

Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission: Living into Truth and Reconciliation A Case Study of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Introduction

The year 2016 marks a significant anniversary in the work of Indigenous rights in Canada. As it is the 20th anniversary of the release of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, it is important to reflect on the impact it has had on the work of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. This paper will present the work of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives (KAIROS) as an example of a social justice organization which has maintained a sustained engagement with the spirit and intent of the Royal Commission, while also engaging with the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The origins of KAIROS are outlined, followed by three different reconciliation initiatives that may serve as models of public engagement with Indigenous rights issues through the mechanisms of advocacy and education. Finally, some reflections on the lessons learned from 40 years of education and advocacy initiatives.

It is important that I locate myself as an author to provide context for the focus of this paper on the work of KAIROS and its predecessors. I currently serve as the Reconciliation Education Project Coordinator for KAIROS, which falls under the Indigenous Rights program. My main responsibilities in this position include strengthening the systems and networks related to the KAIROS Blanket Exercise as our most popular workshop, one which is discussed below. I wrote this paper while physically located in Ottawa, on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Nation. As a person of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry, I am honoured to be involved in the work of reconciliation through initiatives led by KAIROS.

The Origins of KAIROS

Although the current organizational structure of KAIROS as it exists today came into being in 2001, its roots are grounded in the work of previous projects, alliances, and coalitions reaching back into the 1970s. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed history of the genesis of the KAIROS movement in Canada, it is necessary to provide an outline of the events leading up to the foundation of the organization in order to show the context of the continued focus on repairing, restoring, and advocating for a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

In 1975, recognizing the need for a response to the call from Indigenous leaders “urging the churches to do more than pass resolutions and issue statements on the continuing pattern of paternalistic, colonial development in northern Canada that was destroying aboriginal life and culture,” the Anglican, Roman Catholic and United Churches launched the Inter-Church Project of Northern Development, soon shortened to Project North.¹ Initially galvanized by the 1969 report entitled *Beyond Traplins*, presented by Charles Hendry to the Anglican General Synod, a new direction which focused on the “recognition of treaty, aboriginal and other rights and a justice of their land claims” was the core of the proposed justice agenda. The number of energy resource megaprojects proposed in northern Canada during the 1970s, particularly the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, the Alaska Highway, Polar Gas, and the Norman Wells Pipelines, only added to a “sense of urgency” underlying the new church focus.² In subsequent years, the Lutheran Church in America (Canada section), the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the Society of Jesus

¹ Peter Hamel, “The Aboriginal Rights Coalition,” in *Coalitions for Justice: The Story of Canada’s Interchurch Coalitions*, ed. Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc (Ottawa: Novalis, 1994), 16.

² *Ibid.*, 17.

(Jesuits), the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Oblate Conference of Canada became partners in Project North.

Hamel (1994), in his recounting of Project North and the subsequent Aboriginal Rights Coalition, notes that Project North was originally designed to be a two-year project with a twofold purpose of helping the churches in “supporting the creative activities of northern native peoples in their struggles for justice and the settlement of their lands claims ... and challenging and mobilizing peoples in southern Canada to become involved in creative action on the ethical issues of northern development.”³ An agenda of research, communication, and education was developed, with initial approaches including visiting with northern Indigenous communities, responding to their requests and helping to communicate their struggles to people living in the South. Very quickly, Project North’s primary focus became the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, and included offering support to the Dene in their opposition to the pipeline, naming it as a perpetuation of a colonial philosophy of development, and eventually calling for a “moratorium on all Northern resource development projects ... to give Canadians an opportunity to work together to develop alternative lifestyles, based on conserver rather than consumer attitudes.”⁴ Although Project North faced backlash within the churches in part due to the vigorous debate on the “spiritual dimensions of economic development” and whether the coalition had gone too far in what was seen as an attack to the business community, in 1977 the member churches reaffirmed their support for Project North for a further three years.

Hamel (1994) refers to 1979 as the “high-water mark” for Project North’s commitment to building a base of support in Southern Canada on issues of solidarity with Indigenous peoples in

³ Ibid., 18.

⁴ Ibid., 20.

the North.⁵ Plans were laid for the Northern Native Rights Campaign, which included 5 teams of leaders from northern Indigenous organizations that spoke at public forums and media events in 65 centres across the country; there were 62 network groups working on this campaign, with 33 different regional organizers based in all 10 provinces. The Project was also working with 12 different Indigenous organizations. Hamel credits this process that brought together Indigenous leaders, churches, and regional groups as the genesis of contemporary Indigenous rights and solidarity movements comprising of Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.⁶ However, this process did not come without challenges. Questions relating to the division of responsibilities between the national organization and regional support groups as well as the relationship between regional groups and local churches, and how regional groups were going to be organized in the future, led to a re-examination of the processes practiced by Project North. Eventually in 1987, the national structure of Project North “came crashing down”; Hamel identifies the main issue as the structure of the Project, which did not allow for “effective involvement by the network groups in decision-making ... [as] they had no formal access.”⁷ In September 1987 the Administrative Committee of Project North recommended to the church bodies that the following year should be “a year of research, consultation, and transformation.”⁸ Thus, after an extensive consultation project, from June 20-23, fifty delegates from various churches, Indigenous organizations, and network groups gathered in Winnipeg for the creation of a new structure and visioning statement. On December 7, 1988 the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (ARC) came into being.

⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁸ Ibid.

The Aboriginal Rights Coalition was distinct from Project North because it recognized the need for a different organizational structure. Hamel describes ARC in the following terms:

It would be ‘a coalition of churches working in partnership and alliance with both aboriginal (political) organizations and regional network groups.’ The operative words would be ‘partnership’ and ‘alliance’. Its common mission would be to ‘strive for a new covenant that will ensure aboriginal justice in this country.’ The new coalition would be based on a decentralized model, with the emphasis on consultation, participation and networking. A national assembly would be held every two years to set priorities. There would be strong delegations from the three partners. Integral to the process would be the presence of native and non-native spiritual leaders to deepen spiritual reflection on the aboriginal justice concerns.⁹

The Aboriginal Rights Coalition included seven areas of priority, which borrowed from the mandate of Project North, but also reflected the different needs of the time. These areas of priorities included: the creation of public education resources; continued research and analysis of Aboriginal issues; the presentation of public information workshops; taking on the role of independent observers at the request of Indigenous communities (i.e. Burnt Church); participating in land rights negotiations (i.e. Lubicon Cree); participating in federal environmental assessment processes; and finally, organizing press conferences and acting as liaisons for Indigenous partners.¹⁰ ARC worked with several Indigenous communities and nations, including Grassy Narrows, Stoney Point, Barrier Lake, Caldwell First Nation, as well as with the Teme Augume Anishnabe, Gitksan, Nisga’a, Innu, Mi’kmaq, and Lubicon Nations. In addition, they worked with Indigenous organizations, which included the B.C. Interior Alliance and the Assembly of First Nations.¹¹

Writing in 1994, Hamel notes that the factors that made the Aboriginal Rights Coalition a success included the process of Indigenous organizations “assum[ing] many of the roles [Project

⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰ Aboriginal Rights Coalition, *Blind Spots: An Examination of the Federal Government’s Response to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, (Ottawa: Bonanza Printing, 2001), 142.

¹¹ Ibid.

North] once performed.” He contends that the Coalition is in a “unique” position that could allow it to facilitate a solidarity process within the broader church community. This understanding of the vital role of the ARC was also recognized by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which stated in Volume 5 that the Coalition “acts as a collective voice on Aboriginal issues for Canada’s churches and has attempted to perform a bridging role ... ARC has been effective in many of its efforts in public education.”¹²

In the mid 1990s, many Indigenous people both in and beyond churches began to seek apologies and legal settlements with some of the church members belonging to the Aboriginal Rights Coalition surrounding their involvement in the Indian Residential School system. It is significant that ARC was able to continue to work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples during these initial legal processes, and that the Coalition was able to maintain commitments to building relationships and the work of reconciliation.

Finally, in 1999 and 2000, the church members of the Aboriginal Rights Coalition began to notice that there were a number of redundancies in program activities and elsewhere across many of the church-based social justice coalitions. Recognizing the need for a streamlined process to continue to live out the work of social justice in Canada and abroad, KAIROS was formed in 2001 when 10 ecumenical justice coalitions merged.

The word *kairos* is one of the words which denotes ‘time’ in Greek. In contrast with *chronos* or chronological time, *kairos* means “holy or God-given time, time laden with meaning

¹² Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol 5: *Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing, 1996), 95.

and choice.”¹³ KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives finds its grounding in the understanding of *kairos* as it

signals a time of crisis and new possibilities, a time of repentance, renewal and decisive action. This can be a pinnacle moment, such as the current challenges to churches and communities presented by globalization. *Kairos* can also be a stream of moments, daily injustices that call us to act in God’s name ... [r]ecognizing *kairos* means acknowledging that the time to act for justice is now.¹⁴

Currently the mission of KAIROS is to unite Canadian churches and religious organizations in a faithful ecumenical response to the call to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).¹⁵ In its initial beginnings in 2001, KAIROS was dealing with over 30 different program areas of focus, which had been part of the previous 10 coalitions. Ever since then, the organization has been attempting to re-focus and re-organize priority areas. In the Strategic Plan for 2016-2020, KAIROS identified its overarching and intersecting programmatic theme as “Reconciliation”, with specific areas of focus on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, reconciliation in the watershed, and reconciliation with migrant and diaspora communities.¹⁶

In 2016, membership in KAIROS is still comprised of many of the founding church members of Project North, although there have been some changes over the years.¹⁷ In total,

¹³ KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, “KAIROS: Another Kind of Time,” 2003, kairoscanada.org, accessed October 12, 2016, <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Article-HistoryOfKairosMovement.pdf>, 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, “Mission Statement,” 2016, kairoscanada.org, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.kairoscanada.org/who-we-are/mission-statement>.

¹⁶ KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, “Animated by the Spirit for God’s New Community of Hope – KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives: Strategic Plan 2016-2020,” Oct 2015, kairoscanada.org, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2016-20-Strategic-Plan.pdf>, 7. Please see Appendix A for a full statement of the reach of the Program Priorities for Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

¹⁷ The current members of KAIROS include: Anglican Church of Canada, Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Canadian Religious Conference, Christian Reformed Church in North America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and United Church of Canada.

KAIROS draws on over 40 years of ecumenical justice cooperation, including global partnership commitments. These long-standing relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations have allowed KAIROS and its predecessors to maintain Indigenous Rights as a central focus of its work, particularly in light of the focus on reconciliation in Canada ushered in by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There is little doubt that Indigenous rights will remain a priority in the future.

Initiatives of Reconciliation

The previous section of the paper provided an overview of the origins of KAIROS in order to demonstrate its roots in practices which built relationships of solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This is particularly significant given the understanding of the basis for reconciliation first presented by the RCAP, and later embodied by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The TRC, drawing on RCAP, recognizes reconciliation is “about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.”¹⁸ “In order to do this,” they argue, “there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.”¹⁹ Thus, an ‘awareness’ of the historical roots of these issues is at the heart of the TRC’s understanding of how Canadian society can move towards building mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The Royal Commission also found that the federal government must play a central role in the reconciliation process, not only through the acknowledgement and expression of regret for

¹⁸ Canada, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Vol. 1: *Summary: Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (Toronto: Lorimer, 2015), 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

the multitude of violences perpetrated against Indigenous peoples through colonial policies along with a public commitment that such violence will never again be permitted,²⁰ but also through a number of recommendations on policy directions and priorities. Therefore, an emphasis on holding the federal government (and other levels of government) accountable to its commitments is also a central part of the reconciliation process.

In my capacity as Reconciliation Education Project Coordinator, I see many ways in which KAIROS has built upon the legacy of the RCAP and responded to the TRC's Calls to Action to prioritize reconciliation through actions, not simply in statements, both through advocacy at the federal and provincial government levels, but also through the prioritizing of respectful relationship renewal. While there are numerous initiatives to choose from given the length of the commitment of KAIROS and its predecessors to reconciliation initiatives, here I will focus on three that have their beginnings grounded in RCAP, and that have continued to make an influence to this day.

Blind Spots (2001)

In 2001, five years after the release of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Aboriginal Rights Coalition undertook an initiative that examined if and how the government had responded to the recommendations of the Final RCAP Report. Entitled *Blind Spots: An Examination of the Federal Government's Response to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, the preface states that "this collection of essays [is] the latest in a series of public education projects ... [t]his book was conceived of as much needed review

²⁰ Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol 1: *Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing, 1996), 17.

of the government of Canada's response to the Royal Commission."²¹ The collection includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who were originally involved in the work of producing the Royal Commission, and asks them to respond to questions including: if the government had responded to the Final Report, and if so, was the response adequate?; and "has the [federal government's] response been made in the spirit and intent of the Royal Commission's challenge to Canadians to build a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples based on mutual recognition, respect, sharing, and responsibility?"²²

While people with disabilities have helped to deepen understandings of the dilemmas of analogies between blindness and lack of insight, at the time the collection was titled *Blind Spots* for a number of reasons; firstly, and perhaps most aptly, the authors argued that there were a number of areas of 'obscured vision' or blind spots, which have represented the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada historically and today.²³ Blindness can also be seen, as several authors argued, in the federal government's perception that domestic 'solutions' cannot be found, and instead the focus must be international to find any 'solutions'. Professor Anthony Hall, one of the contributors, identifies the final area of blindness as the Royal Commission's "Big Blind Spots", in that the Commission did not subpoena witnesses or documents, in addition to their failure to address the so-called Oka crisis and events which precipitated the formation of the Commission.²⁴ He asserts that the Royal Commission turned a "blind eye to the underlying conditions of its own genesis", which continues to have implications for current government policies on standoffs with Indigenous peoples.

²¹ Aboriginal Rights Coalition, *Blind Spots*, xi.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, xii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Thus, *Blind Spots* was one of the only attempts five years after the release of the Final Report to examine in an intentional and methodical manner if and how the federal government had responded to the numerous recommendations and directives of the Royal Commission. It remains a significant resource not only due to the fact that it measures the federal government's response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission when no one else seemed to do so, but also in its authorship composition. The collection of articles by a multitude of authors originally involved in the work of the Royal Commission was made possible through the relationships the Aboriginal Rights Coalition had developed and maintained over the years. *Blind Spots* represented an attempt to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices to describe a social vision for Canadian society, one that will allow all peoples to live into reconciliation and justice.

The KAIROS Blanket Exercise (1997-Present Day)

One of the beliefs passed on from Project North to the Aboriginal Rights Coalition was the emphasis on public education on issues relating to Indigenous peoples in Canada. Embedded in this priority was the idea that the content of any education initiative had to not only feature but centre Indigenous voices and peoples explaining the issues that impacted them. In other words, both the Project and the Coalition did not speak for Indigenous peoples, but provided a forum through which these voices on the margin could be amplified. There was also recognition that the key to realizing a new relationship based on mutual respect was (and remains) public education.

The Royal Commission noted in Volume 5 that

Public education should be interactive and promote dialogue, balance, and a sense of sharing. Many of the successful examples of public education involve local consultation, face-to-face contact and collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on

a basis of equality. Direct personal contact works to dispel stereotypes and lower barriers to co-operation.²⁵

In recommendation 5.4.1, the Commission outlines the principles of public education on Aboriginal issues, and states that “public education should involve both the sharing of information and a process of interaction, leading in time to a shared sense of advocacy and public support.”²⁶

As a response to this recommendation, in keeping with its own history of commitment to public education initiatives, in 1997 the Aboriginal Rights Coalition produced the first edition of what would later become KAIROS’ most popular education tool: the Blanket Exercise. Based on the major themes and findings of the Final Report of the Royal Commission, the Blanket Exercise is grounded in a participatory popular education methodology which allows participants to live through 500 years of history in approximately 45 minutes. Participants physically step onto blankets representing the land of what is now called Canada, and into the role of First Nations, Inuit and later Métis peoples. Facilitators read a script and assume the role of European explorers and settlers. Participants are drawn into their roles by reading scrolls containing voices from Indigenous people and carrying cards which ultimately determine their outcomes.

The Blanket Exercise covers four broad historical eras and is based directly on the work completed by the Royal Commission, particularly in Volume 1: *Looking Forward, Looking Back*. The story begins with pre-contact, or the traditional Indigenous use of the land we now call Canada. The variety of languages, traditional governance structures, and nations is described. When the Europeans arrive, participants see how the process of colonization unfolded, and how it was based on fundamentally different worldviews and belief systems. The importance of treaty-making, the taking over of land through various means, and the Métis people are

²⁵ The Royal Commission, Vol. 5: *Renewal*, 84.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

introduced in this section. Here, European settlers fold back or remove the blankets entirely to represent this loss of land. Participants then experience a rapid series of historic events during which European colonial forces exercise increasing power, through policies such as the *British North America Act*, the *Indian Act*, the creation of reserves, the policies and practices of assimilation, and the introduction of the Indian Residential School System. Finally, in a fourth section (which draws on more contemporary sources such as the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission), contemporary colonialism and Indigenous rights and resurgence are portrayed. Participants learn about the 60s scoop, the intergenerational trauma of the residential schools, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and other issues facing many Indigenous communities today. Yet there are also positive stories to tell: the Blanket Exercise discusses the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, leadership from young people like Shannen Koostachin from Attawapiskat through her initiative “Shannen’s Dream,”²⁷ the resurgence of traditional ceremonies and healing practices, and the open celebrations of powwow, sundance, round dance and potlach ceremonies, to name a few. The exercise concludes with a number of quotes from Indigenous peoples speaking of what reconciliation means to them. The script of the Blanket Exercise has undergone several iterations since the first edition in 1997 and is constantly being updated to reflect current events. Alterations to the wording of the script are also made based on feedback from Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, and others who have knowledge of the history covered in the exercise.

Following the script portion of the Blanket Exercise, a talking circle or a debrief session is held to allow participants the space to process and to share emotions or questions that arose during this experience. This part of the exercise is often considered by many to be the more

²⁷ For more information, see Shannen’s Dream, <https://fncaringsociety.com/shannens-dream>

powerful portion of the workshop, as participants are able to engage with what they learned on a more personal level and voice what they learned from this experience.

Although the Blanket Exercise has been in existence for twenty years, it has become KAIROS' most popular teaching tool in the past five years. While this may be due to the appetite of Canadians for workshops that explain reconciliation as a response to the work of awareness-raising from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there is also significance in its methodology. The Blanket Exercise builds awareness and understanding of our shared history as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada by having participants literally walk through history in the shoes of Indigenous peoples. Participants are engaged on an intellectual and an emotional level, as history 'comes alive' by connecting the dots of an overarching narrative of colonization; it reaches both the mind and the heart, and many see it contributing to a movement for reconciliation through education across the country.

Winds of Change Campaign (2015-Present Day)

Another iteration of KAIROS' commitment to achieving reconciliation through the advancement of public education initiatives is the "Winds of Change" advocacy campaign. In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools called on governments in Canada, "in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students" (Call to Action 62.1).²⁸ This Call to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission amplifies the Recommendation 1.10.3

²⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Final Report," 238.

from the Royal Commission, which includes “work[ing] with educators in the design of Aboriginal curriculum that explains the history and effects of residential schools.”²⁹

In addition to the creation of resources surrounding issues lifted up by the TRC,³⁰ under the Winds of Change campaign KAIROS also produced a ‘Report Card’ for each province and territory to serve as a baseline to assess progress in achieving reconciliation through education in schools across Canada; these report cards are “intended as a basis for dialogue.”³¹ Canadians are encouraged to read the report card for their province or territory and sign a petition to call for the continued commitment of their provincial or territorial government to making this part of mandatory curriculum. Each province and territory has a different petition, addressed to the appropriate government body.³² KAIROS presented petitions in Ontario in June 2016, is planning to present in Alberta and Nova Scotia in November 2016, and will be presenting petitions in Manitoba and Quebec in early 2017. Other jurisdictions will follow when there are a minimum number of signatures collected. While work on Call to Action 62.1 will continue, in 2017 the Campaign will focus on additional Calls to Action.

The main impetus behind the Winds of Change campaign is to keep the momentum of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission alive. KAIROS characterizes this advocacy work as a response to the Calls to Action: “Over the TRC’s mandate, we listened, we witnessed powerful truths, we shared emotions and we were transformed. Now, more than ever, we need to respond.”³³ The focus on education is a continuing legacy of KAIROS’ predecessors, the

²⁹ The Royal Commission, Vol 5: *Renewal*, 133.

³⁰ See for example, KAIROS’ resource “Strength for Climbing: Steps on the Journey of Reconciliation,” <http://www.kairoscanada.org/?s=Strength+for+Climbing>.

³¹ KAIROS, “Winds of Change campaign,” 2016.

³² For an example of the petition, please see Appendix B: Winds of Change Petition - Manitoba.

³³ KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, “Winds of Change campaign,” 2016, [kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org), accessed October 22, 2016, <http://www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/indigenous-rights/windsofchange-overview>.

recommendations of the Royal Commission, as well as an acknowledgement of the statements and convictions of Indigenous leaders today.³⁴

40 Years of Advocacy and Education: Lessons Learned

The three examples of reconciliation initiatives discussed above are indicative of KAIROS' two main engagement strategies in the work of Indigenous rights: advocacy and education. After 40 years of experience in this field, what are the major lessons that we have learned? What does it mean to be an effective educator and an effective advocate? How has KAIROS maintained relevance and sustainability over this period of time? What are some ongoing challenges that KAIROS faces?

On Effective Education and Advocacy

In its Final Report, the Royal Commission stated: “Of all non-governmental institutions in Canadian society, religious institutions have perhaps the greatest potential to foster awareness and understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.”³⁵ At that time, the churches and religious organizations that were then part of the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (which today form KAIROS) had been working in solidarity and partnership with Indigenous people, organizations, and communities on education and advocacy initiatives for over twenty years. Over those two decades, and in the two decades since, KAIROS has learned that genuine reconciliation requires an understanding of the history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, and that this education is more effective, long-lasting, and transformative if it is holistic and involves relationship and community building.

³⁴ In particular, the Honourable Senator Murray Sinclair, former Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who remains a strong advocate for the need for ongoing education initiatives for all Canadians

³⁵ The Royal Commission, Vol. 5: *Renewal*, 95-97.

We have found that the Blanket Exercise is effective, and powerful, because it creates the space necessary for the history to be told in a way that the conversation and the relationship building can begin. It provides a framework for sharing and collectively learning the history that so few of us have been taught in the Canadian education system. The Blanket Exercise requires participants to engage intellectually, physically, and emotionally, and functions as a wonderful example of a pedagogy that engages the spirit and intent of the Royal Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action surrounding education.

The past forty years of working collaboratively with Indigenous people have taught KAIROS what it means to be an effective advocate and ally. KAIROS has learned that decolonization involves, in part, stepping back, or at least stepping aside. The distinction between what it means to work *with* and not *for*, to take direction and guidance from Indigenous people, and to resist the temptation to believe we have the solution to every problem, are key foundations of advocacy. As an organization with significant settler participation, particularly in governance, KAIROS has a responsibility to support Indigenous peoples' efforts to reconcile. KAIROS has learned the importance of creating the space to allow Indigenous people, the people who have been impacted, to define what reconciliation and a new relationship will look like.

KAIROS has learned that as allies and settlers we must resist the temptation to take charge of the work of reconciliation. Our role is to support Indigenous people, and to educate ourselves about the forces of colonialism; namely, our part in that process as settlers, and the impact of those forces on Indigenous peoples and nations. KAIROS has learned to listen, and we have understood that there is a lot of unlearning involved. We have learned, to paraphrase the Indigenous activist Lila Watson that our liberation is bound up in that of Indigenous peoples.

We have learned to respect the right of communities and organizations to make their own decisions. We try not to take steps that are divisive or cause more challenges. We are willing and prepared to accept the fact that sometimes the best thing to do is nothing. We have learned that effective and useful advocacy often requires being observant and patient. This is particularly important as we understand that the reconciliation journey is a generational one, and that as we move further along that path we are going to face more resistance. This will test our steadfastness, but we are confident that the lessons learned to date, and the relationships forged, will provide us with the strength and fortitude to move forward together, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, towards a just, equitable, and reconciled society.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to present a case study on a social justice organization engaged in the work Indigenous rights and reconciliation initiatives; one which has maintained the spirit and intent of the Royal Commission and amplified the more current work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. From its beginnings in the work of Project North, to its restructuring as the Aboriginal Rights Coalition, to its current iteration as the amalgamation of 10 church-based justice coalitions, KAIROS has grounded its work on the policy and practice of relationship building, not just with Indigenous peoples, but also with other settler allies as well. These long-lasting relationships built over 40 years have allowed staff, board members, and volunteers to take direction from Indigenous partners on how to focus and prioritize efforts surrounding education and advocacy in the field of Indigenous rights. Three reconciliation initiatives were presented as models through which public engagement on issues identified by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can

be augmented. Finally, challenges for KAIROS and the broader field of Indigenous rights work as well as lessons learned were discussed. As KAIROS continues to adapt and respond to new needs and requests from Indigenous partners and its members, one of the key challenges will be to keep the spirit and momentum of the Royal Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission sustained as we continue to walk on the reconciliation journey.

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Appendix A

Program Priorities – Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples 2016-2020

Colonization has bred violence, racism, mistrust, and led to massive inequities in the social, health, and economic realities of Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples means a new relationship built on truth, a relationship of mutual respect that fully affirms the dignity and contributions and rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the globe and strives to bridge existing gaps through renewed justice.

KAIROS' commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples may include:

- Increasing the number and diversity of Canadians knowledgeable about the history and impacts of colonization and engaged in acts of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada and abroad;
- Increasing pressure towards implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
- Contributing to policy change that will close the gap between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians in areas such as child welfare, education, safety for Indigenous women and girls, health, cultural and language supports, and food security;
- Increasing pressure on corporations and governments to implement free, prior and informed consent, ensuring the genuine involvement of Indigenous peoples at every stage of resource development in Canada and abroad;
- Improving understanding and accommodation of the particular needs, roles and responsibilities of women in resource extraction projects in Canada and abroad, and advocating for women's clear representation at every stage;
- Contributing to an improvement in Canadian corporate accountability for mining operations on Indigenous land, including by advocating for access to justice by communities affected by Canadian mining abroad;
- Increasing support, capacity and strategic opportunities by linking Indigenous women with women human rights defenders from around the world, and connecting them to Canadian women for shared advocacy on gender and racial justice, and the promotion of human rights.³⁶

³⁶ KAIROS, "Strategic Plan," 7-8.

Appendix B

Winds of Change Petition – Manitoba

TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

These are the reasons for this petition:

WHEREAS for six years the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC] listened to thousands of former students of residential schools and their families testify to the devastating legacy of this national policy of assimilation;

WHEREAS the TRC calls upon “the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students” [CA 62.1], and;

WHEREAS on July 15, 2015, Canada’s premiers indicated their support for all 94 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and said they would act on them in their own provinces and territories.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows: to urge the Government of Manitoba to fully implement such a curriculum for kindergarten through Grade 12.