

Whitehorse United Church Drum Making Workshop

April 2018



The goal of this musical and leadership training project was to further reconciliation by helping Whitehorse United Church learn about and explore an important indigenous musical instrument -- the drum. To do this, we hosted a drum making workshop led by two local First Nation drum makers who shared their traditional knowledge with 21 members and adherents of our church over the course of 2 days. Each participant made his or her own drum out of elk hide with a yellow cedar frame.

Our drum-making workshop was led by Joe Migwans, an Ojibway man from Manitoulin Island, who has lived in the Yukon for over 30 years. He has worked with youth at Skookum Jim Friendship Centre and led parenting programs there. He also does men's groups and father and son workshops and helps out at the Jackson Lake Wellness Camp. He was assisted by his son and apprentice, Wass Migwans, a 24-year-old Kwanlin Dün citizen who is the son of Sharon Shorty, a member of our church and a Tlingit/Northern Tutchone storyteller and actor who first suggested the idea of a drum-making workshop to us, for which we thank her very much. When Wass was a boy he used to come to our church with his mother.



Four of the workshop participants were pre-teens and teenagers. It was a very diverse group and included people originally from Holland, Uganda, Scotland, and South America as well as second generation Japanese-Canadian and Metis participants. This enriched the workshop because people were able to share the meaning of the drum in their own cultures. For instance, Carlos told us that in some south American traditions, vibration is considered the language of God, so drumming is sacred. This resonated with Joe who told us that in Ojibway, the rattle is the Creator's voice and he said it is how his people call the Creator.



Through the course of the workshop, Joe told us many stories, about patience, effort, learning respect and healing. He said that when you start a project like ours, you must have good thoughts. If you are angry or frustrated or upset, you should walk away and come back when you can put good energy and good vibration into making a drum. He said that though it might sound hokey, it is all about love. Love is very powerful.