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June 16, 2021

June 21 – National Indigenous Peoples Day

"And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in thee." – Psalm 39: 7

Each year I am drawn to this day; these are a couple of my reflections.

Our own daughter is of the Cree First Nation in Saskatchewan. At an early age she was drawn to her roots, where she now thrives with our ever, increasing family. The Cree language is a dialect of the Algonquian languages spoken by approximately 117,000 Canadians from Alberta to Labrador.

The land on which our Huron Shores United Church sits is the territory of the Attawandaron, or Neutral First Nation which encompassed most of southwestern Ontario from Goderich, along the shore of Lake Erie to the Niagara River. The Neutrals were traders of many goods including chert, which we call flint. Flint was plentiful across the region, especially around Kettle Point. Flint was used for tools and weapons which the Neutrals traded with their more warlike neighbours, the Hurons to the north, and the Iroquois to the south. Flint tools and weapons from Kettle Point have been found as far as the Atlantic and Pacific shorelines. When Europeans provided the Iroquois, with iron for tools and weapons, they had less need for flint, and less need to keep the peace with the Neutrals. By the 1650s the Iroquois completely overran the Neutrals. Smallpox, also brought by the Europeans, didn't help the Neutral's cause. The Scout Camp, south of the Pinery Park, bears witness to the history of this sophisticated, and commercially advanced Attawandaron Nation.

Our Mission and Outreach Team has a Right Relations Working Group which connects our congregation to the concerns of the Kettle and Stony Point First Nations. Through our parking lot donations, our Local Outreach Fund regularly supports their Hillside School.

Each month our congregation is reminded of our tie to this land with our Acknowledgement of Indigenous Territory Statement: For thousands of years Indigenous peoples have walked on this land in their own territory. Their relationship with the land is at the centre of their lives. We acknowledge the Attawandaron and Ojibwe/Chippewa First Nations and their stewardship of this land. We acknowledge also our responsibility as Treaty Members, living in the Huron Tract (Treaty 29, from 1827). May we all live with respect on this land, and live in peace and friendship.

This day was first celebrated in 1996, declared by Governor General Roméo LeBlanc, as National Aboriginal Day. The name was changed to its current title in 2017. The date is appropriate because the summer solstice is the day when many indigenous people celebrate their heritage. It's a day that is a constant reminder of hope for Trish and I that our daughter and her family will grow up in a Canada that is increasingly just and inclusive.

Until next time.
Much love and be safe

Peter Challen

*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*

