

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, RECONCILIATION, CHURCHES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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For over 150 years Canada operated 130 residential Schools with the cooperation of Canadian churches. These institutions were designed to eliminate Indigenous culture and assimilate Indigenous children. Incultation in Christian doctrine stood at the heart of this process for many politicians and educators. To accomplish these objectives “[t]hese government-funded, church-run schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development of Aboriginal children.”¹ By the time the last residential school closed in 1996, 150,000 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students had passed through the system. Severe cultural abuse took place in these schools, which have been labelled cultural genocide by the Chief Justice of the Canadian Supreme Court. Furthermore, to date, nearly 38,000 claims have been made for injuries resulting from physical and sexual abuse in residential schools.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established to bring greater healing and accountability to the issue of Residential Schools, and take the solution of these issues outside of the courts. The TRC was developed by the churches, government, survivors and Aboriginal organizations pursuant to an Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The TRC heard about experiences of children in these schools, including the charges of abuse and other ill effects for First Nations children. The Commission was officially established on June 2, 2008, and was completed in December 2015.

In this talk, using a personal lens, I will discuss ways in which churches have and can respond to the Indian Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to actions concerning Indigenous peoples. The framework for my discussion draws upon Article 12.1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [hereinafter UNDRIP]:

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination in spiritual matters, including the right to practice, develop and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies.

I will also discuss the 48th and 49th Call to Action by the Indian Truth and Reconciliation Commission which were addressed to churches.

The 48th Call to Action invited churches to publicly adopt UNDRIP as a framework for reconciliation by March 31 2016. The 49th Call to Action invited church to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples, such as the doctrine of discovery and terra nullius.

Many churches across Canada committed to this proposition. As far as I can tell, 14 churches and faith organizations made some public statement to comply with UNDRIP in their ministries, including the:

1. Anglican Church of Canada
2. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
3. Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)
4. Canadian Interfaith Conversation
5. Christian Reformed Churches in Canada
6. Citizens for Public Justice
7. Conférence des évêques catholiques du Canada
8. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
9. First United Church (Ottawa)
10. Holy Cross Fathers English Canada
11. Réseau Oecuménique Justice et Paix
12. The Presbyterian Church in Canada
13. The Salvation Army
14. The United Church of Canada

This talk will proceed in four parts.

First, I will provide an personal reflection on the need for the TRC, drawn from my family history.

Second, I will briefly discuss the TRC and its mandate and Calls to Action.

Third, I will discuss the actions of churches, and consider what can be done in churches that have not yet formally addressed the TRC and may never do so.

Finally, I will briefly mention the importance of self-determination as a concept in respecting religious freedom.

1) The Need for the TRC – A Personal Reflection

My mother's family is from the Cape Croker Indian Reserve, three hours north of Toronto. For seven generations they have sought to learn from God and nature as Christians and Anishinaabe people.²

In fact, the Anishinaabe of Ontario have over 400 years of experience with people professing Christian beliefs. Samuel D. Champlain, a French Protestant turned Catholic, was the first European we met. He came to our part of Georgian Bay in 1615. We called the French Wemitigoshiwak, those who wave sticks, in references to the crosses they carried before them.³

Two hundred years after those first encounters, in 1829, my great-great-great grandfather, Kagedonce, became the first leader from our communities on the Bruce Peninsula to become Christian. The message he received was delivered by Peter Jones, the great Mississauga missionary, who was born just down the road from Toronto in Burlington.⁴ At the time Peter was resident at the Ojibwe village, on the Credit River, in what is now downtown Mississauga. Incidentally, this missionary's papers were long housed at Victoria College at U of T which I attended as an undergraduate. Peter was a powerful teacher. His writings and sermons were centered on Jesus Christ, and the need to recognize His grace to live with the Great Spirit. Peter was also an ardent proponent of Indigenous land and governance rights. He also taught about God by reference to the environment.

When Kagedonce received Jones' teachings he was the Chief of the Saugeen Ojibwe, on the Bruce. The words he used in this conversion process illustrate that, like his teacher Peter Jones, he also thought about God by understanding his world. He referenced both nature and the Bible in deciding to follow Christ's teachings. The words of my grandfather on the day he was baptized were as follows. He said:

Brothers! I have listened to your words. I believe what you say. I will take your advice and worship with you in the Christian religion.

Brothers! I thank you for telling me the words of the Great Spirit. I thank you for remembering me, a poor, wretched and lonesome man. I have heard from afar that all my brethren around me are turning to the service of the Great Spirit, and forsaking their old religion. I do not wish to stand alone. Brothers! I will follow them. I will be a Christian. It may be that I will stretch out my hands to the Great Spirit for the blessings which my Christian brothers enjoy, I may receive a handful before I die. ...

Brothers, Becoming a Christian I shall desire to see my children read the good book. As for myself, I am too old to learn; and if I can only hear what my children read, I shall be satisfied with what I hear from them.

Brothers! I shall tell all my young men your words – that I shall enjoy your instructions and become a Christian. It shall also be my desire to have my people settle where we may learn to serve the Great Spirit and till the ground...⁵

I have read the good book Kecedonce wanted us to read. In fact, I have read it in Ojibwe, from the translation Peter made for those he taught. I am one of his children he hoped would follow this path, and I have found great comfort from doing so.

Kecedonce was obviously spiritually impressed with the message he heard. The place where Kecedonce was baptized was at the headwaters of the Grand River, near Shelburne. In fact, half of the Saugeen Ojibwe were baptized as Methodists shortly after this event; most others were Catholic from two centuries of French and Metis influences.

I deeply appreciate how Kecedonce linked his understanding of the scriptures to the natural world around him. Again, at his baptism he said:

My brothers and sisters, whilst I was in my own country I heard what the Great Spirit had done for you, so I came to see for myself what all this meant. I have opened my ears to the words spoken by your minister and what I had heard by the hearing of the ear. I now see with mine own eyes. Brothers and sisters, **the Great Spirit has planted a tree at this place whose top reaches the skies** – you have found this place and are climbing up towards the abode of the Great Spirit.⁶

Note the way of looking at the world found in his speeches. Hope for life after death, with the Great Spirit, is likened to climbing a tree. There are many references to trees as path-markers in Anishinaabe and Christian teachings.⁷ In my view we must look to the environment around us, and carefully discern what is happening within it, and apply this understanding to spiritual purposes. We cannot indiscriminately destroy the world and our natural environment without destroying the spiritually embedded in the world.

In accepting Christianity, we did not forsake the most important aspects of our old ways. My family attempted to follow the best of our Anishinaabe traditions while we also lived as Christians. We did so in relative peace and goodwill with the increasing number of people who came to our shores from European nations. In fact, my great-great-great grandfather's son signed a treaty in the 1850's, agreeing to share our lands with non-Indigenous people. He did so in return for promises that the settlers would respect the environment by recognize our hunting and fishing rights throughout our territory, setting aside reservations, and providing

housing, roads and education for our people. An Indian treaty is a covenant to live in peace, friendship and respect and receive and learn from the land and one another in accordance with our most solemn principles. Native and non-native people are treaty people in the territory covered by this treaty, and most homeowners in this area can trace their title to Anishinaabe promises to share this land with them. In this respect treaties are also constitutional agreements, which set the ground rules for subsequent developments. They incorporate Anishinaabe law, which contain standards for how we should respect the environment, and one another.

My great-great grandfather placed his otter doodem on this treaty which dealt with 1.5 million acres of land in Ontario. He was named Peter Kecedonce Jones. As you can hear, he received both his grandfather's name, as well as his father's Christian teacher's name.⁸ He married a Riel/McCleod, and in addition signing treaties, he and his wife did much to keep both Christian and Anishinaabe traditions alive in the lives of their community.⁹ In fact, my great-great grandmother, Margaret McCleod was a medicine woman. She has a rich knowledge of how the environment would heal and strengthen people, and could be used to encourage better ways to live. I know dozens of ancient stories and traditions about the earth and its role in our physical and spiritual health which are directly connected her teachings. They have been part of my teaching and writing throughout my life and career.

The next generation continued to follow Methodism and also maintained a deep connection to their Anishinaabe traditions through the environment. In 1894 my great-grandfather Charles Kecedonce Jones built the Methodist now United Church which still stands in our community at the cross-roads of our reserve. Beside the church is a memorial which references his contribution, and those of his father, and his brothers George and Thomas to the Christian faith at Cape Croker, and as Chiefs of the community. My great-grandfather served as a Chief or a band counsellor for over fifty years of his life; almost matching his father and grandfather's lifelong service as Chiefs.

My mother's strongest memories of my great-grandfather were of his kindness and love. When he was in his 90's he was always the first person at church. He stoked the wood stove so that it was warm when people arrived. When they worshipped he would lift his strong voice in the hymns which everyone sung in Ojibwe. Then, when they went home for dinner he would read the Bible to those who were gathered, to share of his love of God. His wife Ella also served right beside him, and her home was a refuge from worry and pain. She was a midwife too, who delivered hundreds of children throughout the Saugeen peninsula. They helped many people through selfless service because they were trying to live as Jesus Christ taught, and make other's burdens easier through hard times.¹⁰

Unfortunately, during My great-grandfather's life, and that of my grandfather, we began to experience increasing persecution, injustice and great violations of our human rights, which departed from the promises we received upon conversion and in signing our treaties. Though there was never bitterness in great-grandfather's life, because he in fact exhibited deep forgiveness, my grandfather suffered immensely because of how he was treated in these changing circumstances.

Residential schools, run by Christian churches, became institutions of forced cultural assimilation, where people were too frequently abused. Churches attempted to eradicate Indigenous language, culture and tradition, all under the watchful, supportive eye of the federal government.¹¹ They did not respect the moral agency of Indigenous peoples. Residential schools for Aboriginal people in Canada date back to the 1870s. Over 130 residential schools were located across the country, and the last school closed in 1996. These government-funded, church-run schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development of Aboriginal children.

More than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were placed in these schools often against their parents' wishes. Many were forbidden to speak their language and practice their own culture.¹²

This was reinforced by the *Indian Act* which was passed to prevent us from making decisions for ourselves and holding our land in accordance with our own spiritual practices. Provincial hunting and fishing laws were racially biased and gave non-native peoples access to our resources while limiting our own uses. This led to starvation and poverty for most Ojibwe people in the province, which continues to haunt us today. We were denied the right to vote and enjoy the political franchise until 1960. We were denied the right to hire lawyers and raise money to dispute our treatment during the first half of the twentieth century. Some of our reserves were relocated, including two in our own Saugeen territory, and others communities were extinguished. Our people were arbitrarily cut off from band lists and denied access to their families and homes on the reserves. While some of this was supposedly done with the best of Christian intentions, others participated or turned a blind eye to these tragedies because of racist world views. Some of the darkest human traits were on display in this era: selfishness, greed, ignorance and hatred were a part of Ontario's creation. We see the effects of these beliefs marked on our lands most everywhere we turn. While not clearly ethnic cleansing, for most native communities the effects of this history has led to analogous results. Again, I must stress this is not the whole story. There is so much goodness, beauty and decency in the world. However, to ignore the darkness that shaped and continues to shape Ontario and our communities - is to disregard reality too.

In addition, women were forced to lose their status when they married non-Indian men, which cut off great strength from our communities for close to 100 years – my mother was among these people (her status and mine was only restored in 1985 through belated amendments to the *Indian Act*). To add fuel to this fire, another round of children being taken from us began in the 1960's through the 60's scoop. Even today 50-80% of the kids in government care in western Canada are Indigenous children.

One of the results is that today, Indigenous peoples' lives are drastically shorter than other Canadians. They are marked by more suffering as measured by considerably higher rates of poverty, injury, and incarceration, and significantly lower levels of education, income and health. We are currently in crisis mode; Indigenous peoples are living through a period of profound, extended, multi-generational trauma.

This personal reflection is connected to the large dislocations which prompted the need for reconciliation, as identified by the TRC. I will now turn my attention to the TRC and its Calls to Action.

2) TRC: WHAT IS IT?

The Indian Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a five-year inquiry into the abuses which gave rise to residential school and the need to address them in contemporary settings. It issued 94 Calls to Action to Canadians to change relationships between Indigenous and other Canadians for the better.

The **principles** underlying the Truth and Reconciliation process were that it be: “accessible; victim-centered; [ensure] confidentiality (if required by the former student); do no harm; health and safety of participants; representative; public/transparent; accountable; open and honourable process; comprehensive; inclusive, educational, holistic, just and fair; respectful; voluntary; flexible; and forward looking in terms of rebuilding and renewing Aboriginal relationships and the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.”¹³ These principles are appropriate guides for churches and governments as they continue to interact with Indigenous people in their work. The principles guiding the Commission recognized that “Reconciliation is an ongoing individual and collective process”.¹⁴ The work-in-progress nature of reconciliation was reflected in the running of the Commission and in its Final Report.

The Commission’s **Final Report** was clear in its finding about the causes of the problem concerning Indigenous/Canadian relationships. It reported that Canada worked to undermine nation-to-nation relationships with Indigenous peoples, and acted to diminish and marginalize their collective and individual capacities. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada observed in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* at pages 2-3:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as “cultural genocide.”

Physical genocide is the mass killing of the members of a targeted group, and biological genocide is the destruction of the group’s reproductive capacity. Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.

In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things.

Canada asserted control over Aboriginal land. In some locations, Canada negotiated Treaties with First Nations; in others, the land was simply occupied or seized. The negotiation of Treaties, while seemingly honourable and legal, was often marked by fraud and coercion, and Canada was, and remains, slow to implement their provisions and intent.

On occasion, Canada forced First Nations to relocate their reserves from agriculturally valuable or resource-rich land onto remote and economically marginal reserves. Without legal authority or foundation, in the 1880s Canada instituted a “pass system” that was intended to confine First Nations people to their reserves. Canada replaced existing forms of Aboriginal government with relatively powerless band councils whose decisions it could override and whose leaders it could depose. In the process, it disempowered Aboriginal women, who had held significant influence and powerful roles in many First Nations, including the Mohawks, the Carrier, and Tlingit.

Canada denied the right to participate fully in Canadian political, economic, and social life to those Aboriginal people who refused to abandon their Aboriginal identity. Canada outlawed Aboriginal spiritual practices, jailed Aboriginal spiritual leaders, and confiscated sacred objects.

And, Canada separated children from their parents, sending them to residential schools. This was done not to educate them, but primarily to break their link to their culture and identity. In justifying the government’s residential school policy, Canada’s first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, told the House of Commons in 1883:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.

These measures were part of a coherent policy to eliminate Aboriginal people as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will. Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott outlined the goals of that policy in 1920, when he told a parliamentary committee that “our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic.”

Calls to Action

As a result of these findings the Commission issued 94 Calls to Action. They are organized into two components. The first 42 are **Legacy** Calls to Action address issues related to Child Welfare, Education, Language, Health and Justice. The remaining calls to action are aimed at many societal sectors ask us to change the way we live together and Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this land.

Two of Reconciliation Calls to action were addressed to Churches:

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We call upon the church parties to the Settlement Agreement, and all other faith groups and interfaith social justice groups in Canada who have not already done so, to formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation. This would include, but not be limited to, the following commitments:

- i. Ensuring that their institutions, policies, programs, and practices comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- ii. Respecting Indigenous peoples' right to self determination in spiritual matters, including the right to practise, develop, and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies, consistent with Article 12:1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- iii. Engaging in ongoing public dialogue and actions to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- iv. Issuing a statement no later than March 31, 2016, from all religious denominations and faith groups, as to how they will implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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We call upon all religious denominations and faith groups who have not already done so to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius.

3) ACTIONS OF THE CHURCHES

As mentioned, 14 churches and faith organization have formally heeded this call to respond to the 48th and 49th Call to Action from the TRC, as far as I can tell. On March 31, 2016, the date set by the Commission for Official church response, seven churches issued “An Ecumenical Statement on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”.¹⁵ After reciting the litany of causes and harms of residential schools that statement declared:

As churches and religious organizations, we have acknowledged our failures to respect the rights and dignity of Indigenous peoples. We acknowledge the harm done and are committed to journeying together towards healing and reconciliation. Many of us are on different places in that journey: some have been engaged in these questions for decades; for others, it is new terrain. But we are all committed to responding to this call.

We are strengthened in this journey by Indigenous peoples, both inside our faith communities and more broadly across Canada, who have chosen to journey with us. In these relationships, respect and understanding are strengthened, and we see the possibility for transformation.

We undertake this work in our communities of worship and beyond through educational initiatives. We support growing social, political, and legal efforts that promote the UN Declaration. As well, we welcome working alongside governments in Canada as they live into their stated commitments to the implementation of the UN Declaration

The Churches who signed this statement were The Anglican Church of Canada, Christian Reformed Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), The Salvation Army, and The United Church of Canada.

Furthermore, on March 19, 2016 four Canadian **Catholic** organizations also issued documents responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. These four organization represent “Bishops, institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, Indigenous People, and laity”.¹⁶ Two texts were issued by these Catholic groups, on addressing UNDRIP and the other the Doctrine of Discovery. The document addressing **UNDRIP** affirms that “its spirit can point a way forward to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.”¹⁷ It rejects religious coercion. It says “Christianity...is not itself a culture and is therefore expressed in many ways, with each receiving culture contributing something new and beautiful.” The document aims at affirming the Declaration and makes nine appeals to Catholics everywhere for implementation of the UNDRIP. The eight appeals include calls for educational programs, partnership between Indigenous peoples and the Church related to health care, initiatives to enhance restorative justice, support for families including support for the Missing and Murdered Woman’s Inquiry, support for bishops in “deepening and broadening their relationships, dialogue and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples” to implement the Calls to Action and UNDRIP in their work.

The second document addressing the **doctrine of discovery** "considers and repudiates illegitimate concepts and principles used by Europeans to justify the seizure of land previously held by Indigenous Peoples and often identified by the terms 'Doctrine of Discovery' and terra nullius." It says "that now is an appropriate time to issue a public statement in response to the errors and falsehoods perpetuated, often by Christians, during and following the so-called Age of Discovery." The text then goes further and formulates five principles "in response to the errors and falsehoods perpetuated, often by Christians, during and following the so-called Age of Discovery. In light of all this, as Catholics".¹⁸ These principles affirm Indigenous equality and reject the doctrine of discovery.¹⁹

1. We firmly assert that Indigenous people, created in the image and likeness of God our Creator, ought to have had their fundamental human rights recognized and respected in the past, and that any failure to recognize and respect their humanity and fundamental human rights past or present is to be rejected and resisted in the strongest possible way;
2. We firmly assert that there is no basis in the Church's Scriptures, tradition, or theology, for the European seizure of land already inhabited by Indigenous Peoples;
3. We reject the assertion that the principle of the first taker or discoverer, often describe today by the terms Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, could be applied to lands already inhabited by Indigenous Peoples;
4. We reject the assertion that the mere absence of European agricultural practices, technologies, or other aspects common to European culture, could justify the claiming of land as if it had no owner;
5. We reject the assertion that Europeans could determine whether land was used or occupied by Indigenous people without consulting those people

Churches have followed these responses to the TRC's Call to Action with specific resources and programs and activities. In reviewing the activities of the seven protestant churches who participated in the Ecumenical Statement on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, the following activities are discernable.

The **Anglican Church of Canada** has a website which outlines its activities related to truth and reconciliation in great detail.²⁰ These resources for action include Foundational Resources related to plans and specific goals and strategies for the church and congregations, Liturgical Resources for prayers and teaching within the church, and Educational Resources which include exercises, timelines and materials for action. The videos, teaching materials and resources are detailed and practical. They also place this work into a broader spiritual framework, as do all the groups who have responded.

The **United Church of Canada** has responded with documents affirming UNDRIP and rejecting the doctrine of Discovery.²¹ They have established a Task Group to

- Engage the church in learning more about the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the meaning of its “principles, norms, and standards”
- Assess the church’s current alignment with the Declaration in all areas of its institutional life
- Provide mechanisms for addressing non-alignment
- Provide a mechanism with which to assess its progress
- Establish a mode of accountability²²

The United Church has also created and identified resources for pursuing reconciliation which include worship materials, ceremonies, hymns, conferences, justice outreach activities, videos, heart gardens, exercises, acknowledgement of territory etc.²³ As with all the groups reviewed the depth of possible engagement with Indigenous communities can be significant as these plans find place on the ground.

The **Presbyterian Church in Canada** is also responding to the many calls for action in the TRC’s report. Among its activities are new worship resources, educational exercises, presentation aids, territorial acknowledgements, newsletters, liturgical resources, organizational changes, videos, and statement of support for UNDRIP as a framework for work with Indigenous peoples.²⁴

The **Salvation Army** likewise responded to the Calls for Action.²⁵ In its release it dedicated itself to accessibility regarding nutritious food, education and economic opportunity, upholding human rights, celebrating Indigenous presence in its congregations, partnering with Indigenous peoples, developing Indigenous leadership and promoting Indigenous woman’s equality.

The **Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)** has “endorsed, celebrated and committed to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”,²⁶ repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery,²⁷ intervened in the Tsilhqot’in case to support aboriginal title, produced educational materials about UNDRIP, produces policy briefs on Indigenous issues like free, prior and informed consent,²⁸ organizing discussion groups at local worship meetings, and has a “peace and justice body...that responds to Call to Action #48 in a multitude of ways, internationally, nationally, and locally, both within and beyond the Quaker community.”²⁹

The **Christian Reformed Church** has also responded to the TRC Calls to Action. It committed itself to:

- engage with our congregations in a process of learning and dialogue on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People as a framework for reconciliation;
- engage in continuing discernment on the implications of the Declaration for the way we practice mission and social justice in concert with our ongoing discussions on the Doctrine of Christian Discovery;
- and engage in education and advocacy efforts to honour Indigenous self-determination, diversity, and rights.³⁰

Among other things it is following this course by producing educational videos,³¹ educational exercises, developed and involved itself in Living the 8th Fire facilitation workshops,³² hosting Indigenous art installations related to the church and spirituality, developing Indigenous justice themes as part of our lived biblical stories.

The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada** has also taken steps to implement the TRC's Calls to Action. Like the other churches noted so far it issued a statement that recognizes UNDRIP as a framework for reconciliation.³³ This statement outlined five ways in which this would proceed in their church: as treaty people, as an institution, as learners and educators, as advocates and as pastoral and spiritual care providers.³⁴ The treaty commitment recognizes "treaties as sacred covenants involving respect, commitments, and responsibilities by all parties." As an institution the ELCIC committed to "review its policies, programs, and practices in order to ensure they comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This will include a review of investment policy to ensure compliance with the principles of free, prior and informed consent." As learners and educators the ELCIC committed itself to national dialogues on reconciliation, and encouraged local congregations to do the same thing. Advocacy will follow calls from Indigenous leadership and spiritual care will involve "prayer, worship, scriptures, listening, empathy, spiritual care and theological reflection [to] support healing journeys."³⁵

As noted, **other churches and religious organizations** have also taken steps to respond to the TRC's Calls to Action. While time and space does not allow a thorough canvassing of their work, my study reveals their efforts are similarly striving for detail while placing these commitments within a broader spiritual framework. The Mennonites, Muslims, Jews, and other faith groups have also taken action to recognize the TRC Calls to Action and apply them in particular congregations.

LDS SUGGESTIONS

Given that this event is hosted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I thought I might give a few reflections about what our church could do in relation to the TRC Calls to Action.

The LDS 12th Article of Faith proclaims that “We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.” Further, “We do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion, (D&C 134:4)”

In Canada we can support the work of truth and reconciliation, and commit to its ongoing implementation through:

- Personally reading and responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to Action.
- As in our general humanitarian service, working with other churches to participate in their education, partnership and community outreach events related to Indigenous peoples
- Through the JustServe initiative, working with Indigenous groups and individuals to connect volunteers with opportunities to care for others and improve communities.
- Consider partnering with an Indigenous community in hosting some kind of service with our members, friends and neighbours related to indigenous issues.
- Taking this issue to Ward and Stake Coordinating Councils to set and achieve goals directed towards developing greater understanding of local Indigenous communities’ needs, aspirations and concerns.
- Hosting educational events related to Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, such as family history fairs, etc.
- Reviewing the 48th and 49th Calls to Action for churches (related to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Doctrine of Discovery as part of our efforts).

4) SELF-DETERMINATION AND RECONCILIATION

What are we to do? There are many answers in the political, legal, economic and social sphere which I teach and write about every day of my life. Without ignoring the importance of these avenues, I also believe we also need to apply the spiritual teachings from every faith community to help us address the tragedies which unfold on our reserves, and in our streets, every day, when it comes to Indigenous peoples across this land.

The teachings, sacrifice and grace of Jesus Christ are important for Christian churches in their quest for reconciliation. At 18 I was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to commit to living a life which recognizes this belief. In so doing, I also chose to follow the faith of my ancestors. When I joined the LDS church I learned our leaders encourage us to keep all the good we find in every tradition, culture and practice, and then add to it.³⁶ That is my baptismal commitment: to use my best efforts to take upon myself the name of Jesus Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments.

I believe in God, and I believe He cares about all his children today, and that He can help us revitalize our lives. We need the values he taught to guide our future paths – love, humility, honesty, kindness, bravery, respect and truth. These are the seven grandfather teachings of the Ojibwe people, and they are also the teachings inscribed throughout the Bible.

For Indigenous Christians there can be much that can be learned through the revitalization of the best of our Indigenous and Christian frameworks. This requires heeding the best voices of our ancestors, and seeking God's hand in our lives to heal and reconcile us to one another, and God's creations.

The scripture contains profound encouragement to take this path. Of course we will always need more than the scriptures to help us through. We need human reason, science, grace and continuing revelation to ensure we don't fall victim to the dead hand of mindless tradition. We need to ensure we pay attention to the noblest insights found in each faith and knowledge system. Spencer W. Kimball, one of the Prophets of my Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints said:

“...The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.

The Hebrew prophets [spoke of] the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel.

Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all people sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come.

....Our message therefore is one of special love and concern for the eternal welfare of all men and women, regardless of religious belief, race, or nationality, knowing that we are truly brothers and sisters because we are sons and daughters of the same Eternal Father.³⁷

¹ These government-funded, church-run schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development of Aboriginal children.

² My mother, father and sister live on the Cape Croker Indian Reserve, on the Bruce Peninsula on Georgian Bay, three hours north of Toronto. This is part of the larger territory which has been part of my mother's family home from a time beyond memory. We are Ojibwe and live as a people in this area, as well as being spread throughout Ontario, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. There are approximately 100,000 Ojibwe people that live in our ancient homelands, now divided by the US/Canadian border.

³ Perhaps not the most flattering label, but Champlain was no less subtle when commenting on our people he observed:

From this tribe we went on to make our camp in a village of Andatahouats, or, as we say High Hairs, who had come to station themselves near the Freshwater sea with the purpose of bartering with the Hurons and others on their return from trading from Quebec, and we were there for two days doing business with them.

...They lead a nomadic life, except that some of their villages plant Indian corn, and they are at war with another tribe called Assitagueronon, meaning Fire People...These are about 200 leagues, and more, distant from them. They go in bands into many regions and countries as far off as 400 leagues or more (so they told me), and there they trade with their goods and exchange them for furs, pigments, wampum and other rubbish.

⁴ Peter Jones's life is chronicled in Donald Smith, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). See also Peter Jones, *History of the Ojibway Indians with Especial Reference to their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1861).

⁵ Elizabeth Graham, *Medicine Man to Missionary: Missionaries as Agents of Change Among the Indians of Southern Ontario, 1784-1867* (Toronto: Peter Martin and Associates, 1975) at 19.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Anishinaabe people at time also formulated law based on living trees. One such example comes in a council at Detroit in 1773. In this case a Shawane chief named Tshwabame was speaking on behalf of Anishinaabe people who were accused of murdering several fur traders. In the course of his speech he recalled that when their British Father replaced their French Father at Detroit he "planted a Tree" so that whenever "any bad thing" should happen they could "assemble at s[aid] tree & talk together" and "try to moderate any difficulties", Speech of Tshwabame Shawanese & Minitowabe Chiefs, with Sixteen Sawinan Indians who brot in ye three Murderers of Pond &c., Detroit, 9-10 May 1773, Haldimand Add. 21,670: 42-45. I thank Mark Walters for bringing this reference to my attention.

⁸ In some sense, Peter was his Ojibwe we'eh, a powerful namesake for our family to take guidance from.

⁹ See http://books.google.ca/books?id=2SkEAAAAQAAJ&pg=PR10-IA1&lpg=PR10-IA1&dq=kegedonce+wesleyan&source=bl&ots=anQakbb4oB&sig=Bw0LF5CYwyM8veGt89Rymk_DZtM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=4xjQUu-7DZHwoATfsoEo&ved=0CEcQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=kegedonce%20wesleyan&f=false and <http://books.google.ca/books?id=IF0EAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA54&lpg=PA54&dq=kegedonce+wesleyan&source=bl&ots=nG1pKSczv&sig=xzKovUNcpYrb71YPH7GvsX-T4bE&hl=en&sa=X&ei=4xjQUu-7DZHwoATfsoEo&ved=0CDsQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=kegedonce%20wesleyan&f=false>

¹⁰ Irene Akiwenzie wrote about this couple:

"My mother was English, a white woman and My father was an Indian Chief. I was therefore exposed to the two cultures and found their thinking (slightly?) different. Mother's way was...so her family, all ten of us plus three step-brothers and four adopted orphans would have always enough to eat through the winter. Father's way was so that he would have enough to share with his People. Mother was not stingy but she wanted to be sure there was enough for her young ones. We often tell the story of an elderly native woman who came one day to see the "Chief" as my father was called. Her name was "Wah-see-ahse" and she was about five feet tall and quite chubby. She was taken into the Parlour and given tea and a lunch, as she had walked some seven miles. Father then called in my two teen age brothers and told

them to get a small potato bag and go up to the cellar and put some pork, potatoes, turnips and a couple of jars of Mother's preserves in it. Mother was working in the kitchen but she saw the boys pick up the small bag and asked them what they were going to do. They told her what Father had said. As it was late March and the bins in the cellar were becoming empty, Mother was a bit upset. So she said "leave that small bag and take that big brown sack. Fill it to the top and if she can carry it away she can have it all; if not she can leave it." When the boys filled the large bag and carried it into the parlour they told Father what Mamma had said. He translated it to the lady. She smiled and the boys put the bag down on the verandah steps. She took a small rope out of her pocket along with a leather head band. She tied the rope to the four corners of the bag and onto the leather head band, hoisted the bag so it rested on her stooped back and shoulders, waved to the Chief and trotted off on her seven mile trip home. Father always teased Mother about this incident of "sharing: for she shared more than he had intended to. She was finally becoming a "real Indian wife". Sharing is indeed, part of our culture."

¹¹ The United Church Apology says: "We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that we did not or would not hear, and how we have behaved as a church. As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority." See UNITED CHURCH SOCIAL POLICY POSITIONS, *Apology to Former Students of United Church Indian Residential Schools, and to Their Families and Communities* (1998) at <http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1998/a623>.

¹² <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=4>

¹³ Truth and Reconciliation Mandate at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7>

¹⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Mandate at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7>

¹⁵ <http://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Ecumenical-Statement-EN.pdf>.

¹⁶ <http://diocesemontreal.org/en/news/latest-news---en/reader/items/catholic-responses-to-truth-and-reconciliation-commission.html>

¹⁷ See A Catholic Response to Call to Action 48 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (On Adopting and Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) at

<http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/catholic%20response%20call%20to%20action%2048.pdf>

The response reiterates that the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations "has explicitly endorsed this Declaration on numerous occasions." <http://diocesemontreal.org/en/news/latest-news---en/reader/items/catholic-responses-to-truth-and-reconciliation-commission.html>

¹⁸ The "Doctrine of Discovery" and Terra Nullius: A Catholic Response

<http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/catholic%20response%20to%20doctrine%20of%20discovery%20and%20tn.pdf>

¹⁹ The "Doctrine of Discovery" and Terra Nullius: A Catholic Response

<http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/catholic%20response%20to%20doctrine%20of%20discovery%20and%20tn.pdf> :

1. We firmly assert that Indigenous people, created in the image and likeness of God our Creator, ought to have had their fundamental human rights recognized and respected in the past, and that any failure to recognize and respect their humanity and fundamental human rights past or present is to be rejected and resisted in the strongest possible way;
2. We firmly assert that there is no basis in the Church's Scriptures, tradition, or theology, for the European seizure of land already inhabited by Indigenous Peoples;
3. We reject the assertion that the principle of the first taker or discoverer, often describe today by the terms Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, could be applied to lands already inhabited by Indigenous Peoples;
4. We reject the assertion that the mere absence of European agricultural practices, technologies, or other aspects common to European culture, could justify the claiming of land as if it had no owner;
5. We reject the assertion that Europeans could determine whether land was used or occupied by Indigenous people without consulting those people

²⁰ <http://www.anglican.ca/tr/rfa/>

²¹ <http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/undrip-united-church-statement.pdf>

²² Ibid.

²³ <http://www.united-church.ca/tags/aboriginal>

²⁴ <http://presbyterian.ca/healing/>

²⁵ http://www.salvationarmy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/SA_Response_Action48.pdf

A. Accessibility: We believe that everyone should have access to basic rights, such as nutritious food, health care, education and economic opportunity

Identifying obstacles and seeking solutions is imperative to ensuring human rights are upheld.

B. Building Trust: Developing relationships of mutual respect with Indigenous peoples and groups is foundational. We will attempt to accomplish this by:

1. Celebrating the Indigenous presence and expression within our organization.

2. Engaging in effective and ongoing partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations.

3. Maintaining our commitment to reconciliation and walking in truth and accountability with Indigenous peoples.

C. Awareness and Education: We are committed to:

1. Increasing awareness and education of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through various presentation formats.

2. Continuing to foster attitudes and values upholding human rights.

D. Leadership Development: We will continue developing Indigenous leaders within our organization to provide guidance and leadership for Indigenous peoples.

E. Promoting Women's Equality: In our history as an organization, The Salvation Army has upheld and promoted the equality of women. We will continue to address the particular needs of Indigenous women by:

1. Continuing to promote and maintain women's rights.

2. Offering ongoing support with Indigenous women experiencing violence

²⁶ <http://quakerservice.ca/news/quaker-response-trc-call-action-48/>

²⁷ <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Doctrine-of-Discovery-minute-and-background-August-2013.pdf>

²⁸ <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/FPIC-factsheet-Nov-2013.pdf>

²⁹ <http://quakerservice.ca/news/quaker-response-trc-call-action-48/>

³⁰ <http://www2.crcna.org/site/uploads/uploads/UNDRIP/BOT-UNDRIP-statement2016.pdf>

³¹ The video was produced by the CRC's Centre for Public Dialogue, Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee, and Office of Social Justice. <https://www.crcna.org/news-and-views/truth-and-reconciliation-video-released>

³² <https://aboriginalministry.wordpress.com/workshops-landing/workshops/>

³³ ELCIC Statement on Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at <http://www.elcic.ca/Documents/StatementonCalltoAction48.pdf>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Keep all the good that you have, and let us bring to you more good." President George Albert Smith, quoted in *Sharing the Gospel with Others*, comp. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1948), 12-13.

³⁷ "Statement of the First Presidency regarding God's Love for All Mankind," Feb. 15, 1978.