consistently asked for a share of the bountiful wealth of the province which is derived from the resources of the land, to no avail.

In May 2014, Saskatchewan Conference Executive of the United Church of Canada adopted a proposal calling upon the Government of Saskatchewan to enter into discussions on resource revenue sharing with First Nations.

At its 2015 Annual Meeting in Lanigan, Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada decided to give one-half of the net income that it has received from oil producing property to its First Nations counter-part within the United Church, the All Native Circle Conference. This sharing is being done in spite of the adverse effect on the financial reserves of Saskatchewan Conference and its annual budgeting. It is hoped that this sharing will be a positive example to the Saskatchewan Government to enter into meaningful negotiations to share revenue from natural resources with First Nations.

Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Helen Knot, in her Poem, *Invisible*, writes, in remembering all Aboriginal women who are missing:

Your eyes, they curve around me.
I watch you try so hard to find your way past me.
Your sight is like rushing waters,
Moving beside me, behind me, pushing over me, Indirectly consuming me.
They say the path of least resistance makes rivers and men crooked. ...

Come on, baby, and dance me outside.
I think she was just looking for a good time.
I heard she lived a risky lifestyle.
It was inevitable, some say.
This is how you see me.

Never somebody's daughter, never somebody's mother, never an aunt, a sister, a friend.
Never am I seen as strong, as proud, as resilient.
Never as I am.

Finally, given the stars,
Laid to gaze at them on back roads and in ditches,
On ghostly stretches of forgotten pebbled pathways.
Your vastness swallows me.
Do I fall in your line of sight? Do you see me now?
Because I get this feeling that your eyes, they curve around meⁱ.

Between 2004 and 2010, Aboriginal women accounted for at least 8% of homicide victims, despite accounting for 4% of the total female population in Canada.ⁱⁱ

This tragic crisis has, until recently, been largely ignored.

In 1996 John Martin Crawford was convicted of murder in the killings of three indigenous women in Saskatoon. Warren Goulding, one of the few journalists to cover the trial commented. "I don't get the sense the general public cares much about missing or murdered Aboriginal women. It's all part of this indifference to the lives of Aboriginal people. They don't seem to matter as much as white people".ⁱⁱⁱ

Recognizing that a problem exists, in 2013, the House of Commons created a Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls.

Witnesses to the Special Committee called for an independent public inquiry, which would allow victim's friends and family to be heard, and communities to start on the path toward reconciliation.^{iv}:

Reconciliation requires educating the Canadian public about the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, including the legacy of residential schools, poverty and housing, racism, systems and services that are failing Aboriginal women and girls; developing a coordinated national action plan to

address such violence and its causes; and establishing benchmarks for evaluating initiatives aimed at ending violence against Aboriginal Women and girls in Canada.^v

One of the 16 recommendations (listed below) of the Special Committee includes the following:

“That the federal government learn from the stories of the families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to create a public awareness and prevention campaign focussing on violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.^{vi}

While there may be some who say, “of course there is a problem, let’s just fix it”, without a public inquiry the opportunity will be lost for us to hear the stories of others, and understand the part we all play in the supporting, discounting or ignorance of the “Invisible Women in Canada”. Together we must hear the stories, together we must seek justice and reconciliation, together we must be the people who hold ourselves and our country accountable for the existence of such disparity in living conditions, and in the upholding of all human beings whom God loves and cares for.

As people who care for people, we have the responsibility to keep all of God’s people visible, loved, heard and cherished.

We commend the Premier of the Province of Saskatchewan for his stand supporting a National Public Inquiry with respect to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Although the recommendations are aimed at the Federal Government, we also ask the Government of Saskatchewan to do what is within their purview with respect to the 16 recommendations of the Special Committee^{vii}. In particular, we name recommendations 1, 9, 10, 11, 12, and ask the Government of Saskatchewan to take leadership in being proactive in working with other bodies to bring about the fulfillment of these recommendations.

ⁱ Recited by Connie Greyeyes at a meeting dedicated to the families of victims held by the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women, 9 December 2013. The information from this background sheet is from the Report of the Special Committee on Violence Against indigenous Women, *Invisible Women: A Call to Action. A report on Missing and murdered indigenous Women in Canada*. Stella Ambler, Chair, March 2014, 41st Parliament, Second Session.

ⁱⁱ IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, Evidence, 2 May 2013 (Lynn Barr-Telford, Director General, Health, justice and Special Surveys Branch, Statistics Canada). *Invisible Women*, page 10.

ⁱⁱⁱ IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, Evidence, 30 May 2013 (Michele Adette, President, Native Women’s Association of Canada). *Invisible Women*, page 3

^{iv} *Invisible Women*, page 13.

^v *Invisible Women*, page 14.

^{vi} *Invisible Women*, page 39.

^{vii} *Awareness Campaign?*

Recommendations of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls

Recommendation 1

That the federal government learn from the stories of the families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to create a public awareness and prevention campaign focusing on violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

Support for the family of victims

Recommendation 2

That the federal government continue strengthening the criminal justice system to ensure, among other things, that violent and repeat offenders serve appropriate sentences.

Recommendation 3

That the federal government maintain its commitment to develop the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights including initiatives aimed at making the criminal justice system more responsive to the needs of victims, such as keeping them informed and providing them with appropriate standing, access and assistance throughout the process.

Recommendation 4

That the federal government implement a national DNA-based missing person's index

Support for communities

Recommendation 5

That the federal government continue to support K-12 education on reserve as an important tool in combating the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

Recommendation 6

That the federal government continue to support programming and legislation that allow Aboriginal communities to respond to violence.

Recommendation 7

That the federal government examine options to address poverty as a root cause of violence against Aboriginal women and girls by empowering Aboriginal people through economic development opportunities and jobs and skills training.

Recommendation 8

That the federal government engage First Nation communities to examine how to improve supports for shelters and front-line services on reserve for victims of violence.

Recommendation 9

That the federal government support provincial, territorial and First Nation childcare agencies in their responsibility to ensure effective and accountable service delivery.

Police Services

Recommendation 10

That the federal government in cooperation with municipal, provincial and territorial governments examine the possibility of collecting police data on violence against Aboriginal women and girls that includes an ethnicity variable.

Recommendation 11

That the federal government engage Aboriginal communities and municipal, provincial, and territorial governments to examine options to improving procedures among police services to facilitate multipartite investigations.

Recommendation 12

That the federal government encourage Aboriginal organizations, the Canadian Police College and municipal, provincial and territorial governments to improve police officer training, including continuing education, to foster cultural understanding and sensitivity.

Violence against women and girls

Recommendation 13

That the federal government continue to take appropriate action to reduce human trafficking and to reduce the violence and harm associated with prostitution.

Other supports

Recommendation 14

That in implementing the public awareness strategy on substance abuse, the federal government target support to Aboriginal communities.

Recommendation 15

That the federal government examine opportunities to improve the incorporation of best practices into existing programs and services available to Aboriginal women and girls.

Moving to action

Recommendation 16

That the federal government implement all of the recommendations above in a coordinated action plan.

Free Vision, Dental, Hearing and Pharmacare for Seniors

Jesus said “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Matthew 25:40) and Genesis 1:27 tells us we are all made in the likeness of God, therefore , this calls us to recognize the inherent dignity of all human beings. With this in mind, Seniors must be included as full citizens.

A growing number of Seniors in Saskatchewan cannot afford the costs related to their vision, dental, hearing and drugs needs. They are having to make choices such as; “do I purchase my medical needs or do I pay my rent, or utilities, or do I buy groceries”? That is a sad state of affairs in province like Saskatchewan. No one in this province should have to be making such choices. Seniors have a right to justice rather than charity, therefore they have a right to free, vision, dental, hearing and pharmacare, so no Senior goes without medical services, rent, utilities, or food.

A growing number of Doctors have recognized the need for new strategies around care for Seniors that would prevent unnecessary hospital stays and escalating healthcare costs. In a news article a Doctor shared a story of having to give medication samples to patients because they cannot afford a prescription. This Doctor also states; “A successful public health-care system isn’t just about access to a family doctor or an MRI,...It’s also about being able to access drugs, and if there’s a barrier to that, were not meeting the standard of a truly public health-care system...Pharmacare speaks to Canadian values of fairness and equality and access”. This newspaper article also points out that insurance plans are not necessarily covering the needs of Canadians⁴.

The territory of Nunavut realizes this and provides free vision, dental, hearing and pharmacare services for all Seniors⁵. We are asking the same benefits be afforded to all Seniors in Saskatchewan.

Seniors have contributed to our communities, this province and this country in many ways. It is now time for us to show them our gratitude for all they have done. As citizens it is our responsibility to ensure our Seniors are not without the necessities of life.

In light of the above we call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to implement and maintain free vision, dental, hearing and pharmacare services for all people 65 and over.

⁴ Leader Post, “Call now louder for national prescription drug plan”, October 6, 2014. P. A6

⁵ Government of Nunavut, Health Insurance Extended Health Benefits, retrieved October, 15, 2014 <http://www.gov.nu.ca/health/information/health-insurance-extended-health-benefits>

National Aboriginal Day

God reminds us that we are many parts of one body (1 Corinthians 12); and that we should celebrate the gifts found in creation, and in all people.

In many countries around the world, the longest day of the year holds special cultural and spiritual significance. In Canada, this special time is when we observe National Aboriginal Day. This is an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the diverse cultures and outstanding contributions to Canada of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Celebrating Saskatchewan's past and present is deeply connected to the culture, history and traditions of First Nations and Métis people. Stories of Saskatchewan's past include tales of legendary chiefs like Poundmaker and Big Bear, and Métis leaders Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont. Today's modern Saskatchewan Aboriginal culture is one that honours the past while building toward an exciting future.

Canada's National Aboriginal Day gives many people the chance to learn more about Aboriginal people and their contributions to the country's development and progress. First Nations, Métis and Inuit people have the opportunity to showcase their cultures and achievements throughout Canada on this day.

The traditional territories of our First Nations people in Saskatchewan have yielded fruit plentifully for the benefit of all persons in the province. The indigenous peoples of this land have a rich culture which is a gift to non-first nations and future generations; other historical and cultural events and gifts are celebrated in Saskatchewan with a statutory holiday such as Victoria Day, Remembrance Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas. These arise primarily from a European cultural tradition.

It is to be noted that National Aboriginal Day is a paid holiday for employees in the Northwest Territories (except those in the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association).

In developing this proposal, we consulted extensively with First Nations and non- First Nations groups as follows: •

- First Nations People within Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada, including Plains Presbytery
- First Nations people within the United Church nationally such as the All-Native Circle Conference
- The Métis Federation of Saskatchewan
- Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN)
- Non-First-Nations people within the Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada

In light of the above, we request the Government of Saskatchewan to declare National Aboriginal Day (June 21) a statutory holiday in Saskatchewan to celebrate the culture of our First Nations peoples, their contributions to our province and the well-being of all its peoples.

2016 Proposal

Saskatchewan Anti-Poverty Act

As people of faith we recognize that the God of our scriptures maintains the cause of those in need (Psalm 140:12) and we are called to defend the rights of the poor (Proverbs 31:9).

Poverty is a human rights violation. In 1976, Canada with the approval of all the provinces, signed the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Article 11 of this covenant recognizes the right of everyone to have an adequate standard of living for themselves and their family including adequate food, clothing and housing and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. Article 7 of the covenant recognizes the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work which ensure all workers with fair wages for a decent living for themselves and their families as well as equal remuneration for work of equal value. Unfortunately, when these rights are infringed upon there is no domestic remedy in Canada.

Since 1997, the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry has identified key anti-poverty proposals through extensive consultation with low-income people and community groups dealing with poverty issues. The following proposals arise time after time. They are adequate income security benefits, a living wage, quality and affordable housing and childcare, equity initiatives and fair taxation. Each proposal would ensure basic social and economic rights. These proposals have been debated through the courts of the United Church and have become official positions of Saskatchewan Conference of the United Church of Canada. All of these proposals were identified as areas of grave concern by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights in their concluding observation of Canada on March 23, 2016. What is needed now is legislation to ensure implementation.

Over the past two years we have seen the development of a Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy. Unfortunately, this strategy has neither legislation nor a human rights framework. Since it was released on February 24, 2016, we have not seen expansion of social and economic benefits and protections but instead have had cuts announced for many of Saskatchewan's most economically vulnerable citizens.

What is needed is a Saskatchewan Anti-Poverty Act which entrenches the rights that Saskatchewan has committed itself to protect under the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in enforceable legislation. Such legislation is the essential ingredient of an effective anti-poverty strategy and would allow us to once again play a leadership role in pioneering progressive social legislation that is a model for the rest of Canada. Most importantly it would provide needed protection for our most disadvantaged residents.

In light of the above, we request the Government of Saskatchewan to implement a Saskatchewan Anti Poverty Act in order to ensure that the rights it has committed itself to protect under the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are enshrined in enforceable legislation

APPENDIX 1: ORIGINAL PROPOSALS & DOCUMENTS

PROPOSAL NO. 1 [Conference Executive, May 2014]

Title: RESOURCE REVENUE SHARING

Origin: Wascana Presbytery

Financial Implications: none

Staffing Implications: none

Sources of Funding: not applicable

Conference Action: [Adopted by Conference Executive, May 28-29, 2014]

WHEREAS we are called to loose the bonds of injustice (Isaiah 58:6); and

WHEREAS the treaties were covenants to allow both First Nations and settler communities to dwell together in peace and harmony and live off the fruits of the land; and

WHEREAS First Nations people have suffered and continue to suffer negative social and economic consequences because of colonial oppression; and

WHEREAS the National Resources Transfer Act (1930) transferred control of natural resources to the provincial government; and

WHEREAS First Nations have consistently asked for a share of the bountiful wealth of this province which is derived from the resources of the land, to no avail; and

WHEREAS the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that the interpretation of the treaties be done in a liberal fashion, taking account of the oral tradition of First Nations; and

WHEREAS First Nations have consistently stated that they believe the treaties only allowed for the use of the top part of the land (to the depth of the plough); and

WHEREAS the Government of Saskatchewan has refused to enter into meaningful negotiations respecting sharing resources revenues with First Nations;

THEREFORE BE IT PROPOSED that the Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to enter into discussions on resource revenue sharing with First Nations.

Intermediate Court Action: not applicable

PROPOSAL NO. 1 [2015 Annual Meeting]

Title: RESOURCE REVENUE SHARING FROM THE MOATS LAND FUND

Originating Body: Saskatchewan Conference Executive

Financial Implications: One half of the capital and income of the Moats Land Fund

Staffing Implications: None

Source of Funding: The Moats Land Fund

Conference Action: [Adopted by Conference Annual Meeting 2015]

The Saskatchewan Conference Executive Proposes that 50% of both the Moats Land Fund and the net income which accrues to such fund be shared with the All Native Circle Conference, or its successor.

Background:

A Proposal was made to Saskatchewan Conference in 2013 (which was considered by the Saskatchewan Conference Executive in lieu of an annual meeting) that Saskatchewan Conference call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to enter into discussions on resource revenue sharing with First Nations.

That proposal was approved by consensus and during the discussion of the proposal it was suggested that if Saskatchewan Conference is going to ask the government to share resource revenue then we should also be discussing how the proceeds resulting from the sale of the Moats Land Fund should also be shared with First Nations.

The result was a decision, again by consensus, that a conversation be initiated with the Saskatchewan Conference All My Relations Network about resource revenue sharing by the sharing of a proportion of the income from the Moats Land Fund with First Nations people within the United Church.

A variety of suggestions were received from the All My Relations Network which resulted in a conversation with the Speaker of the All Native Circle Conference (ANCC), Cheryl Jourdain. The conversation with Cheryl Jourdain informed the Executive that:

- there is a general lack of funding and also specific financial needs at both the ANCC and the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, which is the theological school which trains ministry personnel to serve as ministers within First Nations communities,
- there is also a place for charity within First Nations communities as the ANCC often receives requests from First Nations communities for this type of assistance,
- the sharing of money without directions or conditions allows the recipient to make their own decisions about priorities, and,
- most importantly, sharing will support good relations regardless of who the sharing is with and how it happens.

Treaties were covenants to allow both First Nations and settler communities to dwell together in peace and harmony and live off the fruits of the land. However, First Nations people have suffered and continue to suffer negative social and economic consequences because of colonial oppression and have consistently asked for a share of the bountiful wealth which is derived from the resources of the land. To date no sharing has taken place.

A decision as proposed would be consistent with who we are as Christians and who we are as The United Church of Canada. Such a decision would also have financial consequences.

At April 30th, 2015, the Moats Land Fund had a balance of \$303,599.65. The income of the Fund over the 5 years from 2010 to 2014 has averaged approximately \$60,250 per year.

Sharing of one half of the Moats Land Fund and of the interest which accrues upon the Fund would affect the status of the reserves of Saskatchewan Conference and the annual budget process.

PROPOSAL NO. 2: [2015 Annual Meeting]

Title: SUPPORT AND CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR A NATIONAL PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

Originating Body: River Bend Presbytery

Financial Implications: None

Staffing Implications: None

Source of Funding: Not applicable

River Bend Presbytery Proposes that Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada, and the General Council of The United Church of Canada:

1. **Support and continue to encourage “the struggle against the de-valuation of aboriginal women by holding” a National Public Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [i].**
2. **Call upon its churches and ministries to at least annually remember Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women through education[ii], and in our prayers[iii], in particular on the Sunday immediately prior to October 4, the date of the cross-Canada Sisters in Spirit Vigil[iv],**
3. **Urge individuals to participate in the Sisters in Spirit Vigil on October 4**
4. **Urge congregational members to contact their Member of Parliaments (no. 5) to voice support for a National Public Inquiry.**
5. **Call upon the government of Canada and all levels of governance, to put resources towards the implementation of the 16 recommendations made by the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women**

Background:

As people of faith, we rely on sharing stories: stories of creation, stories of faith, stories of Jesus, stories of salvation. As a church increasingly seeking to strengthen our intercultural identity, it is crucial that our voices be heard, and the voices of those oppressed are heard clearly. We believe in a Holy Love that loves us all equally, and passionately. While it is clear that while the issue of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women is a Canadian issue[v], it is also a faith issue. The issue is a symptom of intersecting colonializing oppressions including racism, patriarchy, and economics. Yet we seek to celebrate and live in a world created by a justice - seeking, story-loving Divine Presence. Without hearing the voices and stories of those directly involved, which an Inquiry would provide, as Canadians we risk perpetuating the errors of the past in trying to fix problems without listening broadly or understanding the issues completely. Any action must be guided by the 'essential voices', that is, those directly involved.

Churches can be safe places for exploring why so little changes have occurred when the economic, social, violence and health disparities between aboriginal communities and non-aboriginal communities are well researched and well documented. At its best, our churches are places for self-reflection and collective action. [vi]

At an ecumenical endeavour held in Saskatoon in 2015, *Voices of Our Sisters: Standing Together in Hope*[vii], stories were shared, and solidarity sought. River Bend Presbytery believes that at the local, regional and national level, we walk with our murdered and missing aboriginal women when we stand with the National Association of Chiefs of Police in partnership with the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC); the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, the Saskatoon Tribal Council, the Assembly of First Nations, the Premier of the Province of Saskatchewan, Amnesty International, and the (Washington based) Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and many others, to support a National Public Inquiry. We choose to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God and with each other.

Intermediate Court Action: Concurred with by Saskatchewan Conference

- i. In May 2013, the United Church's General Secretary wrote Prime Minister Stephen Harper informing him of The United Church of Canada's support of the call by NWAC and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) for a National Inquiry, and urging him to act quickly to institute one. All members of The United Church of Canada were also encouraged to write their respective councillors, mayors, provincial representatives, and MPs.
- ii. Information is available at www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/takeaction/140912
- iii. A prayer, written by Alydia Smith is available at www.united-church.ca/files/planning/theme/aboriginal_prayer.rtf
- iv. In early 2004, the United and Anglican Churches joined with NWAC to launch the Sisters in Spirit campaign, raising concerns about elevated levels of violence against Aboriginal women. The campaign included a letter from then-Moderator Peter Short and a congregational action kit.
- v. Indigenous women are going missing and being murdered at a much higher rate than other women in Canada—a rate so high it constitutes nothing less than a national human rights crisis. (Amnesty International). According to RCMP data, at least 1,017 Indigenous women and girls were murdered from 1980-2012.
- vi. Summarized from a letter "Call for Collective Action", Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, written by Janet L. Clarke.
- vii. Organizing participants included those from the Anglican Diocese of Saskatoon; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada-Saskatchewan Synod; Mennonite Church, Saskatchewan; Presbyterian Church in Canada, Presbytery of Northern Saskatchewan; Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon; Saskatoon Native Ministry; Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon; and the River Bend Presbytery of The United Church of Canada.

PROPOSAL NO. 1

(Conference Executive, November 2015)

Title: FREE VISION, DENTAL, HEARING, AND PHARMACARE FOR SENIORS

Originating Body: Wascana Presbytery

Financial Implications: None

Staffing Implications: None

Sources of Funding: Not Applicable

Conference Action: Approved by Saskatchewan Conference Executive of The United Church of Canada on November 6, 2015.

The Wascana Presbytery proposes that Saskatchewan Conference of the United Church of Canada call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to implement and maintain free vision, dental, hearing and pharmacare services for all people 65 and older.

Background

Jesus said "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Matthew 25:40) and Genesis 1:27 tells us we are all made in the likeness of God, therefore , this calls us to recognize the inherent dignity of all human beings. With this in mind, Seniors must be included as full citizens with full benefits.

A growing number of Seniors in Saskatchewan cannot afford the costs related to their vision, dental, hearing and drugs needs. Seniors have a right to justice rather than charity, therefore they have a right to free, vision, dental, hearing and pharmacare, so that no Senior goes without. Doctors have recognized the need for new strategies around care for Seniors that would prevent unnecessary hospital stays and escalating healthcare costs. The territory of Nunavut realizes this and provides free vision, dental, hearing and pharmacare services for all Seniors. We are asking the same benefits be afforded to all Seniors in Saskatchewan.



May 1, 2015

Prime Minister Stephen Harper,
Office of the Prime Minister,
80 Wellington Street,
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

I am writing on behalf of The United Church of Canada to recommend that you declare National Aboriginal Day (June 21st) a national statutory holiday.

For several years now, the United Church has given its employees a paid day off on June 21st and encouraged them to use that day to engage in Aboriginal educational and cultural activities. Our experience has been very positive, with employees taking part in a variety of learning opportunities, and gaining a deeper understanding of issues that are important in our work and in the life of our nation.

Referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, your 2008 Apology ended with the powerful words, "(T)his Commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system. It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other, and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us". The Commission's mandate is drawing to a close, but for those of us who are parties to the Settlement Agreement, and for all Canadians, the work towards reconciliation must continue.

The declaration of National Aboriginal Day as a statutory holiday would be a welcome and fitting gesture of reconciliation by Canada as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission ends its mandate.

Respectfully,

Nora Sanders
General Secretary, General Council

PROPOSAL NO. 2 [2010 Saskatchewan Conference Annual Meeting]

Title: NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Origin: TWIN VALLEYS PRESBYTERY

Financial Implications:

Staffing Implications:

Sources of Funding:

Conference Action: CARRIED [at Conference Annual Meeting 2010]

PREAMBLE: The intent of this proposal is to ask Saskatchewan Conference to petition the Government of Saskatchewan to declare National Aboriginal Day (June 21) or other suitable day a statutory holiday in Saskatchewan to celebrate the culture of our First Nations Peoples, and their contributions to our Province and the well-being of all its peoples.

WHEREAS: We, as The United Church of Canada, are called to be an “Intercultural Church”; and

WHEREAS: God reminds us that we are many parts of one body (1 Co 12); and that we should celebrate the giftedness found in creation, and in people; and

WHEREAS: The traditional territories of our First Nations People in Saskatchewan have yielded fruit plentifully for the benefit of all persons in the province; and

WHEREAS: We are all treaty people; and

WHEREAS: Canada’s National Aboriginal Day gives many people the chance to learn more about Aboriginal people and their contributions towards the country’s development and progress. First Nations, Métis and Inuit people have the opportunity to showcase their cultures and achievements throughout Canada on this day; and

WHEREAS: Other historical events and gifts are celebrated in Saskatchewan with a statutory holiday such as Victoria Day, Remembrance Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, etc; mostly from a white, European cultural tradition; and

WHEREAS: The Indigenous Peoples of this land have a rich culture which is a gift to non-first nations and future generations; and

WHEREAS: National Aboriginal Day is a paid holiday for employees in the Northwest Territories, (except those in the Northwest Territories Teachers’ Association).

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada petition the Government of Saskatchewan to recognize National Aboriginal Day, June 21, as a statutory holiday in Saskatchewan; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Saskatchewan Conference direct the Executive Secretary to forward to General Council Executive of The United Church of Canada a proposal to endorse National Aboriginal Day as a national statutory holiday and call upon the Federal Government to recognize Aboriginal Day, June 21, as a national statutory holiday.

Appendix 2: Original Proposal 2016

Proposal No. 1

Title: SASKATCHEWAN ANTI-POVERTY ACT

Originating Body: Wascana Presbytery

Wascana Presbytery proposes that Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to implement a Saskatchewan Anti Poverty Act in order to ensure that the rights it has committed itself to protect under the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are enshrined in enforceable legislation.

Background:

The God of our scriptures maintains the cause of those in need (Psalm 140:12) and we are called to defend the rights of the poor (Proverbs 31:9).

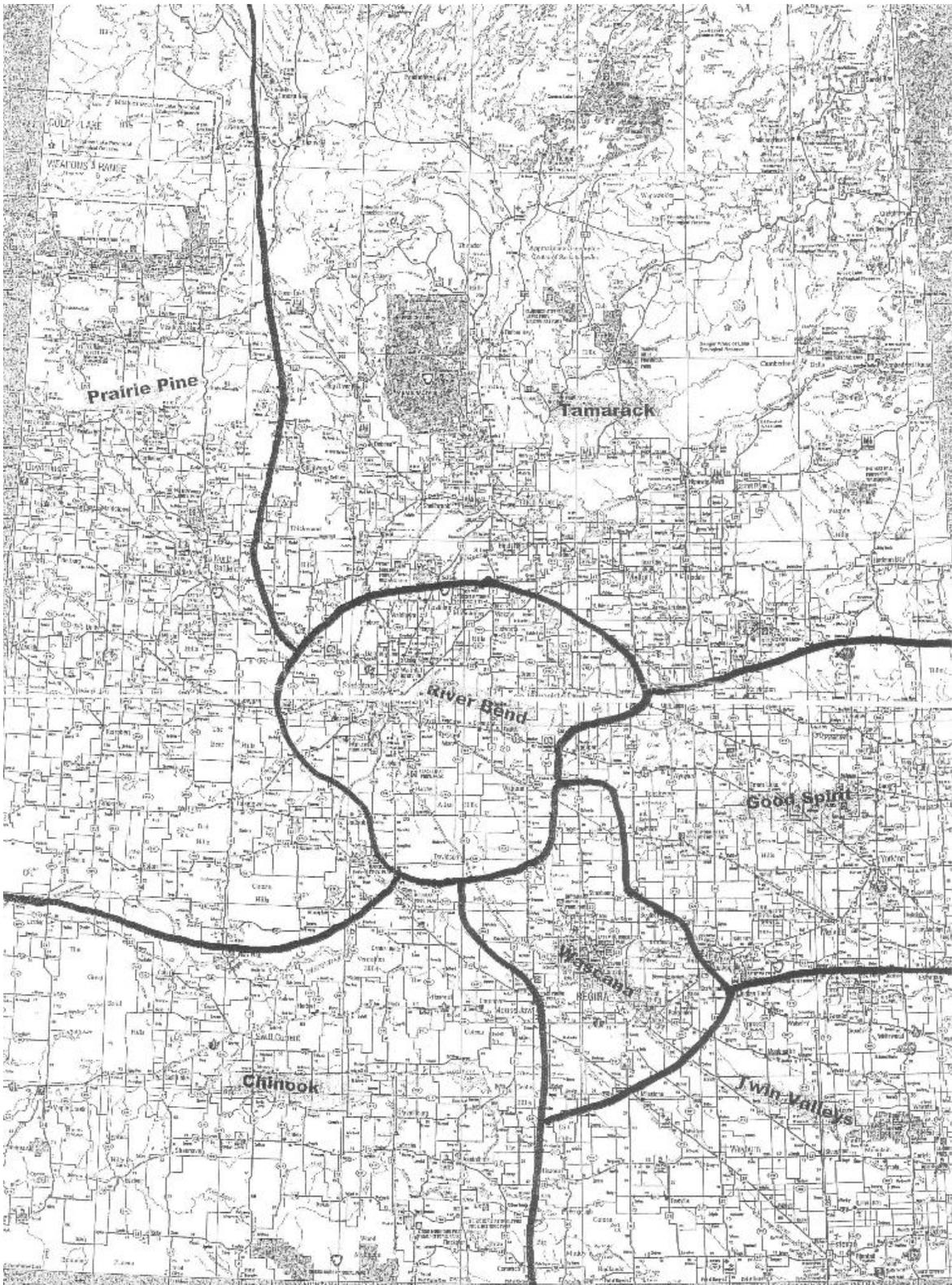
Poverty is a human rights violation. In 1976, Canada with the approval of all provinces, signed the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Article II of this covenant recognizes the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their family including adequate food, clothing, and housing and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Article 7 of the Covenant recognizes the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work which ensure all workers with fair wages for a decent living for themselves and their families as well as equal remuneration for work of equal value. This means that issues such as adequate income security benefits, a living wage, quality and affordable housing and childcare and pay equity are not just social policy concerns. These are basic Human Rights. When Federal and Provincial Governments do not ensure these rights, they contravene International Law. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has been very critical of Canada and the provinces for not ensuring these rights in such a wealthy nation.

Saskatchewan could once again play a role in pioneering progressive social legislation that becomes a model for the rest of Canada by recognizing basic economic rights in enforceable legislation. Such legislation would not only improve the lives of low-income people but would benefit Saskatchewan as a whole.

For instance, public health research consistently shows that those societies with a narrower gap between rich and poor are healthier, happier and have a better quality of life than those with greater economic inequality.

Furthermore, it costs far less to deal with the roots of poverty than to be forever increasing expenditures on the symptoms of poverty in our health, justice and family service symptoms.



Appendix 2: Presbyterian Map of Saskatchewan

