



On March 31, 2016 the United Church committed to honour the Call to Action, adopting and complying with the principles, norms, and standards of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation. The Aboriginal Ministries Council has begun a process of consultation to determine its vision and future structure within the United Church. The principles for the new relationship include:

- the right to self-determination
- the right to cultural and spiritual identity
- the right to participate in decision-making
- the right to lands and resources
- the right to free, prior, and informed consent
- the right to be free from discrimination

Our Church is committed to a new identity, a new relationship, and a new way of being, both within the Church and in the world. Gibimishkaadimin, as a project of Bloor Street, Fairlawn and Rosedale United Churches, has the skills and resources to play a role in this process of reconciliation.

### **Consultation Process for this Project**

Reconciliation with the Indigenous people of Canada is the single most important challenge for our country and the United Church. Consistent with the principles for a new relationship with Indigenous people, which include mutual respect, participation in decision-making and self-determination, in developing this project a group from Bloor Street consulted with:

- Aboriginal Ministries at the General Council Office
- The Speaker of the All Native Circle Conference
- Rev. John Thompson, United Church minister at the remote First Nations community of Oxford House
- Erik Mathieson, Chief Financial Officer, United Church of Canada

Flowing from that consultation, several options were explored, culminating in the development of the Gibimishkaadimin project. To achieve our commitment to reconciliation and right relations, we agreed that we must focus on the youth of our Church as they will become the leaders in this reconciliation process.

### **The Project**

In 2016 members of Bloor Street met with Rev. McLeod and Springwater Hester-Meawasige, the Aboriginal Youth Leadership Co-ordinator, to mutually develop the project. The centrepiece of the project was a seven-day canoe trip on Lake Superior, including youth from across Canada. The idea for a canoe trip was suggested by Indigenous leaders in the United Church, and the Executive Minister for Aboriginal Ministries pledged her support for this pilot project. The concept of developing knowledge and skills through experiential learning was strongly endorsed.

Gibimishkaadimin will be a success if it contributes to reconciliation between Indigenous and non- Indigenous peoples by creating opportunities of mutual learning, building respect and developing skills in our youth to become leaders in the reconciliation process. As a pilot project, Gibimishkaadimin will be evaluated against its goals and deliverables at the end of five years.. If successful, it could be modelled or varied by other communities of faith across Canada. Our commitment is to reconciliation.

This Project will provide leadership for our Church in offering an opportunity for our Indigenous and non- Indigenous youth to have a life-changing experience that will change stereotypical attitudes, develop leadership skills, lead to lasting friendships, and formulate plans to achieve the goal of reconciliation. EDGE is a network



## Highlights from Year One – 2017

Twenty-two youth ranging in age from 14 to 18 went on the 2017 canoe trip, including a Leader-in-Training. Twelve were Indigenous youth from BC, Alberta and Manitoba and ten non-Indigenous youth from Winnipeg, Thunder Bay and Toronto.

There were four Indigenous Program Leaders, including the Very Rev. Stan McKay as Elder, Joe McGill, a former outdoor education teacher from Marathon, Rusty Burns and Lindsey Gagne, social workers working with Indigenous youth from Calgary and Edmonton, respectfully.

The trip began in Thunder Bay on August 22nd, where participants had the opportunity to meet with staff at Ka-Na-Chi-Hih, a solvent abuse treatment centre for young Indigenous men. This was followed by an introductory session at the spiritual centre, which provided an opportunity for participants to get to know each other in preparation for the subsequent seven-day journey.

The group then travelled to Neys Provincial Park, on Lake Superior, where they were met by Diane Richmond, a local Elder. During the next two days, participants were guided through discussions and learnings about Aboriginal spirituality and Indigenous issues such as the legacy of Residential Schools. Donald Michano, an Indigenous leader from Thunder Bay, led a workshop in which youth made drums and learned about the drum tradition.

In preparation for canoeing, guides from Naturally Superior Adventures (the contracted outfitter), taught water safety and canoeing skills. They were additionally, and importantly, responsible for the food, equipment and safety on the journey.

The group paddled east in three voyageur canoes, camping on remote beaches in spectacular scenery. The canoe trip ended with two nights on Biigtigong First Nation and drumming with the Heron Bay Singers.

## Reunion



The youth got together from February 23 – 26, 2018 for a reunion.

The out-of-town youth were billeted with Toronto youth and had an overnight at Bloor Street.

Led by Stan McKay and Rusty Burns, the youth consolidated their learnings from the summer and had fun.

Everyone went to the CN Tower, saw the Leafs win, and were part of Sunday service at Bloor Street.



### Learn More

Gibimishkaadimin has a Facebook page, an email address [Gibimishkaadimin@gmail.com](mailto:Gibimishkaadimin@gmail.com) and a website: [www.gibimishkaadimin.wix.com/home](http://www.gibimishkaadimin.wix.com/home).

Please take the time to look at the video from the 2017 canoe trip: Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/obrctm5pe0o8pu1/Gibimishkaadimin%20video%20Oct%202022%202017.mp4?dl=0>