



Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action # 48
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
The Presbyterian Church in Canada
March 29, 2016

When survivors of residential schools began to speak their truth, members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada started to understand the consequences of our involvement in running residential schools. Many members of the denomination attended the national, regional or community events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and witnessed the painful and courageous testimonies of survivors. These testimonies are sacred moments to be honoured.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Confession (1994) concerning the harm done to Indigenous children in the residential schools run by The Presbyterian Church in Canada ends with these words:

With God's guidance our Church will seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God's people.

With this Confession, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been guided to acknowledge the truth, to seek forgiveness and reconciliation and to contribute to building a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada acknowledges with gratitude the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Commission's 94 Calls to Action will challenge and guide The Presbyterian Church in Canada in its ongoing journey to reset right relations with Indigenous people.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada welcomes the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a framework for reconciliation.

Indigenous sisters and brothers from around the world were instrumental in writing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Their leadership has laid essential groundwork for the church and all institutions. We acknowledge with humility the challenges before us in gauging our progress on reconciliation. The church will continue on this journey with guidance from the Holy Spirit and from Indigenous people.

Call to Action 48 calls on organizations to ensure that their institutions, policies, programs and practices comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In the coming year, The Presbyterian Church in Canada will begin a process to assess how the church's structures can comply with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This will involve consultation with national committees in the church including the National Native Ministries Council.

The church's Healing and Reconciliation program is in its 10th year. The program focuses on helping Presbyterians build connections with Indigenous organizations and collaborate on initiatives that advance healing and reconciliation. The program supports a national network of local leaders committed to working toward reconciliation in their respective communities. They are encouraged and supported in informing and involving congregations across Canada about issues of concern to Indigenous people.

The church's General Assembly adopted a report on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in 2015 concerning church investments in resource companies. The church has written to these companies inquiring how FPIC influences their policies and practices. This is a part of the church's commitment to embed these principles in our own institution.

Call to Action 48 section 2 calls on organizations to *Respect Indigenous people's right to self-determination in spiritual matters consistent with Article 12: of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada heard many survivors ask what the churches are saying about Indigenous spiritual practices today given that the churches once told Indigenous children that their spiritual heritage was wrong and had to be abandoned. In January 2015, The Presbyterian Church in Canada released the *Statement on Aboriginal Spiritual Practices*. This Statement is based on *Living Faith*, a doctrinal document of the church, the church's 1994 Confession and a report entitled *Theological Framework for Aboriginal Spirituality*, adopted by the 2013 General Assembly.

First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples, before any encounter with Christianity, found meaning, spiritual benefit and the presence of the creator through life-giving Indigenous spiritual practices that have deeply rooted traditions...

It is not for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to validate or invalidate Aboriginal spiritualities and practices. Our church, however, is deeply respectful of these traditions. We acknowledge them as important spiritual practices through which Aboriginal peoples experience the presence of the creator God. In this spirit, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is committed to walking with Aboriginal people in seeking shared truth that will lead to restoring right relations.

The church respects Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination in spiritual matters. This is an important step in the church's journey to reconciliation. Support is provided to the church's three theological colleges so that candidates for ministry learn about the impact of residential schools and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Call to Action 48 section 3 calls on organizations to engage in ongoing public dialogue and actions to support the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

As a member of KAIROS/Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, The Presbyterian Church in Canada began informing Presbyterians about the Declaration in 2011 and joined with other churches in Ottawa in June, 2011 to acknowledge and welcome the decision by the Government of Canada to endorse the Declaration.

The Declaration is included in the Healing and Reconciliation Program's leadership training workshops so that members of our denomination understand that the Declaration is a framework for reconciliation.

Through the Healing and Reconciliation Program, funding was provided to an interfaith workshop about the Declaration in January 2016, in Calgary, AB. The key resource person was Doreen Spence, an Indigenous elder and a contributor to the Declaration. Similar initiatives are taking place elsewhere in Canada.

Copies of the Declaration will be given to all commissioners attending the General Assembly in June 2016. They will be asked to encourage their congregations to learn about the Declaration in partnership with Indigenous people in their communities.

The Declaration is the basis of a worship resource that will be available to all congregations.

A children's resource on the Declaration has been developed by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society in partnership with UNICEF, the Secretariat for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus. Summer camps run by The Presbyterian Church in Canada will be invited to include this resource in their activities.

The Call to Action 48 is being promoted on the church's web site and includes stories and examples from Presbyterians who are committed to living out the principles of the Declaration in their communities.

Call to Action 48 section 4 challenges organizations to issue a statement by March 31, 2016 on how church parties to the IRRSA and other faith groups, interfaith groups and social justice groups will implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada acknowledges its role in the colonization of Indigenous people and commits to examining the theological and ethical implications of the Doctrine of Discovery and other doctrines that asserted the superiority of one group of people over another.

Resetting our relationships with Indigenous people will take time and commitment. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is committed to working for justice in those areas of Canadian society where the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are shamefully obvious in our country: access to health care, education, clean water, housing, land, reasonably priced food, safety for girls and women.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides a clear and positive framework for reconciliation and The Presbyterian Church in Canada commits to using it to enhance our journey of healing and reconciliation with Indigenous people in Canada.