

For Immediate Release: January 8, 2020

TEACHING HOUSE RECEIVES \$225,000 GRANT

The Indigenous Studies Program at the Vancouver School of Theology has received this significant grant from **The United Church Health Services Society Program Grant Fund at The United Church of Canada Foundation.**

This grant will be utilized over the next three years to help with the delivery of **Teaching House That Moves Around** programs (Teaching House) for Indigenous people in the northwest BC communities of Bella Bella, Bella Coola, and Hazelton.

The Teaching House is an integral component of the Indigenous Studies Program (ISP) at VST, under the direction of Dr. Raymond Aldred. Dr. Aldred is the director of the ISP whose mission is to partner with the Indigenous Church around theological education. Dr. Aldred is status Cree, ordained with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, and whose teaching and research specialization in narrative and systematic theology within the indigenous context. He is a frequent presenter and speaker, guest lecturer and writer.

The Teaching House involves a team of primarily Indigenous instructors and counsellors travel to Indigenous communities where support, encouragement and theological education are offered for the good of these communities, their spiritual health and the leadership of their churches. This has been an integral way in which the Indigenous Studies Program (ISP) at VST is able to deliver courses and expedite completion of degrees for its indigenous students.

The ISP is unique in North America. It was initiated by and for indigenous communities over 30 years before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did its important work in Canada. The ISP delivers theological education remotely to communities where Indigenous students live. Using a combination of online lectures and onsite mentors, Indigenous students are prepared for leadership in their communities, including ministry that suits their context.

The Indigenous Summer School, on the campus of VST, provides a once-a-year opportunity for students to travel to Vancouver where a community of support and encouragement is formed and progress in the program can be made.

The success of the Teaching House is built on the important understanding that the “House” is the basic social unit of west coast Indigenous peoples.

Integral to this program, the ISP with the local church and local Indigenous leaders will embark on a full needs assessment. This assessment will be inclusive of the spiritual, physical and emotional health of these communities, with corresponding courses, programs and services to be offered in response to local needs. The VST team come as expert counsellors to offer the requisite supports.

As part of these intensive community efforts, a specific stream will give attention to the engagement of local youth. In addition to delivering programs and services on-site, the ISP

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will also draw on this grant to bring youth and other local indigenous leaders to participate in the annual ISP Summer School, a two-week intensive featuring multiple courses, held at VST's Vancouver campus.

Indigenous youth and other leaders from the communities will have further opportunities to pursue theological education at VST online under the mentorship of the ISP.

At the onset and conclusion of each year, an impact assessment will be undertaken to help ensure the program provides positive, cumulative results in response to the needs and interests of each community.

About the Teaching House That Moves Around

The Teaching House is an effort to think through the process of taking theological education to communities building on the already created partnerships that exist in the Vancouver School of Theology Indigenous studies program and Indigenous Communities in Canada and the Pacific. Indigenous communities desire to see healthy spirituality lived out in commitments to family, the land and waterways

The Teaching House works with people in their own community bringing a team of leaders/ elders who will live and learn with them over many days. This praxis model of sharing, celebrating, storytelling and biblical interpretation with pastoral awareness will establish a context of sacred space in and through which a community's capacity to engage in supportive ministry to each other flourishes. Counselling is an integral aspect of the Teaching House.

Bringing Indigenous Christian ministry into the framework of traditional Indigenous practice, understanding of knowledge, and style and pace of learning will open participants to repair their relationships with the land, with people in their lives, with their spirituality and with themselves - repair and healing essential to finding freedom from violence and abuse.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission named healing in indigenous communities as the beginning work required to address the residual effects of Residential Schools and other colonial practices. Healing is a sacred undertaking in the context of sustainable community, belonging to and on the land.

There is an urgency to design, develop and implement new ways of equipping the priesthood of all believers so that this bottleneck need not limit healing and reconciliation. The Teaching House, with its high level of accountability and personal discipleship, will nourish examples of peace in the cultural milieu of Indigenous community.

The Teaching House will help communities move towards greater health (spiritual, emotional, physical) measured by research to show increased coping skills, parenting skills and leadership skills. Assessment will be done interactively with the communities and in close conjunction with the local churches.

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The Indigenous Studies Program at VST

Vancouver School of Theology has also developed graduate degree programs by extension and by distant education specifically for First Nations. The network of students, graduates, tutors and teachers spans Canada, the USA, and the Pacific Rim. VST expects to find among this network individuals capable of leading and animating the Teaching Houses that Moves Around, and its other ISP programs with each of these communities.

An integral component of the Indigenous Studies Program at VST is the commitment to help develop indigenous clergy and leaders, for indigenous communities, and done primarily by indigenous leaders. Each year under Dr. Aldred's leadership, VST hosts the Indigenous Summer School, drawing faculty and participants for intensive dialogue and training on prevailing issues, and leading towards formal academic accreditation, as well as providing insightful professional and continuing education.

The Vancouver School of Theology's primary mandate is to educate and form thoughtful, engaged and generous Christian leaders for the church in the 21st century. Among theological schools, VST is viewed as a change agent and an innovator for the church.

As an affiliated college of the University of British Columbia, VST is now ranked 31st globally and in the top 10 of most improved theological schools. The Vancouver School of Theology welcomes students from many Christian communions, other faith traditions and Indigenous communities, while celebrating its core relationships with the Anglican Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church in Canada and United Church of Canada. The Indigenous Studies Program at VST is central to the school's identity and commitments.

The Vancouver School of Theology acknowledge that the land on which they are located is the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) People.

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