

Ministry Update

May 2025



**Kathryn
Guenette**

1429 Seaview Rd,
Black Creek, BC
V9J 1J7
250-337-5032
guenette@naim.ca

NAIM
NORTH AMERICA
INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES

NAIM OFFICE:

PO Box 220, Stn A
Abbotsford, BC
V2T 6Z6

PO Box 499
Sumas, WA 98295

604-850-3052
office@naim.ca
www.naim.ca

NAIM staff and the
ministries they
represent are solely
funded through and
fully accountable to
North America
Indigenous
Ministries.

Spring 2025

Greetings from Campbell River, friends and family!

As many of you know, two and a half years ago my sister lost her husband, Earl (a hereditary chief from the west coast of Vancouver Island). This past April 12, she held a “drying of the tears” potlatch. It was an amazing event for the community, for my sister, and for all who loved Earl. As I tell you about the event, I thought that maybe a quick “Coles-notes” version of the potlatch and its vulnerable history is in order.

A potlatch is a ceremonial event practiced by many Indigenous peoples of the Pacific coast of Canada. Nations all up and down the coast, including those in Washington State and Alaska imbed their lives in the potlatch. The host (in our case, my sister) invites guests to a lavish gathering that includes feasting, traditional dancing and singing, the passing of oral histories and storytelling, and giving of gifts to the guests.

The potlatch serves multiple social and cultural purposes. For one, it redistributes the wealth, demonstrates the host’s generosity and reinforces their social status. It is used to mark significant events such as marriages, births, deaths, or the passing of a hereditary seat. And it strengthens community bonds by honoring relationships and shared history. These “parties” can last anywhere from twelve hours to three days.

In 1884 potlatches were banned by the Canadian and U.S. governments because authorities saw them as wasteful and contrary to Western economic values. Regalia was burned and anyone involved in potlatches was arrested. This, along with the implementation and running of the residential schools across Canada, created a one-two punch to the nations and almost decimated them (which was the idea). But many Indigenous communities kept the potlatch tradition alive by going underground. The ban was lifted in 1951, and the potlatch tradition has seen a strong revival in recent decades.

As I reflect on these events of the last century or so, I realize that this is the context in which all of NAIM staff are doing their work. Most times we work with a people group hostile to Jesus and the church—and can you blame them? There is a deep current of resentment and mistrust when it comes to the Christian God. Many NAIMers feel that we have the opportunity to speak into this, and it all comes down to relationships, approaching people with gentleness and respect, and speaking as the Holy Spirit moves us to speak.

There is much ado about something when someone in the community holds a potlatch.

About 400 people came to my sister’s potlatch to remember and honour Earl. Many shared their own stories, songs, dances, relational connections to the family, and gave gifts for the host. We feasted and laughed and prayed and cried and listened and witnessed to the importance of each other and our dear elder/brother/husband/dad/great-great grandfather/uncle.



One of the many things I love about potlatches is visiting with all the people that come from all along the west coast of Vancouver Island (and some east side nations too). Most people I only ever see at potlatches or funerals. So, it was lovely to re-connect with many friends.



The months (and years) of leading up to this event were filled with pulling cedar (which can only be done in May) and harvesting Devil's Club (only in June) so that during the winter months we could gather to make gifts and items that were needed specifically for the potlatch: cedar hats and headbands, cedar roses, cedar sashes worn to identify the "policemen" appointed to keep

order during the event, Devil's Club beads that were used in jewelry, necklaces and other beaded ornaments. One of our friends made sock monkeys and knitted hats for my sister to give away!



The most significant part of this past year has been reconnecting with my First Nations sisters (and my blood sisters! All four of us Guenette girls were involved in many aspects of making this happen, too, along with our brother, who was an amazing help in the days leading up to the potlatch and during the event). Harvesting and crafting has given us many hours of being together to support my sister in pulling off this very expensive and emotionally charged event. It's been a beautiful way and reason to work together. I'm honoured to have been a part of it.

Now that it's May, we'll head out into the woods together to pull cedar and next month we'll go and harvest Devil's Club so that in the fall we can come together and make gifts for the next potlatch, whenever that will be.

Thank you for your amazing financial and prayer support as I do the Lord's work here.

Much love,

Kathryn



A foundation that loves God and wants to see all of our staff at 100% support is offering a matching grant for every donation given from a new donor, as well as increased donations from current donors, up to \$1000/month for 12 months. They will match ongoing new donations whether the donations are monthly, quarterly, or given spontaneously until August 2026.

Please consider giving (or giving a little bit more), knowing that your donations will be doubled.

Thank you!

To support this ministry financially, checks should be made out to NAIM with **Project #508** in the memo line. Donations can also be made online at www.naim.ca/donate