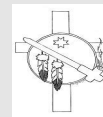




# Urban Aboriginal Ministry



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Consider giving to Urban Aboriginal Ministry [Care + Share](https://urbanaboriginalministry.com/care-and-share/) by navigating to <https://urbanaboriginalministry.com/care-and-share/> you may also contact Vivian Seegers (UAM Priest) at [vivianseegers@hotmail.com](mailto:vivianseegers@hotmail.com)

## Rev. Vivian Seegers.

Interview by Kim Seary

It is October 11, Thanksgiving Sunday. Vivian began her homily on "The Giving of Thanks" this morning, with a story of how her people always made sure, when they moved from one place to another, that they left "the living-room of the animals" exactly as they had found it. In our liturgy at St. Mary Magdalene, we are invited to give a brief response to the homily. Responses to Vivian's homily were lively and varied, with different "hearings" - that especially resonated for people. I always think that signifies a good homily - when folks are inspired by the Spirit to speak to what moved them. Vivian is very tired today, which she often is. Her ministry is so deeply demanding. But she is gracious about the time she will be spending with me. "I have huge respect for Vivian", I once heard John Marsh, our recently retired priest say. I feel the same. What follows is my interview with Vivian.

*K: What do you see is the work is of UAM?*

**V: It's a ministry to First Nations people and their loved ones. I say "their loved ones" because there are many Nations that are loved by First Nations, and many Nations that love First Nations. We do a lot of reconciliation and healing. There is the legacy of Residential School that is inter-generational mostly. The ones that went to Residential School are fewer and fewer. So we have a lot more second and third and fourth generation that really need a lot of healing.**

*K: So what does that healing work look like?*

**V: We do honouring of the culture, and ways of praying; our spiritual songs, our drumming and singing are traditional ways of praying. So we are**

**respecting First Nations spirituality. We have the drum circle. We deal with isolation and poverty.**

*K: Yes. You have the weekly drum-circle and feasts throughout the year.*

**V: Thanksgiving feast is not really a Christian ceremony, but for First Nations, it recognizes the generosity of the people. There's that lovely story of the pilgrims who came and were fed by the First Nations people, so it's a memory - a holding-up of our Generosity. Generosity is core for First Nations people - the generosity of Mother Earth, the Generosity of Creator to Mother Earth.**

*K: You told a story today in your homily about your family and having to have a bear every year.*

**V: We always had to honour that spirit of the bear because the bear has saved us from the harsh winter. We would bundle it's bones and put them up in a tree to always honour the Spirit who was keeping us alive.**

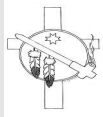
*K: Let's look at a week, no let's make it a day. What kinds of on-the-ground work do you do?*

**V: Well, I get calls for food, I get calls for furniture. There are people who need housing. Thankfully, there is more housing being provided, so people are able to get in. We move people. We just respond to whatever calls for help that come in a pastoral manner. Usually that means some kind of physical support. It could be a bus-ticket, it could be buying minutes for a telephone so someone can be available for a job or housing.**

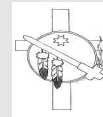
*K: You also do a lot of crisis and addiction work?*

**V: Oh yes. All of the problems that come with poverty. Thankfully, there are so many of us in the ministry that have experienced the same things,**





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**Rev. Vivian Seegers. Continued**

that we can help each other.

*K: Who are the people?*

**V: Well, we have someone who knows a language. She's an elder, and we have a Grand-father who actually holds the Spirit of the people, and we have a couple of ladies who are very active in the community, and just so committed to healing and being there with other people, to be a community so the isolation is less.**

*K: One of the things I've seen you do, is pull people in, and empower people toward leadership.*

**V: Yes. It's wonderful to see people with new purpose; to see that they are grabbed by the Spirit to take responsibility for a project or something. You see them, they walk lighter and they get light in their eyes!**

*K: That's so beautiful! Now, I wanted to ask: How do you think Native spirituality blends with expressions of Anglican spirituality? How do the two blend for you?*

**V: That's a long question. You know we have a tradition. We have the teachings of the elders. The Anglican church has a tradition and the teachings of the elders. We have the liturgy, and the Sundance is the same thing, it's the liturgy of the dance. And the way that Jesus empties Himself for us. That is the teaching of the Sundance also – that we empty ourselves for the people. The two just compliment each other so much. I don't see much of a difference.**

*K: I know in the ceremonies that I've attended, you always say, "We give thanks for Jesus the Christ whose light can never be overcome by darkness."*

**V: It's so important to affirm that. At Sundance at dawn we dance the first light that comes into the darkness.**

*K: This church space is UAM's home; first St. George's and now St. Mary Magdalene, and I wonder why? Why is St. Mary Magdalene?*

**V: I really love this space. It's like an apartment building, but the sanctuary it's round. The lights are around the space in the ceiling and when I sit and close my eyes, I can just imagine that those are the grand-mothers and grand-fathers that are**

**sitting with us. It's like that "cloud of witnesses" guarding us from the spirit-world.**

*K: What is your vision or hope for the future of UAM. How would you like to see it grow?*

**V: It would be nice to have a place that we could call our own. But it would have to be exactly like this place! People could live up-stairs that are in transition, and we could have our own Sunday services, and our weekly community gatherings. It's a big big dream.**

*K: What else would you hope for that would help with the work that is happening with UAM now?*

**V: We definitely need volunteers and skilled volunteers. There's so much administration, and communication, care of elders, and children.**

*K: You are doing a lot of Pastoral work. That is your heart. That's what I see. Going out and helping deliver groceries and ministering to the people at the same time, helping people move, helping people in crisis, answering to needs related to Covid. What I see is that the administrative work is difficult on top of that.*

**V: Yes. We definitely need more volunteers.**

*K: So how does it look when someone wants to volunteer. What would they do?*

**V: What I usually say when somebody calls me and wants to volunteer is, "Come on Friday to the Drum-circle. Then you can see who is here, and how we do things. That pretty well represents what happens in our whole week – what happens in that circle.**

*K: What happens in that circle? What does it look like?*

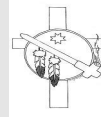
**V: Well, it depends. We always respond to the situation at hand. So, sometimes we can be sitting in the circle with the drums out or we could be in the lounge area and talking. We've been dreaming about making a teepee, and a sweat-lodge, and a big Drum.**

*K: Last week was just so beautiful when we drummed the heart-beat. The heart-beat of Mother Earth.*

**V: Yes. Normally we would pass the talking stick, but we can't because of Covid. But we do two rounds. The first is what is on our hearts, what is happening for us this week, basically sharing anything. And the second round is a gratitude, and**



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## Rev. Vivian Seegers. Continued

### it's usually one word

*K: So, I will end this circle with one word; "Thank-you".*

**Drum circles are  
Fridays 12pm – 2pm.**



## Systematic Racism A Deepening Awareness

By John Marsh

In the fall of 1963 when I was eight, we went to visit my grandmother who was in hospital in Brantford, Ontario.

The hospital was on the outskirts of the city and on our way, driving along the city's edge, we passed a large, imposing rather institutional looking building. "Dad, what's that place?", I asked pointing in the building's direction. "That's the

**Did you know that the urban aboriginal ministry has its own website? We have been up and running since early 2019. On the site are pages about our past and upcoming events and so much more. Join a drum circle, attend a cultural feast or cultural camp. The web site has it all. We are looking for contributors and would be delighted to add UAM members with stories to tell.**

**Navigate to: [UrbanAboriginalMinistry.com](http://UrbanAboriginalMinistry.com)**



school for Indian children" my father replied. Being but a child myself, I simply said, "Oh" as the building receded into the distance and the recesses of my memory.

We moved to Vancouver from my hometown of London, Ontario at the end of June in 2000. Our family moved because my then wife had accepted a job as the dean of VST. As students returned that fall, one day my wife said that there was a student she wanted me to meet. Asking why this particular student, she replied that after our experience in the Diocese of Huron (Southwestern Ontario) she thought I would be interested in meeting this person. One afternoon upon arriving home, my wife greeted me at the door and said, "You remember that student I wanted you to meet, she's here in the living

room with her son. Come and say hi." Entering the living room, I was introduced to Vivian Seegers and her son Stephen. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a twenty year, ever evolving, working relationship with Vivian. After introductions, my wife said, "John before you got home, I was telling Vivian something of our experience in the Huron diocese. I got as far as the lawsuit and the diocese's reaction. Why don't you carry on from there..."

In October of 1998, the Diocese of Huron, together with the Federal Government, was served with a 2.3 billion dollar class action lawsuit for its involvement with the Anglican residential school within its jurisdiction. My reaction to hearing the news was probably similar to the reaction of most in the diocese,



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## **Systemic Racism: A Deepening Awareness. Continued**

"We had a residential school in our diocese – really? I thought most of those were up north or out west?". My response, and I think most responses, was not one of wilful ignorance but that blindness in which convention hides a multitude of sins.

The diocesan bishop, knowing little or nothing about the school called together a task force to coordinate how to respond.

My wife, Wendy, as professor of church history at Huron College in London, Ontario, was asked to do archival research on the history of the residential school, the Mohawk Institute and I was asked to develop a relationship with LAIC, The Lenni Lenape Algonkian Iroquoian Council which consists of representatives of the six First Nation parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Huron.

You may ask why was I asked to develop such a relationship? A good question.

Why did the bishop not have a relationship? Another good question.

Yet questions aside, more truthfully questions left unanswered, I connected with LAIC and was immediately invited to their monthly meeting. Before the first meeting I was offered the opportunity to tour the now closed school, closing in 1969. Readily agreeing and following the directions given, I drove to

Brantford to meet a number of former students who would conduct the tour. Arriving, I discovered, much to my surprise, that the Mohawk Institute was the very same building my father had described as the school for Indian children some 33 years before.

My tour of the Mohawk Institute began a deepening of my awareness of systemic racism in Canada rooted in the painful personal narratives of survivors; my year and a half experience of monthly meetings with LAIC, these meetings the epitome of hospitality, respect, and grace, deepened my understandings of the colonial effects of western domination of First Nation people's.

Very quickly, it became clear to me, that while I was welcome and encouraged to continue attending, I was not the person who needed to be there – the bishop needed to be there to listen, to hear, the stories told by those gathered, Anglicans, Anglican Mohawk, Anglican Iroquois, Anglican Chippewas, within his own diocese. No matter how much I endeavoured to explain the need, no matter the varied ways I approached the topic, inclusive of asking LAIC to extend an invitation to the bishop, I could not persuade the bishop to attend, not even once.

The bishop maintained distance, distancing his own brothers and sisters in Christ, because they were First Nations, apparently because they had the audacity to complain in the form of a lawsuit. To say I was disappointed would

certainly be an understatement. To my mind, it seemed that the bishop attended more to legal advice than the pastoral requirements of his faith, his job.

This was some of the immediate background to my meeting of Vivian and Stephen. Perhaps frustrated by institutional ecclesial re-

## **Rose's New Home!**



(From Left to Right) Vivian, Rose, and Kim

Vivian and I were raised together in Uranium City. We were kids together and raised to

know each other as relatives. I was in Residential School. Holy Angels Residential School and Bishop Pishe Day School. I was there from 7 years old to 16. Summer months, we were in Fort Chip and would visit Uranium City, but the rest of the year, September to June, we were in school and we weren't allowed to leave. It really did mess me up good.

I was a teacher in Alberta for many years. About fifteen years ago, Vivian was going to school here, and I just came back here from Fort MacMurray. We've stayed in contact ever since. Back





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## Rose's new home! Continued

then, Vivian was bringing people together in a good way. We talked a lot. I was always going back and forth to Fort MacMurray for funerals. Fort MacMurray is my homeland – my family. My sister Dora loves Vivian for the work she's doing! She's 82.

Vivian never gave up on me. The first time she brought me here (St. Mary Magdalene), I didn't want to go to any kind of church. I hesitated, but I did anyway. I was down and out and homeless. I thought, "Nobody loves me". I had nowhere to go. "Jesus and God don't care." I came to this church with Vivian. I'll never forget it. When it was time to leave, I told Vivian, "Do I have to go?" That was my first safe feeling. It was a warm safe feeling here. Now I feel more gentle about my involvement with UAM, and I have gained a lot of comfort just sitting in church. It's not a feeling so heavy from when I first walked in. The people I've met are kind and so nice. I don't feel like people are looking down on us – on me and my sons and relatives. They accept us for who we are.

The church people have been very helpful in so many ways.

One of the main reasons I like the church is because Vivian is able to use sweetgrass and our Sacred things are recognized and accepted in the Anglican church. That's what has

kept me coming back. And I like Jean's garden. I am grateful to be part of this Aboriginal Ministry. I am starting to lead the Friday drum circles at the church. Vivian is trusting me with that, and that feels a bit scary but good.

## A Dynamic Community of Volunteers

By: Karen Thorpe

I first met Vivian at St. Mark's Church 8 years ago. I had just been retired a year and moved

from Toronto and was excited to find a vibrant community at St Marks and got involved with the community meals ministry. I was also happy to see that the parish welcomed and supported First Nations. I was interested to learn more about and begin to live out reconciliation. I began to get to know Vivian and to appreciate her calling.

In Toronto I was the coordinator of the Women and Family programs for the Yonge St. Mission in the



Dreaming of our own teepee



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## A Dynamic Community of Volunteers. Continued

Regent Park area, one of the poorest neighbor hoods in the city. I was blessed to work with families from all over the world and different faiths – Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist and also with the Indigenous Women's Centre. My ministry was much like Vivian's in that it was very hands-on and practical with special feasts and many different celebrations and programs.

I also began to be involved with Vivian's ministry and with the DTES. I volunteered with the Listening Post and became part of the Harmony of Nations Drum group, thanks to UAM and the drum that Randy made for me.

What I observed with UAM was a dynamic community of volunteers that was nurtured by Vivian's leadership. I know the value of a great volunteer team. So gradually, I became more involved and was part of her discernment committee and so happy for her when she was ordained.

In the meantime, I became the coordinator of the Listening Post and then it became a link for people from there to come to the feasts. One example of this is Jesse Bear. I brought him to church to meet Vivian and he became involved in UAM and worked alongside her bringing food to the DTES, drumming at the feasts and participating in a workshop on regalia. Vivian helped him to find housing and furniture and he be-

gan attending St. Mary Magdalene where he was baptized. His mother had passed away and I am now his adopted Mom for which I am very thankful.

It was exciting to see the team in action. Natalie and Bruce and others helping with the set up and cleanup, Jessica and Ron and their 4 boys bringing so much energy and joy drumming and singing and being part of the sharing circles. Sylvia kept the kitchen clean and organized in a very efficient way.

Stephen Vivian's son continues to be a great support to his Mom. He is an amazing chef who prepared fabulous meals and made it look so beautiful. He has been the backbone of a lot of the heavy work helping people move - delivering furniture and helping with the food ministry, especially during Covid when there were lots of donations. Every day demanded a lot of work.

Randy made drums for the children and others, so lots of people had an opportunity to participate. Diane's son William smudged each event and Charlie drummed and sang with a powerful voice. It was such a gift to see the blending of Christianity and First Nations spirituality in a way that is inclusive and welcoming at all of these UAM feasts and events.

I saw how Natalie and Jessica were encouraged in their leadership abilities and so I invited them to come to Kit's Neighborhood House where I volunteer

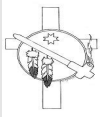
doing music with the pre-school programs. I had written a play called Mother Earth Smiled to celebrate Earth Day. Natalie looking beautiful in her regalia was Mother Earth and Jessica's boys were on the stage with the other children including Jessica's baby sitting on Natalie's lap at one point. 105 people attended the event, we sang and drummed along with Harmony of Nations and Bruce videotaped it. The second event was a drumming and sharing circle under the leadership of Natalie and Jessica.

This is just a small snapshot of this vibrant ministry that is blessed by Creator's love and guidance.

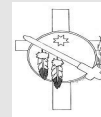


Karen Thorpe





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**UAM and Jesse Bear**

By: Jesse Bear

When I first came to Vancouver from my reserve in Alberta I met Karen at the Listening Post and she asked me to come to church and meet Vivian. I got involved right away volunteering with special events with UAM. I've been involved on and off for 4 years because I went back and forth to my reserve 3 times. I was always welcomed back and I never got pushed away. The last time Vivian even picked me up on her way home from Calgary and is helping me to settle in again and I have helped her a few times as well. I enjoy the conversations with Vivian because we share our cultural values.

I actually love what she does in her ministry and I learn a lot from her. I enjoy meeting new people every day and it doesn't matter where you come from. She tries her best. When I first came to St. Mary Magdalene, everyone way. I didn't feel judged including greeted me in a friendly Pastor John

who gave me good advice. The church really helped me get home when my Auntie passed away and I am very thankful for that.

I feel supported by both ministries and working with both makes me happy – seeing both ways that always teaches me to be positive. It's very helpful to learn and I am thankful for this

With UAM, I'm able to share my culture by drumming and singing for events, sharing about the meaning of ribbon shirts, helping out at feasts and funerals. I even spoke at the march for the environment and I helped deliver food to the people of the DTES. I was proud to go to Vivian's ordination.



**Gerry and Anakin**

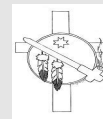
**UAM Members Enjoying Gifts of the Creator**



**Deana and Athena**



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## Vivian's Prayer

We acknowledge with gratitude that we gather on the territory of the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, Musqueam and Tsawwassen people

for the health and well being, for the common good of all our relations, the two-legged, the four-legged, those that creep, those that swim, those that fly.

Creator of all that is good, we thank you for the gifts you send us from the four sacred directions. We thank you for the gift of the first rays of the sun in the early morning. We thank you for your gift that you sent us in your son, Jesus Christ, and through whom the light comes into our darkness, a light no darkness can overcome.

We thank you for the gift of generosity and abundance sent through Mother Earth. We thank you for the gift of the drum, teaching us how to unite in our hearts, unite to ourselves, to each other, to Mother Earth and to the heart of the universe, uniting us all in your Heart, Great Spirit.

We thank you for the gifts of the four winds, the changing seasons. We thank you for the lessons we learn in the changing seasons of our lives, lessons that help us to grow in compassion and understanding for ourselves and for each other.

We thank you for the water of our bodies and the water of this earth. We thank you for the cleansing power of water, the reminder that we are always striving to be in balance and united with you.

Help us to grow in the wisdom of your sacred circle through the many sacred circles you present to us in our daily lives.

Help us to walk humbly on the back of Mother Earth always keeping in our minds the gentleness of the sweet grass. In the sacred teaching of humility we acknowledge that we are pitiful, like an infant without its mother, and that we need you in every way in every day.

Guide us in your teachings as we walk the road toward community and health.

Urban Aboriginal Ministry's office is located in the St. Mary Magdalene Parish.

2950 Laurel Street,  
Vancouver, BC, V5Z 3T3  
Canada

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you may also contact Vivian Seegers (UAM Priest) at [vivianseegers@hotmail.com](mailto:vivianseegers@hotmail.com)