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Letters from the Law Commission of Canada

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Spring daffodil in Vancouver, BC

Early March took the Law Commission west to Vancouver, Regina, and Saskatoon. I was delighted to discover cheerful daffodils blooming next to the Pacific Ocean, and equally delighted to watch Arctic hares playing in the still-deep Saskatchewan snow. The striking range of springtime images was matched by that of the people who made time to meet with us, share their preoccupations and projects, and offer suggestions for the LCC's future directions. Together with Kirk Shannon, Director General of the LCC and fellow traveller, I have returned to Ottawa both energized and inspired by exchanges with individuals and organizations we now include among our friends and neighbours.

As I review the notes with which I filled an entire notebook over the week away from the office, it seems to me that the voyage was marked by meetings with “adventurers”, “teachers” and “stewards”. In this letter, I will simply point to examples of each and demonstrate the LCC's embrace of all.

The “adventurers” include the Justice Education Society (JES) and First Nations University (FNU). Based in downtown Vancouver, JES does its work at digital, local, and increasingly international sites. Originally founded as a provider of public education about law courts, and still driven by a people-centred approach to justice, JES currently develops and offers an incredibly broad array of



Arctic hares in Saskatchewan.

programs and resources that tackle, for example, youth suicide, human trafficking, changing family forms, justice sector capacity-building, and victim support services. First Nations University (FNU) exists and extends in four directions. I met the university's president, Professor Jacqueline Ottman, at the beautiful Regina campus designed by Douglas Cardinal; students, 90% of whom are Indigenous, can pursue their education here or in three other ecosystems or campus locations across Saskatchewan. FNU offers meaningful programs and support through a focus on Indigenous knowledge systems integrated into discipline-specific and interdisciplinary learning. Both “adventurers” – FNU and JES – are growing in size and ambition, aware of their past and



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excited for their future. Ready to carve new paths, meet new partners, and experiment with new projects, they exude a love of exploration and a willingness to chart daring courses if and as necessary.

The “teachers” we met include members of the faculties of law at the University of British Columbia and the University of Saskatchewan, and the director of the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. Perhaps less obviously, the British Columbia Law Institute and the Law Reform Commission of Saskatchewan – our provincial counterparts – also perform roles and responsibilities of teachers as they develop legal literacy and direct wide-ranging research and recommendations. In our “listen and learn” mode, we heard about projects related to regulation of emergencies, criminal justice and artificial intelligence, Indigenous laws and legal traditions, reproductive rights, religious education, and shifting parameters of municipal government. Keen to teach about their own areas of exploration or publication, everyone was also keen to share ideas about how the Law Commission of Canada could welcome young scholars pursuing graduate degrees in law or related disciplines, encourage and provide a home for collaborative exchange, and support crucial links among ideas, understanding, and positive change.

The “stewards” we discovered include the provincial law societies of British Columbia and Saskatchewan, who oversee the legal profession and its members within their respective provinces, and Regina’s Intercultural Grandmothers Uniting (IGU) group whose members explain they have been quietly and determinedly practicing reconciliation for three decades. All shared their wisdom and their worries, and all carry the significant burden of leaders, guides, and role models. The law societies worry about the independence of the legal profession in a free and democratic society; they offer wise counsel as to areas of law or projects of reform where a Canadian Commission might make some difference; they acknowledge the heavy responsibility of ensuring varied and responsive competencies on the part of lawyers. In a very different register, the members of IGU share a commitment to demonstrating mutual support and constructive listening, particularly to children and youth in Regina. The Intercultural Grandmothers meet in a circle once a month to share ideas and energy, discuss projects and discoveries, and nourish the ongoing recounting of stories among Indigenous and non-Indigenous friends.

While the labels of adventurer, teacher and steward are meant to convey distinctive roles or perspectives, considerable permeability exists across the categories. All our interlocutors demonstrated the courage and curiosity associated with an adventurous spirit. All engage in some kind of teaching, whether through educational programs, modelling and leadership, or production of study papers and reports. All exhibit stewardship through the care and investment they pour into the sustained wellbeing of people and projects. From all of them, we heard about the richness and challenges associated with the fact that their province is home to many distinct Indigenous communities and Nations. The associated multiplicity of issues, experience, sites, and perspectives can feel overwhelming. But it also fosters patience, determination, and passion.



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We carried many messages, insights, and expectations back home to the Law Commission's office in Ottawa. We have been invited to try to stitch together what can feel like disparate and lonely law reform endeavours. We were asked to consider convening unexpected conversations; we were encouraged to provide steady, credible leadership in a contemporary context that feels polarized and fractured. We were entrusted with working across statutes and regulatory frameworks, rather than confining ourselves to usual and well-worn categories and spaces. And we were reminded of the importance of shaping and nurturing the promises of law and of building durable bridges between global and local, between ideas and practices, and between theory and engagement.

I bring this letter to an end in April, firmly situated in a season of springtime celebrations associated with reflection and revival. The transition from one season to the next serves as reminder of the cycle of life and the rhythm of intergenerational renewal. The people we discovered on this trip capture that cyclical rhythm in their ongoing and always evolving work. A little like spring sunshine - whether encouraging the flowers or melting the snow - their projects radiate energy and inspire hope.