

Interview with Lt. Crystal Porter

Kwe'! Ni'n Teluisi Crystal. Hello my name is Crystal.

Hello Crystal. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Can you begin by telling me how long have you been an officer, and where do you serve?

This is my fourth year as an officer with The Salvation Army and our fourth year in Labrador West!

You also identify as Indigenous. Can you say more about your cultural heritage and background?

Like many Indigenous people in Newfoundland, I did not know much about my Mi'kmaq ancestry until 2008 when the application process began for the Mi'kmaq Qalipu Band. It was then that my great grandmother believed it was safe to share with her family our Indigenous ancestry. Since then I have been on a cultural journey to discover and restore my Mi'kmaq identity.

Currently I am going through a difficult process in my membership. You may know that the government has revoked approximately 12,000 accepted Qalipu Band members that no longer met government enforced status requirements. Selected members of my family still qualified, however many were denied, myself included. It was at this time that I realized the road to reconciliation would not be easy. There would be moments of questions and frustration, but a big step in moving forward was realizing that a government issued card did not make me Indigenous. I realize that only Creator can tell me who I am. And so, I've learned to listen carefully. I have heard Him in the mighty roar of the waves, I have seen Him in the bright orange and soft pink sunsets, I have felt Him in the gentle breeze, and my heart knows, He has made me Mi'kmaw. For that gift I will ever be grateful.

There aren't very many people in Canada who can say they are both Indigenous and a Salvationist. Is it difficult to integrate the two?

I can't imagine one without the other! Being a Salvationist has been an integral part of my journey. Through the Salvation Army, I first learned about Jesus. This is where I was exposed to His grace and acceptance. When I began to learn more about my Indigenous heritage and embrace my culture, I felt as though my identity in Christ was only strengthened. Through Christ, I was able to be reconciled to the person He created me to be. I am an Indigenous Salvationist – something I see as a sacred calling.

What can non-Indigenous Salvationists do to be reconciled to their Indigenous neighbours?

Embrace. Listen. Respond. Indigenous people have a rich culture and a sacred connection with Creator and creation. Although we might worship in different ways, it does not mean one is more 'right' than the other. We should embrace and celebrate the diversity of Creator!

There are many things we can learn from Indigenous neighbours as we seek to care for creation and grow in our relationship with Jesus. Listening to each other's stories is a powerful step in reconciliation. Each story reveals a sacred journey between Creator and His creation.

Salvationists are known for their amazing ability to evangelize. In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus speaks about evangelism as a very practical way of life, freeing the oppressed, releasing captives, and recovering sight to the blind. A lot of this is justice work. In Canada, Indigenous people are victim to many injustices, and I feel like The Salvation Army has this amazing ability to respond – to stand alongside Indigenous people, and to empower and support as we all walk this road to reconciliation.

We'lalin. Thank you!

Thanks for offering your wisdom!