

*Meghan: "Hi Meghan here, producer of the Relief, Development and Podcast.
We'd originally planned to air this episode in August,
But given the ongoing discovery of undocumented graves
Found at the sites of former residential schools,
It felt important to air this episode now.
It's July. The month of fourth of July and Canada day celebrations.
And this year, many people are questioning how appropriate it is
To celebrate countries that have committed so much violence
Against the original inhabitants.
Settlers still have so much learning to do
About our history and the ongoing violence of colonialism.
It's hard to know where to start, but today we're going back
to the beginning.
At first contact.
Here's the show."*

*Sophia: "I'd like to tell you a story about
a living treaty, documenting important promises that were made.*

*This story starts at the very first meeting between two nations.
And takes place on what some call Turtle Island and others call North America.*

*This is the **true** story of the Two Row Wampum belt.*

*When the Dutch first arrived on a ship in Mohawk Haudenosaunee territory,
They set to work cutting trees and clearing land for their homes.*

The Mohawk people were confused about what these strangely dressed people were doing so, they sent a delegation and held a meeting with the newcomers.

They both spoke different languages so understanding each other took time.

After many discussions they developed an agreement about how they would treat each other and live side by side.

The agreement was beaded into a belt with white and purple wampum shells.

Each of their ways shown in the purple rows running the length of the belt.

In one row is a ship with the ways of the Dutch Europeans

And in the other a canoe with the ways of the Haudenosaunee people.

The agreement was that each will travel down the river of life side by side.

Neither would attempt to steer the other's vessel.

This was a treaty.

The Haudenosaunee and the Dutch agreed on three principles to make this treaty last.

The first was friendship.

The second was peace.

The final one was that this agreement would last forever.

As long as the grass is green, the water runs downhill,

As long as the sun rises in the East and sets in the West,

And as long as our Mother Earth will last.

The Haudenosaunee see the Two Row Wampum as a living treaty,

A way to live in peace and for each nation to respect the ways of the other

As they meet to discuss solutions to the issues that come before them."

Meghan: “That was the story of the Two Row Wampum belt, with details taken from the Onondaga Nation website and told by MCC staff Sophia Bezoplanko.

She mentions Mohawk Haudenosaunee territory, which extends between what’s today known as Ontario and New York state.

This type of story, of course, is not unique to this corner of Turtle Island.

Treaties have been made all across what’s today called Canada and the United States—they are agreements made between Indigenous peoples originally with the crown and subsequently the Government of Canada.

But many of these promises have been broken over the years and continue to be broken.

The impacts of those broken promises are far reaching, and can be seen in many areas of Indigenous people’s lives. From lack of clean drinking water on reserves, to the horrors of what are known in the US as boarding schools and in Canada as residential schools.

Today on the show, we’re talking about how honoring treaties with Indigenous peoples is connected to peacebuilding.

We’ll hear about ways the Haudenosaunee people from Six Nations are asserting sovereignty and fighting for the land that is rightfully theirs, according to the original treaties.

We’ll also hear about how some settlers and churches are learning more about these histories and taking steps towards reparations.

I’m Meghan Mast, producer of the show and today I’m guest hosting.

You’re listening to Relief, Development and Podcast, a production of Mennonite Central Committee.

Music swells and then fades

Today I’m speaking with Adrian Jacobs.

Adrian is Ganosono of the Turtle Clan, Cayuga Nation of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy at Grand River Territory, ON

Adrian used to work as community liaison with MCC’s Ontario office to educate constituents on the Six Nations land claims and today he often consults for MCC’s national Indigenous Neighbours program. He is keeper of the circle at Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre in Manitoba, Canada.

Welcome, Adrian. So glad you could join me in this conversation.”

Adrian: “My greeting to you Meghan is what I heard growing up at the Six Nations reserve. And the greeting is sagoulie. I asked one of the language teachers at Six Nations, what is the exact

meaning of that word? And it means it's an actual inquiry into your well being. And it means is your spirit life still going on? To which you would reply? Yes. Or you could reply "uh heh," which is yes. Sagoulie, so it's a reply back to me."

Meghan: "Uh heh. This is where English falls a little short, I would say.

I'll start with having you talk about the history and present land struggle with Land Back Lane and Caledonia, in Ontario, Canada, which I know is close to your heart."

Adrian: The conflict over land in the 1492 land back lane issue in Caledonia, happened in 2020. And it was in the same land claim area as the conflict in 2006. When I was working for Mennonite Central Committee, Ontario, the development that was being constructed then was called Douglas Creek estates. That was in 2006. The 2020 development was called Mackenzie Meadows, same idea, housing development. And on the same land claim area, our people in both instances decided to occupy the land and to stop construction. And so, it was the exact same situation, the same background, it just was history repeating itself.

It all came to another head during the Victoria Day holiday. At Six Nations, we have our own holiday, called "bread and cheese," where we recognise the treaty that we had with the crown and our relationship as allies. And at one time, the Queen used to give blankets to Six Nations as a gift of recognition of our treaty relationships. Well, that stopped many, many, many years ago. And so our people decided to give ourselves bread and cheese on that day, as a way of gathering together to remember our treaty relationship with a crowd. And so, on that day in 2006, and when I got into the car, I heard a call over our local radio station that there was a conflict in Caledonia, and that our people were needed there.

And so I took my children to my parent's place. And then I went to the conflict in Caledonia. And there were hundreds of our people protecting the land. And then there were 500 or so protesters from Caledonia. And they were separated by probably 70 or 80 riot police that were standing between us. And that's a very critical moment in my own life as a Christian, and as a pastor, a leader, a Christian leader, at Six Nations.

I had been aware of all of the conflict from growing up at Six Nations. I knew of the land issues, I knew of the bigger picture as well. The conflicts that happened in New York State with the putting in of the Kinzua Dam and flooding of the Salamanca, Seneca reserve

The old traditional sites that were in graveyards that were flooded by that dam, I knew other things—of our resistance to the occupation of our lands. And so I went down there to support our people I was standing, because I felt like if Jesus was doing something, Jesus would be standing with those that are experiencing injustice.

But anyways, so when I got there, there was about 70 yards between us. And we were there facing this crowd that was wanting to get at our people, I suppose. So at one point, one of our elders came forward, and they brought a evergreen branch, which represented peace, and also a war club that represented conflict. And they laid it on the ground. And they said, it's up to you

to decide what you want to do. We want peace. But if you want to fight us over this, we will defend our lands. And nobody from the Caledonia side, responded to peace, the peace offer. And so our people are brought forward a couple of backhoes. And they were getting prepared to then dig up the road. And I remember standing there watching this happen. And one of the backhoes got the edge of the asphalt pavement, and began to dig it up. And I saw that first bit of pavement being lifted up. And I wept at that moment. It was a Kairos moment for me, because I felt like, we were finally saying no, to all of the injustice that we were experiencing up until that time, not just in that instance, but going back decades, and even 100, over 100 years of conflict over land. And so that was something that was a turning point for me. And I felt like my Christian faith became embodied in actual activity, that it wasn't just a theoretical thing of my mind. It was an actual standing up and for and with our people in the context of that conflict. And so that was something that then fuelled my continual support for our people.

And I was out of that time of conflict that pastors met at the Caledonia Baptist Church. And we prayed for resolution. And the very first meeting I had with the pastors was recounting to them the history of the land. And the immediate response of the pastors is, we need to call a public meeting. And we need to have you tell this story to the people of Caledonia, because we don't know it.

And so that led eventually to my being involved with Mennonite Central Committee, Ontario, in the Aboriginal Neighbours program. And taking on that responsibility of educating the Mennonite constituency concerning the Six Nations land claim issue.”

Meghan: “Wow, there's so much richness in what you everything that you just said. You talked about ways the promises have not been honoured of those original treaties, and the histories have largely been forgotten by white settlers in the area.

And I'm really struck by the way that your people have continued to remember. And also that that line of resistance and taking what is yours, the “bread and cheese” day, and then also with digging up the road, like you said, that Kairos moment for you, wow. I'm curious what you've seen change between the land struggle in Six Nations in 2006 and today at Land Back Lane.”

Adrian: “Right, 1492 Land Back Lane, is this same land claim area, the same kind of context of a development happening, the same injunctions being served the same police raid happening, and then the same charging people so nothing is changed. It's exactly the same, only we have a younger generation now. There is a group of young men and women, some of them were children are not even born back in 2006, who had been at the forefront, and in the midst of the current conflict, defying the colonial injunctions and continuing to stand up for future generations for our land.

And so, the effort of the colonial system is to charge people, which requires each person to hire a lawyer. And I'll tell you, our people are poor, we, we don't have the ability to hire lawyers. And it was all an effort to shut us down to keep us from pursuing this in a legal fashion. And so, the colonial system that was at work in 2006, is still at work, trying its best, using the same tactics

now, in 2021, as they did all along. And my overall estimation is that the colonial system is hoping to wear us out, bankrupt us, and delay until we till the resistance dies, until we're no longer there.

And so, I will forever be somebody that will promote and support our Indigenous nationhood and our Indigenous connection to the land that makes Indigenous nationhood possible. But I, I believe that our cause is just that our way forward in resisting this colonial violence is in the same spirit as Martin Luther King. And I believe that the long arc of conflict will bend towards justice ultimately. And if there is any sense in which Christ determines justice for Indigenous people, we will be at the forefront of that resolution. And I think it will be a good thing for us as people.”

Meghan: “Thank you, Adrian, for that really eloquent explanation and also hope for the future. I want to I want to recognise your you're explaining one land claim struggle. We've got listeners from both sides of the colonial border in Canada, in the United States.

These land claim struggles are happening all over. And they're not always very well covered in the media. And many of these land claim struggles are over resource extraction and land development.

So just to name a few. There's the We'suwet'en land struggle in British Columbia, Canada, where last year we saw the matriarchs there arrested on their own land. And that's an ongoing struggle, where the Canadian government is building a pipeline through their land. So, we've seen resistance there, we see resistance right now at line three, which is a crude oil pipeline, extending from Alberta to Wisconsin. And then of course, maybe most famously, there's the Dakota Access Pipeline, where we saw resistance come to a peak in 2016 at Standing Rock that covers North and South Dakota.

And these are only just a few of the many, many land claim struggles. And we know there will be more, of course. So obviously, there's a discrepancy in understanding of the treaties, or even knowledge of the treaties between Indigenous people and often white settlers that are connected to these land struggles. Can you talk a little bit about the connection in that discrepancy?”

Adrian: “Prior to colonisation, we lived for 1000s of years very successfully on our lands, taken care of in a very good way by the land. And that's why we were feeling so generous. When the Europeans came saying we know this land provides very well for us. There's plenty for you as well. Welcome to the land. And I think that that story has not been taught in a broad educational way.

Over and over again, we have people that live on the border roads of our reserves here in Canada, reservations in the United States. They live right across the road, from Indigenous territory and they know nothing of the history.

It's not in the curriculum. It's not being told. And so, I think that there is a movement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report [in Canada]. There is a movement with the acknowledgement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people. And currently here in Canada, there is a movement of education, with the uncovering of the 215 grave sites of Indigenous children at the Kamloops Indian residential school. And even today, there is going to be a news conference announcing hundreds of graves by another residential former residential school site in Saskatchewan. And all of this has been triggering an education process.

In the United States, Indigenous people are a smaller percentage of the overall population. And so, they are more invisible. People in the United States say to Indigenous people, oh, I thought you were all dead. Because of that invisibility.

It's an overwhelming task of, of dealing with the ubiquitous ignorance that is in the United States, but also in Canada to the Indigenous story. And I'm thankful that we have, even though there are it's a tragic, horrible thing that our community is reeling from. It's perked the consensus of Canadians saying we need to do something about this.

Go to your local communities, listen to their story. Let them tell you the story, the story of the land, there's land beneath your feet, there's a story to that land. And until you know that story of that land, you are ignorant of the great injustice that has happened. And it behoves you to learn that story. But then I challenge people, once you hear this story, you go and talk about it with your family. You go and talk about it with your church, you go and talk about it with your neighbours, because of it just stops with you. Our efforts are being cut off by the cutting off of our words once again."

Meghan: "Absolutely. And hopefully this podcast can reach some more ears. And that can multiply hopefully. You mentioned the graves that were found in Canada. This might be new information for our listeners in the states. But I know that there's actually also a federal investigation that Deb Haaland, the new United States Secretary of the Interior, is heading up to investigate boarding schools in the states.

Well, I have to two more questions. Um, I understand that you've been approached by settlers and churches who are learning a little bit more about these histories and want to give land back Can you talk a little bit about what that's looks like?"

Adrian: "When I was working for Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, they actually introduced me to my own traditional government at the Onondaga longhouse at Six Nations. And I spoke for a few minutes about what I would do in terms of education of those Mennonite churches. After the meeting, we had lunch, and I sat across from Rick Hill, who is a Haudenosaunee Indigenous knowledge keeper. And he asked me a question. He said, do the churches paid taxes? And I knew he was referring to property taxes.

And I said, No.

He said, good, then they're not a part of the system. Wouldn't it be great if we had a spiritual covenant with the churches where the churches could acknowledge Six Nations jurisdiction over their land. They could continue to pay a token lease payment and continue their spiritual work. And then if they ever decommissioned the church, it could revert back to Six Nations.

And then, as we dialogue that with Mennonite communities, it was further amended. And Rick suggested, let's put a 99 year lease a renewable lease on that, giving it a term. And then the Mennonite community said, if a church was decommissioned, perhaps it could become an education centre for Six Nations land issues and culture in that area so that other people in that wherever that church was located, could be educated, and that the knowledge could spread.

And then finally, Rick said, sometimes it's difficult to restore land that is in the Canadian system back to reserve land. So maybe in the interim, a joint management board could hold the land in trust. The joint management board would have Mennonite and Six Nations folk on it. And they would hold it in trust for Six Nations.

And so that idea was floated. I've since had renewal of that conversation over the years. Nobody has taken that up yet. Although there was a hopeful inquiry from one church that said, where can we send money? So that was something that was good. So, I shared that, since that time, from 2007 here in my work in Manitoba. And everywhere that I share it has inspired people's interest in it. And so, people have said to me, how can we do that?

I know that individuals have tried to do that with their personal properties. And again, it's difficult to extract it from the residential system in which it's embedded to make it reserve properties. So that's a little bit harder to do.

But the idea of returning properties to Indigenous communities, is something that is being spoken of now in this current situation with unmarked graves, that there needs to be a tangible response. And that's one of the tangible ways in which people can lead the government forward by doing what is right. If the church is actually the conscience of the country, then that's one way in which it could express itself by leading the way in terms of a just response.

Meghan: "That's very cool. Lots of good ideas in there for individuals and churches who might be listening. Very cool.

And along those lines, how do you think that honouring (this is sort of the crux of this episode) How do you think that honouring treaties and even learning these histories is connected to peace building between settlers and Indigenous peoples?"

Adrian: "You know, one of the very foundational principles of the original two row wampum agreement with the Dutch was the belt records the river of life, the common river of life that we travel down, the Dutch are represented there, going up and down the river of life, in their ship of state, with their laws, their leaders, and their people, their religion, their education system, their way of life.

And now, on that same river of life, our people are going up and down in our canoe of state, with our laws, our leaders, our language, our education, our spirituality. There are three rows of beads between the two vessels that describe the relationship and how that relationship would be lived out. The first row is the desire for friendship, the desire to have a good relationship.

Friendship, even though the Dutch wanted to establish a trading relationship, an economic relationship, the Haudenosaunee people said, we want to be friends.

The second row is the row of peace. But the idea of peace is not simply the absence of conflict, the idea of peace is rooted in the idea of respect. That where there is equity, and respect, there is a relaxing in a relationship, that is the spirit of peace. It is where you are secure, and not on guard, trying to protect yourself, or trying to prevent theft happening, but you are secure in a relationship of friendship.

And so that that piece is at the very centre of that original idea of relationship with the European. And so at the very heart of this idea of Treaty, of Covenant, is the idea peace. And the third row is if we have a relationship like that and maintain it, then we have a strong relationship. And to me, this sounds like the relationship that could work in this whole world.

In fact, North America was full of many nations. And we had these kinds of relationships with one another. Sure, there is conflict, there was conflict, just like every people in the world, there's conflict between groups. But there, there was also this fundamental recognition of the right to exist, the right to feed yourself, the right to live your own culture, to speak your own language, to perform your own ceremonies. That was all there. And we said, because we know this kind of work, relationship works. We're willing to make it with you.

And I think that that is the spirit of treaty that really needs to infect North America and really the world. In fact, the Haudenosaunee peacemaker, when he joined together five nations that were at conflict with each other, there is a hand that extends out from our five nations confederacy to the rest of the world.

And really, that idea of embrace, of inclusion, of welcome is the spirit of Treaty. And that's what really, this world needs. That's what Canada needs right now."

Meghan: "It is what the world needs, isn't it? Thank you so much, Adrian, for this conversation and for your wisdom and all the thought that you brought to this conversation. It's clear that you're an educator and that this means a lot to you. And I'm so grateful you could join us on the podcast today. Thank you.

Adrian: "Yeah, it was very good. I love to talk about this. It's it's in my heart and it comes out of my mouth."

Meghan (laughs): "Thank you. Thanks, Adrian. Take care.

That was Adrian Jacobs (who is Ganosono of the Turtle Clan, Cayuga Nation of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy at Grand River Territory, ON).

Since this recording, there have been several more press conferences in Canada, announcing many more unmarked graves and we know there will likely be more.

Each of these graves represents the life of a person who was loved, whose life mattered and was cut short too soon.

We honor those people and the people who survived.

Also after recording with Adrian, the developer of the housing project in Caledonia announced they were cancelling the project because of the Six Nations land defenders.

Notices have been sent out to homeowners and deposits have been returned in full.

According to The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation,, Land Back Lane spokesperson Skylar Williams said, "I think this is a big statement to Indigenous communities and to all of Turtle Island ... these wins are attainable. I think we have an opportunity to be able to say to the feds and the province that if our community says no to these developments, whether that's massive housing developments or resource destruction — if we say no to that and we stand behind it, these wins are possible."

Pause

That's it for this month's episode.

Next month, Scott will be back and speaking with Sara Melgarejo (Mel Ga Ray Ho), a project coordinator for MCC in Colombia and Ecuador. She'll talk about how integrating peacebuilding and development is important in the region that has a long history of armed conflict.

This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was recorded on Treaty 1 territory, the original land of the Anishinaabe, Cree and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

This episode was produced by me, Meghan Mast, and the head producer is Emily Loewen.

That's it for now. If you like this podcast, it would be great if you could subscribe and rate it and tell your friends to give us a listen!

As Scott always says at the end of the show, which continues to ring true: A lot is happening in the world right now. This is a difficult time for many. May you experience God's provision and protection as we work together to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ.

Thanks, and take good care.

(MUSIC PLAYS US OUT)