

## **Indigenous Reconciliation**

### **Starting the Discussion with your Parish**

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#### **Introduction**

The aim of this document is to provide you with a starting place to explore what your church or parish can do to join the journey toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. As the Church, we are mandated to model the Kingdom of God through actively establishing shalom in the world; that is the restoration of all relationships. This is why it is essential that we engage in this journey.

The non-Indigenous Church has been the cause of much harm toward Indigenous peoples in Canada. Contributing to forced assimilation and committing abuse through Church operated residential schools, this harm has broken the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This requires us to approach reconciliation with humility and to choose to listen first and keep listening, before we act, and then take the time to listen again. The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has been, for the most part, destructive for the last 500 years and will require many years to foster a healthy relationship. We have hope as Jesus followers, though, that this is possible as he is already reconciling all people to himself.

#### **Helpful Terminology**

**First Nations** - A term used to describe Aboriginal peoples of Canada who are not Métis or Inuit. The singular form can refer to a band or reservation community.

**Indian** - A term that refers to the legal identity of a First Nations person who is registered under the Indian Act. The term “Indian” should be used only when referring to a First Nations person with status under the Indian Act, and only within its legal context. Aside from this specific legal context, the term “Indian” in Canada is considered outdated and may be considered offensive.

**Indigenous** - A term used to encompass a variety of Aboriginal groups. It is most frequently used in an international, transnational, or global context. In Canada, Indigenous includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

**Inuit** - Refer to specific groups of Aboriginal peoples living in the far North.

**Métis** - Refers to a person who has mixed ancestry, Indigenous and Euro-American. The term can be used for anyone with mixed ancestry but legally it refers to a specific community.

**Native** - Refers to a person or thing that has originated from a particular place. It does not denote a specific Indigenous ethnicity (First Nation, Métis, or Inuit). In Canada, the term Indigenous is generally preferred to Native. Some may feel that Native has a negative connotation and is outdated.

\*\*\*If possible, it is always more important to use nation-specific names over generalized terms.



## Land Acknowledgements

A land acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes the unique and enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories.

To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on, and a way of honouring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land. It is important to understand the long standing history that has brought you to reside on the land, and to seek to understand your place within that history. Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: it is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation. It is also worth noting that acknowledging the land is Indigenous protocol.

As we engage in the process of reconciliation it is critical that land acknowledgements don't become a token gesture. They are not meant to be static, scripted statements that every person must recite in exactly the same way. They are expressions of relationship, acknowledging not just the territory someone is on, but that person's connection to that land based on knowledge that has been shared with them. Learn more about doing one at your parish [here](#).

- [Search on which territory your church is situated](#)

Example Land Acknowledgement:

*Today we are honoured to be on the traditional territory of the Mississauga Nations. We honour the Mississauga people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. We're grateful for the opportunity to meet here and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land.*

## The Truth & Reconciliation Commission

The first residential schools opened in Canada in the 1870s. The schools were a product of churches and the government; a collective, calculated effort to eradicate Indigenous language and culture that the commission called a policy of cultural genocide.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed as a means of reckoning with the devastating legacy of forced assimilation and abuse left by the residential school system. From 2008 to 2014, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard stories from thousands of residential school survivors. In June 2015, the commission released a report based on those hearings. From that came the 94 Calls to Action: individual instructions to guide governments, communities and faith groups down the road to reconciliation.

- [Learn about the 94 Calls to Action & follow up-to-date progress](#)
- [Learn where residential schools were located near you](#)

The Be In Christ Church of Canada (BIC) denomination, did not run a residential school but our family of churches did operate a children's home located in Timber Bay, Saskatchewan. This home provided housing for approximately 50 children annually between 1952 until 1994. While this was an attempt to minister the love of Christ to children whose parents often worked on northern traplines we recognize there could have been a better means to support, minister and love our Indigenous neighbours.



## Indigenous Events in Canada

September 30 - [Orange Shirt Day](#)

This day is a legacy of the St. Joseph Mission Residential School (1891-1981) Commemoration Project. The event was designed to commemorate the residential school experience, honour survivors, and contribute to the reconciliation process.

October - [ImagineNATIVE Film & Media Arts Festival](#)

An annual festival celebrating film and media arts from Canadian and international Indigenous artists. The aim of the festival is to dispel stereotypical notions of Indigenous peoples through diverse media from within Indigenous communities, thereby contributing to a greater understanding by audiences of Indigenous artistic expression.

October 4 - [Honouring Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls](#)

This is a day to honour the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada is a national tragedy. On this day we take the time to give thanks to the families who are our reason for demanding continued action as well as commit to raise awareness.

June - [National Indigenous History Month](#)

The history of Indigenous peoples in Canada is rich and diverse. It stretches long into the past before the arrival of the European newcomers. This month provides an opportunity to recognize not only the historic contributions of Indigenous peoples to the development of Canada, but also the strength of present-day Indigenous communities and their promise for the future.

June 21 - [National Indigenous Peoples Day](#)

National Indigenous Peoples Day is a day to recognize and celebrate the cultures and contributions of Indigenous peoples from across Canada. The day was first celebrated in 1996 as National Aboriginal Day, and was renamed in 2017. There are festivals, events, celebrations and ceremonies which take place across Canada to mark the occasion.

June-September - Pow wow season

Pow wows are celebrations that showcase Indigenous music, dances, dance apparel, food and crafts. They promote cultural pride, respect and health in an inclusive setting. They are important for many Indigenous people as a forum to gather together, celebrate their culture, and create a space for cross-cultural sharing with non-Indigenous people.

## Resources

### Film

1. *Jingle Dress First Dance & Study Guide* (Film Available at all Meeting House parishes)  
A film that chronicles Jules Koostachin's (Cree, Attawapiskat) six-year quest to dance at a pow wow for the first time in a sacred healing Jingle Dress. Jules' journey honours her mother who was held against her will as a child for ten years in the Canadian residential school system and her grandmother who didn't understand that the horrific, abusive system was a deliberate tool of assimilation. [Access Study Guide](#)
2. *First Contact*  
A short mini series about six non-Indigenous Canadians who were immersed in Indigenous culture for 21 days.
3. *Secret Path & Panel Discussion*  
A multimedia experience following the story of Chanie Wenjack, a boy who died while fleeing a residential school near Kenora Ontario in 1966.
4. *Reserve 107 the Film & Study Guide*  
A MCC Saskatchewan documentary about how a village in Laird, Saskatchewan discovered that their village was the former reserve of the Young Chippewyan First Nation. [Access Study Guide](#)

### Books

1. *The Inconvenient Indian & Study Guide*  
A novel by Thomas King which explores the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people since the fifteenth century and examines the way that popular culture has shaped our notion of Indigenous identity. [Access Study Guide](#)
2. *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*  
A novel by Dr. Richard Twiss which looks at contextualizing an Indigenous expression of the Christian faith among the Native communities of North America. He surveys the painful, complicated history of Christian missions among Indigenous peoples and chronicles more hopeful visions of culturally contextual Native Christian faith.
3. *Wrong to Rights: How churches can Engage the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*  
A novel written by over 40 authors from diverse backgrounds including Indigenous and settler, Christian and traditional to wrestle with the meaning of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for the Church.

## Group Activities

1. [KAIROS Blanket Exercise](#)  
The Blanket Exercise is a unique, participatory history lesson – developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and educators – that fosters truth, understanding, respect and reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.
2. [Living the 8th Fire](#)  
A seven week small group discussion series developed by The Centre for Public Dialogue to help facilitate conversation on reconciliation.
3. [Woodland Cultural Centre](#)  
A former residential school which has been reclaimed as a museum located near Brantford, Ontario. The museum offers group tours and educational programs that explore the history and culture of the Haudenosaunee people as well as the legacy of the Canadian residential school system.
4. [Peacemakers Fundraiser](#)  
The Meeting House church in Ontario, organizes an annual campaign in support of Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) peacebuilding initiatives. One of the key areas of partnership is MCC's Indigenous Neighbours program which walks with Indigenous communities in Ontario by listening to the desires they have for their community and responding. Work with a group to organize a fundraiser this February.

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