

and because they connect people, preparing them to listen respectfully to each other in a difficult dialogue. Ceremonies are an affirmation of human dignity; they feed our spirits and comfort us even as they call on us to reimagine or envision finding common ground. Ceremonies validate and legitimize Treaties, family and kinship lines, and connections to the land. Ceremonies are also acts of memory sharing, mourning, healing, and renewal; they express the collective memory of families, communities, and nations.

Ceremonies enable us to set aside, however briefly, our cynicism, doubts, and disbelief, even as they console us, educate us, and inspire hope.¹⁸⁵ They have an intangible quality that moves us from our heads to our hearts. They teach us about ourselves, our histories, and our lives. Ceremony and ritual have played an important role in various conflict and peace-building settings across the globe, including North America, where Indigenous nations have their own long histories of diplomacy and peacemaking. Ceremonial rituals have three functions in the peacemaking process. First, they create a safe space for people to interact and learn as they take part in the ceremony. Second, they enable people to communicate non-verbally and process their emotions. Third, ceremonies create an environment where change is made possible; world views, identities, and relationships with others are transformed.¹⁸⁶

Those in attendance at TRC events learned to acknowledge and respect Indigenous ceremonies and protocols by participating in them. The Commission intentionally made ceremonies the spiritual and ethical framework of our public education work, creating a safe space for sharing life stories and bearing testimonial witness to the past for the future.

The Commission's National Events were designed to inspire reconciliation and shape individual and collective memory by demonstrating the core values that lie at the heart of reconciliation: respect, courage, love, truth, humility, honesty, and wisdom. These values are known by many Aboriginal peoples as the "Seven Sacred Teachings." They are also in the ancient teachings of most world religions.¹⁸⁷ Each National Event focused on one of these teachings. Working closely with local Aboriginal communities and various regional organizations, representatives of the parties to the Settlement Agreement, and other government and community networks, the Commission took great care to ensure that the proper ceremonies and protocols were understood and followed throughout every National Event. Elders offered prayers and teachings at the opening and closing of each event. Smudges, sacred pipe and water ceremonies, cedar brushings, songs, and drumming occurred on a regular basis throughout. At each event, a sacred fire was lit and cared for by Elders and Fire Keepers. Water ceremonies were performed by the women who were recognized as the Protectors of the Waters. The sacred fire was also used for ongoing prayers and tobacco offerings, as well as to receive the tissues from the many tears shed during each event. The ashes from each of the sacred fires were then carried forward to the next National Event, to be added in turn to its sacred fire, thus gathering in sacred ceremony the tears of an entire country.