

Anglicans redress wrongs

Area parishes raise money for share of national debt to natives

By SHARON BOASE
 Faith and Ethics Reporter
 The Hamilton Spectator

Local Anglicans are looking deep into their souls, as well as their wallets, as they begin raising their \$2-million share in making amends for the widespread abuse inflicted on thousands of native Canadians in the country's residential-school system.

As federal Public Works Minister Ralph Goodale and Archbishop Michael Peers ink the \$25-million residential schools agreement today in Ottawa, Anglicans are dreaming up ways to make good on the deal and build bridges to the aboriginal community.

The Anglican Diocese of Niagara never housed any of the state-sanctioned boarding schools that stripped native children of their languages and names, and subjected thousands of them to physical and sexual abuse.

But area parishioners are meeting this challenge with a sense of duty and compassion, with some parishes going so far as to pledge more money than they are being asked to pay.

St. Simon's, a parish of 400 families in north Oakville, pledged \$32,800 by the end of 2007, when it was asked for only \$27,000. Church pastor Rev. Michael Patterson says the parish vote was unanimous to boost the amount.

The whole social conscience of St. Simon's

has always been a case of our recognizing that we live in a broader world than just the local community in which we live," says Patterson.

At the Church of the Resurrection on Hamilton's west Mountain, Betty Ann Bushell and Dorothy Johns are organizing fundraisers they hope will put their church over the \$15,000 they've been asked to raise.

"I live a very charmed life in this country, with its values and priorities and infrastructure," says Bushell. "And I have this life because somewhere along the way my ancestors, who have been here for hundreds of years, and their friends and colleagues and neighbours took over an area of land that did not belong to them. There is a debt to be paid in more ways than just this (deal)."

On a Sunday last month when Niagara diocese Anglicans were told they must come up with \$1.88 million as part of the national redress package, a handful of parishioners at Church of the Resurrection gave \$1,200, says Archdeacon Marion Vincett.

"That just floored me," Vincett says. "That was just one parish on one Sunday. I feel really encouraged and excited that people have gotten on board the way they have."

Now an anonymous female parishioner at Church of the Resurrection has promised to match whatever the church raises in March.

Archdeacon Richard Jones, pastor at

Church of the Resurrection, says the church is well on its way to raising the 2003 portion of its five-year commitment.

"The money for victims is just the tip of the iceberg. Having a sense of duty about this is OK, there's nothing wrong with that. But it doesn't involve the complete person."

Johns says they won't be holding any raffles. They're too much like lotteries, where shelling out the cash for a ticket is, in fact, an act of self-interest. Instead, they're planning a Good Friday walk-a-thon and a spring sale.

"We want this to come from our hearts and our sense of connectedness to our aboriginal brothers and sisters," says Johns.

More than 12,000 claimants have filed 4,500 suits naming the Anglican, Roman Catholic, United and Presbyterian churches, which ran residential schools for the federal government from 1892 until 1969. Ottawa has since estimated that one in six children were physically or sexually abused by school staff.

Negotiations continue between Ottawa and the United Church, but talks have stalled with Catholic Church groups named in more than 70 per cent of cases. The Presbyterian Church was responsible for the fewest number of residential schools and was the first to finalize an agreement with the government.

sboase@thespec.com or 905-526-2452.

