

Working Together for Change

Lessons from the Church and from the Commissioner Tour

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(show slide) As many of you know, I had the opportunity from June 2013 to December 2014 to criss-cross our province and to ask residents of SK what they wanted changed in our approach to mental health and addictions needs. Turns out this all happened in what was literally a record-breaking cold winter in SK. And we have a big province. (show slide of North)

One of the key questions was, “What are the levers that we would need to pull to create meaningful change and improved mental health for all peoples in SK?” People told me (show slides):

- **Enhance Access & Capacity**
- **Focus on Prevention & Early Intervention**
- **Create Coordinated, Person & Family-Centred Services**
- **Respond to Diversities**
- **Partner with First Nations & Métis Peoples**
- **Reduce Stigma & Increase Awareness**
- **Transform the System & Sustain Change**

If you'd like more information about the official recommendations from the report, you can find it on the Government of SK website. When Patrick asked me to speak this Sunday, it was in the context of personal learnings. And so I've been asking myself, what were my greatest

learnings from this tour? It is probably reflected in the title of the report, “Working Together for Change.” As I toured the province and spoke with people, I became profoundly convicted that change does not come from one person alone, although one dynamic leader can bring profound change. But more often change comes when we work together, sometimes across seemingly disparate views or even strongholds, that change will come.

And, as it happens, this topic of change is particularly relevant for us at Nutana Park Mennonite. As you’ve likely noticed we’re in the middle of some very *concrete* changes (pun fully intended for those with that humour!). (show slide of trench work) Right now change is no abstract concept, but a lived reality in our church. Ripped out carpet (show slide), half-painted doorways (show slide), and furniture in unusual locations. We are in the middle of change. The recent Mennonite Church Canada Assembly had more elements of change: movement toward a more decentralized Mennonite Canada to something more regional. Churches free to engage in their own processes of discernment similar to what we’ve engaged in over the past 15 years. CHANGE.

How does *constructive* change come about? Well, a few thoughts on that that were *reinforced* (okay, no more renovation puns) by sweeping the floor with Ruth, watching my daughter, Deanna, & Stan work together on painting doors, and listening carefully to instructions from Tammy, our inestimable crew chief. (show slide of group discussing plans).

1. We all have our own gifts and voices to add to the change.
It is truly our diversity that allows change to happen.
Diversity in as many dimensions as we can consider.
Diversity in our personalities – we need truth-tellers who are

bold prophets, peace-makers who help us see other views, reflecters who can pause and consider implications, doers who get things done. We also have gifts – artists like Nicole, planners like Joel, and our many deconstruction and reconstruction experts. (show slide of group sitting in kitchen). When I was on the road as Commissioner, I also saw this need for diversity. Government leaders with passion for change, front line workers with compassion and creativity, people with lived experience with willingness to have their voices heard to propel change forward. Diversity in our cultures – settler, First Nation, Métis, and “Newcomers” – peoples from around the world. We all have stories to tell that help us to see the world anew and to give energy to change.

2. We work for change because it gives us joy. (show slide of group from Scattered Site)

Scattered Site is tucked into a smallish building on a side street of La Ronge. Staff here serve meals to those who are hungry, give counselling to those who need it, and provide a safe haven for people during the day who have nowhere else to go. The energy of the staff is palpable. These are people with a mission who are grounded in an understanding that their work makes a difference to the lives of people living in La Ronge. When I visited there with a team member, we were warmly welcomed by Rose, who gave us a tour and led us into the back where she showed us what she considered to be treasures of food and other gifts from the community. Her joy was palpable, and I imagine that many people in the community donated food simply for

the pleasure of being on the receiving end of her smile.
Doing something we believe in gives us joy.

3. We work for change because we must.

There is a song on the radio right now (or at least on CBC radio) by Ndido O that pulls me in every time I hear it. “How long must we wait for things to get a little easier.” With a persistent pulse and the artist’s bluesy voice, it reverberates within my soul for those times when I’ve waited and hoped for change – for myself, for family, for friends, or for our larger society – mental health and addictions, poverty, reconciliation, the environment – just to name a few. Many of us work for change because we must. We see things around us that call us to try to make a difference. We have many examples in our church: Howard Willems and his fight to reduce the harms associated with asbestos; Jake & Barb and their work to have a safe hospital in which to recover from mental illness; our whole church’s work to make our congregation a safe and inclusive one; my lovely husband serving on the board of the Solar Co-op; Jared’s work in growing and distributing produce. There are so many more examples that I could name – we are truly blessed in the encouragement we can provide to each other as we go about the work that we feel we “must” do.

On a national level, I think of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations as a “must” for every Canadian and for each Canadian organization to consider how they will respond. (show slide) I am thankful that as a church we now begin our service by recognizing that we are on Treaty 6 land. I hope that each time it is stated, it reverberates within us,

recognizing the history of the Treaties, and the realities of our nations living together. Justice Murray Sinclair stated, “Reconciliation turns on this concept: I want to be your friend and I want you to be mine and if we are friends then I’ll have your back when you need it and you’ll have mine.” Sinclair also noted that reconciliation is for all Canadians, “I really don’t care if you feel responsible for the past. The real question is do you feel a sense of responsibility for the future because that’s what this is all about.”

What we can do every day to bring change:

When I completed the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan and returned to my front-line work, I was initially happy to just breathe for a while. But gradually I began to look around, and wonder, what pieces of the change for which I had advocated was I now going to try to work toward in my life as an individual, a professional, and in my workplace.

A couple of small examples:

- a) Support communities that sustain us. (show slide) Kelly and I are very involved in the Marion Graham Music Association, because, in part, that is a community for our high school students that nurtures them. We need communities like that for our children and for ourselves.
- b) Do whatever I can to reduce racism and encourage inclusiveness in my daily life. Racism is a lived reality for many in SK. But I want our community to be welcoming. So I make a conscious effort to smile/nod/greet everyone on the trail as I run. I was gifted with a desktop teepee on one of my visits with a First Nation community. (show slide) That teepee sits on my desk at work. It sends a clear welcoming message, and has opened conversations about traditional healing.

c) I've helped to start a project called, "Bring Home to Rehab." Part of that project is to create a welcoming and restoring environment of healing for all cultures, and to reduce the institutional feel of our ward that can be reminiscent of residential school experiences for some of our patients. It is in its early stages, but we are having good change conversations as a result.

Each of you have your own areas of passion for change. May the Creator encourage us as we work together to create change, and to honour the holiness that is within each other.