



Full Transcript:
Q&A With Moses Falco on FDTF and Settler-Indigenous Relations (via Email)
June 2016

EVI: What's an experience you've had that informs how you feel the Mennonite Church should be approach Settler-Indigenous relations?

MF: For 7 years, our church, Sterling Mennonite Fellowship, has been engaged in a partnership with Living Word Church in Cross Lake, northern Manitoba. Over those years, we have visited that community at least once a year to spend time there, build relationships and learn from one another. Going to Cross Lake is one of the highlights of my year because I encounter God in so many unexpected ways. I think we have a need for the Mennonite Church to be engaged in relationship building with our Indigenous neighbours. That takes many forms, but because of our history as a nation and a church, it is essential. I am becoming more and more convinced that it means little for us to call ourselves a church of peace and reconciliation if we are not actively engaged in Settler-Indigenous relations. The foundation of that has to be relationships, not programming. The result of that is that God makes himself known in new and exciting ways.

EVI: When it comes to Settler-Indigenous relations, what do you see Mennonite Church Canada (not necessarily the national staff, but all partners, including congregations) called to do a better job of?

MF: Building relationships take time. We, as western Christians, often like to see our work in terms of projects. We rally around one thing and when we think it is finished, we move on to the next. Settler-Indigenous relations is not a project. We are not called to build something, or advocate for something, with a deadline in mind. For Winnipeg churches to build a relationship with Shoal Lake 40 First Nation so that they could together advocate for a road that would get them out of forced isolation is wonderful. But when the road is built, it is not over. We need to let go of our project-based thinking and focus on relationship-building as long-term and perhaps even life-long. There is transformation to be had, and very often, we will find that that transformation is taking place within ourselves.



EVI: How do you think that Indigenous Mennonites (and perhaps Indigenous non-Mennonites) could be given more of a voice in Mennonite Church Canada (including its area conferences and congregations)? What would need to change in how we do things? What new structures or processes would you envision making this happen?

MF: We need to have eyes to see and ears to hear. Not everything will make sense to us. Cultural and spiritual traditions are not always comfortable when they seem foreign. But if we create space to listen and learn, we will begin to see things in a new way. Traditionally, there has not been a lot of room to listen. We are quick to defend our history, or to say “it wasn’t me.” Settlers don’t like to think of themselves as the problem. We need to rethink some of our stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and begin to see them as brothers and sisters. When we start to do that, our structures and processes will reflect that.

EVI: If you're familiar with the Future Directions proposal, what about it do you think might improve Settler-Indigenous relations for Mennonite Church Canada? What about it concerns you?

MF: The vision of the Future Directions Task Force puts an emphasis on Indigenous-Settler relations. This is good. It calls congregations of all levels to be engaged in this work and to work together for collective initiatives. When it comes down to it, most of the work happens at the local level, where congregations discern the ways in which they can build relationships with Indigenous communities. However, there is a large part of resourcing, connecting, and awareness building that happens on the national level through the offices of Mennonite Church Canada. I think it is vitally important for that work to continue, where the churches are reminded of the responsibilities and opportunities that are available to them. I think that the proposal of FDTF still makes room for that, but I think we need to be deliberate about making that happen. To simply forget about it in this restructuring would be a great loss.

EVI: Is there anything else that you would like to share about these topics? Is there another question you'd like to pose to the others in this email group?

MF: Behind the work of Indigenous-Settler relations are people who are passionate about this work. They are people who see this as a part of their daily lives and as a part of the call of the church. As long as we continue to have those kinds of people in our churches, Indigenous communities, Area and National churches, and other organizations, this work will continue to grow. It may look different, but it will not go away.