

DIAKONIA World Federation Prayer Letter

October 2019



(c) 2011 Jaime Black. The REDress Project.
Photo credit: Jaime Black
<http://www.redressproject.org>

It's been a little over five weeks since the 160 attendees at the 2019 DOTAC Conference left Vancouver, British Columbia to return home. I often return home from Regional or World Gatherings full of renewed friendships, challenged to think about our call to diakonia, to contemplate the things in the world that are not "of God", the places where we are made aware of the many ways we have fallen short of God's glory.

This year however, I have been haunted. I was haunted by the image above, or one similar to it, that was shared in Vancouver. It comes from a travelling exhibition created by Jaime Beck, a Canadian activist artist, as her response to the growing epidemic in the United States and Canada of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. I am haunted by this image of empty red dresses hanging outside in the cold.

This image has driven me to find out more, to look at websites, and to learn about this issue. But how do you do this? I typed "Murdered and Missing indigenous women in the United States and Canada" into my search engine as a start. I was a bit overwhelmed by the number of "hits" I got. Following those leads resulted in so many things to read and reflect upon. I'm still haunted. The statistics are horrifying, they represent real living, breathing women, who are no more. I am haunted by women I never knew and will never know.

As I sit in this space of haunting, as I recognize the depth of the problem, and struggle to not be "frozen in place" because of it, I turn to one of my sources of strength, the community of DIAKONIA. I visit the Facebook groups of which you are all a part. While I may not always, or often, respond personally to your shared stories, know that I join with you in birthday celebrations, ordinations, and new ministry starts, sharing your joys, lifting you in prayer, giving thanks for your presence in my life. I follow your journeys, your struggles, your sorrows, lifting you in prayer, crying with you, being present with you over the distance.

This is the joy of DIAKONIA, the community we have shaped and honed over distance and time. The strength of being part of God's family, the One Body of Christ, united in service to the world, cannot be over stated. It holds us fast when we are haunted by pain, creating a safe space for sorrow and discernment, for figuring out how we respond.

So, I give thanks, and know that we give thanks together. Thanks for each of you who has shared time and stories at World and DOTAC Conferences, shared stories and time, challenging and encouraging each other. Thanks for those of you who serve God in your own communities and towns. Thanks for the people who serve this organization on the Regional and World Executive Committees, thanks for those of you who hold the world in prayer.

May we continue to walk together, always remembering the strength of this community and these relationships.

Amen and Amen.

~ Deacon Jan Cherry, ELCA Deacons Ecumenical Engagement Group

Here are a few sites to visit that I thought had some good information if you wish to pursue this topic further:

<https://ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/red-dresses-there-just-not-there>

<http://www.highwayoftears.ca/>

<https://thinkprogress.org/missing-and-murdered-women-is-a-grim-unsolved-problem-native-communities-are-demanding-action-cdde640e38b3/>

<https://indianlaw.org/issue/ending-violence-against-native-women>

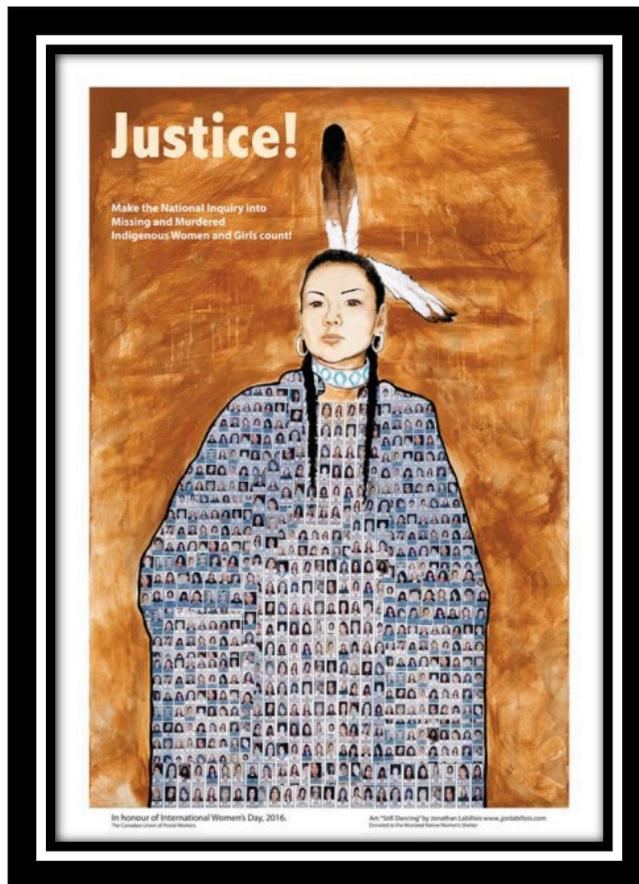


image: International Women's Day 2016: <http://nativenewsonline.net/currents/25661/>