

Truth Telling Toward Reconciliation, December 11, 2022

Introducing the Right Rev Carmen Lansdowne

This month's Truth-Telling Toward Reconciliation fits nicely into this Advent season, a season of hope and anticipation. Today, I would like to introduce you to the new moderator of our United Church of Canada, the Rt. Rev Carmen Lansdowne. Dr. Lansdowne, whose Indigenous name is Kwisa'lakw, is a member of the Heiltsuk (Hyltsik) First Nation in BC, and her installation this past August is noteworthy, because she is the first Indigenous woman to lead a Christian denomination in Canada.

Rev. Lansdowne was born in Alert Bay, BC, located on an island along the north coast of Vancouver Island. She attended her first United Church Indigenous ministry consultation as a child. She explains that her parents, who are retired fishers on the Pacific Coast and keepers of the waters, wanted her to be exposed to the church and its justice issues at an early age. She's come a long way since then, having worked with the World Council of Churches, earned a PhD from the Theological Union in Berkley, and served as executive director of the First United Church's Community Ministry. This ministry does its work in the heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Canada's poorest postal code.

The road to this point in her life hasn't always been an easy one. Broadview magazine reports that she struggled with addiction earlier in her life, and lost a brother to suicide, before experiencing a strong call to ministry at the age of 26. That was 20 years ago.

Stan McKay believes that she is the right person to be the church's next spiritual leader. "She has the capacity", he said, "to see new possibilities for the church beyond our current model." Others who have met Lansdowne remark on her gifts as a deep listener and observe that she reads widely, is constantly learning and approaches life with humor.

When asked how communities of faith can best develop relationships with Indigenous communities, Rev Lansdowne answered in part: "Now is a chance to focus on our internal work as a church. We need to work on understanding racism and colonialism – how they function nationally and in our faith communities and how they are still part of who we are today. Once we have done that hard work, we can – in an informed way - approach Indigenous communities and ask to walk gently with them."

Another person who has worked closely with her describes her as one of the "most evocative leaders that the church has ever had, who is filled with a great sense of joy, a lightness that inspires other people". It's a profound gift to know that now during Advent, as our nights grow longer, we have a moderator who inspires others with joy and light.

Sources:

1. Much of this information was gathered from Broadview magazine (October/November)
2. A YouTube recording of the Installation of C. Lansdowne can be found by following [THIS LINK](#). The start of her sermon is at the 1 hour 25-minute mark.