

THE QUEST FOR HOPE AND HEALING:
A HISTORY OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL APOLOGY
FROM
ST ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH IN PORT ALBERNI, BC
MAY 6, 1997

Julianne Kasmer, 2007

Photo Credit: Diane Morrison - Alberni Valley Times

“There can be no forgiveness...where perpetrators, whether individuals or collective, lack the courage to disarm themselves in front of the victims. This is a painful and demanding act.”¹

“Because a thing is difficult for you, do not therefore suppose it to be beyond mortal power. On the contrary, if anything is possible and proper for [people] to do, assume that it must fall within you own capacity.”²

¹ Geiko Muller-Fahrenheit, quoted in Vanier, Jean. *Becoming Human*, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998) p.157

² Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Trans. Maxwell Staniforth (London: Penguin, 1964) Book Six, 19, p. 95

Table of Contents

Time Line	3
Introduction	5
Background	8
The Apology	31
Conclusion	51
Bibliography	58
Appendix I	60
Appendix II	61
Appendix III	63
Appendix IV	64
Appendix V	65
Appendix VI	70
Appendix VII	71
Appendix VIII	72
Appendix IX	73
Appendix X	74
Appendix XI	75

Time Line

1973 - Alberni Indian Residential School closes

1986 - Apology of the 31st General Council of the United Church to Native Congregations

1995 - Dormitory Supervisor, Arthur Plint, is convicted of sexual assault at Alberni Indian Residential School in 1960's. Ongoing appeals process begins

January 1996 - the congregation of St Andrew's begins a study of residential school issues

February 1996 - BC Conference Minister Reverend Keith Howard, Communications, Global and Societal Concerns; Gaye Sharpe; and John Siebert, General Council staff member for aboriginal affairs speak to the residential school study group at St Andrew's

February 1996 - a petition originating with the congregation of St Andrew's calling for a formal apology for participation in residential schools is forwarded, with concurrence, from Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery to BC Conference of the United Church

April 1996 - Charlie and Maude Thompson, members of local First Nations and former residential school students speak to the study group

May 1996 - meeting of residential school study group, petition to Minister of Indian Affairs re: resources for First Nations in need of healing from effects of residential schools

May 1996 - BC Conference of United Church Annual Meeting in Qualicum Beach
- Moderator Marion Best meets with members of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council to discuss an apology
- Moderator Marion Best, General Secretary Virginia Coleman, and General Council staff John Siebert meet with interested members of St Andrew's

June 1996 - meeting to begin formulating a St Andrew's' Apology, first draft complete by June 24

September 1996 - General Council Staff, John Siebert travels to St Andrew's for discussion

October 1996 - St Andrew's presentation to BC Treaty Commission on land claims

January 1997 - eight members of the Nuu-chah-nulth people attend a gathering to review the draft of the St Andrew's Apology

February 1997 - email from GC staff John Siebert urging caution around an apology.

February 1997 - Reverend Kathy Hogman presents petition from St Andrew's to Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery Meeting for concurrence; forwarded to BC Conference Annual Meeting, May 9th and 10th

March 1997 - letter to Reverend Kathy Hogman from General Council Legal Counsel, Cynthia Gunn

April 1997 - plans for a presentation of the Apology and a feast proceed

May 6, 1997 - St Andrew's United Church hosts a feast for around 700 guests at Maht Mahs

May 9, 10, 1997 - the petition for an apology is forwarded, with concurrence, from the meeting of British Columbia Conference to General Council of the United Church of Canada

August 1997 - meeting of General Council in Camrose, Alberta issues “statement of repentance” rather than an apology for residential school harm

1997 - United Church of Canada instigates a third-party lawsuit against the Federal Government over vicarious liability

1998 - A British Columbia lower court ruling attributes vicarious liability in the AIRS case jointly to the federal government and United Church of Canada

1998 - United Church appeals Justice Brenner’s decision on vicarious liability to the Supreme Court

June 1998 - Moderator The Right Reverend Bill Phipps sends out a letter to all congregations expressing the great difficulty with which a decision to appeal the judgement was made

September 6, 1998 - meeting at St Andrew’s to discuss upcoming visit of Moderator Phipps

September 1998 - Moderator and eleven members of General Council Executive visit St Andrew’s

October 1998 - letter from St Andrew’s expressing frustration with reluctance of General Council to apologize, and behaviour of United Church lawyers

1998 - United Church of Canada at last delivers an *Apology for Complicity in the Indian Residential School System*, delivered by the Moderator, The Right Reverend William Phipps

March 2000 - Clare Hunston’s *Addenda to the Apology* is presented at a gathering of Residential School Workers at Vancouver School of Theology

2003 - Alternative Dispute Resolution process is put in place to deal with claims of physical or sexual abuse or wrongful confinement by former residential school students

2005 - First Nations groups, churches and the federal government sign an agreement which recognizes and guarantees compensation for loss of language and culture

September 19, 2007 - Implementation of a final, comprehensive, national *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*

October 13, 2007 - Tseshah First Nation (one of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth peoples) celebrates the official opening of a new, traditionally designed House of Governance on the Tseshah reserve just outside Port Alberni. They had up until that time been operating their administrative centre near by out of the dormitory of the former Alberni Indian Residential School.

“We have learned, rather too late, that action comes, not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility.”³

Introduction

1998 was a difficult year for the United Church of Canada. A lengthy legal process, still unresolved, hung over the denomination. The case involved vicarious liability for claims resulting from the conviction of Arthur Plint, a former dormitory supervisor at the Alberni “Indian” residential school, for physical and sexual abuse that had occurred at the school in the 1960s. The General Council Executive, the church’s lawyers and legal counsel and ordinary members of the denomination had struggled since the original revelations of the trial and Plint’s subsequent conviction, three years before, for an appropriate response to the matter. At times the complexities involved seemed overwhelming.

By mid-summer, a lower court decision that vicarious liability was attributable to both the federal government and the United Church was handed down. In July, the church would begin a three stage appeal of the Mr. Justice Brenner’s decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Moderator, The Right Reverend Bill Phipps, wrote a letter to all congregations of the United Church outlining the reasons for the appeal and how the decision was reached “The General Council Executive concluded that the appeal will expose errors in law as well as keep the door open for more comprehensive negotiations with the Federal Government to settle the plaintiffs’ claims earlier and more justly.”⁴ In the meantime, plaintiffs in the original Alberni Indian Residential School (*Blackwater v Plint*) trial which had been decided in their favour in 1995, waited in vain for any sign of an apology or compensation from either the United Church of Canada or the Federal Government for events that took place at the school thirty years before.

³Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Attached by Keith Howard to the email copy of “The Moderator’s Letter re: Residential School Trial”, Thursday, July 2, 1998.

⁴Right Reverend Bill Phipps. *Moderator’s Letter re: Residential School Trial*, 2 July, 1998.

In addition to the agonized waiting of the plaintiffs and their families in British Columbia, many still living in the Alberni Valley, the wait was especially painful for a dedicated group of people from St Andrew's United Church in Port Alberni, who had worked patiently and unceasingly over much of the previous two years to bring about a formal apology from the United Church of Canada for its participation in the residential school system as a necessary first step in the healing process between the church and First Nations people.

The ambiguities, contradictions, and painful paradoxes of the time are perhaps best illustrated by the words contained in the introduction to the 31st edition of *The [United Church] Manual*, which coincidentally came out in that turbulent year of 1998. An updated edition of *The Manual* is published following each meeting of General Council of the United Church, (usually once every two years) in response to changes in process and polity that have come about from the denomination's deliberations and decisions at that meeting. The introductory statements in the 1998 edition remind us our lives together, like *The Manual*, must always be considered a "living, working document," a work in progress.

Members of the United Church share a common belief that God's will for the church is continually being revealed, and that the church must therefore be 'always reformed.' ...Contingencies that were not foreseen now need to be addressed. Sometimes agreement cannot be achieved on the wisest way of dealing with a contingency. So *The Manual* continues to be a document of compromise. One ought not, therefore, to be surprised that ambiguities remain, sometimes intentional...It must always be remembered that, in a conciliar church such as ours, freedom and responsibility under law are not only are part of our heritage but also place inescapable demands on every member of the church.⁵

These statements make a fundamental point about our illusions and strivings for human, theological or practical perfection; about our hopes, fears and even our despair at the heart of our quest for faith-filled integrity in our actions as individuals and as a denomination.

In our common understanding, God's will for the church is not only continually being

⁵ The United Church of Canada. *The Manual*, 1998. 31st Edition (no place: United Church Publishing House, 1998) p. 3

revealed, it is continually being re-interpreted according to our particular understanding and the needs and circumstances of our particular age. Sometimes there are indeed “ambiguities,” and sometimes it is these ambiguities that threaten to overwhelm the institution itself, or at least to cause what threatens to become an irreconcilable rupture in the body of the church. For the United Church, some of these ambiguities have come to light within our denomination as we struggled with the debate over full inclusion in the body of Christ for people of all sexual orientations, which in effect opened the way for the ordination of openly gay clergy. The issue of same-sex unions and marriages has provided another opportunity for us to listen for the Spirit to attempt to discern God’s will for the community and the whole people of God.

There are other times when the ambiguities around discerning God’s will for the church of today result from our re-evaluation of our participation in the mission of the gospel according to the theological, cultural and political climate of another era. Within this category we could include the establishment of mission hospitals, overseas missions, and the complex issue of our participation in the “Indian” Residential School system. In its time, each of these endeavours was an attempt by a denomination to faithfully live out its gospel commitment to care for the poor, to heal and to educate. Through the many deep and at times painful re-examinations of these missions, it is both humbling and refreshing to note that we do not expect now, nor at any time in the future, to approach infallibility in determining God’s will. At best, we can strive to bring about, for our time, a compromise that maintains as much of the integrity of our faith as our human fallibility and the frailties of our institutions can sustain.

As Terry Whyte, a retired minister and former residential school worker says at the end of a statement included in a letter to then Moderator of the United Church of Canada, The Right Reverend Bill Phipps in August of 1998:

Church history includes many examples of ‘charity/love gone wrong,’ ‘purity gone wrong,’ ‘stewardship gone wrong.’ To rededicate ourselves as faithful followers of Jesus is surely the most appropriate response to our history as ‘Canadian imperialists’ - to rededicate ourselves to a life-encompassing commitment to health, wholeness,

salvation. Then to get to work; with humility, for we are surely no wiser or more dedicated than those who have gone before.⁶

This history is an attempt to chronicle the historic “Apology From St. Andrew’s United Church [Port Alberni, BC] to First Nations Peoples for Harm Caused by “Indian” Residential Schools,” and the political and theological fall-out experienced during that journey towards rededication by the congregation and the United Church of Canada.

Background

On March 25, 1995, Arthur Plint, a former dormitory supervisor at the United Church-run Alberni Indian Residential School (AIRS), was convicted of physical and sexual abuse of students at the school in the 1960s, and received a sentence of eleven years in jail. Immediately following the conviction, the General Council of the United Church, and especially BC Conference,⁷ gave several press releases around the AIRS trial and conviction which put the ministers and congregations of local United Churches (Vancouver Island, and especially, Port Alberni) in the unenviable position of having to answer questions about “official” United Church statements about AIRS for which they were neither responsible nor forewarned.⁸

For some, this additional slight from a seemingly unresponsive national denomination was the final prompting they required to start an initiative of their own. “The trial had been well covered in both the local and the broader press, and some of the [St Andrew’s] congregation who

⁶ Terry Whyte. *A Contribution to the Indian Residential School discussion at St Andrew’s United Church, Port Alberni, BC.* (7 June, 1996)

⁷ The United Church of Canada is governed by a four ‘court’ system, Pastoral Charge, Presbytery, Conference and General Council. See Appendix I for a slightly enlarged discussion of this system.

⁸ “Originally, it was felt that National Office should get our approval before releasing any information in regards to issues around the Residential School, however, it was decided to ask the National Office to just inform us of press releases prior to the release so that [Reverend] Kathy [Hogman] can be prepared for any inquiries she may get.” *Minutes of the Official Board, St Andrew’s United Church, Port Alberni, BC.* December 19, 1995.

had long standing relationships with aboriginal people felt the need to come to terms with dealing with the implications of the United Church's part in the AIRS. There was anger and questions from the First Nations community about what had happened."⁹ For others in the congregation the publicity had made them aware for the first time of their own disconnect from a community with whom they were so closely linked. Ten years later, some members of that original group can still recall their shock, horror, and sense of incredulity about what had happened in their own backyard under the auspices of the United Church without their knowledge. Some felt that they had been living "with their heads in the sand" and felt a sincere need to educate themselves about the reality of residential schools.¹⁰

In January of 1996, with the approval of the congregation's Session, a group of thirty-seven concerned members of St Andrew's United Church in Port Alberni, BC, gathered to begin a process of study and discernment to educate themselves about the residential school system and the experiences of former students at the United Church-run Alberni Indian Residential School, and to work towards some sort of a response.¹¹ The group was not without appreciation of the risks involved. First, the delicacy with which they would need to proceed in reaching out to First Nations people who were so badly wounded and possibly resentful of what they believed the United Church had done in the past, and was or was not doing in the present, and second, because of the potential for a further lawsuit following the Plint conviction of 1995. Still, Bernadette Wyton recalls that "there was an incredible amount of positive energy at the time, there was energy to work and a huge attempt to move ahead."¹²

⁹ Personal interview, Mike Lewis, Port Alberni, 18 September, 2006.

¹⁰ Personal group interview with former members of St Andrew's United Church, Port Alberni, 22 October, 2006.

¹¹ See Appendix XI for names of attendees.

¹² Personal group interview with former members of St Andrew's United Church, Port Alberni, 22 October, 2006.

There was indeed a huge amount of positive energy, and every ounce of it would be needed. An average of twenty-two members of that original group persevered through often monthly meetings over the course of the next seventeen months, leading ultimately to a formal apology feast put on by the congregation of St Andrew's United Church at the Maht Mahs hall, the gym of the former Alberni residential school. The feast was attended by around seven hundred invited guests and dignitaries. The large number of members who made the commitment to follow through with the long process of study, discernment, consultation and more consultation, and then the task of organizing the apology feast, with all the attendant planning and protocol, gives some perspective on the dedication and care that went into the larger project of apology and reconciliation, and the dedication to consultation with and learning from the First Nations people. The journey was both a labour of love and a statement of faith.

It helped that many personal relationships already existed between members of the group and aboriginal people in the community. For instance, Mike Lewis had been Executive Director of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council in 1973, when he, along with other NTC staff members Nelson Keitlah and Roy Haiyupis had overseen the closing of the AIRS. At that time they had also faced opposition, from the Director General and principal of the school, John Andrews, who argued there were no options other than to continue the school for the sake of the remaining students. Their personal interviews of family members, parents and grandparents of every student still attending AIRS provided the necessary documentation to convince the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa to close the school. In 1996, both Mike and Nelson were active members of St Andrew's United, and Nelson was co-chair of the NTC. Other members of the St Andrew's group, such as Terry and Shirley Whyte, had longstanding friendships with native people and had the added experience of working in residential schools, though not in Alberni. Others were eager to learn.

The first meeting to introduce the topic of residential school issues began innocently

enough. The announcement in the weekly church bulletin gives a flavour of what might lie ahead for the congregation of St Andrew's.

The Christian Education Committee is organizing a gathering to educate ourselves around issues involved in Residential Schools. Although we as a congregation had no direct involvement in residential schools we feel a need to learn more about it. This informal gathering will take place - Tuesday, January 23rd at 7:30 p.m. in the lounge. Advanced reading is available from Kathy [Hogman, minister]. *96/01/07 Bulletin St Andrew's UC*

Thirty-seven people from the small congregation were moved to attend.¹³ The second monthly gathering, in February of 1996, featured speakers from the United Church of Canada. BC Conference Minister Reverend Keith Howard, Communications, Global and Societal Concerns; Gaye Sharpe; and John Siebert, General Council staff member for aboriginal affairs all attended and shared their own experiences with residential school issues, and presented the perspective of the United Church of Canada. A recent development in the ongoing legal action stemming from the Plint convictions made this meeting especially important. On January 31, 1996, the United Church was named, along with others including the federal government, as defendants "in a group action suit... being brought by some of the students allegedly abused by Mr. Plint."¹⁴ While the charges had immediate legal ramifications in terms of discussion of liability, the church, its member pastoral charges, presbyteries, and special groups were not precluded from engaging in discussion and healing and reconciling work together with First Nations. In fact, at least from the perspective of BC Conference, this task was to be encouraged, rather than discouraged.

This does not mean that we are unable to talk about the general issue of residential

¹³See Appendix XI for list of attendees.

¹⁴ *Message to Pastoral Charges and Special Ministries in BC Conference Presbytery Chairs and Secretaries* from Brian Thorpe, United Church of Canada, British Columbia Conference, 200-1955 West 4th Avenue, Vancouver, BC. February 6, 1996.

schools, the role of the United Church and the initiatives for healing and justice currently underway in First Nations communities. At our 1995 General Meeting ...British Columbia Conference...[was] asked to 'listen to our stories (those of First Nations peoples), acknowledge that spiritual, mental, physical and emotional abuse occurred as part of the Residential Schools, acknowledge that healing has begun, and participate in prayer and support.' ...It is most important that we do not allow the existence of a lawsuit to deter us from the important ministry of listening and of presence to which we are being called...If we are willing to take the risk, we might be able to encounter First Nations peoples and listen to their stories from a position of humility and trust in the realm of justice and reconciliation to which our God calls us.¹⁵

While the church was urging caution on one front, it was reaching out with encouragement from another. Since 1993 the United Church had established funds for healing projects in First Nations communities related to the Residential Schools legacy, and in 1994, the General Council initiated The Healing Fund with a goal of one million dollars. In addition to the work urged upon individual members and congregations, BC Conference also met in February of 1996 to develop a "BC Conference Response to Residential Schools," that would identify goals, process, responses and strategies for healing and reconciliation work with regards to Residential School issues. Reverend Kathy Hogman from St Andrew's would be one of the participants in the Conference team.¹⁶

By February, 1996, too, it was already becoming clear to the congregational study group that the church needed to apologize for its part in the residential schools. Confessional prayer plays a part in the Reformed Protestant liturgical tradition to which the United Church belongs, and previous apologies on behalf of the United Church of Canada had been offered in specific instances, such as the 1986 Apology to First Nations people. However, the difficulties around a

¹⁵ *Message to Pastoral Charges and Special Ministries in BC Conference Presbytery Chairs and Secretaries* from Brian Thorpe, United Church of Canada, British Columbia Conference, 200-1955 West 4th Avenue, Vancouver, BC. February 6, 1996.

¹⁶ *Towards a BC Conference Response to Residential Schools*, Wednesday, February 14th, 1:30-4:00pm, BC Conference Office, Board Room, 19955 West 4th Avenue [Vancouver].

specific apology for the United Church's part in the residential schools system had become more complex with the legal realities of the new lawsuit. Such an apology would, of necessity, "name specific sins"¹⁷ which could have serious legal consequences while the church was still deeply involved in litigation.

In April, 1996, several members of the "Native Community" were invited to "share their thoughts and experiences" with the study and discernment group. Charlie and Maude Thompson were two of the First Nations guests who shared their experiences at residential school. This critical engagement signaled the beginning of a new and deeper phase of learning process.

The process of reconciliation begins through the taking of what might appear to be small and often tentative steps such as meeting and listening to the estranged 'other'. But it is a critical first step involving both parties...Are we going to regard the 'other' as a conversation partner, a fellow human being struggling with us to find a way beyond the impasse in which opposing claims are countered in an endless cycle thus the 'other' makes an ethical demand on us, challenging not only our claims but also our self-understanding and identity. Who do we think we are, and what are we trying to become?...If there is the will to pursue the conversation for the sake of reconciliation, we will not presume to know the 'other', but be willing to come to know.¹⁸

Certainly the group from St Andrew's continued to be willing to come to know; to challenge themselves and their own self-understanding and identity, and with knowledge, prayer, and discernment, to act. As Bonhoeffer discovered, to act is to discover who we are, and what we are trying to become.¹⁹

In May, 1996, BC Conference of the United Church held their Annual Meeting in Qualicum Beach. Marion Best, then Moderator of the United Church of Canada, and Virginia

¹⁷ de Gruchy, John W., *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) p. 107

¹⁸ de Gruchy, John W., *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 152

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Attached by Keith Howard to the email copy of "The Moderator's Letter re: Residential School Trial", Thursday, July 2, 1998.

Coleman, then General Secretary, who were in attendance at the Conference meeting, were invited to meet with the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council while they were in the area. John Siebert from General Council staff would also attend. The Moderator and General Secretary also expressed an interest in meeting with the congregation of St Andrew's during their visit to Port Alberni, and all interested people were welcomed to attend. On May 2nd, members met with the guests at lunch.

At the May, 1996 meeting with the Moderator and General Secretary, representatives of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council (NTC) and community members; Nelson Keitlah, Charlie Thompson, Ron Hamilton, Dan Watts and Richard Watts discussed the need for an apology from the United Church. They asked for both a general apology for residential schools, and specific apologies accepting responsibility for the harms done at the AIRS. The Moderator was in a difficult position. While she and other guests were deeply moved, as Moderator, Marion Best had to tell the men that, while she could apologize personally for what had happened at residential schools, she was unable to officially apologize for the United Church of Canada. She later described that time as probably the most painful part of the meeting. There was a lot of pressure on the Moderator to apologize for the church, but within the polity and governance of the United Church of Canada, the decision was not hers to make. Such a decision would have to come from General Council or its Executive and then be passed on to her to deliver. There was a lot of negative feeling at the meeting when the Moderator said that she could not apologize for the church.²⁰ Many people did not understand that the Moderator does not have the authority or autonomy to make decisions on her own and felt that the church was just avoiding the issue of responsibility.

The next notice in the congregational bulletin highlighted the frustration over the

²⁰ Telephone interview with Marion Best, 2 November, 2006

difficulties and roadblocks that continued to arise. **Residential School Discussion**...continues Thursday, May 23 ('96) at 7:30 p.m. Topic: "Where do we go from here?" There was a strong sentiment at the meeting that the process of working towards an apology was too tentative and too slow. The discussion was far ranging. Was more study in order, or was it time to take action? What should this action consist of? Reparations? Should the word "apology" be used? How to acknowledge wrong? One attendee suggested that "we need to apologize for having had to be pushed so hard to take action and make reparation." Some spoke of "looking forward to something better" [in terms of relationships present and future].²¹

Regardless of the sense of frustration over the feasibility of offering a comprehensive apology not just from St Andrew's, but from the entire United Church of Canada, the congregational group was not resting on its laurels. The apology was only part of a larger picture of acts of solidarity and justice-making engaged in by the congregation of St Andrew's. Late in May of 1996, the congregation sent a petition to then Minister of Indian Affairs, The Honourable Ron Irwin, with regard to resources for healing from residential schools:

We are a group of non-natives who are deeply concerned because the healing of those native people who lived in Indian Residential Schools and/or whose parents or grandparents lived in Indian Residential Schools is such a complex and difficult process.

We know that the psychological damage done was very deep, and is causing great pain and suffering, and that the path to recovery costs a lot of money.

Because the people and government of Canada imposed the Residential Schools system on native peoples we urge you to do everything in your power to make adequate and generous resources available to this healing process, a process which supports the survivors of the residences who are struggling to achieve healthy minds and spirits.

We, the undersigned members and adherents of St Andrew's United Church, Port Alberni, urge you to support these people with financial assistance for counselling and group therapy.

²¹ Notes from Terry Whyte's notebook, Section I, Our Meetings.

We also urge you and the Government of Canada to acknowledge publicly that the legacy of the residential school system involves problems of both personal and community dimensions that need to be addressed by healing processes.

The petition was signed by over thirty members and adherents of the congregation.²²

By June, 1996, the movement toward action on an apology had coalesced. **Residential School Discussion** - "*Making a Statement*," was the heading of the next meeting. Statements written by Jack Thornburgh and Terry Whyte were circulated and a decision to begin framing a draft apology was made. Bernadette Wyton and Jack Thornburgh would consult on the wording, then consultation with Nelson Keitlah and others from the First Nations community would take place. The draft would go back to the group for further tinkering, and finally, the draft would go to the congregation for final approval. A discussion of Terry Whyte's statement was scheduled for later in the month.²³

Terry's statement "a contribution to the Indian Residential School discussion at St Andrew's United Church, Port Alberni, BC," coming as it did from someone who had spent time working in residential schools, and who had also written a history of one of those schools, carried both moral and theological weight. In his statement, which he later sent to the Right Reverend Bill Phipps, Moderator of the United Church of Canada, Terry referred to the culturally destructive arrival of European settlers, the epidemics and devastation of alcohol, the loss of freedom of movement and the various responses by the churches and government over the generations to the plight of the native populations now reduced to poverty, sickness and desperation; including cultural assimilation and the Indian Residential Schools system. But the main thrust of his contribution was that the church of today desperately needed to rededicate itself "as faithful followers of Jesus [to] health, wholeness, and salvation."

²² Petition to Minister of Indian Affairs, The Honourable Ron Irwin, May 1996.

²³ Notes from Terry Whyte's notebook, Section I, *Our Meetings*

Some of the newcomers thought they could help...Some thought education was the answer...some thought the eradication of Native culture, including language and unique expressions of world-view...The mix, desperate plight and the deep sense of cultural superiority, resulted in tragedy...one component...was clearly the Indian Residential School experience...Church history includes many examples of ‘charity/love gone wrong’... To rededicate ourselves as faithful followers of Jesus is surely the most appropriate response to our history as ‘Canadian imperialists’ - to rededicate ourselves to a life-encompassing commitment to health, wholeness, salvation. Then to get to work; with humility, for we are surely no wiser or more dedicated than those who have gone before.²⁴

On Tuesday, June 25, 1996, a draft statement of an apology from “St Andrew’s United Church to First Nations Peoples for Harm Caused by Residential Schools” was ready. However, it would be seven months before the next full discussion and consultation of the draft statement took place.

Meanwhile, the congregation of St Andrew’s continued its work on other projects and social justice work, including a petition to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly’s Select Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs hearing held in Port Alberni on Thursday, October 17, 1996. The petition encouraged the provincial government to continue with the treaty negotiation process. “We...want the Standing Committee to know that we believe that the land of BC has to be obtained legally and fairly from the First Nations peoples...We affirm our belief in [the treaty] negotiation process and we want to express our appreciation to those who are working with such perseverance to obtain fair and just treaties.”²⁵

General Council too, continued to be a presence in the discussions between First Nations and the church on issues of healing. John Siebert traveled to Port Alberni again in September of 1996 to “further discuss potential healing initiatives raised by Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council

²⁴ Terry Whyte. *A Contribution to the Indian Residential School discussion at St Andrew’s United Church, Port Alberni, BC.* (7 June, 1996)

²⁵ Copy of petitions in Terry Whyte’s notebook, Section II, *The St A Apology*

(NTC) leaders and community members during the 2 May 1996 meeting at the NTC offices.”²⁶ The members of the NTC who met with him expressed “the necessity of the United Church not dictating the process or the outcome [of healing initiatives], but working cooperatively where that was requested. There was also a need to respect and not interfere in the discussions between political leaders in the NTC and those offering leadership in these healing initiatives.”²⁷ Siebert also referred to the encouraging and ongoing work of “the people of St Andrew’s in responding to their neighbours in the Nuu-Chah-Nulth territory in which they live.”²⁸ It is clear from the level of consultation and discussion that reconciliation and healing work on residential school issues continued to be of importance to the whole of the United Church, although the main focus would continue to develop more at local and regional levels, rather than from General Council Division of Mission staff.

Back at St Andrew’s, work on the apology had not been forgotten. On January 24, 1997, eight guests from the Nuu-Chah-Nulth First Nation: Richard Watts, Nelson Keitlah, Ron Hamilton, Cliff Atleo, Charlie Thompson, Marie Rush, Delores Seitcher, and Geraldine Allwork joined sixteen members of the congregational “committee” in the sanctuary of St Andrew’s United Church for a discussion of the draft form of the apology and to give feedback. All of the guests had some personal knowledge and understanding of residential schools, though not all had been students at AIRS. This meeting was a pivotal one in cementing St Andrew’s’ decision to formally present the apology to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth First Nation. Ron Hamilton had not originally been invited to the meeting because of some of his outspoken critique of the idea of an apology, but attended at his own initiative. Ron was a respected and formidable leader, whose

²⁶ *Memorandum* from John Siebert, General Council staff, Division of Mission in Canada, to Kathy Hogman et al, 1st October 1996.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

long experience with residential school issues included writing, *Indian Residential Schools: The Nuu-Chah-Nulth Experience*, and conducting the research for the vicarious liability trial in regard to the AIRS, as well as conducting many public meetings and interviews on residential school issues.²⁹ After Reverend Kathy Hogman spoke about the lengthy process of learning and discernment that the “committee” had gone through and read the draft apology,³⁰ comments were made by the eight guests.

While appreciation was expressed for the work of the local congregation, the former students and survivors of the residential school were still “looking at the church at large” and the liability of the federal government. There was a strong desire by the guests to hear an apology from “high offices.”³¹ “We need to increase the pressure on the federal government and we can work together on this.”³² “There is no question of the responsibility of the Federal Government. There is also no question of the church’s involvement in this.”³³ There were various expressions of sadness that the apology and reaching out to the First Nations had come so late. The devastating consequences of the separation of children from their families and communities, the resulting deprivation of the love of parents and grandparents, the unnecessary suffering, some of it from the abuses that had taken place at AIRS, and the toll it had taken on generations of First Nations were still painfully evident. The effects of the residential schools system and in particular the abuses that had occurred continued to result in “horrendous” losses in the First

²⁹ Terry Whyte. Letter to Moderator the Right Reverend Bill Phipps, 6 September, 1998.

³⁰ See Appendix III for the text of the Draft Apology

³¹ Nelson Keitlah, “We need to hear, ‘We’re sure sorry, we did wrong’ from high offices.” Meeting at St Andrew’s United Church, January 24, 1997.

³² Richard Watts, meeting at St Andrew’s United Church, January 24, 1997.

³³ Cliff Atleo, meeting at St Andrew’s United Church, January 24, 1997.

Nations communities.³⁴ The loss of parenting skills as well as the loss of language and culture, the anger and pain that continued to manifest itself in alcoholism, neglect and abuse within First Nations families and communities were all referred to by the various guests. Although they expressed the difficulty of being present at St Andrew's, sitting in the church with representatives of the people who had run the Residential Schools, the Nuu-Chah-Nulth women spoke of their desire to seek a better future for their children and grandchildren, "seeing that the future generation has a healthier life, with compassion and gentleness."³⁵ Another said, "I want to clear the way for my grandchildren, so they don't have to walk through the pain I walked through. I know I can't take it out on people who are trying to help us today. I want to give you my gratitude for being here today and doing what you are doing."³⁶

Despite their obvious sadness over the ongoing dysfunction in the First Nations communities at least partially attributable to the residential school system, and AIRS in particular, the overwhelming sense from the Nuu-Chah-Nulth guests was one of gratitude for the sincere and faithful work that the congregation had put into the apology. The importance of personal relationships between members of the congregation and First Nations people was emphasized as one of the reasons for the high level of trust that was able to be achieved at the meeting. Ron Hamilton, who had come to the meeting unannounced, spoke words of reconciliation and hope. First he spoke to the breach in protocol that occurred by his attendance at a meeting to which he was not specifically invited. "I hope I don't offend those who did not want me to come. I'm a man of faith and I operate on hope."³⁷ He spoke about the present, as

³⁴ Marie Rush, worker with Residential School Survivors. Meeting at St Andrew's United Church, January 24, 1997.

³⁵ Marie Rush, meeting at St Andrew's, January 24, 1997.

³⁶ Delores Seitcher, meeting at St Andrew's United Church, January 24, 1997.

³⁷ Ron Hamilton, meeting at St Andrew's United Church, 24 January, 1997.

well as the past. “It is important to stress that the damage is continuing.” The nature of the many personal relationships between people was highlighted by Ron’s reference to the work of Joan Jacobson, a member of the group in whom he had great faith as a “good and moral person.” “You who put this together really have something to be proud of. You are the good moral people I have been looking for. It means very much to me. I’m proud to have you as my neighbours.”³⁸ One of the former students said, “This apology says all the things I want to hear as a survivor of Indian Residential Schools. I hope this apology goes all the way to the General Council. This is an important small step.”³⁹ Another said it was a “strong step” and was “going to be acceptable.”⁴⁰ However, the move from an apology to following up with action that would benefit First Nations would be the true test of the sincerity of the church.⁴¹

The congregational “committee” had been apprehensive about the meeting, and what the First Nations guests might have to say about the apology. Ron Hamilton had to leave the meeting early. “Before he left Bernadette [Wyton], of St. Andrew’s, said: ‘We feel weak and vulnerable, and if we are stepped on we are sensitive; and that’s why we were afraid of you. Your response has been unbelievable. Thanks for coming.’ Cliff Atleo said later that it was good that Ron came, because if we wanted feedback on the wording of the Apology we should ‘put it to the toughest comment.’”⁴²

After this exhausting, draining, but ultimately exhilarating meeting, the group called for a

³⁸Ron Hamilton, meeting at St Andrew’s United Church, 24 January, 1997.

³⁹ Cliff Atleo, meeting at St Andrew’s United Church, 24 January, 1997.

⁴⁰ Cliff Atleo, St Andrew’s, 24 January, 1997.

⁴¹ All quotations from notes from a meeting held 24 January, 1997 at St Andrew’s United Church, Port Alberni. From the personal binder of Terry Whyte, Section I, *Our Meetings*. Transcribed to a typed copy by him from notes taken at the meeting.

⁴² Notes from Terry Whyte’s binder on meeting 24 January, 1997, St Andrew’s.

full Congregational Meeting to be held February 2, 1997 to present the now further fine-tuned draft of ‘An Apology from St Andrew’s United Church to First Nations Peoples for Harm Caused by “Indian” Residential Schools’ to the congregation. Sixty-six people attended. The meeting lasted a mere forty-five minutes, including a history of the apology to date and comments from attendees. “The congregation was asked how it wanted to deal with the draft...Several people spoke of the relationship of the United Church with the Indian Residential Schools, noting their personal experiences. Luke Atleo, of Ahousaht, [a Nuu-Chah-Nulth village north of Tofino] who was present with this mother, spoke at some length.” Following the speakers, a motion was put forward “that the “Apology...” as distributed be presented to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council and to Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery.” The motion was carried unanimously.⁴³

From here the process which seemed to have so much momentum began to encounter opposition, particularly from General Council. Almost immediately that they were informed of St Andrew’s intent to actually go through with a formal apology, General Council staff and Executive members began weighing in with serious concerns around financial implications and liability for the church, particularly in light of ongoing litigation and the judgement on vicarious liability still extant in the AIRS trial. General Council Executive, their staff, and their legal council were fairly unanimous in their belief that any apology, whether from an individual congregation, or from the larger body of the United Church of Canada, could have serious legal and financial implications that would have the potential to bankrupt the church.

The apprehension on the part of General Council Executive members and staff was not without genuine merit. In 1997 the church was still waiting for a decision on vicarious liability from Justice Brenner pertaining to the original Plint conviction, and was deeply concerned that

⁴³ Minutes of Congregational Meeting, St Andrew’s United Church, 4574 Elizabeth St., Port Alberni, BC V9Y 6L6, February 2, 1997 - Terry Whyte, secretary.

an apology which did not name the Federal government as at least as fully responsible as the church for the administration and running of the school would leave the church vulnerable to settlement payments that could bankrupt the denomination. The United Church of Canada could be decimated by the costs, requiring the denomination to sell off all its assets, including churches and manses in First Nations villages, and particularly damaging, to sell off church buildings like First United in Vancouver, [and the Stella Mission in Winnipeg and the Fred Victor mission in Toronto] where a large part of the social ministry outreach was to urban First Nations people.⁴⁴ It was feared any perceived acceptance of responsibility from the United Church, such as an apology, against the advice of the lawyers, could be taken by the church's insurers as reason to walk away from any insurance claims which would leave the denomination without the resources it would need to compensate aboriginal claimants and plaintiffs for damages suffered at the schools. The legal and theological complexities were enormous, and deeply divisive for all concerned.

The United Church and its Executive and legal counsel were not alone in their analysis of the situation. Janet Bevalis, in her occasional paper on "Formal Apologies by Canadian Churches to First Nations," writes, "when I looked for the pressures facing the churches who would apologize, I found a surprising number. Crucial among these was the potential for legal liability, which truly put officials "between a rock and a hard place." I came to believe that, for the most part, the churches overcame the other obstacles, but could not solve the legal one."⁴⁵

As former moderator, the Very Reverend Bob Smith said,

I was deeply involved during that long struggle to say the "Apology" word, in two ways;

⁴⁴ Personal email from Very Reverend Bob Smith, former Moderator of the United Church of Canada, 26 October, 2006

⁴⁵ Bavelas, Janet, Centre for Christian Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, Occasional Paper No. 1 *An Analysis of Formal Apologies by Canadian Churches to First Nations* (University of Victoria, July 2004), p.28

first, as a person from British Columbia who shared the conviction that it was absolutely essential if there was going to be healing; and second, as someone with a clear understanding of the dilemma of those in leadership at a national level. Along with Brian Thorpe [United Church liaison for Residential Schools], who was in the same place I was, we spent our time in Toronto arguing that the church had no choice but to apologize - regardless of the cost, and our time here in BC reminding the eager-beavers here that there were sound reasons not to jeopardize the institution...⁴⁶

Others at the General Council level had no such ambivalence. An apology would be folly at best, total financial disaster at worst. Letters, email correspondence, and telephone conversations flew from General Council to the minister and congregation of St Andrew's as the arrangements between St Andrew's and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth proceeded towards a formal presentation of the apology.

On the 27th of February, 1997, John Siebert, General Council staff member responsible for aboriginal issues, sent an email to Terry Whyte indicating his sincere and emphatic reservations about the formal presentation of the apology in its congregationally approved form. For Siebert, there was no doubt that without specific reference to the predominant role of the federal government in the administration and responsibility for the residential schools, there was a very strong likelihood that the apology could be "interpreted legally to be accepting full responsibility and blame for what took place in residential schools, the federal government could use this to absolve itself legally of its responsibilities to participate in settlements and healing strategies."⁴⁷ While Siebert acknowledged that it "may appear institutionally self-serving and damaging to the relational work with the Nuu-Chah-Nulth for the United Church to keep pressing on the federal government role, it is very practical and very necessary."⁴⁸ The

⁴⁶ Personal email from Very Reverend Bob Smith, former Moderator of the United Church of Canada 26 October, 2006.

⁴⁷ email to Terry Whyte from John Siebert, General Council Staff, 27 February, 1997.

⁴⁸ email from John Siebert, Terry Whyte's binder, Section II, *St A Apology*

unmistakable message was that the resulting damage from the congregation's proposed action on the apology would be "a tragedy first and foremost for First Nations people"⁴⁹ resulting in the loss of their ability to obtain "redress" from the federal government, with its far greater ability to pay such compensation than any church. While acknowledging that the idea of an apology was, ironically, like the residential schools themselves, done with good (albeit misguided) intentions, it might also net similar "tragic results." It might indeed satisfy "some voices among the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council and other First Nations to have this or any apology from the United Church,"⁵⁰ but in the end Siebert was forced to strongly advise against any action that might have the result of doing "the very opposite of what you intended in the longer time frame."⁵¹ He called the plan "bad moral reasoning and bad strategy for First Nation financial reasons." Siebert's qualifications in terms of his "number of years of very patient and diligent work on the national scene" were undisputed, however, his latest reasoning and rationale were not.⁵²

For one thing, the connection between the federal government's case on the charges of vicarious liability over the residential schools issue and the various legal arguments were well understood and accepted by the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council. The United Church, including the St Andrew's congregation, were seen as strong allies in maintaining pressure on the federal government. However, the argument that a church apology would endanger those negotiations or make First Nations relinquish their quest for justice from the federal government was seen by some in the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council as condescending in its implication that the United Church of Canada did not respect the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people and other First Nations as agents

⁴⁹ email to Terry Whyte from John Siebert, General Council Staff, 27 February, 1997.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See Appendix IV for full text of the email from John Siebert dated 27 February , 1997.

fully capable of putting legal pressure on the federal government on their own behalf. As Richard Watts had reiterated at the consultation meeting in January 1997, there was a strong need for First Nations and the church to work collaboratively to “increase the pressure on the federal government”⁵³ to accept responsibility and financial liability for its role in the residential school system.

Others among the Nuu-Chah-Nulth concurred with Siebert’s reasoning. At the apology feast in May 1997, Elected Chief Jack Thompson and some other members of the Ditidaht First Nation, one of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council bands, refused to accept the apology presented by the congregation. Among the many reasons they gave was that they would not “acknowledge any apologies until they’re accompanied by a formal and fitting apology from the provincial and federal government.”⁵⁴

Beyond the possible legal consequences, the ethical implications of the perceived willingness of some at General Council to risk destroying the relationships of trust that had built up between the people at St Andrew’s and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth and other First Nations people in counseling St Andrew’s not to go through with the apology was quite another matter. For many it was a difficult pill to swallow and began to affect perceptions about General Council’s commitment to the theological and moral integrity of their previous apology to First Nations people and the potential for any future apology addressing the legacy of the “Indian” residential schools. The St Andrew’s congregation also recognized that the inability to apologize can and does have “negative consequences for personal well-being, but also with regard to moral values

⁵³ Richard Watts, meeting at St Andrew’s United Church, 24 January, 1997.

⁵⁴ Caption under photo of protestors. *Dididaht protest in quiet dignity* - By Karen Beck, Staff Reporter *Alberni Valley Times*, Wednesday, 7th May , 1997, page 1

and social responsibility,”⁵⁵ values both they and the United Church of Canada as a denomination espoused.

In the meantime, while the original impetus for an apology was, and continued to be, a lay-led grass-roots initiative, the role of the minister in fielding much of the inevitable flak for the apology continued to grow. Reverend Kathy Hogman remembers the increasing pressure, much of it directed towards her in her role as minister of the St Andrew’s congregation, as the time for the apology feast neared.⁵⁶ It was Reverend Hogman who had so passionately pressed the petition from the congregation on to Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery at its regular meeting in February, 1997, in Parksville. From there the petition would go on, with concurrence, to the meeting of BC Conference on May 9th and 10th, where it would be relayed again with concurrence, to the 36th Meeting of The General Council of the United Church in Camrose, Alberta, in August of 1997. Those actions, coupled with the congregation’s ongoing insistence that their own apology would proceed, made Kathy the principal and most visible political figure in the initiative. Members of St Andrew’s acknowledged the risks that she took, both with General Council Executive, by taking the lead in pushing for the apology, and by meeting with the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council as the “official spokesman” for the congregation.

Neither Reverend Hogman nor the congregation were under any illusion as to the genuine conflicts the apology presented. There was, however, a growing conviction that the presentation of the formal apology was the only recourse for the congregation, and indeed, for the United Church of Canada for the sake of its theological integrity. “There can be no forgiveness...where perpetrators, whether individuals or collective, lack the courage to disarm themselves in front of

⁵⁵ De Gruchy, John W., *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*.(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) p. 106-7

⁵⁶ Reverend Kathy Hogman, Telephone conversation, 13 September, 2006.

the victims. This is a painful and demanding act.”⁵⁷ As the length and depth of the process and the care with which preparations for the St Andrew’s apology make clear, there continued to be both personal and corporate struggle with the idea and the reality of the painful and demanding act of an apology for residential schools.

The United Church, especially at the grassroots level, had learned much from its involvement with the ecumenical movement, particularly Latin American Catholic liberation theology. One gift of that relationship had been to begin to see that

communal confessions of sin with regard to injustice and oppression require corporate penitence and commitment to joint acts of reparation ... bringing confession back into the public domain in relation to the struggle for justice and reconciliation. In this way the practice of the sacrament of penance has to do with social accountability, peace-making, reparations and the restoration of justice. It is also related to the need for the Church itself to recognize its own guilt and accountability, and to fulfil its ministry of reconciliation vicariously within the social and political arena.⁵⁸

To remain faithful to its own professed commitments to “social accountability, peace-making, reparations and the restoration of justice” the United Church needed to make a stand recognizing its own “guilt and accountability” in the matter of the residential school system, and the AIRS. The church’s struggle with previous apologies offered St Andrew’s the hope that a similar change of heart would allow this congregational apology to proceed with the blessing of General Council.

In March of 1997, Reverend Kathy Hogman received correspondence from Cynthia Gunn, Legal/Judicial Counsel for the United Church of Canada, which indicated a slight softening of the previous hard line legal position. There had been a request from Nelson Keitlah to make a presentation of the St Andrew’s apology as it had appeared in the petition to General

⁵⁷ Geiko Muller-Fahrenheit, quoted in Vanier, Jean. *Becoming Human*, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998) p.157

⁵⁸ de Gruchy, John W., *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) p. 106-7

Council the previous summer, in the context of an upcoming Treaty negotiation meeting with the province of BC and the federal government to be held in Port Alberni. According to Ms. Gunn, such a presentation “could represent an important step for all on the healing path.” Although the General Council was not yet ready to endorse the apology, or present its own apology for residential schools, there was some latitude contained within the “autonomy of Congregations within [the] boundaries [between the “national” United Church and its congregations]. If the “distinction between St Andrew’s, as a congregation, and the United Church, as a whole,” was clearly explicit, “particularly when the United Church is in the midst of lawsuits relating to the residential Schools,” the apology had the potential to play a part in the reconciliation process so necessary between the church and aboriginal people. Gunn concluded her letter on a gracious and personal note. “I enjoyed speaking with you a couple of weeks ago. I have heard much about the initiative of your Congregation around residential school issues. The apology reflects a strong and urgent sense of justice, which is encouraging to those of us presently involved in the institutional legal process.”⁵⁹

It seems clear that even for the United Church’s own legal counsel, there was some latitude in law in terms of liability implied in an apology given under the “autonomy” of a congregation and the same apology given on behalf of a “national” church. Janet Bavelas, in her study of formal and institutional apologies and their legal implications, and specifically, apologies from Canadian churches to aboriginal people has these comments on the subject:

In the law, many believe that to take responsibility as part of an apology is to become legally liable (alter, 1999; Cohen, 1999; Taft, 2000.)...However, there is a small, recent literature worth following up; Cohen (1999) provided an excellent review of the legal issues and possibilities, albeit in an American context. There seem to be voices within the legal and legislative communities speaking to the restorative function of an apology (for both parties) as well as to the moral and ethical issues raised by preventing an

⁵⁹ Cynthia Gunn Legal/Judicial Counsel for the United Church of Canada - original letter from Terry Whyte’s binder, Section II, *The St A Apology*

apology.” (Bavelas, 14)

Another, more intriguing alternative is to question two key assumptions, first, that a full apology will in fact establish or increase liability, and second, the corollary that avoiding a full apology will prevent or minimize liability. Regarding the first, which is the widespread belief that to apologize is to concede liability and will lead to adverse legal consequences, there is apparently very little Canadian case law even referring to apologies.

...the second assumption, that avoiding a full apology will prevent or minimize liability, is also worth questioning....Anecdotal evidence suggests that victims may sue precisely because they do *not* receive an apology. The courts then become their only option for confirming the responsibility of the offender. In any case, the churches’ avoidance of true apologies, as analysed here, has not prevented litigation that is both extended and extremely costly... (Bavelas, 15)

One conclusion is that, in order to achieve the potentially restorative and reconciling functions of an apology, we need to reconsider both our assumptions and our practices regarding whether taking responsibility must always lead to increased liability. (Bavelas, Abstract)⁶⁰

Testimony from some First Nations people who were part of the St Andrew’s apology, among others, tends to bear these conclusions out. According to Nelson Keitlah, the apology feast and the actions of the congregation, along with the response of many of the First Nations people who attended, proved beyond a doubt that money was less of an incentive for people than the opportunity to have their reality affirmed and to receive a heartfelt and honest apology. The desire for an apology was clearly not simply

about money for the former students and their families. The feast and apology came at the time of Treaty negotiations, the Healing Fund money, \$500,000 was already available from the [Federal] government, [as was close to \$1,000,000 from the United Church Healing Fund, established after the 1986 United Church Apology]. It proved that money was not the solution. The work of the church [has been] to go amongst us [First Nations people in British Columbia]. [People had been] alienated from trust by the Treaty negotiations. [The apology and feast] were the spiritual way [to regain some of

⁶⁰Bavelas, Janet, Centre for Christian Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, Occasional Paper No. 1, *An Analysis of Formal Apologies by Canadian Churches to First Nations* (University of Victoria, July 2004)

the trust between peoples].⁶¹

The Apology

Even as the General Council continued to press for caution, the congregation was moving forward with plans to present the apology. At first there was no particular plan to host a feast.

The thought was that the apology would be presented to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth and former students of AIRS at some suitable time. That is the way it got life... Right from the beginning St Andrew's was determined that it be an outright apology. [Nelson Keitlah] was one of the advisors. At first [the congregation] didn't count on a feast, just a meeting and a presentation, St Andrew's and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth, quite formal. Of course it has to be formal [there is certain protocol to be observed]. Of course it is [the Nuu-Chah-Nulth] tradition to have a feast. There is no term equivalent to the word "apology" in the Nuu-Chah-Nulth language or tradition. When a wrong is done there is a feast - that is where it is [resolved].⁶²

"Embedded in every culture and tradition are teachings that foster right action, peaceful coexistence, and reconciliation. Tapping into those teachings, whether they are secular, humanistic values or spiritually based insights, inspires parties to live in alignment with their highest ideals."⁶³ The decision to honour the Nuu-Chah-Nulth tradition by hosting a feast was an important one for both the congregation and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth. In his essay on "Buber, Heschel, and the Future of Jewish Life," Marc Ellis writes of the possibilities for renewal implicit in tradition and "primal origins." "Buber saw the particular and the universal as separate and connected with the strength of each particularity leading somehow to a community of communities. Therefore each community plumbed its history and returned to its primal origins in

⁶¹ Nelson Keitlah, Telephone interview, 12 October, 2006.

⁶² Nelson Keitlah, Telephone interview, 12 October, 2006.

⁶³ Sutherland, Jessie. *Worldview Skills: Transforming Conflict from the Inside Out*, (no place: Worldview Strategies, 2005) p. 78

order to reconstitute itself in the contemporary world.”⁶⁴ Both the congregation of St Andrew’s and the First Nations people affected by the residential schools systems and other systemic injustices within Canadian society were at the place in their separate and collective histories where the need to reconstitute themselves was crucial to the integrity of their existence.

Clearly, for a feast, there was more work to be done,. There would be a need for more consultation on protocol, and practical preparation for a meal that would serve a large, but not exactly known number of guests, with no danger of running out of food. It was difficult to gauge how many people might come. Five hundred, seven hundred, or more? The venue of Maht Mahs, the Nuu-Chah-Nulth community hall, located in the building that housed the gym of the former Alberni residential school, was agreed upon, at the suggestion of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council. Gifts of framed copies of the Apology and other gifts were prepared, and there was more consultation on protocol for gift giving. To whom, and how would gifts be distributed? It was decided that members of the congregation, couples, families and individuals would present the various gifts. Framed copies of the apology would be presented to the elected Chief of each band. Gifts of blankets would also be given. Three handwoven shawls to the three co-chairs of the NTC, and a gift of money [\$3000] for the Nuu-Chah-Nulth language fund would also be presented. Other gifts, large and small would be distributed.

Then there was consideration over who should speak, and when. Nuu-Chah-Nulth elders and chiefs would begin the speaking, with traditional prayers and territorial welcome. The congregation would acknowledge the welcome with gifts of blankets. Then an elder from St Andrew’s, Fred Bishop, would address the Chiefs, the Tribal Council, the former students and guests. At first the congregational group considered whether Fred should speak a few words of greeting in the Nuu-Chah-Nulth language as a sign of respect. On consultation with Nuu-Chah-

⁶⁴ Ellis, Marc H. *Revolutionary Forgiveness: Essays on Judaism, Christianity and the Future of Religious Life*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2000)

Nulth elders, however, they learned that the language had been almost lost to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people and had been regained at much emotional cost from the few remaining elders who were still fluent, and then also had to be reclaimed from the linguists who had come to study the language. It was now considered to be too fragile and precious to be shared with others. The ongoing consultations on cultural sensitivity and protocol and the need for respect would be critical to the hoped for success.

Work on the Agenda proceeded. A history of the process leading up to the apology would be given by various speakers from St Andrew's. Then, the Reverend Kathy Hogman, as leader of the congregation, would present the actual apology itself, to show respect to the Chiefs and guests. In that capacity, Kathy would wear the full regalia of her position, robe and stole, something that she rarely (if ever) did for regular Sunday worship at St Andrew's. Then there would be a song by the St Andrew's choir, presentation of the copies of the apology to each of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth nations and to a representative of former students who were from other First Nations. Following those presentations, the meal would be served by the congregation to the First Nations guests.

A decision was made to have an open mike after the presentations and the food, a departure from the strictly traditional approach which would see only specific Chiefs, elders and other honoured guests speak and in particular order of protocol. Preparation of speeches, setting up of the venue, planning the meal, the food, and the serving protocol continued. While concern persisted about whether guests at the feast would really accept the apology, even after all of the prior consultation and preparation, there was no hesitation to go ahead with the feast. In all cases, acceptance of the apology at the feast would be on an individual basis. Even the Chiefs who agreed to accept the apology would accept it for themselves, not on behalf of others. One of the St Andrew's participants said later, "There is a difference between forgiveness and justice. There is a need to be willing to be vulnerable. [The congregation had to apologize] even if the outcome

might not be in their favour [that the apology might not be accepted].⁶⁵

At last the time had come. The Chiefs and guests, including representatives from the United Church, had been invited. On Tuesday, May 6, 1997, the apology was presented at a feast.⁶⁶ Kathy Hogman, minister of St Andrew's spoke these words to the assembled company: "We stand before you today to offer this apology from our hearts:

*An Apology From St. Andrew's United Church
To First Nations People For Harm Caused By
"Indian" Residential Schools*

We wish to address the issue of the continuing damage caused by the former United Church "Indian" residential schools. We know this damage takes many forms. Emotional and psychological scarring, social deprivation, and undermining of family and culture have all been identified as destructive elements of the racially segregated schools. Without a doubt the schools were intended to facilitate assimilation. The practical effect was to alienate young people from their families and their culture, resulting in hopelessness, confusion, anger and self-hatred - all of which fire oppressive cycles including a whole range of personal and social abuses.

Beyond the arrogance of assimilation there were the additional personal tragedies experienced by victims of physical and sexual abuse. The repercussions of these tragedies continue to haunt not only the victims themselves but entire families and communities.

Some of the facts about "Indian" residential schools have become clear. In trying to come to terms with them we hereby acknowledge and confess that many wrongs were committed in the name of the United Church under that system. We confess the past complicity of our church with the dominant culture of the day and with the federal government in perpetrating these injustices for so long. We acknowledge, as well, that those damages continue to transfer grief and violence into First Nations family, social, and cultural life. We of today's United Church apologize for these things.

We respect the integrity, strength, and hope nurtured by so many First Nations people. In the same spirit, we recognize and celebrate the healing process that is already alive, bringing with it the reclamation

⁶⁵ Group interview in Port Alberni with people involved in the apology, 22 October, 2006.

⁶⁶ See Appendix V for the complete Agenda for the Apology

*of dignity and wholeness. This apology is not meant to be an end but a springboard moving us into the new energy of courage and commitment needed in the task of rebuilding. Our hope is that it will further the healing process in native communities and add to the spirit of reconciliation.*⁶⁷

Obviously there were mixed emotions at the feast. Many, many people were honestly moved and accepted the apology for themselves. Many took the opportunity to speak about what the apology meant to them. Both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people felt they had been changed by the process. One of the St Andrew's elders, Fred Bishop, then in his eighties, spoke of the apology as the most powerful spiritual experience of his life. Many First Nations people spoke of their need to hear the words of the apology. For most, the apology feast was a spiritual experience, one that was for the most part accepted in the spirit in which it was evidently offered; the spirit of sincerity, humility, cultural sensitivity and honesty.

Ron Hamilton, who had at first been skeptical of the idea of the apology, said that the feast made a large impact on people, with the gift-giving and the sincerity with which the gifts were dispersed to people in the gathering. The gifts were beautiful, most made especially for the occasion. Besides the larger gifts, (he himself received a blanket from Ester Haack which he still treasures), Ron remembered the young people going out to various people where they were seated with smaller gifts. The fact that the young people of the congregation participated in speaking and gift-giving was seen as another sign of their sincerity. As one of the consultants on protocol, Ron Hamilton was impressed by the care for protocol and the respect with which the congregation acted.⁶⁸ The possibility for healing between the church and First Nations, a relationship damaged so badly during the original AIRS trials in the 1990s and as a result of the

⁶⁷ An Apology from St Andrew's United Church to First Nations People For Harm Caused by "Indian" Residential Schools, 6 May, 1997, Maht Mahs, Tseshaht IRS, Port Alberni, BC.

⁶⁸ Ron Hamilton, personal interview, 11 December, 2006.

residential school experience of so many of the local First Nations people, began to crack open just a little as a result of the apology and feast.

Regardless of what their participation had been, people who attended the feast retain strong emotional memories of the event. Even with all the planning, there was some apprehension even into the actual program itself about how it would be accepted. One person remembered that it was as if some of the First Nations people, even if they had not originally intended to accept the apology, felt obligated to accept when it was obviously so sincere. But the final show of acceptance was when the various groups of Nuu-Chah-Nulth started to come forward to drum and to sing.⁶⁹

Remembering that night almost ten years later, Nelson Keitlah spoke about hope and reconciliation. He said that before the apology, there was a “clashing of cultures” [between the Nuu-Chah-Nulth and the church/non-aboriginal people in the Valley] The apology was “one of the biggest moves by the church” to change that. It was “a true act of courage and it showed” the First Nations people that there were non-native people, including church people, who were sincere. “It showed sincerity, even through there were still some legal hurdles....I think it showed some ways of expressing a true feeling that we [the church] really meant it.” There was however, “some alienation” due to the small amount of support that came “out of the east” [General Council]. “It felt really good at the feast. All the Chiefs and people who wanted to come were sitting down. The congregation of St Andrew’s did all the cooking and serving and running the floor [following protocol, making presentations, running the mikes etc.]. The process and the act of the feast and apology was “absolutely beneficial. History will tell us as time passes.”⁷⁰

We [First Nations] are in a critical stage of our history [now in 2006]. Suicides and things

⁶⁹ Personal group interview with former members of St Andrew’s United Church, Port Alberni, 22 October, 2006.

⁷⁰ Telephone interview with Nelson Keitlah, 12 October, 2006

are not good news. From the beginning [of contact] smallpox and other diseases [have devastated communities]. [Now], major decisions must be made by *our* people, *our* leaders. The young ones are coming with great ambitions.”⁷¹ Terry Whyte also talked about the fact that ten years later, it was good to see that major economic and political initiatives in the Alberni Valley were coming from the First Nations people themselves, like Chief Judith Sayers of the Hupacasath, and others.⁷² While not direct outcomes of the apology, the resurgence of the First Nations people is seen as an essential part of the whole fabric of healing and wholeness for the greater community.

Of course to assume that all was immediately healed and made well would be a gross over-simplification of the experience. Not everyone trusted what was being said. Some wondered what gave the congregation of St Andrew’s the right to apologize for something they had no direct participation in. There were others for whom no apology would ever suffice. The personal and inter-generational effects were too devastating. The loss of parenting skills, of language, of culture, and the physical, psychological and emotional scarring were too deep. The culture of abuse in families and communities torn apart by generations of residential school attendance was too painful to overcome. An article in the local Port Alberni paper the following day speaks of the pain of the Ditidaht people.

Ditidaht protest in quiet dignity - By Karen Beck, Staff Reporter *Alberni Valley Times*, Wednesday, 7th May , 1997, page 1

The divided emotions of a nation and even a family quietly stood vigil over the first step in a peace-making process on the Tseshaht reserve, Tuesday.

Not everyone is prepared to accept the apology offered by St Andrew’s United Church congregation to people affected by abuse and neglect at the United Church-run Alberni Indian Residential School.

⁷¹ Telephone interview with Nelson Keitlah, 12 October, 2006

⁷² Personal group interview with former members of St Andrew’s United Church, Port Alberni, 22 October, 2006.

Charlie Thompson accepted the plaque with its printed words of sorrow and regret from members of the church on behalf of the Ditidaht Nation. His brother, Jack Thompson, the elected chief of that group, sat on the stage in silent protest.

Some of the residential school victims and their family members were overcome with emotion during the ceremony. Speeches lasted long into the night. Tears coursed down the lined cheeks of half a dozen protesters as well.

“We’re white people living in a Indian skin - that’s all we are now and we’re going to change that,” Carl Edgar Sr. said before the assembly of about 500 people. “We don’t accept your apology.”

The demonstrators belong to the Ditidaht First Nation. Every one of the six members who sat on the stage at the side of the room holding large signs are survivors of the Alberni Indian Residential School. Behind them sat friends and family in quiet support.

Among the hundreds of First Nations people gathered in the main part of the hall, about 12 identified themselves as being former students of that facility [that closed in 1973].

“JUSTICE TO MY FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE WILL NEVER BE UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT AND THE DIA (Department of Indian Affairs) TAKE RESPONSIBILITY,” was printed in big letters on a sign carried by one woman.

Caption under photo of protestors: Some members of the Ditidaht First Nations, elected Chief Jack Thompson among them, won’t acknowledge any apologies until they’re accompanied by a formal and fitting apology from the provincial and federal governments.⁷³

The Ditidaht [protesters] expressed what others felt. Maintaining a relationship with the Ditidaht after the apology was very important in terms of building trust.⁷⁴ According to others looking back on the event, it was humbling to be protested. Perhaps that too, showed that the apology was being treated as an authentic act, even by those who could not accept it for themselves.

Much of the protest by the Ditidaht was about cultural losses, losses to their community

⁷³ Ditidaht protest in quiet dignity - By Karen Beck, Staff Reporter *Alberni Valley Times*, Wednesday, 7th May , 1997, page 1

⁷⁴ Mike Lewis, interview, 22 September, 2006, Port Alberni.

from the breakdown of families [this community was one of the hardest hit in terms of generational impacts of violence and sexual abuse]. One former member of St Andrew's expressed the opinion that it would be impossible for anyone not directly affected by the residential schools to have a true appreciation of the losses. "How can you begin to imagine the loss of culture? We haven't lost the tools to deal with life and living."⁷⁵

Members of the congregation, too, while unanimous in their support of presenting the apology, were not entirely without their own personal struggles. There were members who had served diligently, faithfully, and sometimes sacrificially as workers in the residential schools, and with students from the residences, providing them with loving care, opportunities for social occasions, sports, and other extra curricular activities. Others had taken children from the residential schools into their homes during holidays when they were not able to return to their own families or communities for whatever reason. Church members were often the only people at the time who knew or cared about what happened to aboriginal children. Some of these people played a instrumental role in the push for the apology, while at the same time recognizing the pain they and others felt at the implication of guilt for their participation in a now reviled system. The struggle to make amends for an historical wrong while at the same time doing justice to people whose life's work was now seen as part of a system that was completely destructive was extremely difficult. Claire Hunston wrote an "Addenda to the Apology" at the time of the apology feast. It was used as part of the healing program at a gathering for former residential schools' staff, held at Vancouver School of Theology in March, 2000.⁷⁶

The feast was over, the apology had formally been given to the First Nations people from the congregation of St Andrew's, but the ongoing frustration with General Council over offering

⁷⁵ Ester Haack, group interview, Port Alberni, BC, 22 October, 2006.

⁷⁶ See Appendix VI for text of the "Addenda to the Apology"

an apology was still far from resolved. The petition from the congregation that had been making its way up the courts of the church had now, in August of 1997, reached the floor of the General Council Meeting in Camrose, Alberta.

Then came a devastating blow from the fourth and highest court of the United Church. After considerable debate of the floor of the court, General Council decided that it was best, and certainly safest from a legal point of view, to issue a statement of “repentance” for the United Church’s involvement in residential schools rather than the apology that was called for in the two petitions on the matter.⁷⁷ While the commissioners from British Columbia had pressed hard for an apology, there was little interest from commissioners from the rest of the country. East of Manitoba the legacy of Residential Schools was largely unknown, and with the majority of commissioners originating in Ontario and the Maritimes, the long term repercussions of the decision not to apologize seemed unimportant at the time. It was a bitter pill to swallow.⁷⁸

Even more intolerable was what seemed like continuing and callous disregard for the plaintiffs from the United Church lawyers in the ongoing litigation. The United Church had instigated a third-party lawsuit against the Federal Government over vicarious liability in the AIRS trial, and its lawyers were still engaged in aggressive questioning of plaintiffs at trials in Nanaimo and Vancouver. The hoped-for changes resulting from the apology and the church’s “statement of repentance” were nowhere in evidence. Whether the language used is that of apology, like St Andrew’s’ or of repentance, like General Council’s, the implication is that of change, of turning, of transformation. Two local clergy, members of the same Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery of which St Andrew’s was a part, wrote an article that appeared in a Parksville community newspaper:

⁷⁷ See: Appendix II for text of the statement of repentance.

⁷⁸ email correspondence from former Moderator Marion Best, 5 November 2007

While using the theological language of repentance is most appropriate in the church, the result of this reticence about an apology, coupled with the church's recent third party lawsuit against the Federal government, gives the impression of fearfulness at best and lack of integrity at worst. The Biblical understanding of repentance has everything to do with a sharp change of direction, of doing a 180 degree turn. It is ultimately about returning to God. If we in the church are going to return to God, then the first step, the smallest step we can take is to apologize to those we have injured.⁷⁹

What continued to follow in terms of the actions of the United Church and its lawyers, was far from transformative.

In September 1997, John Siebert, Division of Mission in Canada staff from General Council again traveled to the West Coast to listen and to explain the church's position. The following is a Memorandum on the trip, Re: Residential Schools, sent to Kathy Hogman and others.

This trip was undertaken at very short notice as a partial response to comment and media coverage of the United Church of Canada third party claim and the statement of repentance passed at GC 36 in Camrose in August 1997. ... Questions remained about what the third party legal action really signified - its timing and actual meaning - and its relation to the two petitions calling for an apology which originated in BC. Did what was passed actually say what the petitions called for in different language or did it mean the church got scared? Or caved in to lawyers and insurance opinion?

There is considerable difference of opinion about what the legal implications are in civil suits of using the word "apology" when legal authorities give very different interpretations. Some former students who do not relate to the UC are hostile to the churchy word "repentance." All they want to hear from the UC is someone say they are sorry, and they judge the UC to have stopped short of this. The press coverage and editorials criticizing the UC has caused bitterness at the GC in some folks, within and without the church, which should not be underestimated....

In the afternoon I met with the new Executive Director of the Provincial RS Project, Gloria Murdock-Smith. The Project is accountable to the BC Summit of Chiefs, a body representing those First Nations in BC which are participating in the Treaty Commission process. Until recently the Project's work has focused on providing counseling and other supports to former students bringing criminal

⁷⁹ Spencer, Phillip and Foster Freed, *PQ News* Faith Column, no date, typewritten copy attached to John Siebert's *Memorandum* Sept 10-11, 1997. For the full text, see Appendix VII

complaints relating to former staff to the RCMP. A new strategic plan for the Project has recently been adopted which envisions a tri-partite table of FN, governments and churches to discuss issues such as apologies and restitution, support to healing centres (possibly establishing 3 new healing centres), education and communication of the facts of what happened in the schools, and advocacy for a provincial inquiry....

On 11 September I traveled to Port Alberni for meetings with Kathy Hogman, the minister at St. Andrews UC, Simon Read, on staff at the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council (NTC) and several former students who attended the Alberni RS who have been deeply involved in the healing processes in their communities.

This was the most difficult part of the trip. Anger and disappointment were strong in each meeting, although reaction was mixed to my explanation about why “repentance” was substituted for “apology” in the GC 36 motion so that legal leverage could be maintained to pursue the federal government’s primary responsibility for the schools. In some cases it was seen as a contribution to the longer term resolution of the legacy of residential schools, but it was also viewed as an inappropriate assumption of a task which First Nations will undertake.

I suggested that the GC36 motion was not the last action by the UC and encouraged those interested to write directly about their concerns for the church to hear and respond...

On 12 September I met over breakfast with five members of Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery. The ethical and theological problems of the GC actions were a primary concern. Phillip Spencer and Foster Freed’s submission to the local newspaper (attached) captures some of this. United Church folks on Vancouver Island have been especially vulnerable to the media criticisms on this issue, which focuses concretely in their own backyard. The GC’s right to make decisions and act on of behalf of the church was acknowledged, but there is a practical need to inform and preferably to consult so that the best possible decisions can be made for the whole church. Mention was also made of the positive contribution of former staff and the need for balance.

It is hard not to conclude that the UC’s attempt to explain its course of action over the past few months in terms of being responsible for its role while pursuing federal government primary responsibility is either not being heard or being largely discounted. This will need to be kept firmly in view as the time proceeds to the scheduled 2 February 1998 court date for civil suits arising from sexual abuse at the ARS.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Memorandum* from John Siebert, 15 September 1997, Subject: Trip Report to BC re: Residential Schools, 10-11 September 1997

Siebert's memorandum contains several hopeful elements, in terms of some appreciation of the scepticism and disappointment from both the aboriginal and non-aboriginal community over the church's continuing refusal to change its ways and apologize; as well as references to the desire to engage in initiatives like "a tri-partite table of First Nations, governments and churches to discuss issues such as apologies and restitution, support to healing centres (possibly establishing three new healing centres), education and communication of the facts of what happened in the schools, and advocacy for a provincial inquiry." While apparently sincere, Siebert's conclusion seemed largely aimed at maintaining the United Church's justification of its position on the viability of a true apology. The significance was not lost on local clergy.

Earlier this year members of St Andrew's United Church in Port Alberni took a first step in working toward healing by offering an apology to First Nations people who experienced abuse at the church run school... The General Council chose, however, not to issue an apology...An apology was not offered at this time out of concern that it could lead to enormous financial awards from law suits. The church can repent it seems, but we cannot yet apologize.

...if there is anything that we have learned from our experience with the residential school system it is this: good intentions and fine motives are not enough....today, as we consider our errors of the past, we need to risk doing the right thing. We need to say we are sorry."⁸¹

It seemed that the sharp differences in understanding over both a real apology from General Council and the need for a change of heart in the actions of the United Church in its behaviour as far as litigation was concerned were becoming, if possible, even more entrenched. The battle with General Council would continue for another year, while the appeal over vicarious liability dragged on, with more and more "collateral damage" to the theological and moral stance of the United Church of Canada and more and more frustration from the congregation of St Andrew's and other Vancouver Island congregations.

⁸¹ Spencer, Phillip and Foster Freed, *PQ News* Faith Column, no date, typewritten copy attached to John Siebert's *Memorandum* Sept 10-11, 1997. For the full text, see Appendix VII

In July of 1998, following a decision on vicarious liability by Mr. Justice Brenner on June 4, 1998 in the Alberni Indian Residential School (AIRS) trial, Moderator The Right Reverend Bill Phipps sent out a letter to all congregations. The letter expresses the great difficulty with which a decision to appeal the judgement was made. “..the General Council Executive met to consider what actions to take...No part of the process was easy. After much discussion, sharing of information, and theological reflection, a multi-faceted decision [to appeal] was reached.”⁸² There were also attempts at conciliation and responsibility for continuing work towards healing.

The filing of the appeal does not in any way limit our plan to pursue more comprehensive methods of resolving claims arising out of the residential school system. We are not denying our involvement...Rather we are seeking ways alternative to the court system to understand more clearly our involvement and to take fair and just action...Any decision we take in this process are fraught with moral dilemmas. Every person involved is struggling with how justice for horrific wrongs can be achieved....In September I will accompany some members of the General Council Executive to Port Alberni and Vancouver to listen, to learn, to pray together with people directly involved in native ministries and communities where the pain of these events is an every day reality. We are in the midst of a long and painful journey. Despite differing perceptions and opinions, may we never lose sight of the ultimate goals of justice, healing, and hope.⁸³

The decision by General Council to appeal Justice Brenner’s decision on vicarious liability in the AIRS trial, while seen as necessary to get “the best judgement we can get” for all parties⁸⁴ by some members of the congregation, was seen by others as a further betrayal of the social gospel theology of the United Church, which has long prided itself in “speaking truth to power.” The use of the word “repentance” placed alongside the questionable actions of the lawyers employed by the United Church of Canada in their defense in the actual Alberni Indian

⁸² Moderator’s Letter re: Residential School Trial, 2 July, 1998.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Terry Whyte, correspondence to Moderator Right Reverend Bill Phipps, August 9, 1998.

Residential School trial appalled and enraged many members of the United Church community throughout Vancouver Island and British Columbia. Certainly none more so than those who had worked so hard and so long to establish the beginnings of a healing relationship to First Nations by apologizing for abuses at the very school, abuses, that it seemed, at least to some, that the Church was now, a mere year or so later, trying to evade responsibility for in a court of law.

A meeting was held at St Andrew's on September 6, 1998 to discuss the Moderator's forthcoming visit in light of the continued litigation, and what the congregation hoped would be accomplished by the visit. Items numbered four and five from the notes of that meeting are instructive.

Much has happened in the last 15 months since the Apology Supper at Maht Mahs. I think that I can safely say that that was a significant congregational event and that, regardless of our different opinions and backgrounds, we pulled together and something special happened; something no other UC congregation had done. We had control of the event, and it happened. Since that time, there has been disappointment, confusion, even anger, due to events beyond our control - Trial in Nanaimo, Appeal, the national church's position.⁸⁵

Obviously at least some of the frustration over the reluctance of General Council to apologize for the United Church's actions stemmed from the real or perceived lack of integrity and hypocrisy that led the church-directed lawyers to continue their severe cross-examination of plaintiffs in the AIRS trial. Some of the Alberni congregation who attended the trial were very affected by the actions of the lawyers. The day after the meeting at St Andrew's, David Hooper, a member of the St Andrew's congregation, relates his own experiences with the AIRS trials in a letter to the Moderator:

I attended the trial in Nanaimo on four different occasions: early this year, I witnessed our lawyer, Mr. Chris Hinkson, cross-examining one of the plaintiffs, Marlon Watts; I was there for the cross-examination of former Principal, Mr. John Andrews; I was in attendance for Mr. John Siebert's testimony; and I attended a

⁸⁵ Notes from a meeting, St Andrew's United Church, Port Alberni, September 6, 1998, Terry Whyte's notebook, Section III, General Council Visit, 98-09-21 and follow up.

morning session of the second part of the trial, in August, when plaintiffs Martha Joseph and Calvin Barton were on the stand. It was not an edifying experience.

I am disturbed by the discrepancy between our official words of “repentance” and what I saw in the courtroom in Nanaimo. I saw being undone before my eyes the beginnings of reconciliation that had been achieved through our “Apology” to the Nuw’chah-Nulth people in May of last year.

The United Church lawyer displayed no glimmer of “repentance”...quite the contrary. He was aggressive and insensitive in his cross-examination of plaintiffs. He was occasionally even defiant at the suggestion of United church responsibility for A.I.R.S. At the end of the day, we...came across as “weasels”, squirming to get off the hook and trying to “pass the buck” onto the Federal Government.

“Good lawyering”? - maybe - but a human relations disaster. We came across as just another corporate client, concerned about the legality, rather than the morality of the case. If you had been in the courtroom when Mr. Hinkson was cross-examining plaintiffs, suggesting that just maybe, they had not even attended A.I.R.S., you would understand how our careful words about “repentance” ring hollow out here.

The announcement that we were appealing the Brenner decision only confirmed the trend of our legalistic approach to this human tragedy.

Why are we going the “legal route”? From my viewpoint, every day longer that we are in court, more damage is caused: to the plaintiffs, who have to relive their pain for the court; to the mainly First Nations spectators and supporters, who see what they see and form their own conclusions about the United Church, which appears to be standing for no higher purpose than self-preservation.

I look forward to your visit to Port Alberni.⁸⁶

Finally, in September of 1998, 11 members of General Council Executive of the United Church of Canada traveled to Port Alberni to spend the day with the congregation of St Andrew’s learning about the work that went into their apology and hearing from members their reflections on the AIRS trials. The proposed agenda for the day included a review of the process that led up to the St Andrew’s apology, the apology itself, and then reflections on the meaning of the

⁸⁶ Letter to the Moderator, The Right Reverend Bill Phipps, from David Hooper, September 7, 1998. Permission for use granted by telephone, 4 November, 2006.

apology, for individuals as well as for the congregation. After lunch there would be remarks and questions for General Council Executive from the St Andrew's folk about what had happened since the apology. There would be a time for General Council to respond, then after a break, six questions previously framed by the congregation.⁸⁷ These questions outlined similar concerns to those expressed by David Hooper in his letter to the Moderator prior to the visit.⁸⁸

The trip to Port Alberni was a memorable one for those who attended from General Council Executive. According to Very Reverend Bill Phipps, who attended as Moderator at that time, some who made the trip to Port Alberni described the experience as life-changing. Indeed, he credited the meeting with the congregation as instrumental in the eventual General Council Executive decision to formally apologize to all First Nations people who had attended residential schools.⁸⁹

Despite the positive experience of the General Council Executive visit to Port Alberni, the behaviour of the United Church of Canada lawyers in the AIRS trial continued to mitigate against the sincerity of the St Andrew's apology and the United Church's commitment to "repentance." The congregation again struggled with the need for theological congruity between the words and the actions of the United Church of Canada. In particular, the congregation felt the challenge in maintaining the theological integrity of a particular congregation or pastoral charge at a time when the General Council was behaving in a contradictory manner. There were still many theological concerns remaining after the visit by the Moderator and the General Council to Port Alberni. In a draft letter to General Council, the congregation attempted to put into words their genuine concerns and frustrations with the ongoing reluctance of the United Church to

⁸⁷ Proposed Agenda, General Council Executive Visits St Andrew's - 98-09-21, from Terry Whyte's notebook, Section III, General Council Visit, 98-09-21 and follow up.

⁸⁸ See Appendix VIII for full text of the questions to General Council Executive.

⁸⁹ Very Reverend Bill Phipps, telephone conversation, 21 September, 2006.

make substantive changes in behaviour and language around an apology for their role in the residential school system, and the abuses that occurred there. Most importantly, what reconciliatory action could be expected from General Council as a result of their expressed sorrow and repentance?

Healing takes place within the context of personal relationships in communities. What is the church doing to assist at this level? Most definitely it needs to engage native people on their ground and ask them what they feel is needed to free up the next steps on the path.

When Marion Best [former moderator] was here in 1996 the message to her from Nuu-chah-nulth leaders was clear, “We want an apology.” The sentiment remains. When will the church clearly and unequivocally apologize to these people? We need to accept some responsibility and communicate that publicly.

An apology is needed. A repentance statement may seem like a good theological substitute and has the advantage of being less implicating legally but it neither replaces or absolves us from the truly interactive dynamic of the apology native people are waiting for. From Port Alberni it is clear that nothing else will be acceptable.

We shared with you some of the anxiety, risks and fears that accompanied us through our apology process. We realize the larger church is entering the same unsure ground of vulnerability and would like to encourage you, as leaders, to accept the unknowns and act in faith. Doing what is right has a cost but it is ever so much more bearable than the baggage produced by acting otherwise...⁹⁰

The letter that was ultimately sent to the General Council Executive, dated October 11, 1998, while less confrontational, touched the deeply felt theological pain of the congregation. In it, the congregation urged the General Council Executive to take courage from the struggles that the congregation itself had gone through. The letter especially emphasized the need for the United Church to place its priority in its “witness to the love of God” rather than as defendants in secular courts.

To our sisters and brothers in Christ...

We came away from our day with the members of the Executive feeling both blessed and

⁹⁰ From a draft letter to General Council Executive from St Andrew’s United Church congregation, October 1998. From a copy in Terry Whyte’s notebook, Section III, Prepare for General Council Executive Visit

troubled; blessed that our Church is indeed struggling to discern a path consistent with being followers of Jesus, and troubled that we may be missing the signposts that point out His path.

Part of our difficulty is that we believe our witness to Christ cannot be divorced from the context of the court case. Whatever the complexities of the case, the steps we take in the months ahead must be authentic and transparent. We must be witnesses to the love of God first and be defendants in the secular setting of the courts, second.

Unfortunately, our actions in the courts have already betrayed this fundamental demand of our faith. Through our lawyers and through an official representative who took the stand on our Church's behalf, we presented information that was misleading and inaccurate (see attached).

While we applaud the Church giving the lawyer instructions to behave respectfully, it is not enough. We believe that we must apologize to the plaintiffs directly and publicly in this matter... we support the General Council's call for repentance. We were heartened by the statement of our moderator that we must accept our responsibility for the Church's involvement in the residential schools...Let us assume a stance that is worthy of followers of the Way, the Truth and the Life.

We also need to state once more that an apology is needed... When Marion Best [former moderator] was here in 1996 the message to her from Nuu-chah-nulth leaders was clear, "We want an apology."

Those of you who were with us know something of the risks, anxiety, conflict and fears that accompanied us through our apology process. You were also witness to the hope, renewal and depth of spiritual vitality that was the result. Based on our experience, we know apology is important in our healing process....

Your sisters and brothers in Christ, ⁹¹

The appendix of this letter to General Council Executive gave details of specific inaccuracies from the residential school trials as noted by Reverend Jim Manly, who along with his wife, Eva, had attended the Alberni Indian Residential School (Blackwater v Plint) trials in Nanaimo and subsequent appeals trials. The inaccuracies noted related to the United Church agreement to manage the AIRS, discrepancies in testimony between United Church witnesses as to whether administrators and staff of the school were church employees, objection to historical documents

⁹¹ Letter from St Andrew's United Church, 4574 Elizabeth Street, Port Alberni, BC, V9Y 6L6, to General Council Executive, October 11, 1998. Copies in Terry Whyte's notebook, Section IV, General Council Visit, 98-09-21 and follow up.

from the Presbyterian Church from 1895-97 because the United Church of Canada did not exist at that time, and equivocation by the Executive Secretary about the duties of a particular General Council Executive staff member responsible for aboriginal issues.⁹²

Throughout the process of moving from the specific St Andrew's United Church apology toward a larger apology from the General Council of the United Church of Canada, and other more specific apologies directed toward plaintiffs and witnesses at the Alberni trials for mistreatment by the United Church of Canada lawyers and misrepresentations by United Church witnesses, the congregation continued to press the urgency and theological imperative for justice. At the same time, they continued to stress their own struggles and learnings, about vulnerability, about transparency, about fallibility, about the nature of humility and faith and the "freedom and responsibility under law...and the inescapable demands placed on every member of the church."⁹³

After all is said and done, in the church and in the courts of law, is there a place when an institution arrives at some kind of terminal accountability? And for a church, what does that terminal accountability consist of: is it protection of the ongoing legal status of the institution, or adherence to some essential core belief system? And if and when those values or essential beliefs conflict, as they so obviously did during the negotiations and litigation over residential school issues, how does the institution make decisions about how to proceed? These were the critical questions that continued to dog the relationship between the United Church of Canada and the St Andrew's congregation and many other people of faith, and most importantly, on the continuing relationship of the Church to First Nations peoples.

⁹² Back side of letter from St Andrew's United Church, 4574 Elizabeth Street, Port Alberni, BC, V9Y 6L6, to General Council Executive, October 11, 1998. Copies in Terry Whyte's notebook, Section IV, General Council Visit, 98-09-21 and follow up.

⁹³ The United Church of Canada. *The Manual, 1998*. 31st Edition (no place: United Church Publishing House, 1998) p. 3

Conclusion:

As St Andrew's implied in their letters to General Council Executive, it was time for the church to get on with the truly interactive dynamic of an apology, change its focus and behaviour, and make amends and restitution. As Ron Hamilton said in an interview on 11 December, 2006, "What would be the worst thing that would happen if the church just said, we are responsible? That they would have to sell everything to pay off what they were responsible for? Would that be such a bad thing? To have to sell all the property, all the buildings, everything? [Would the church cease to exist?] Then they would have to meet in each other's houses. I don't want the church to do anything it doesn't want to do...but what if they just accepted their responsibility for the abuses, and let the chips fall where they may?"⁹⁴ As the congregation at St Andrew's said in one of its draft statements to General Council Executive, "we realize the larger church is entering the same unsure ground of vulnerability, and we would like to encourage you, as leaders, to accept the unknown, and act in faith."⁹⁵

As time went on, various initiatives towards reconciliation with First Nations people were implemented, with varying degrees of success. Some, like the Alternative Dispute Resolution Process, have only recently concluded. Others, like the sharing and healing circles held in various congregational settings, are less prominent now. Late in 1998, the United Church of Canada, through a decision by General Council, apologized for "its complicity in the Indian Residential School System." The Moderator, The Right Reverend Bill Phipps issued the apology on behalf of the church. In it, the Moderator urged "each and every member of the church, to reflect on these

⁹⁴ Personal interview with Ron Hamilton, 11 December, 2006.

⁹⁵ Draft letter to General Council Executive, 10-05-98, in Terry Whyte's notebook, Section IV, General Council Visit, 98-09-21 and follow up.

issues and to join us as we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation and healing.”⁹⁶

The idea of reconciliation is not only a fine moral ideal, but an intrinsic part of Christian theology. But to fulfil its theological potential, reconciliation must be seen to be more than an abstract theological idea. John W. de Gruchy, writing in the aftermath of the apartheid era and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, writes: “...*dare* we Christians speak about reconciliation as though we have a monopoly on the word and its basis, as though we all agree on what it means, and as though the Church has been a shining example of a community of reconciliation? In a world of many Christianities and many faiths, what is it that we have to say that must be said, and which others might find worth hearing?”⁹⁷ The struggles to determine what the church means and how it is willing to engage in the work of reconciliation with First Nations is still as much a painful reality in the life of the United Church of Canada as in the secular world.

We have spoken of steps that can and must be taken, and choices that must be made, in the process of reconciliation. The aim of each step is to break through the barriers of the past, discern common interests, and so break open new possibilities that can take the process further. As in any art, to do this suggests that there is a discipline to be mastered, skills that need to be developed, and decisions that must be made. Yet it is important to recognize that there is no formula that if implemented will automatically bring success. The simple reason for this is that there is no such thing as reconciliation in the abstract. If and when it occurs, reconciliation always does so within a particular context and with regard to a particular set of interpersonal or social relations.⁹⁸

It is this continuing reality that guides local theology, including the various actions and initiatives of individuals and congregations within the United Church. In the ten years since the

⁹⁶ United Church Apology for complicity in the Indian Residential School System, 1998. See Appendix IX for the full text of the apology.

⁹⁷ de Gruchy, John W. *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) p. 15. Emphasis in text.

⁹⁸ de Gruchy, John W. *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 154

St Andrew's congregation in Port Alberni began their discernment, there has been much progress in relations between the United Church of Canada and First Nations peoples. Vicarious liability for the AIRS was adjudicated at 75% to the federal government and 25% to the United Church. The General Council of the United Church of Canada created a Residential School Steering Committee, composed of both aboriginal and non-aboriginal members, to deal with the ongoing nature of our mutual healing around residential school issues. In 2003, an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process was set up to deal with claims of physical or sexual abuse or wrongful confinement by former residential school students. This allowed survivors to seek justice and healing beyond the confines of the adversarial and often traumatizing court system. About 10% of applicants to the ADR are former students of United Church-associated residential schools. As of September 30, 2007, six hundred twenty six applications have been forwarded to the United Church of Canada, and four hundred twenty seven hearings have been completed or scheduled into October 2007. One hundred eighty three ADR hearings so far have been attended by representatives of the United Church. (Representatives attend all United Church related hearings, except where requested not to by the claimant.)⁹⁹ As well as witnessing to the process, the United Church representatives also offer an apology directly to the claimants.

The ADR process has now been terminated with the implementation of a federally funded Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, September 19, 2007. "As of March 21, 2007, when the courts approved the Settlement Agreement, no more ADR claims for physical and sexual abuse or wrongful confinement have been accepted. Former students can make an abuse claim under the new Independent Assessment Process (IAP)"¹⁰⁰ now that the agreement is

⁹⁹ *Residential Schools UPDATE*, October 2007.

¹⁰⁰ *Residential Schools UPDATE*, July 2007

implemented. It will take up to two years to process all the ADR claims already received.”¹⁰¹

“Under the Settlement Agreement, there are provisions for some claimants who already settled under the ADR process to have their awards reviewed and possibly adjusted upwards.”¹⁰²

In 2005, “Native groups, churches and the federal government signed an agreement...that limits the United Church’s liability to about \$6.5 million (most of which has already been paid out).”¹⁰³ The United Church, working as part of the tri-partite team of First Nations, Churches and the federal government envisioned in 1997, helped to ensure an agreement in which loss of language and culture were recognized. In April 2006,

the federal government, the Assembly of First Nations, the four churches [Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United], and counsel for the plaintiffs finalized the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. It provides for a Common Experience Payment, a revised process for resolving abuse claims, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and funds for healing programs and commemoration. At its spring meeting...the General Council Executive... unanimously agreed that the United Church of Canada would become a signatory to the agreement.¹⁰⁴

The historic signing of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in September of 2007 was a significant step on the healing journey. However, a legal agreement and monetary compensation is never a final answer, and certainly not a theological one. Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine was quick to remind Canadians that the common experience payments to former students were not a gift, or even compensation, but merely recognition of an historic injustice.

Even now that the Agreement has been signed, the largest beneficiaries are the lawyers

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² *Residential Schools UPDATE*, October 2007

¹⁰³ Mike Milne, “No more saving for a rainy day,” in *The United Church Observer*, December 2006, p.32

¹⁰⁴ *Residential Schools UPDATE*, July 2006. (Published Quarterly by The Residential Schools Steering Committee, The United Church of Canada)

for all the parties. In the end, lawyers will receive around \$300 million, whereas the average amount per survivor is likely to be around \$25,000. (Compare this amount to the ten million dollars already paid out by the federal government to Maher Arar for his rendition to Syria.) The date to apply for pay out for any and all phases of the final agreement will end in the year 2012, after which time there will be no more federal money ever.¹⁰⁵ And the United Church itself seems content with the idea that the majority of its financial obligations to First Nations people has been satisfied.

While progress has been made towards reconciliation, and the United Church has belatedly begun to catch up to the actions and initiative of its members and congregations, there are still disturbing dissonances between intent and action. Much of the federal government funding for the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement has already been distributed. For instance, the \$125 million over five years for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation will be distributed to projects that are already funded. The \$60 million for a National Truth Commission will fund seven national events in large cities, and then others in communities, including the creation of archives. In terms of reconciliation, the Truth Commission provides the best hope for further engagement of local congregations and Residential School survivors, some of whom have continued to be part of the United Church. True reconciliation is always broader, deeper, and more sacred than anything we can accomplish ourselves.(2 Corinthians:16-18). Yet we can ask ourselves if we are willing and able, as individuals and as a church, to make a beginning. When asked in an interview with Janet Silman if the 1986 Apology to Native People by the United Church had been “truly a process of reconciliation,” The Very Reverend Stan McKay, first aboriginal Moderator of the United Church of Canada, had this to say:

I think there is a potential for some sharing of power. It hasn't happened yet, but the

¹⁰⁵ Chief Robert Joseph, Residential Schools Survivors Society, Summer School course, Vancouver School of Theology, July 2006. From my personal notes.

potential is being worked on in some aspects. Also a sharing of spirit, of sacred ways. At the apology that evening [at General Council in August 1986], Art Solomon - always the elder of insight beyond the bullshit - said to the church, "Get real, or get lost!" (laughter) And that is reconciliation. Not the pretense, but the struggles for the fullness of human life shared. The ongoing struggle to be fully human...

The reconciliation begins in that will to be involved, but if you are unwilling to struggle with the realities of the history and with the dreams of the people...In Canada many people within the structure of the church have not yet analyzed the historical breaking of spirits, the crushing of people *in order to maintain the institution at all costs*, and they still are hanging onto dreams that are our nightmares. If that history is not dealt with, there is a hollowness to the apology. The expected reconciliation is forever delayed because people still do not understand each other. The talk of reconciliation is too soon, because the inequity, the status quo, really hasn't changed. If part of the church can have all the benefits of the land's resources, and others go wanting, reconciliation cannot happen. Justice and the image of being the people of God aren't being acted out.¹⁰⁶

It is to be hoped that churches like the United Church, rather than being content to rest on the limits of their legal obligations, will continue, when asked, to participate in mutual healing events with First Nations peoples, particularly on the local level where real and lasting human connections are made. It is also imperative that churches and their members actively engage in their own healing. Martin Luther King's networks of mutuality remain as relevant today as they were in the 1960s. We will certainly not achieve perfections in our attempts at reconciliation, whether it is reconciliation with ourselves and our institutions, or with others. "If there is no guaranteed formula for success there is also no precise mechanism for deciding when the goal of reconciliation has been achieved. In the full sense of the word it always lies beyond us. Yet there comes a point in the process when reconciliation becomes a reality, when the conversation reaches a new level of commitment, embrace and shared hope."¹⁰⁷

With its historic "Apology to First Nations People For Harm Caused by 'Indian' Residential Schools", the people of St Andrew's United Church in Port Alberni embraced a new

¹⁰⁶ "A First Nations Movement in a Canadian Church" by Stanley McKay and Janet Silman, in Baum, Gregory and Harold Wells, eds. *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) p. 182 emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁷ de Gruchy, John W. *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) p. 153

level of commitment and shared hope. In doing so they also gave the United Church of Canada a great gift: the gift of renewal, of hope, and the gospel gift of belief in the possibility of change. Their faith, creativity and perseverance provided the impetus for the institution to re-examine its relationship with repentance and forgiveness, and to move toward a recognition of the need for mutual healing.

Sadly, many of the people who were so involved with the St Andrew's apology are no longer at home in the local United Church of Canada. No doubt this is a serious loss to the institution of the church. On the other hand, Ron Hamilton's comments about the church returning to its roots, with small groups of hopeful, committed, justice-seeking people, meeting together to share, explore, and strengthen their faith is a living reality for many of them. May they continue to be blessed on their journey.

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Telephone interviews were graciously granted to me by:

Marion Best
Reverend Kathy Hogman
David Hooper
Nelson Keitlah
Reverend Jim Manly
The Very Reverend Bill Phipps

Individual personal interviews were graciously granted by:

Beate Granneman
Ron Hamilton
Mike Lewis

An invitation to worship and then a large and lively personal discussion with Terry Whyte and many of the members of the original St Andrew’s congregation including but not restricted to:

Gordie Brand	Ester Haack
Diane Mayba	John Mayba
Myrtle Spencer	Ian Thomas
Shirley Whyte	Terry Whyte
Bernadette Wyton	

email correspondence was received from The Very Reverend Bob Smith and former Moderator Marion Best

Archival material from St Andrew’s now held at the amalgamated Alberni Valley United Church was assembled with the most gracious assistance of Church Secretary Anna Cole.

Material from the United Church Archives at the Vancouver School of Theology was assembled with the able assistance of Blair Galston, Archivist for BC Conference.

Appendix I

The basic unit of organization of the four court system of the United Church of Canada is the Pastoral Charge (*The Manual*, 104), which may be made up of one or more congregations. These in turn are part of a Presbytery (310), whose membership consists of members of the Order of Ministry within the [geographical] bounds of the Presbytery, and one or more lay representatives from each Pastoral Charge, according to membership numbers.

Each presbytery is part of a Conference. Members of the Conference are all Presbytery members within the bounds of the Conference (410).

Finally, General Council, whose membership includes commissioners appointed in equal numbers from the ordered and lay members of each Conference and other members specific to General Council Executive, Moderators and past moderators, General Secretary and other General Council Secretaries and others. General Council, besides having full powers to legislate on matters respecting the doctrine, worship, membership, and government of the United Church [subject to certain restrictions] (505 a - i.), also, through the Division of Finance, has general oversight of the finances of the United Church. It was from this legal position that the pressure from General Council was most keenly felt during the discussion of the St Andrew's apology. The United Church of Canada.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ All information from *The Manual, 1998*. 31st Edition (no place: United Church Publishing House, 1998

Appendix II

“Repentance Statement of the 36th General Council (1997) in response to Petitions 78 & 79:

Having heard and considered Petition 78, entitled Residential School Apology and Petition 79, entitled An Apology From St Andrew’s United Church for Harm Caused by “Indian” Residential Schools, and having considered presentations by the First Nations consultation to this General Council and table group responses, and having listened to the stories of a former student and a former Christian educator in a residential school, and having consulted widely with resource people and First Nations commissioners, Therefore be it resolved that the 36th General Council adopt the following statement:

Rationale & Faith Base:

Jesus said, “When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go: first be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matt. 5: 23-24)

We now realize that the offering of the churches and of countless faithful and caring servants of the churches, through their participation in the residential school system has tragically resulted in pain and suffering and injustice for many.

Whereas the United Church supported the residential school system; and

Whereas the native residential school system contributed in a primary way to the uprooting of native societies and to the rejection of native culture by removing children from their communities and by denying them access to their language, traditions and spirituality; and

Whereas those losses were compounded in many instances by a wide variety of profound injustices and acute deprivations; and

Whereas the destructive consequences of the residential school system continue to this day; and

Whereas an individual has been convicted of numerous counts of sexual and physical abuse in connection with the Port Alberni residential school; and

Whereas any healing initiative will be inadequate in the absence of a clear statement of repentance and contrition by the United Church; and

Whereas such a statement would set a positive example that the Government of Canada should be persuaded to follow;

Therefore be it resolved that the 36th General Council:

1. Recommit ourselves to living out the apology of the United Church of Canada to native congregations offered in 1986, and specifically the fourth paragraph, which states:

‘We imposed our civilization as a condition for accepting the gospel. We tried to make you like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result you and we are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we were meant by the Creator to be;

2. Acknowledge the role that the federally-funded and controlled residential school system has had in the suffering of native people, in their loss of wholeness, of life, of language, of culture, and of spirituality, and our role in that system;
3. Express our deep regret and sorrow to the First Nations of Canada for the injustices that were done and for the role of The United Church of Canada in the native residential school system, and as part of our expression write an open letter to the First Nations of Canada;
4. Continue dialogue and consultation with the First Nations of Canada in order to consider appropriate means to express our repentance and to take further steps along the healing path and towards reconciliation;
5. Urge individuals, congregations, Presbyteries/Districts, Conferences, and Divisions and the Ethnic Ministries Council of General Council to learn directly from native persons their experiences in residential schools and/or to study resources such as those provided by The Healing Fund;
6. Urge individuals, congregations, Presbyteries/Districts, Conferences, to join the General Council in petitioning the Government of Canada to accept the Government’s responsibility for the abuses of the residential schools and to take meaningful steps immediately to redress those abuses.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Adopted by the 36th General Council of the United Church of Canada, Camrose Alberta, August, 1997.

Appendix III

Draft of “An Apology from St Andrew’s United Church to First Nations Peoples For Harm Caused by Residential Schools” (96-06-25) Presented to consultation meeting (97-01-24)

We wish to address the issue of the continuing damage caused by the former United Church residential schools. We know this damage takes many forms. Emotional and psychological scarring, social deprivation, and undermining of family and culture have all been identified as destructive elements of residential schooling. Without a doubt the schools were intended to facilitate assimilation. The practical effect was to alienate young people from their families and their culture, resulting in hopelessness, confusion, anger and self-hatred - all of which fire oppressive cycles such as substance abuse and suicide.

Beyond the arrogance of assimilation there were the additional personal tragedies experienced by victims of physical and sexual abuse.

The facts about residential schools have become clear. In trying to come to terms with them we hereby acknowledge and confess that many wrongs were committed in the name of the United Church under that system. We admit the past complicity of our church with the dominant culture of the day and with the federal government in perpetrating these injustices for so long. We acknowledge, as well, that those damages continue to transfer grief and violence into First Nations family, social, and cultural life. We of today’s United Church apologize for these things.

We acknowledge the integrity, strength, and hope nurtured by so many First Nations people. In the same spirit, we recognize and celebrate the healing process that is already alive, bringing with it the reclamation of dignity and wholeness. This apology is not meant to be an end but a springboard moving us into the new energy of courage and commitment needed in the task of rebuilding. Our hope is that it will further the healing process in native communities and add to the spirit of reconciliation.

Appendix IV

email correspondence from John Siebert to Terry Whyte, Thursday, 27 February, 1997, copy to Keith Howard. Subject: St Andrew's Apology on Residential Schools

I need to revise my message from 2 days ago. Thanks for sending me the wording of the apology. Today I read the text and my heart sank. There is no mention of the role of the federal government. I feel like I have massively failed to communicate why this is so important to the progress of the church responding to the residential school system. Cynthia Gunn, the church's lawyer, told me she has spoken to Kathy Hogman by telephone in the last couple of days. Please excuse me if this message is repetitious.

While it may appear institutionally self-serving and damaging to the relational work with the Nuu-chah-nulth for the United Church to keep pressing on the federal government role, it is very practical and very necessary. If any United Church apology is interpreted legally to be accepting full responsibility and blame for what took place in residential schools, the federal government could use this to absolve itself legally of its responsibilities to participate in settlements and healing strategies. This would be a tragedy first and foremost for First Nations people. It is likely that only in the legal arena will the feds be forced to take responsibility. While it may satisfy some voices among the NTC and other First Nations to have this or any apology from the United Church, in this form it could kill their chances for redress from the federal government. This is bad moral reasoning and bad strategy for First Nations financial reasons.

One of the over-riding ironies of the churches involvement with the residential schools was that it was done with good intentions but tragic results. Now I fear, very greatly fear, that your good intentions in delivering this apology and passing it up the church ladder will cause a great deal of damage to First Nations in seeking federal government redress. It could do the very opposite of what you intended in the longer time frame.

I cannot say this strongly enough. I bring a number of years of very patient and diligent work on the national scene into account in sending this message.

The Canyon City Fed-Salvation Army settlement is not worth holding your breath for. The conviction of the perpetrator was in 1998. We do not know when the civil action was initiated, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Plint was convicted in the Alberni situation in 1995 and that, even under the best of circumstances, we are many years away from that stage in Fed-United Church civil suits. The nature of the school (a day school) is quite different in Canyon City and we have no hard information on the nature of the settlement to make real comparisons. Sorry to be a bad news carrier on this too, but it comes with the territory.

Appendix V
Agenda for Presentation of the Apology

1. Opening Prayer - Nuu-Chah-Nulth Elder

2. Welcome from the House of Shewish - George Watts

3. St Andrew's recognize the House of Shewish (George Watts) and Opetchesaht (Hugh Watts) with the presentation of blankets. John [Mayba] speaking - Stephen [Mayba] and Amos to present blankets

4. Address the Chiefs then the Tribal Council then the former students and other guests:

Fred Bishop - "On behalf of the congregation of St Andrew's United Church I bring our greetings to all gathered here today. Those who are foremost in our hearts this day, with whom we wish to communicate most directly, are all of you whose lives today, and in the past, have been affected by the Alberni Residential School. We have learned much in our congregation, much we did not know, and what we have learned has brought us to this day. We come with sorrowful hearts. We come knowing that there is a great need for healing in our relationship. We come to try in some way to let you know how deeply we feel regret for the pain the United Church of Canada's actions have inflicted on so many people's lives.

We also greet and recognize the Ha-Wee-a, the leadership of the First nations and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council, the members of the First Nations represented here, and other guests. We would like to begin by briefly sharing the learning process that has brought us here today."

5. Present how the apology came to be:

1. Discussion Group Begins: Anne Gray

"In January of 1996, the Official Board of St Andrew's United Church decided to initiate a discussion group to gain an understanding of the issue of Residential Schools. The first discussion was held January 20, 1996.

We had watched in horror as the crimes committed by Arthur Henry Plint were revealed in open court. Many were shocked and indeed dumbfounded that such terrible things happened here. There was a desire to know more about Residential Schools and what happened there.

We studied information from the Church including: the United Church brief to the "Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples", information on the newly established

“Healing Fund” to assist First Nations communities in working toward healing, the text and rationale of the “1986 United Church Apology to Native Congregations” and the “Report of the Moderator’s Taskgroup on Residential Schools”. The group of approximately 25 people gathered monthly sharing information and welcoming guest speakers.”

2. Guests: Kristi Lewis

“The people we welcomed as guest speakers included: John Siebert from the National Offices of the United Church of Canada Gaye Sharpe and Keith Howard: from the office of the Conference of British Columbia of the United Church Charlie Thompson, his wife Maude, and his sister Amy Campbell all of whom attended Alberni Residential School. Charlie used material from the Native Indian Residential School Task Force Presentation, and all three shared their own personal experiences.”

3. Moderator’s Visit: Terry Whyte

“In May of 1996 we were visited by Ginny Coleman who is the Executive Secretary of the General Council of the United Church of Canada and Marion Best who is the Moderator of the United Church of Canada. They met with representatives of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council and later with members of the congregation of St Andrew’s. Our conversation with them and with members of the First Nations communities led us to the realization that our thoughts and beliefs had to be expressed as a formal apology.”

4. Apology Draft: Sue Comeau

“The Residential Schools Discussion group began the drafting of an apology that would reflect our learning from our many months of meeting. We met three times honing the draft and shared it with First Nations people to see if it was a document which would be acceptable to them. On Friday, January 24, 1997 we met with: Richard Watts, Nelson Keitlah, Cliff Atleo, Charlie Thompson, Ron Hamilton, Marie Rush, Delores Seitcher and Geraldine Allwark to see if the document was acceptable to them. We were grateful for their input and encouragement.”

5. Congregational Approval: Bernadette Wyton

“The congregation of St Andrew’s United Church approved the Apology as presented to them on February 2nd, 1997 with no dissenting votes. It was felt at that time

that all levels of the United Church should be encouraged to offer an apology regarding Residential Schools and so St Andrew's United Church sent a petition through the Church courts requesting that the National Church issue a similar apology. The Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery, represented here today by the Chair Rev. Jim Massey and other members of the executive, voted to concur with this petition on February 15, 1997, and the Conference of British Columbia, represented here today by its President, Diane Cardin and other dignitaries, will consider the petition this week at its Annual Meeting. Hopefully General Council, which represents the whole national United Church, will issue a similar statement when it meets in August 1997."

6. Presentation of the Apology: Kathy [Hogman - minister of St Andrew's]

"We stand before you today to offer this apology from our hearts.

*An Apology From St. Andrew's United Church
To First Nations People For Harm Caused By
"Indian" Residential Schools*

We wish to address the issue of the continuing damage caused by the former United Church "Indian" residential schools. We know this damage takes many forms. Emotional and psychological scarring, social deprivation, and undermining of family and culture have all been identified as destructive elements of the racially segregated schools. Without a doubt the schools were intended to facilitate assimilation. The practical effect was to alienate young people from their families and their culture, resulting in hopelessness, confusion, anger and self-hatred - all of which fire oppressive cycles including a whole range of personal and social abuses.

Beyond the arrogance of assimilation there were the additional personal tragedies experienced by victims of physical and sexual abuse. The repercussions of these tragedies continue to haunt not only the victims themselves but entire families and communities.

Some of the facts about "Indian" residential schools have become clear. In trying to come to terms with them we hereby acknowledge and confess that many wrongs were committed in the name of the United Church

under that system. We confess the past complicity of our church with the dominant culture of the day and with the federal government in perpetrating these injustices for so long. We acknowledge, as well, that those damages continue to transfer grief and violence into First Nations family, social, and cultural life. We of today's United Church apologize for these things.

We respect the integrity, strength, and hope nurtured by so many First Nations people. In the same spirit, we recognize and celebrate the healing process that is already alive, bringing with it the reclamation of dignity and wholeness. This apology is not meant to be an end but a springboard moving us into the new energy of courage and commitment needed in the task of rebuilding. Our hope is that it will further the healing process in native communities and add to the spirit of reconciliation.

Song: Kristi [Lewis] and Luke once, Choir once in unison, group 1 start, add group 2, add group 3, sing the whole song through twice and then quieten down and Mike [Lewis] will start presentations.

8. We wish to offer our apology to those members of the _____ First Nation, present and past, who suffered within the Alberni Residential School. We present this plaque to the leadership of your First Nation so that it may publicly witness to our sorrow for the suffering the United Church of Canada contributed to you, your families and your communities and our hope that our relationship may one day find healing.

Presentation of the framed text of the apology - to be given to the Elected Chiefs or designates.

Kyuquot - Grannemans	Ehattesah - Spencers	Nuchatlaht - David Hooper
Mowachaht/Muchalaht - Warrender		Hesquiaht - Vataminuik
Ahousah - Whytes	Tla-o-qui-aht - Parks	Ucluelet - Wytons
Toquaht - Ronalds	Uchuckleshat - Comeaus	Ohiaht - Robertson
Dididaht - Maybas	Opetshesah - Bishops	Tsesah - Houles <i>Darlene</i>

(Hupacasah)

Tribal Council - Mike Lewis

9. Invite the Nuu-Chah-Nulth peoples and guests to break bread together in the spirit and traditions of both our people - Mike Lewis

10. Nuu-Chah-Nulth response to the apology

11. Presentations: MCs - Mike [Lewis] and John [Mayba]

- a. Three blankets - Lillian Howard, Richard Watts, Nelson Keithlah - Ester and family
- b. Tree - representing new possibilities Bernie [Wyton]
- c. Gift of Money - to further the preservation of language - Shirley [Whyte]

We of the congregation of St Andrew's Church understand that the loss of language is one of the great tragedies cause by having generations of children in Residential Schools. We know that language is necessary to the continuing strength and life of any culture. We also know that you have committed yourselves to the teaching and preservation of language. We offer this gift of money. [\$3,000]

Our hope is that it will help in your effort to restore the language, and with it the rich traditions and customs of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth.

d. Witness recognition [It is a very important custom of many coastal peoples, including the Nuu-Chah-Nulth, that a gift of money is given to people present as a payment for their witness to what has occurred at the feast or potlatch. The amount is usually nominal, perhaps a dollar or two dollars.] - Mike Lewis with help from Jack Little and Nelson [Keithlah] - Members of our congregation will take it to the appropriate people.

12. Wrap up in preparation for meal. Nelson Keithlah

13. Eating

14. Speeches and introductions - Nelson [Keithlah] and Kathy [Hogman] to arrange for each side.

15. Parting words - Nelson and Kathy

The speaking will be on the west end of the gym [Maht Mahs, the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council gathering hall - part of the old Alberni Indian Residential School still in use] People singing and speaking should try and arrange themselves in the vicinity of this end of the gym. There will be microphones, some of which will be roving mikes so there should be no problem with audio.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Many copies throughout Terry Whyte's notebook.

Appendix VI

For participants

Mar. 13/2000

In May of 1997, when St. Andrew's United in Port Alberni invited the First Nations people to a feast at which they made their apology to them, I [Claire Hunston] wrote the following:

An Addenda to the Apology:

May, 1997

We do, however, wish to acknowledge the grief of many who worked in these schools (and later, hostels or residences) as sincere, dedicated individuals who gave their best years to the education of the children, often working against the mainstream to alleviate what they considered to be too confined or too strict regimens or too harsh treatment. Not all of these inflicted abuse; in fact, they gave extra time and energy to provide extra-curricular events and outings for the children, and they provided love and warmth and encouragement where there was little opportunity for the children to experience these within the system. Often, too, this was done by people who loved their jobs despite the very low wages which the church offered.

These people have been made to feel guilty by the sins of a few and they are also in need of a healing touch that says they are free of the shame placed upon them. We ask that First Nations People allow them to be absolved and we ask that the church include them in the healing process, so that all may be reconciled to each other. To that end, the healing between/among nations may have the opportunity to flourish. /CH

With this gathering of former workers [at Vancouver School of Theology] at least the portion of 'inclusion for healing' is happening. We may have to wait longer yet for the absolution from the First Nations people. / Claire Hunston ¹¹¹

¹¹¹ A copy from Terry Whyte's notebook, section Two, *The St. A Apology (I attempted to contact Claire Hunston for permission to use this addenda, but was unable to find her. This addenda was circulated to participants at the Residential School Workers event at Vancouver School of Theology on March 13, 2000)*

Appendix VII

Earlier this year members of St Andrew's United Church in Port Alberni took a first step in working toward healing by offering an apology to First Nations people who experienced abuse at the church run school. Following their lead, the next larger courts of the church, the Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery and then the British Columbia Conference of the United Church grappled with the issue and agreed on the need for a formal apology for the wrongs committed. Finally, the General Council met in Camrose in August and United Church representatives from across the nation had the opportunity to consider this issue among a host of other concerns. The General Council chose, however, not to issue an apology. Rather, it reiterated a 1986 apology for church attempts at assimilation, expressed regrets for injustices done and for the church role in the residential school system, and "to consider means to express our repentance." An apology was not offered at this time out of concern that it could lead to enormous financial awards from law suits. The church can repent it seems, but we cannot yet apologize.

While using the theological language of repentance is most appropriate in the church, the result of this reticence about an apology, coupled with the church's recent third party lawsuit against the Federal government, gives the impression of fearfulness at best and lack of integrity at worst. The Biblical understanding of repentance has everything to do with a sharp change of direction, of doing a 180 degree turn. It is ultimately about returning to God. If we in the church are going to return to God, then the first step, the smallest step we can take is to apologize to those we have injured.

We do not offer this opinion without significant sense of struggle. We care deeply for our denomination and we know that the General Council's decision was certainly made with the best of intentions. But if there is anything that we have learned from our experience with the Residential School system it is this: good intentions and fine motives are not enough....today, as we consider our errors of the past, we need to risk doing the right thing. We need to say we are sorry.¹¹²

¹¹² [The Reverends] Phillip Spencer and Foster Freed, *PQ [Parksville-Qualicum] News Faith Column*, no date, typewritten copy attached to John Siebert's *Memorandum* Sept 10-11, 1997

Appendix VIII

The six questions directed to General Council Executive for the September 21, 1998 meeting.

Although our apology was received and acknowledged at the highest level in the church no significant action was taken to complete the process and affirm our move. Instead, the energy and attention of the national church was usurped by the courtroom. This has spoken louder than our words.

We have been waiting to meet with you and learn how you see things. We have been waiting to have some of our concerns addressed such as:

1. The courtroom behaviour of the people representing the UCC in the first Nanaimo hearings was not helpful to the process and inflicted further pain on many of the plaintiffs. Can we not expect the same kind of presence in a courtroom as we would from each other?
2. We would like to understand your “theological reflections” and your “multi-faceted decision” to proceed with an appeal. How does this relate to the stand the church will take on actual liability?
3. How can the church consider an apology or statement of repentance with regards to harm done to native people in residential schools when it contends it was not really responsible or liable for same?
4. What happened to the General Council decision to issue a statement of repentance? Whose decision was it to withhold or delay the distribution? Hasn't that decision and what has taken place since rendered the process meaningless?
5. Many people have asked “Why is the General Council Executive visiting you now? So late? What could their motives be at this late stage in the game?”
6. Other general concerns have to do with issues like our lack of communication over the last few years on this subject and the secrecy around your decision making process.¹¹³

¹¹³ Handwritten notes dated 98-09-21 in Terry Whyte's notebook, Section III, General Council Visit 98-09-21 and follow up.

Appendix IX

United Church Apology for Complicity in the Indian Residential School System

“I am here today as Moderator of the United Church of Canada to speak the words that many people have wanted to hear for a very long time. On behalf of the United Church of Canada I apologize for the pain and suffering that our church’s involvement in the Indian Residential School system has caused. We are aware of some of the damage that this cruel and ill-conceived system of assimilation has perpetrated on Canada’s First Nations peoples. For this we are truly and most humbly sorry.

To those individuals who were physically, sexually and mentally abused as students of the Indian Residential Schools in which The United Church of Canada was involved, I offer you our most sincere apology. You did nothing wrong. You were and are the victims of evil acts that cannot under any circumstances be justified or excused. We pray that you will hear the sincerity of our words today and that you will witness the living out of this apology in our actions in the future.

We know that many within our church will still not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the blame for this horrendous period in Canadian history. But the truth is we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore we must also bear their burdens. We must now seek ways of healing ourselves, as well as our relationships with First Nations peoples. This apology is not an end in itself. We are in the midst of a long and painful journey. A journey that began with the United Church’s Apology of 1986, to our Statement of Repentance of 1997 and now moving to this apology with regard to Indian Residential Schools. As Moderator of the United Church of Canada I urge each and every member of the church, to reflect on these issues and to join us as we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation and healing.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ United Church Apology for complicity in the Indian Residential School System, 1998. Delivered by Moderator the Right Reverend William Phipps.

Appendix X

Apology of the 31st General Council to Native Congregations

“Long before my people journeyed to this land, your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of Creation, and of the Mystery, that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured.

We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you the good news of Jesus Christ, we were closed to the value of your spirituality.

We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.

We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel.

We tried to make you like us and in doing so we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer, and the image of the Creation in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be.

We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God’s Creation healed.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Delivered by Moderator the Right Reverend Robert Smith, 31st General Council, August 15, 1986.

Appendix XI

Members of St Andrew's United Church, Port Alberni, BC who participated in the study and Apology to First Nations, 1996-97¹¹⁶

Lois Andow	Mike Lewis
Fred Bishop	*Barb Martin
* Gordie Brand	John Mayba
Sue Comeau	Diane Mayba
Fred Comeau	Joan Parks
Johanna Dutton	David Parks
*Yvonne Forbes	*Shirley Rodgers
Beate Granneman	Dave Ronalds
Henny Granneman	Rosemary Ronalds
Anne Gray	Ed Spencer
Ron Gray	Myrtle Spencer
Ester Haack	Jack Thornburgh
Norah Harach	Val Thornber
Bev Herd	Shirley Whyte
*Glen Herd	Terry Whyte
Kathy Hogman	Bernadette Wyton
*Armand Houle	*Sherella Wyton
Joan Jacobson	*Keith Wyton
	*Ira Wyton

¹¹⁶A list of people who attended the Indian Residential School meetings at St Andrew's, January 23, February 21, April 9, May 2, May 23, June 13, June 25, 1996. From Terry Whyte's notebook, "Our Meetings." * indicates only attended one session.

