



Meeting Notes

Attendees: Edna Arcand, Elder (Alexander First Nation), Ella Arcand (Alexander First Nation), Jody Kootenay, Director of Education (Alexander First Nation), Verna Arcand, Assistant Director, Leanne MacMillan, Community Strategy (City of St. Albert), Gwen Crouse (Métis Association)*-Regets Tanya Sharp (Parent), David Keohane, Superintendent (GSACRD), Rhonda Nixon, Assistant Superintendent (GSACRD), Barb Brochu, Associate Superintendent (GSACRD), Carol Bruineman, Communications Manager (GSACRD), Joan Crockett, Trustee (GSACRD), René Tremblay, Trustee (GSACRD), Noreen Radford, Trustee (GSACRD)

1. **Hospitality and Networking**
2. **Acknowledgement of Territories** – The acknowledgement was done by David.
3. **Tobacco Offering** – The offering was done by Barb to the Elders, Ella and Edna.
4. **Opening Prayer** –Edna opened the meeting with prayer.
5. **Presentation:** Gary Gagnon presented on Connecting Our Faith to Indigenous Spirituality. Gary is a Coordinator of Aboriginal Relations with the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton and is also employed by Edmonton Catholic Schools.

Gary will join GSACRD for our National Aboriginal day pipe ceremony. He has a connection with the community of St. Albert. When growing up, his family was encouraged not to talk about being of “mixed blood: His family encouraged in the home to use Cree words - kohkum and moshum. There was always a sense of pride within the family for their aboriginal roots. St. Albert was originally a Metis settlement. Gary’s family lived four river lots off where the District Office is located. Gary wonders if we talk about the Métis in our schools?

Métis people encouraged Fr. Albert Lacombe to come and set up a church in this area. There is a great history of Métis families in the St. Albert area. The small foot bridge by St. Albert Centre is named after Gary’s uncle Joe Benoit. Chester Cunningham is another notable Métis Elder. There is a lot of local richness.

Gary has gone back and forth between the Catholic and First Nation spiritual traditions. His uncle suggested that it was fine to practice both and feels very blessed that he can live out his faith and living traditions each day. He recognizes many of the family names, at times they do not self-identify.

Historically, his family was encouraged to non-verbally check out; not self-identifying with their Métis heritage. Gary recalls picking Saskatoons and fun in the Sturgeon River (fishing, swimming), great family times and many memories. The family has a small cabin up by Hinton. Gary recalls getting in trouble for going somewhere out of bounds as a child and as a consequence, having to collect rocks to say a living rosary!

Feeling very privileged that he learned how to work hard and graduate from school. It’s too bad that not all aboriginal youth had that same opportunity. If God brings us to a situation, he will make sure we get through it. Gary is very comfortable in the First Nation, Métis and non-aboriginal worlds (i.e. in either the sweat lodge or the church). He sees many similarities within the two worlds. If youngsters asked clarifying questions in public about First Nation spiritual practices, they were often “shushed” by the adults. Smudging is one such spiritual practice. Smudging is a way to bless ourselves and bring God’s presence closer to our human bodies. Laudato Si - the Pope’s encycle speaks to many aboriginal understandings, such as water is not to be sold; everyone has rights to water. It’s important to acknowledge our traditional people. As a child, Gary was often told that you can’t paddle two canoes. Gary says that he sails under one wind.

The elders tell us that we are born good. If we get into a negative place, it is suggested that we go back to the beginning and unlearn those negative thoughts. It is important to instill a sense of identity and pride in our aboriginal youth. Alexander First Nation accepted Gary into their community; they are his people as well. Indigenous identity is all about building relationships.

Gary was asked to speak to the Cultural Support board. He shared a story about a young student who lost a family member and was accused the following day of smoking drugs at school when he was actually smudging. Ella joined the conversation to explain the medicines that are used in ceremony. Dan (Ella's husband) now does ceremonies with a helper (Gary is the helper). Some of the cultural items Ella shared are: the rock, sweetgrass, muskrat root, and muskeg tea (which has mint flavor). Dan and Ella make their own tobacco for the pipe. Smudge is made at a time when there is little movement (often winter). It is important to look at the sage to know if it is right for picking. It will have little beads on it. Traditional pipe tobacco is made from red willow leaves. Red willow is used in the tobacco for the ceremonies. Ella showed a traditional smudge bowl.

There are definitive roles for each gender; traditional work for women is to gather the medicines, then the men do the ceremonies.

Ella explained her family's traditional practices. Her sister has danced and prepared ceremonial meals. Ella's mother was Métis with a strong connection to the spiritual world. It is a First Nation belief that after death, we will be reunited with our loved ones who have gone on before us. Resiliency has brought indigenous people this far. Grand chief of Treaty Six is speaking to the UN about the World Indigenous Nations Games 2017 - being held on July 1-9 in Edmonton, AB <https://www.wingames2017.com/> Volunteers are encouraged.

Gary is the eskapios (which means "young man" or helper). He holds a very prominent position within the culture. The position is passed on from generation to generation. One has to be given the right or title.

The Office at the Archdiocese is growing! Fr. Albert Lacombe's cabin is now located out at Lac La Nonne. Fr. Albert Lacombe was also Métis. Gary spoke of a significant event when he saw a Golden Eagle flying over the Archdiocese. This was a sign for him to accept the secondment with the Archdiocese to further the Truth and Reconciliation work in our area.

6. **Break:** A Smudge ceremony took place for Ella and Edna's sister who is in the hospital.

7. **Update on Key Strategies – Three Year Education Plan**

World Indigenous Nations Games 2017 – an update was provided. The information will be posted on the District website. Discussion took place regarding Leadership Quality Standards and the Residential Schooling PD session that will be presented to schools in the next school year.

On September 26, 2017 Cheryl Devin will present the Residential Schooling Session to our District (GSACRD and Alexander First Nation lead staff). Should we consider a special Residential Schooling informational session for parents at this time? Could we invite a few parents and School Council chairs to join the September 26th staff presentation? Perhaps after experiencing the session together, staff could then consult with parents who attended about how to move the Residential School session forward in the District. Elders will walk through key terminology for us.

8. **Closing Prayer** – The group closed with prayer.

9. **Next Meeting:** May 25, 2017 – 1:00 pm