

**Ontario Provincial Convention Report
July 4-8, 2015, Americana Conference Resort and Spa, Niagara Falls**

**Community Life Standing Committee Report
Prepared by Mary Jane A. Yaeger**

Madam President:

You are in your kitchen enjoying breakfast with your family when suddenly there is a knock at the door and then the door bursts open. The next few minutes are a nightmare. Your children are taken from you and as you attempt to stop them you are threatened with jail for yourself or anyone else who attempts to stop this atrocity.

What is happening?

In the 1870's, the Canadian government in partnership with Anglican, Presbyterian, United and Roman Catholic churches set up a residential school system for Aboriginal children. The plan.....to assimilate Aboriginal people forcibly into the Canadian mainstream by eliminating parental and community involvement in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development of Aboriginal children....in other words "to kill the Indian in the child".. More than 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children (some as young as 4 years old) were placed in what were known as Indian residential schools. We have been hearing more about this since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released their report.

The Commission started with three members in June 2008. It was replaced with three others in July 2009. A ten-member Indian Residential School Survivor Committee, made up of former residential school students, was also appointed to serve as an advisory body to these commissioners.

Once removed from their homes, the survivors spoke of being sent to school hundreds and even thousands of kilometres from their homes. It was impossible

for their parents to visit them. These children stayed in school over the Christmas holidays and even summer. Some did not return to their homes for years.

There were many unimaginable things experienced by these children until the last federally-administered residential school closed in 1996.

- Clothing and footwear, handmade by loving mothers and grandmothers taken and never seen again
- Being deloused with lye or chemicals, regardless of whether they had lice
- Names changed or simply given a number
- Long hair, often in traditional braids that reflected sacred beliefs, sheared off and sometimes shaved
- Brothers and sisters separated and even if they were at the same school, they were punished for hugging, waving **and** even talking to each other
- Food was strange, spoiled, rotten, poorly prepared and in short supply
- Much of their school day spent doing manual labour to support the school.
- Children only allowed to speak English, made to feel ashamed of their traditional language
- Children being forced to beat other children, sometimes their own brothers and sisters
- Children died of disease, killed themselves and there were mysterious and unexplained deaths
- Sexual abuse that sometimes started within days of arriving at the school – abused by staff and even older students
- Children frightened, degraded, humiliated and simply treated like animals
- 7 generations of children affected

There was no one to tell.....Who would believe you?

- Survivors said their mouths had been padlocked

What have we learned from all of this?

The commission has directed us to become aware of what has happened to our Aboriginal neighbours.

We must increase public awareness and understanding of the history of residential schools. We need to change the curriculum in our schools so that our history books may remove stories that state that Aboriginal people were only savages, and heathens and responsible for the deaths of priests. We need to add to our history books **this** story.....residential schools.

80,000 former students are still living today and they need support to develop and provide mental health and wellness healing centres, with specialization in childhood trauma and long-term grief.

The Manitoba Justice Institute has felt that residential schools laid the foundation for the epidemic we see today of domestic abuse and violence against Aboriginal women and children.....is this why we have so many missing and murdered Aboriginal women????

Pope Francis wrote, "we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own"

One Heart – One Voice – One Mission

My report can be found on page 17 of the annual report book.

Madam President, this concludes my report.