

On October 16, 2009, LEAF Manitoba held our 19th annual Persons Day Breakfast. The topic “The Never Ending Equality Journey: Past Successes and Future Challenges” was addressed by two individuals whose lives reflect extensive experience and commitment to equality for all persons. Although the occasion recognized the anniversary of the historic Persons case, it recognized also that the success of that case was limited. Many women, including Aboriginal women, were excluded. The use of law to advance equality for all continues today.

Professor Kathleen Mahoney, spoke of the importance of LEAF’s work in education and law reform and the impact on Canadian jurisprudence, written law, and on the lives of Canadian women. Outlining LEAF’s approach to equality, Kathleen referred to several cases she regards as significant, and spoke of setbacks, current challenges, and the need for ongoing vigilance.

She then spoke of what she considers to be one of the greatest equality advances – the 2005 residential school agreement developed to address an immense Canadian tragedy often hidden from view. Kathleen stated that the human rights violations in the residential school system occurred in many areas of law – criminal, civil, human rights, treaty, and equality law. Through an incredible series of events, guided by principles of equality and restorative justice, a solution has been reached that may be a model for the world. She then spoke to the hard work and commitment, the pain and hurt, progress and setbacks, education and collaboration, the limits of litigation, the importance of negotiation - all leading to the Agreement and to the subsequent establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She drew attention to the fact that this is the first time a “first world” country has agreed to subject itself to the telling of its terrible history. It is a time of healing for all of us and a challenge to groups such as LEAF.

Former AFN Chief Phil Fontaine spoke of the “sad and tragic, largely unknown chapter in Canada’s history”. He observed that

his personal story, discussed publicly in 1999, was not unique but received attention because of his position at the time, Grand Chief. He spoke of the innocent children who were the victims of the residential school 2

system, the pain and suffering, the racism and discrimination, and the negative impact on family functioning and on relationships. Phil acknowledged the support of many individuals and organizations and stressed the importance of moving forward together. He stressed the opportunity presented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Justice Murray Sinclair of Manitoba. He urged people to join in the conversation, to participate and ensure that all Canadians are involved not only the survivors. He stated that the denial of truth has impoverished all Canadians and truth telling will begin the healing for all of us. Openness and reflection are required. "Don't be absent from the process". Together we can solve the challenges of poor and overcrowded housing, hunger, the fact that 100 First Nations communities are without safe drinking water, schools in poor repair, 1300 outstanding land claims, 27,000 First Nations children in care largely due to poverty. He reminded people that in spite of progress, Canada voted against the Declaration On The Rights of Indigenous Peoples, indicating Canada continues to pick and choose who has rights.

Phil advised people that the first national meeting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will occur this spring in Manitoba. This will be an incredible undertaking, will consider not only sad stories but also good things that have occurred and how we can learn more about ourselves and move forward together.

Following the Breakfast, both speakers generously spent two hours with high school students discussing issues and answering questions.

Two additional Breakfast happenings – a \$75,000 challenge contribution to the LEAF Manitoba W.I.S.E., Working In Support of Equality endowment!! And the presentation of a lifetime achievement award to Betty Hopkins by Brenlee Carrington Trepel on behalf of "the LEAF National Board of Directors and the entire LEAF family".

Also LEAF Manitoba made available to the attendees copies of “The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”.