

In *Times and Tides*, there is no reference to the Land Claims Campaign of the early 1990s—both the significant educational component and the raising of one million dollars towards the resolution of Native Land Claims (in particular towards the cost of mounting the Supreme Court challenge which resulted in the ruling that has made such a huge difference to the capacity of First Nations to regain control over their traditional lands and to resolve claims by gaining some measure of economic independence).

At the time, the motion that was passed at the General Meeting in Terrace in 1989 was viewed by many as foolish (to the extent that it had to be confirmed a year later at the General Meeting held in Naramata). The Land Claims Campaign contributed significantly to raising awareness in the church about the work we had to do in repairing our relationship with our First Nations sisters and brothers. In doing so it was an important precursor to the work on Residential Schools. (In fact, the Conference Land Claims Campaign Committee basically morphed into the Residential Schools Task Force.)

In thinking back now on the Land Claims Campaign I am remembering many small details. In particular, at the General Meeting in Naramata when people were saying “It is one thing to pass this motion. Who is going to actually do the work to raise the money?” I found myself (along with others like David Ewart and Keith Howard and more) stepping forward to the mic and saying “I will.” I remember, too, the gratitude of Jim Angus and others for that commitment that the Conference kept.

The Land Claims Campaign came in direct response to a cry from people like Jim Angus and Alvin Dixon and others in BC’s Native Ministry. They said that we had passed motions in support of land claims but much more was needed. Raising money for a court case was not something the church had done before. Nor had we embarked on such an educational campaign around an issue like this. We forget how controversial this was at the time. Many were opposed to both the claims of First Nations and to the church being in support. I suspect that the success of that work and of the court case has led to us moving on and forgetting. The issue of the Residential Schools is still alive for us and deservedly receives attention. I think that the two—land claims and residential schools—go hand in hand.

This work was the most important of my ministry. Chairing both the Land Claims Campaign and the Residential School Task Force left an indelible mark on me. It was BC’s initial engagement with the questions raised by survivors of the Residential Schools that pressed the General Council Executive to visit B.C. and then move to an apology (against the advice of its lawyers). The conversations in the Land Claims Campaign Committee about the emerging stories from survivors led to the establishment of the Residential School Task Force. That group began to provide direction to our corporate journey of repentance.

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