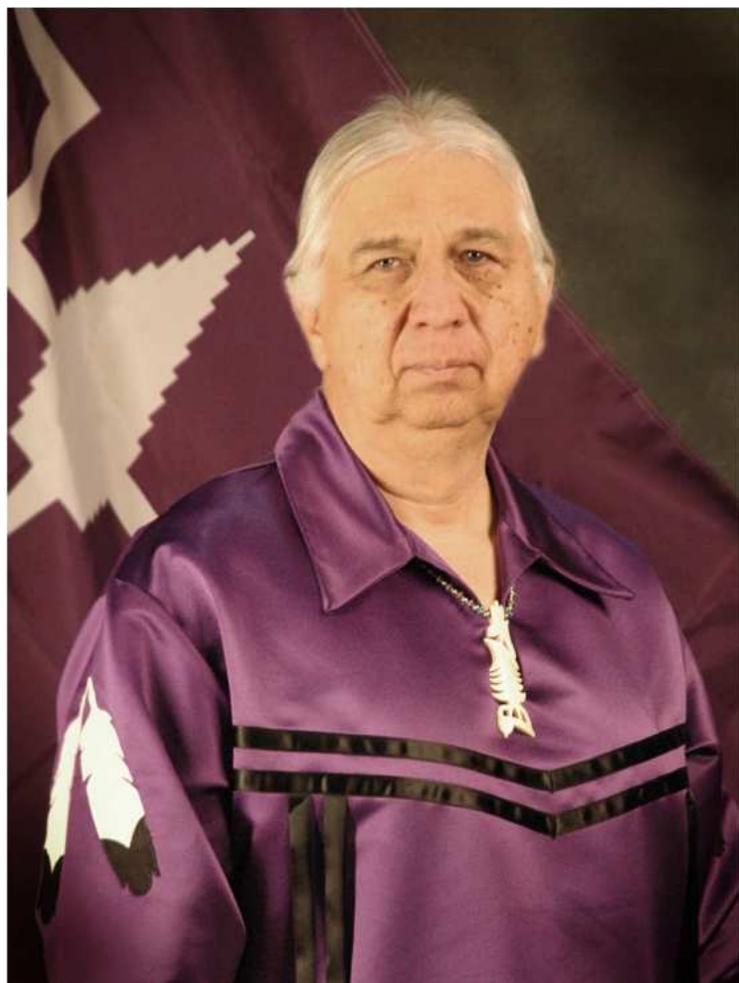


# A Major Conference in May



Elder Kenneth Deer

Plans are well underway for an ecumenical conference on Saturday, May 20. Centre piece of discussion will be the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Since the 1994 Confession, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has sought “to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God’s people,” has acknowledged “with gratitude the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” and welcomed “the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation;” An organizing committee representing Presbyterian, United, Anglican and Catholic denominations has drafted an agenda shaped around proposing “practical, achievable goals and objectives for all participants” in furtherance of reconciliation.

The day will lead off with a blessing and welcome to traditional Haudenosaunee territory accompanied by the hand drums of the Native Friendship Centre. Called the Iroquois Confederacy by the French, and the League of Five Nations by the English, the confederacy is properly called the Haudenosaunee Confederacy meaning People of the long house.

A Salish descendant, Concordia Theology Professor Christine Jamieson will discuss “Indigenous thought and practice – identities and realities.” Then Elder Kenneth Deer, instrumental in the 35-year struggle to write the Declaration and, in 2007 have it approved by the UN General Assembly, will outline its history and message.

Over lunch provided by a Kahnawake caterer, participants with Indigenous and non-Indigenous discussion leaders, including Rev. Stewart Folster, will consider preamble clauses to the Declaration. Later, after comments and questions, attention will turn to the complexity of reconciliation’s challenges. Federal Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould, herself Indigenous, told the Assembly of First Nations in 2016 that measures adopting it into “Canadian law are...a political distraction to undertaking the hard work actually required to implement it back home in communities.”

That hard work in our community will be the focus of deliberations for the balance of the afternoon, specifically on articles of the UN Indigenous Declaration that stress rights to freedom from discrimination, and rights to education, employment and vocational training, health and other social programs, and development of mineral, water and other resources. It is hoped that practical proposals will result that can be turned into actionable, measurable projects of reconciliation by churches in the Montreal area working hand-in-hand with Indigenous peoples.

More information will be forthcoming about participating in this celebration of the potential of healing and reconciliation. In the meantime, members of the Twinning sub-committee of Mission & Outreach will be happy to answer any questions.

*Keith Randall*  
*Twinning sub-committee*