

ABORIGINAL ISSUES IN LIGHT OF DIGNITY OF RIGHTS AND PERSONS



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Life Member

How can we possibly build a society that is free from racism? We can work toward this goal one step at a time, one issue at a time and one person at a time. One step at a time begins with education and awareness. One issue at a time also depends on awareness, but the fact is that racial issues are composed of many layers that have become part of our very thoughts and actions over many years. One person at a time means us, members, who can do our part in our particular communities and neighbourhoods.

“It is a strength and not a weakness that we [Canadians] are a ‘permanently incomplete experiment built on a triangular foundation – aboriginal, francophone and anglophone.’ What we continue to create, today, began 450 years ago as a political project, when the French first met with the Aboriginal people. It is an old experiment, complex and, in worldly terms, largely successful. Stumbling through darkness and racing through light, we have persisted in the creation of a Canadian civilization.” (Her Excellency the Rt. Hon. Adrienne Clarkson, October 7, 1999)

The “experiment” that is identified in the above quotation is “complex” to say the least. There is not only great diversity among Canadians, but also among Aboriginal peoples, including status and non-status First Nations, Inuit and Métis. In general, people must realize that issues, besides being multi-layered, can be interconnected and yet divided into issues that are unique to individuals or communities. As an example, non-status First Nations and Métis people, women in particular, do not have access to some federal government community support programs which are available to status First Nations and Inuits.

The “experiment” is “old.” A genuine healing from

mistreatment that took place years ago must underlie all that we do. Past hurts and insensitivities toward the Aboriginal people must be acknowledged. This begins with reconciliation regarding residential schools and unfair and unequal opportunities for Aboriginal participation in society. There must be greater understanding and appreciation of the role taken by Aboriginal sisters in the development of Canada from its very beginning.

Aboriginal Canadians suffer greatly with issues concerning poverty, health, family violence, death rates and unemployment, to name just a few. League members can encourage the recruitment of more Aboriginal people to be involved in the justice system. Members can also encourage cultural awareness training for police, judges and corrections staff.

Equality in a diverse country is more than laws and legislation. It takes teamwork in the workplace, communities, places of business, families, schools and on the street. It takes time to study current policies, especially in local areas, to see what specific issues Aboriginal peoples face. It takes time and teamwork to become acquainted with social programs – those that are in effect and those that are lacking. Newspapers, dialogue and the use of the Internet will help greatly to keep members informed.

I invite you to write to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians The Hon. Jim Prentice and to your local members of parliament to voice your concerns.

We can work together to create a Canada where there is equality for all. †

HIGHEST INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP NATIONAL AWARD

On Monday, February 13, 2006, then National President Agnes Bedard went to St. Margaret Mary Parish Council in Hamilton, Ontario. She was participating in a conference in the area and took the opportunity to present a special award to the council. Members were proud to accept a certificate of recognition, framed by Agnes, for having the highest increase in membership throughout Canada for 2005. Members were delighted with their national president and her spirituality left them renewed.

Another highlight for members in 2005 was that their much loved pastor, Gerard Bergie, was ordained as auxiliary bishop in Hamilton.

Pictured are Agnes Bedard and St. Margaret Mary Parish Council President Eunice Baldwin.

