

## House of Commons passes motion to recognize Canada's Indian Residential Schools as Genocide

As our church continues to walk the path of Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples the Social Justice Team will throughout the year present short stories and news items that reflect upon this walk.

Today I am going to touch on a recent and momentous moment in our history.

On October 27, 2022 a motion by Winnipeg Centre MP Leah Gazan calling on the government to recognize Canada's Indian Residential Schools as genocide passed by unanimous consent. This was a second attempt by Ms. Gazan as a similar motion was defeated last year.

Leah Gazan's motion read as follows: That, in the opinion of the House that the government must recognize what happened in Canada's Indian Residential Schools as genocide, as acknowledged by Pope Francis and in accordance with article II of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

"We must honor the experience of residential school survivors, their communities and families." said Gazan. "We all have a responsibility as elected officials to speak the truth. Only then will we achieve justice and demonstrate that we are truly committed to reconciliation."

Leah Gazan has a particular and personal history to genocide through her own family. Her mother is Lakota/Chinese. Her father is a Jewish Holocaust survivor from the Netherlands.

The residential school system in this country was established with the aim to rid First Nations children of their language, culture and way of life. The schools were far away from reserves and

children were torn from their families by police and church officials including priests.

Said Sir John A. MacDonald in the House of Commons in 1883 " When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages. He is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write."

These words are shocking to hear today. It is clear now that the objective was not education but eradication of an entire people. Children were abused psychologically, physically and sexually. They were used as child labor. They were malnourished and lived in unsanitary conditions that lead to illness and often death. They were buried in unmarked graves. Parents and families were often not informed of their deaths.

We can no longer deny this incontrovertible truth. The goal was to eliminate them altogether. It is a testament to the strength and resilience of our Indigenous brothers and sisters that this did not happen. But the toll has been immense. The systemic racism that is still found today throughout our country-in education, in the criminal justice system, in the child welfare system, in sports and in business. Indeed, in all parts of our society. We, as a settler people have benefitted from our privilege founded by this colonial system.

By recognizing the residential school system as a genocide this is a beginning to walking in reconciliation with our First Nations Peoples. May we continue to learn from our past and make Canada a truly just and equitable society for all.