

# Making Connections

*Maya People of Guatemala  
and Aboriginal People of Canada*



by Faye Wakeling

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**The Church's Study 2007-2009  
The Presbyterian Church in Canada**

# Making Connections: Maya People of Guatemala and Aboriginal People of Canada

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Study 2007-2009

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## About the author

Faye Wakeling, an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada, worked for five years in Guatemala with the Maya women's organization, the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterians. Since returning to Canada in 2004, Faye has worked as interim ministry program staff at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre (a United Church theological college offering ecumenical training programs for First Nations people), near Beausejour, Manitoba. Faye remains committed to collective biblical reflection that begins with personal experiences, connects with each others' stories, and challenges God's people to deeper understandings and new relationships with one another and with God. Faye's passion continues to be with groups on the margins — to learn from them and seek with them God's vision. Faye and Pierre Goldberger are enjoying being back in Canada and spending time with their five children and grandchildren.

## About the cover photo

The *chuj'ubál* (chook-ew-bal) is the hand-woven shawl used by Guatemalan Maya mothers to carry their babies on their back. It is an example of the tradition of weaving patterns, symbols and colours that identifies their culture and tells the history of their people, their stories.

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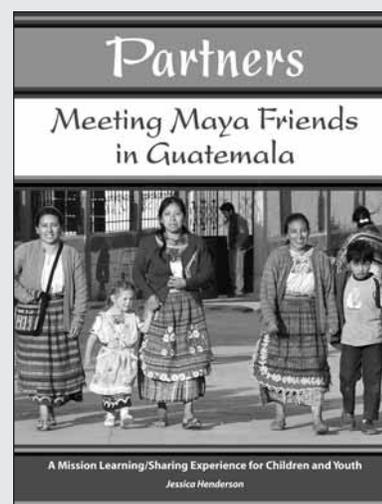
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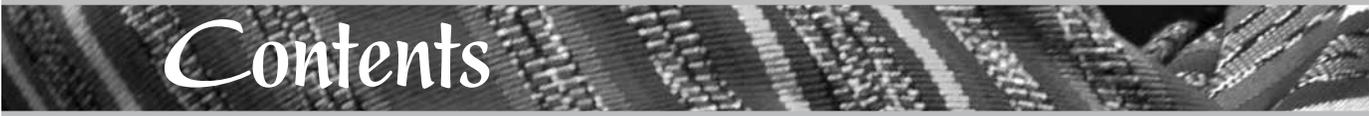
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**A children/youth study is available from  
The Book Room for \$10. Also available, a  
video or dvd, *Hola from Guatemala*, for \$10.**



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# Writer's Note

**M**y writing of this study has been inspired by the stories of the Maya people in Guatemala, by their commitment to the long-term struggle for justice, and by their hope that calls me back to the roots of faith.

I am deeply indebted to those who are engaged on a similar path among the Aboriginal communities and disenfranchised peoples in Canada, who have shared their stories to lead us to new understanding. I am very grateful to The Presbyterian Church in Canada for providing me with this opportunity to make connections between these Aboriginal peoples as we seek guidance in living faithfully in the global context.

I deeply appreciate the wisdom and support I have received throughout this process from Annemarie Klassen and, in the final stages, from the editorial, design and production team. I wish to thank Stephen Allen, Ken Kim, Karen Plater and Lori Ransom for their thoughtful input and suggestions.

I hope that this study will enlighten, provoke and be a tool for all those who may use it, in seeking God's kingdom.

## Note:

In this study I use the word "Maya" rather than "Mayan." While there is not consensus on this point, I chose to be consistent with the researchers and writers I know. Also, this method is consistent with the way Aboriginal people in Canada identify themselves (e.g. the "Cree" or the "Ojibway").

Women's group in Piedras Preciosas.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey

# Introduction

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's faithful engagement and walking with the Maya people of Guatemala are the roots of this study. It is a transforming experience to be a mission partner in the struggle for basic conditions for living in peace, dignity and freedom from terror. What a blessing to accompany the Maya people, to witness first-hand their faith in God's presence and guidance through times of great trouble and their thankfulness for each day as God's gift!

In this study we have the opportunity to seek new understandings of how to be church in our changing, complex world — through the sharing of stories from the Maya people of Guatemala, by connecting with experiences of Aboriginal people in Canada, and in relating to our own journeys of faith and struggle. At the core of this study are biblical stories of a people seeking to be builders of God's new creation and parables of Jesus turning our perceptions upside down (or "right side up" as an Aboriginal student once challenged me).

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## Land of Contrasts

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Guatemala is a country whose natural physical beauty of volcanic mountains, cascading waterfalls, exotic flowers and colourful birds contrast starkly with the human, and increasingly environmental, devastation wrought by oppressive, military regimes. The country has endured 500 years of oppression — almost three centuries as a Spanish colony until its independence in 1821, a variety of military and civilian governments, a 36-year civil war that officially ended in 1996, and encroaching global economic powers.

Throughout Guatemala's decades of violence and oppression, its indigenous Maya people suffered the greatest losses. In 1999 the Guatemalan truth and reconciliation commission (the Commission for Historical Clarification) reported that Maya accounted for an estimated 83% of the 200,000 civil war victims, that in the early 1980s the state waged a genocide campaign against the Maya population, and that 93% of the atrocities had been the work of state forces and related paramilitary groups.

The facts and statistics represent human loss, torture and fear. Even though the brutal 36-year civil war ended in December 1996 with the signing of the Peace Accords by the government and rebel forces, the people of Guatemala — particularly the Maya — continue to suffer a decade later. About half of Guatemala's population of 12.3 million are Maya. Without the dismantling of the military networks, a culture of violence continues. According to police records, killings of women and girls have been on the rise in the context of an increase in general violent deaths. Along with a flagrant abuse of human rights, there is continued corruption. The distribution of income remains highly unequal, with growing poverty and about 75% of the

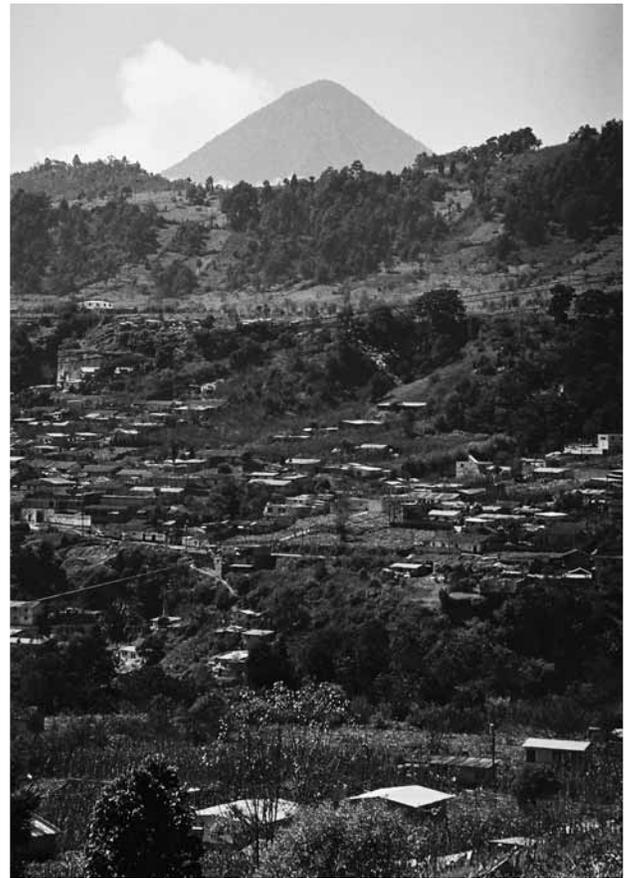


Photo: Iancerto Lopez

Santa Catarina Volcano

## Maya language and culture

The Maya language and culture are in fact comprised of a number of cultures and 23 officially recognized languages. Some of the storytellers in this study will refer to specific Maya cultural groups. These include: Quiche, Kaqchikel, Mam and Kekchi. While Spanish is not the first language of our Maya partners, it is the most widely spoken official language in Guatemala. Sometimes study participants are invited to speak or sing in Spanish. This is meant as an opportunity to act in solidarity with our Maya brothers and sisters. For more information, see “Tips on Spanish Pronunciation” on page 9.

population living below the poverty line. Among the poor, the Maya are represented disproportionately with about 87% in the poorest sector. UNICEF estimates that 75,000 children are severely malnourished. In 2001 the official unemployment rate including underemployment was approximately 35%. Two-thirds of arable land is owned by 2% of the population. As poverty increases and the effects of the global economy drive peasants off the land, more and more men, young and old, are forced to leave their region to seek work to support their families. Guatemala’s leaders remain unwilling to respect the commitments of the Peace Accords, which would begin to address the basic needs of the indigenous majority for health, education and respect.

Today the Maya people, and in particular Maya women, experience the greatest day-to-day hardships. Maya women continue to be discriminated against and marginalized on three accounts: race, poverty and gender. The majority of Maya women have not had the opportunity to learn to read and write. Most of them have no access to land and no place or power in church or government structures.

At the same time, the Maya people freely offer hospitality to the visitor. In their homes and communities there are always smiling faces and the sounds of laughter. And the people have such hope — they recognize and celebrate the importance of the smallest signs of change. Women, who never had the opportunity to go to school, rejoice that their daughters and sons are learning to read. In spite of increasing violence in their country today, they talk about their freedom to speak, their freedom to be without curfews and to go out from their homes in the evening, and their freedom to gather together with groups of friends without the fear that they experienced through the 36 long years of war.

(Sources: Amnesty International; CIA The World Factbook; United Nations Development Fund for Women; United Nations Development Program)

## Land of Stories

The bold, beautiful colours and exquisite designs of Maya weavings are visible throughout Guatemala. Maya women are seen with their back-strap looms in front of their homes, along the roadside and in the marketplace, weaving beautiful creations that reflect the splendour of nature’s vibrant colours. Through this tradition the Maya people transmit their history.

The woman’s *huipil* (traditional woven blouse) and man’s *chaqueta* (jacket) are different in every Maya village, with interwoven patterns, symbols and colours that identify the history of their people and the stories of the 23 Guatemalan indigenous Maya cultures and languages.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey

The hand-woven shawl used by mothers to carry their baby on their back is another example of traditional weaving that is unique to each Maya culture. In this study the Maya woven shawl will become a symbol for the life experiences of Aboriginal partners in Guatemala and in Canada, and for the way this study will weave the stories of their lives into our new understandings of our partnerships with them (see “Story Stoles,” page 8).

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## How to Use This Study

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The underlying themes of the six sessions are:

- Human rights and empowerment
- Poverty and power
- Water as a sacred gift
- Spirituality
- Ways of learning and knowing
- Solidarity and hope

In each session participants will have the opportunity to pray, study scripture, reflect, sing, hear stories from Aboriginal people — both Guatemalan and Canadian — and respond.

The study is designed for groups to gather for six 60-90 minute sessions with members sharing leadership (see box “Shared Leadership”). The optional suggestions and ideas for further learning that are provided in the sessions can assist groups who wish to extend the study over a longer period, proceeding at their own pace.

Congregations that are interested in these themes and in learning more about our Aboriginal partners in Guatemala and Canada, but are unable to hold a group study, are invited to use parts of the study in ways that suit their particular situation and membership. In the past, some church leaders have used such a study as a resource for short meditations at the beginning of a meeting of Session or a mission committee, for example, or for part of a Sunday worship; prayers, reflections and stories are sometimes used with young people; or excerpts from stories or the text in sidebars might be used in church bulletins or newsletters as teaching moments about mission. The hope is that the study will be noted as the source, and people will be encouraged to learn more by reading online or obtaining a copy of the study for themselves.

Each session begins and builds on the experiences of our Guatemalan partners. Maya women and their insights and faith will often lead us through biblical study. Through reflections, stories and actions, the study encourages users to make connections with Aboriginal people in Canada.

Through this study we can share the belief that God’s promise will be fulfilled, that God’s kingdom of justice will come, that the Aboriginal people of Guatemala, as in Canada and other countries, will be lifted up and live in dignity. Indeed, through this study we will share a common hope and patient faith in the struggle for God’s justice. In this way I hope each of us will strengthen our understanding of the challenges we face in living out our mission at home and abroad “to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).

### Canadian Aboriginal languages

*The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* says that there are 11 distinct North American Indian language families in Canada as well as Inuktitut and its dialects and Michif, a Metis language. In these language families, there are between 53 and 70 separate languages. While Cree, Inuktitut and Ojibway are the most widely spoken Aboriginal languages in Canada, there are at least 11 others that are still spoken by a significant number of people.

### Shared Leadership

Often participants share the leadership of mission studies, taking turns each session. For each session, one or more people take responsibility for bringing the necessary supplies and information. Occasionally, some preparation is required. In all six sessions, provide participants with Bibles, copies of *The Book of Praise* (1997) and copies of the opening and closing prayers. True to the oral tradition of storytelling among our Aboriginal partners, we recommend that participants listen while stories are read or re-told by one person. This study book can be passed back and forth or copies of the stories can be provided to the readers.

## Story Stoles

Since the Maya woven shawl, the *chuc'ubál* (chook-ew-bal) is an integral part of this study, a suggested response is the creation of a "Story Stole" by each participant. Historically, stoles have had a liturgical meaning in Protestant churches as they were worn only by the minister. However, consistent with our reformed tradition's belief in "the priesthood of all believers," this study gives each participant the opportunity to make and wear a stole whose design and colours will be a reminder of the partnerships, stories and expressions of hope that are the focus of this study.

Each session has a theme, a colour and images that can be used by participants in making their stoles. The purpose of the activity is for participants to "weave" into their stole something from their learning experience in each session.

The activity begins in Session One with everyone choosing a blank stole from a variety of soft fabric pieces (16cm x 1.5m or 6in. x 80in.). These might be cut from old blankets, sheets or drapes. Variety in colour and pattern is encouraged. Participants will begin decorating and personalizing their stoles using the supplies provided: scissors, fabric glue, needles and colourful threads, yarns, fabric pieces, buttons, beads, feathers and fabric markers/paints. Encourage participants to approach their task with a sense of leisure so that they continue to add to it over all six sessions. However, if a person joins the group in the middle of the study, it is an activity that can begin in a later session.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey

# Spanish Pronunciation Tips

All five Spanish vowels — a, e, i, o, u — are basically pronounced in a consistent way in every word. If there is an accent mark on a vowel, then that vowel is to be stressed.

Almost every consonant is always pronounced separately and pronounced much like in English.

However, if you want to begin learning to speak Spanish, begin by noting these main exceptions:

- c** is pronounced before a, o, u or a consonant like the k in English; before e and i like s in English
- ch** is pronounced like the English ch in child. (coche, Chile, mucho, ...)
- ge** is pronounced like the English ey in hey (geografía).
- gi** is pronounced like the English word he but not as strong (giro).
- gui** is pronounced like the English g and the Spanish i. (guiar)
- gü** is pronounced like the English g in guy and oo in food.
- h** in the beginning of a word, it is silent.
- hia** the h is pronounced like the English h in he and the Spanish a. Do not pronounce the i. (hiato)
- hie** the h is pronounced like the English ye in yellow and the Spanish e. Do not pronounce the i. (hielo)
- j** is pronounced like the English h in hat or hey or hoe (bajo) but not that strong.
- k** is pronounced like the English k in key
- l** is pronounced by placing your tongue on your teeth to make this letter.
- ñ** is pronounced like the English ny in canyon.
- qu** is pronounced like the English k in key
- r** is pronounced like the English dd in the word ladder. (crema, harina, oro, ...)
- s** s, z, and c before e or i is pronounced like the s in sing. (vaso, cima, zapato, ...)
- v** is always pronounced at the beginning of a word like the English b.
- x** when between vowels it is like the English gs in eggs; when before a consonant, like the English s.
- y, ll** in most countries it is pronounced like the English y in yes. (oye, llama, bella, ...) When it stands alone, it is pronounced like the English i in thing. (hoy, y, muy, ...)
- z** is pronounced like the English s.

# Session One

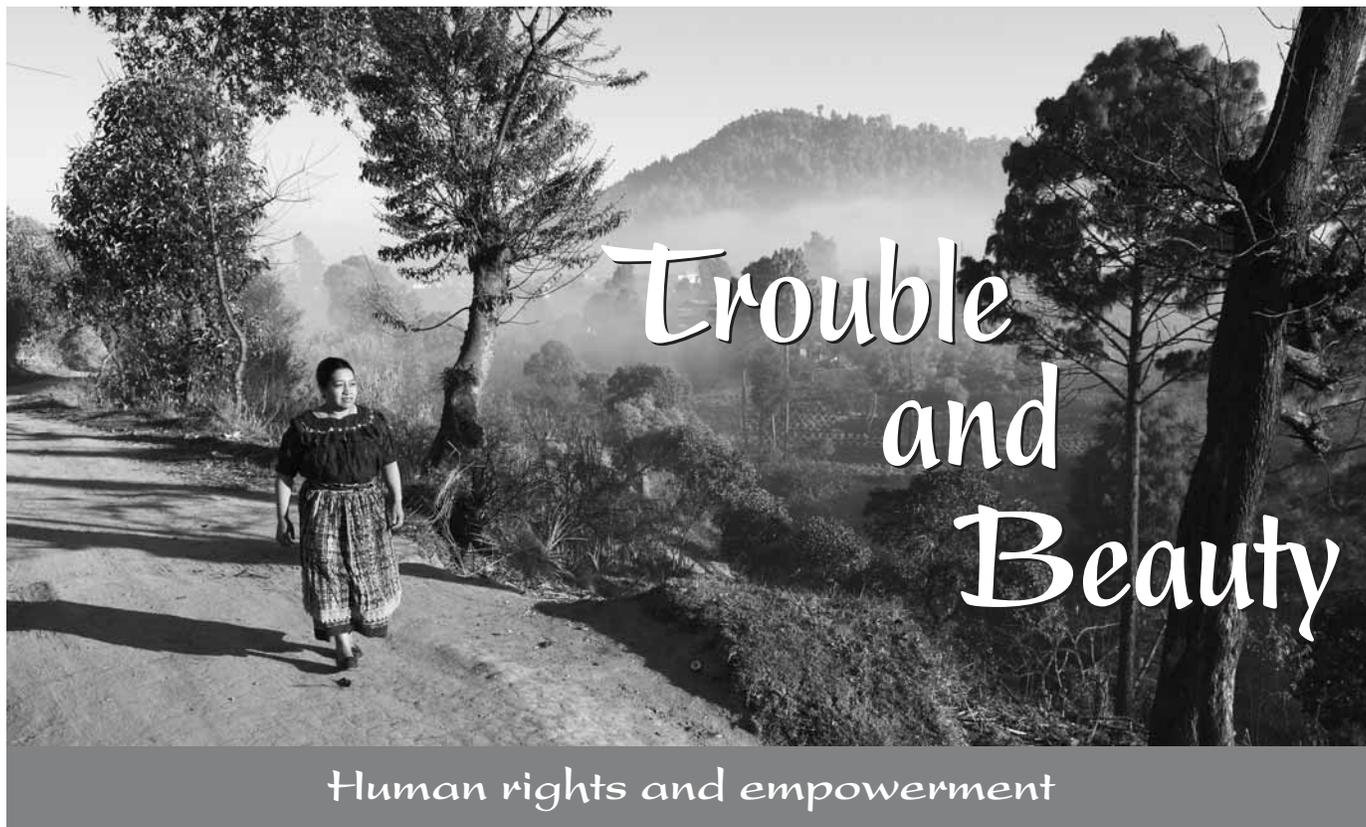


Photo: Paul Jeffrey

## Purposes

1. To begin learning about Guatemala and the Maya people.
2. To listen to stories from our mission partners about their struggles.
3. To make connections with the challenges that face Aboriginal and marginalized people in Canada.

## Materials

- Read information on “Shared Leadership” on page 7.
- A piece of colourful woven cloth (from Guatemala if possible, perhaps from a Fair Trade shop) and a central table.
- Pictures of Guatemala cut out from a photocopy of the centrefold pictures. Note that additional pictures can be downloaded from the photo gallery on the church’s website [www.presbyterian.ca](http://www.presbyterian.ca).
- Bring copies of the study’s “Introduction” (pages 5-7) and the map of Central America (page 17).
- Slips of paper and pencils.
- Option: Borrow the DVD/video *Precarious Peace*. See page 71 “For Further Study.”
- Flipchart, markers, tape, copies of Canadian news magazines, local newspapers and a copy of “The Aboriginal News” on page 18.
- Materials for making “Story Stoles”: a variety of soft fabric pieces (16cm x 1.5m or 6in. x 80in.) one for each participant, scissors, fabric glue, needles and colourful threads, yarns, fabric pieces, buttons, beads and fabric markers/paints.
- Review the optional suggestions in the “Responding” section and choose which ones the group will consider, bringing the necessary information and materials.

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# 1 Opening

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Welcome participants, giving opportunity as necessary for people to introduce themselves. Review the purposes for this session (as outlined above). Begin by reading the following prayer:

Mighty and tender God,  
voice of the voiceless,  
power of the powerless;  
we praise you for your vision  
of a community of wholeness,  
a realm of peace,  
in which all who hunger and thirst are nourished,  
in which the stranger is welcomed,  
the hurting are healed, and the captives set free.  
Guide us by your truth and love  
until we and all your people  
make manifest your reign of justice and compassion.  
Amen.  
(Anonymous)

Place the woven material on the central table. Set out the study's front cover picture of the Maya woman carrying her child in a *chuj'ubál* and read aloud the following:

*In the Quiche\* culture of the Guatemalan Mayas in the western highlands, mothers carry their babies on their backs in a hand-woven shawl called a chuj'ubál ("chook ew bal"). In the distinctly woven coloured lines of this cloth are the symbols of the unswerving faith and hope of Maya people who know that God walks with them. In the flaming red colours in the weaving of the chuj'ubál that holds the baby close to her mother's body, we see the red of passion, fire, warmth, life, blood and suffering. It has been said that "God carries the world in a chuj'ubál."*

\*Quiche is one of the Maya cultural groups.

Set out the coloured pictures of Guatemala and then say:

*Our sacred dream is to say  
our people are weavers —  
a people who have woven history  
with our hunger, sacrifice, and blood.  
(Words of Rigoberta Menchú)*

## Rigoberta Menchú

Rigoberta Menchú is a Guatemalan Quiche whose family lived and worked in poor conditions on a cotton plantation. She never had a chance to go to school. Members of her own family, including her parents, were killed during the civil war. At 21 years of age Rigoberta, afraid for her own life, fled to Mexico and people there helped and encouraged her. In an effort to bring about changes for her people, she became a human rights activist and writer, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. At the time of writing, Rigoberta is a candidate in the November 2007 presidential election in Guatemala, running against a former Army general involved in the civil war atrocities.

## Children's Rights

The women are studying human rights and identifying the needs and rights of children. One group identified "The Right of children to go to school." Human rights for children and citizens of all ages are beautifully expressed in the Constitution of Guatemala, in the Peace Accords and in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. But how do we speak of rights where there are no resources to fulfil them or no will by the state to meet basic needs for survival?

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## 2 Introducing activity: Trouble and beauty

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Refer to the map of Central America (page 17). Point out Guatemala's location and size relative to its neighbours. Indicate that what the map does not show is what we will come to learn — that Guatemala is a country both of "trouble and beauty." Ask everyone to think about what they know about Guatemala and its people. Then invite them to read the author's "Introduction" to the study looking for descriptions of "beauty" and of "trouble."

Invite participants to choose a picture or print a description on a slip of paper that refers to either Guatemala's "beauty" or "trouble." In turn, place the picture or slip of paper on the woven

## Trouble and Beauty

*By these labouring wings  
we have come thus far  
to this place in the wind  
where we see trouble and beauty.*

The song lyrics of “Trouble and Beauty” by songwriter and social activist, Carolyn McDade, capture the contrasts, longing and hope in the lives of Guatemala’s Maya people. Why do you think a song with this title came to mind for this study? What songs come to your mind? How might the song title reflect the experiences of Canadian Aboriginal people?

(The song “Trouble and Beauty” is on McDade’s 1986 CD, *This Tough Spun Web: Songs of Global Struggles and Solidarity*. Used with permission. To order Carolyn McDade’s CDs go to <http://www.carolynmcdademusic.com>)

cloth on the central table, saying either “Guatemala, a land of beauty” or “Guatemala, a country of trouble,” as appropriate.

**Option:** Watch the first 10 minutes of the DVD/video *Precarious Peace*, stopping with the English subtitles “That day was very difficult for us. There was nothing we could do.” This will provide a brief visual and audio introduction to the land, people and challenges facing the Maya people in Guatemala. Note that some scenes from the civil war are gruesome. (For information about this movie, see the section “For Further Study” on page 71.) As you watch the clip, note the aspects of beauty and trouble. Take a few minutes to share these observations.

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### 3 Considering our context: Canada as a country of trouble and beauty

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In many ways Canada is also a mixture of trouble and beauty. As in Guatemala, natural geographic wonders are found in abundance and a diverse population provides a rich range of cultural practices and artistic endeavours. However, there are also situations of poverty, abuse, injustice and need. Environmental concerns, a growing gap between the rich and the poor, and relations between different groups of people are just some of the issues that we have in common.

Set out the news magazines, copies of local newspapers, a copy of “The Aboriginal News” (pages 18-19), slips of paper and pencils. Print the word “Canada” on the centre of a sheet of newsprint. Ask group members to cut out pictures and headlines that portray something of Canada’s “trouble” and “beauty” or write some phrases on slips of paper. Ask participants, in turn, to tape a picture, headline or phrase somewhere around the word “Canada,” identifying it as an example of “beauty” or “trouble.”

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### 4 Hearing a story from Scripture

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Stories have power to convey truth, to encourage action, and to build connections between people. Jesus was a great storyteller, often using parables; and the gospel writers continued the story-telling tradition in their accounts of Jesus’ ministry. To understand the impact and challenge of Jesus’ words and actions, we need to think about the cultural and religious practises of his time.

Begin with one person reading or telling the story from Luke 13:10-17. Verses 10-13 tell the story of Jesus healing a bent-over woman.

In the synagogue in Jesus’ time, women were separated from the men by barriers. Yet Jesus looked out and saw the suffering of this woman. Men did not speak to women in public, yet Jesus spoke directly to her. Men, and particularly a Rabbi, did not touch women in public, yet Jesus crossed beyond the dividing barrier to place his hands on the bent-over woman ... “and she stood up.” It is not surprising that the officials of the synagogue denounced Jesus for this healing, using the pretext of Sabbath laws. It is no wonder that the people rejoiced over Jesus’ compassion and healing powers that set the woman free.

## Discussion:

1. What surprises you in this encounter?
2. Share a story you have experienced or witnessed of women “standing up.”

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## 5 Hearing partner stories

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Invite three participants to read aloud or re-tell in their own words one of the following stories.

### Story 1

The Maya women are sitting in a circle with babies on their backs and small children on the earth floor of their church in a remote village in Guatemala. They are thinking about Jesus’ healing of the woman “bent over” for eighteen years as told in Luke 13. Slowly the women begin to speak of the burdens that weigh them down — the constant struggle for survival, the lack of opportunity to learn to read or to own land, and the marginalization of women in the church. At the close of the session, each woman in turn was called (in Spanish), as from Jesus: “*levantate*,” meaning “stand up.” Even those who had never spoken before in a group stood up to share how this passage was a sign of hope for them. It was so moving to see their determination, and yet agonizing to see how hard it was for them to speak.

### Story 2

Josefina Inay is one of two ordained Maya women pastors in the Presbyterian Church of Guatemala. When she looks back on her life-work, she speaks of her “life journey to find a way forward as a woman, to confront the many obstacles and adversities, always putting confidence in God to find the way.” Like the majority of Maya women, Josefina did not have the opportunity to go to school as a child, but her inability to read has not stopped her from teaching children and animating women’s groups. Each night her minister husband would read biblical texts to help her prepare to teach the following day and much later in life she learned to read with his help. During the most violent times of terror, kidnappings and assassinations during the civil war, Josefina and her husband resisted being paralyzed by fear. They claimed openly that all human beings are children of God and no one had the right to take a life that is sacred. Because of their stand and work in the church, they were forced to flee their Lake Atitlan community and were welcomed by the local



Photo: Claire Borel Christen

Josefina Inay

#### Josefina Speaking about Maya human rights

“Many of them put us down because we’re indigenous. They say we’re not equal to the Ladinos [mixed Amerindian-Spanish] but that’s not what God says. When God created us we were made all the same and one God made us all. So we shouldn’t discriminate against anyone... God gave us the earth, the land, all the plants and fruit to use and care for, unfortunately the others haven’t seen it like that. They’ve wanted to get ahead and they’ve taken away our land... and put us down. They look at us strangely and they say we’re not worth anything because we’re indigenous. But that’s not true.”

(Josefina Inay in *The Wounds of Manuel Saquic — Biblical Reflections from Guatemala* by Jim Manley, United Church Publishing House, Toronto, 1997, page 60)

## The Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterials

The Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterials is one of the partners in Guatemala of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This organization of Maya Presbyterian women provides a network for more than 3000 indigenous women. It helps the women to organize Bible studies (like the one described in Story 1), education workshops, literacy programs, health care services, income generating activities and training sessions on women's rights. The Ministry of Women Program promotes and strengthens women through theological education, leadership training, the recuperation of the values of Maya spirituality, human rights education and raising consciousness of gender issues within the church and society. The training helps women to confront the prejudices they face and to increase their level of participation and leadership within the family, church and community. At the 1998 Synod, women were finally given the right to become ministers.

presbytery in the Chimaltenango region. Josefina works with the Maya women in the surrounding villages. She is past-president of the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterials and continues to give leadership on the Board of Directors as a very respected, wise elder.

## Story 3

I lost my talk  
The talk you took away.  
When I was a little girl  
At Shubenacadie school.  
You snatched it away:  
I speak like you  
I think like you  
I create like you  
The scrambled ballad, about my world.  
Two ways I talk  
Both ways I say,  
Your way is more powerful.  
So gently I offer my hand and ask,  
Let me find my talk  
So I can teach you about me.

(*Rita* by Rita Joe, a Mi'kmaq poet, writing about attending the residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, <http://www.presbyterian.ca> — see Healing and Reconciliation.)

Carmelina Sam, an organizer for the Fraternidad de Presbiteriales Mayas, helps lead a women's group in a Bible Study and discussion.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey

## Engage in group discussion:

1. *The Message* translation of Luke 13:13 describes the afflicted woman as “so twisted and bent over with arthritis that she couldn’t even look up.” Afflictions other than physical ones can hold people down. What has afflicted the Maya women like Josefina Inay? What afflicts and holds down people in your community?
2. The context of the Luke story is that Jesus has spoken to a woman in the synagogue, touched her and engaged in healing on the Sabbath. In so doing he has run up against a powerful system of oppression. What systems of oppression are evident in Josefina’s story?
3. How has the Fraternidad enabled women to “stand up”? What difference do you think this has made to individuals and their communities?
4. In Canada, many Aboriginal people have felt oppressed. What systems of oppression do you see in Rita’s story? How does it connect with Josefina’s story?
5. Where else in Canada might you find experiences of oppression?

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## 6 Responding

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### Story stoles

Lay out all the lengths of fabrics, the undecorated stoles. Read over the box “Story Stoles” on page 8. Invite everyone to choose their stole and reflect on the themes, images and symbols of this session. Set out all the materials and invite participants to begin their stoles while reflecting on the information and issues raised in this session.

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## Additional Options

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### Empowering Maya women

Projects in the *Something Extra* booklet (see page 70 “For Further Study”) provide resources for workshops for members of the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterians in Guatemala. Read about these projects and plan to raise funds from amongst yourselves and members of your congregation. What information will you share about the Maya people and the Fraternidad?

### Storytelling

Storytelling is important in many cultures around the world as a way of transmitting a community’s cultural heritage from one generation to another, and thereby empowering people. Read the article “Grandmother Moon” on page 19. In what ways is the tradition of Grandmother Moon reflected in the Guatemala stories of the Fraternidad and Josefina Inay? The “Sisters in Spirit” campaign is one example of an expressed need to stand up with Aboriginal women. Plan how you could find opportunities to re-tell the stories of this session and give people in your congregation an opportunity to stand up with Aboriginal people and work toward reducing their oppression.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey

## Movie viewing

Plan a special gathering to view the entire movie *Precarious Peace* and to discuss it using the study guide.

## Removing barriers, building bridges

At its meeting in 2006, The General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada approved plans for a Healing and Reconciliation ministry. At the heart of this new ministry is the belief that society will be transformed for the better when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people develop a new understanding of each other and build a new relationship founded on mutual respect and love of neighbour. Reflect on the situation of Aboriginal communities in your region. Brainstorm some ideas about how your congregation can reach out and build a relationship with an Aboriginal community. What group in your church might be interested in this initiative? Ideas, guidance and possibly seed funding are available from Justice Ministries at 1-800-619-7301.

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## 7 Closing

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Gather around the table with the woven cloth and pictures. Have one person re-read (or re-tell) Luke 13:10-13. Jesus calls us to “stand up,” free of oppressive burdens. Stand up together (if you are able) and pray in unison:

O Great Spirit,  
whose voice is heard in the soft breeze  
and whose breath gives life to the world,  
we need your strength and wisdom.  
May we walk in beauty. May our eyes  
ever behold the red and purple sunset.  
Make us wise so that we may understand  
what you have taught us.  
Help us learn the lessons you have hidden  
in every leaf and rock.  
Make us always ready to come to you  
with clean hands and straight eyes  
so that when life fades, as the fading sunset,  
our spirits may come to you  
without shame. Amen.  
(From the *1981 World Day of Prayer* worship service,  
written by North American Aboriginal women)

Sing together verses one and five of the hymn “In suffering love” #696 in *The Book of Praise* (1997).

### Go Forth:

Go now and carry your faith and spirituality into the world,  
all the time asking for God’s deliverance —  
*from the cowardice that dares not face new truth,*  
*from the laziness that is contented with half-truth, and*  
*from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth.*  
*Good Lord, deliver [us]. Amen.*

(Italicized words are Kenyan and anonymous. See #397 in *The Book of Praise*, 1997.)

# Map of Central America



# The Aboriginal

## **Mistawasis Memorial Presbyterian Church**

is working towards restoring relationships and providing a number of services to the Mistawasis First Nation in rural Saskatchewan. These services are helping to restore dignity and to create relationships with Aboriginal people based on love, caring and compassion. The Mistawasis community numbers about 2,090 residents, of whom about 50% are under the age of 25. There is a need to help young people find hope and opportunities for the future. Plans are in the works, in cooperation with the Mistawasis Band Council, to launch a Youth Consultative Process — a program of encouragement and empowerment for youth.



Photo: Courtesy of J. Henderson

## **Life Expectancy of Canadian Aboriginal People**

The gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people has decreased from 10.8 years in 1980. But Aboriginal people still live on average 6.6 years less than non-Aboriginal Canadians.

**The Cariboo Ministry** has one of the largest children's ministries among Presbyterian churches in British Columbia. Much work is being done with children of the Nazko First Nation. A Bible class takes place weekly on the Nazko reserve, offering games, healthy snacks, crafts, Bible stories, praise songs and prayer in a way that also celebrates and honours the children's Carrier culture. The church also offers a vacation Bible school and a "Talking Circle" for teen girls.



Photo: Shannon Bell-Wyominga

## **Canadian Aboriginal people are closely connected to the land.**

As they explain, care of creation is a *way of being* for Aboriginal people. They perceive the Creator's spirit alive in all natural things. Taking seriously the gift of creation, they live mindful that creation belongs to God. Aboriginal care of creation is a way of being that is humble and respectful — to the extent that in decision-making, efforts are made to consider creation's needs even seven generations into the future.

# News

## Negotiations Are Ongoing

273 specific land claims have been settled between the Government of Canada and Aboriginal people. Most often these concern First Nations that signed treaties. Over 400 other specific claims have been filed with the government and 120 of these are under active negotiation.

## Higher Post-Secondary Enrolments

Approximately 25,000 Aboriginal students are enrolled in post-secondary education. While the gap is closing, the post-secondary attainment rate remains 23% among Aboriginal people compared with 38% among the non-Aboriginal population.

## Grandmother Moon

Storytelling is a vital tradition among the Aboriginal peoples and cultures, including the Maya of Guatemala and the Aboriginal people of Canada. Stories are used to teach Aboriginal values and culture. Like the stories from our Bible, these traditional stories are told over and over again at ceremonial gatherings. The Rev. Amanda Currie, writing for the Healing and Reconciliation program of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, says that

*"Stories bridge the gap between generations. Aboriginal Elders have a special role in their communities to tell the stories of their ancestors to subsequent generations. Elders model the important traditional value of respect. They know that even the youngest children do not have to be told what a story means. They recognize the power of stories: how different elements of a story will speak to different individuals, in different ways, depending upon the individual's place in the circle of life. Members of the community will hear the stories over and over again throughout their lives, and as they acquire different experiences, their understanding of what the story is about will change, even though the stories themselves do not change."*

One storytelling tradition refers to Grandmother Moon. The story of Grandmother Moon is a powerful teaching about Aboriginal women's special connection to our Grandmothers, those who have gone before us, who have now passed into the Spirit world. Grandmother Moon provides direction, strength, knowledge and wisdom for women to take their place in their families, communities and beyond.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) uses a depiction of Grandmother Moon as the logo for the "Sisters in Spirit" campaign. This campaign was established in 2004 to raise public awareness of the violence faced by Aboriginal women, and to establish a federal fund to support research and education related to this issue. Churches and church organizations are invited to participate. More information is available from



Native Women's Association web site <http://www.nwac-hq.org/> or

KAIROS <http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/times/kt041018.asp#r1> or Justice Ministries at 1-800- 619-7301 or 416-441-1111

# Session Two



*Poverty and power*

Photo: Paul Jeffrey

## **Purposes**

1. To learn about poverty and power in Canada and among the Maya people of Guatemala.
2. To discern Jesus' message to the poor and oppressed, making connections with Aboriginal people in Guatemala and Canada, and those who live in poverty in our country.
3. To listen to mission partners' stories of working for change.

## **Materials**

- Read information on "Shared Leadership" on page 7.
- A piece of colourful woven cloth (from Guatemala if possible) and a central table.
- A loaf of unsliced bread (or tortillas or bannock, if available) and a cob of corn on a plate or in a bread basket.
- Flipchart and markers
- Glue stick and newsprint sheet on which is drawn a large triangle shape (pyramid).
- Cut-out faces or figures (from newspaper, magazines, photos, or drawn freehand) of people from all walks of life in Canada to represent people of different ages and abilities, cultural and family backgrounds, and different economic levels. Label them on the back. Include at least one: Aboriginal person, landed immigrant, child, youth, senior, unemployed person, single mother, disabled person, politician, CEO, professional, blue collar worker, homeless person, professional athlete, farmer, fisherman, artist.
- The "Story Stoles" begun last session and the materials for adding to them: a variety of soft fabric pieces (16cm x 1.5m or 6in. x 80in.) one for each participant, scissors, fabric glue, needles and colourful threads, yarns, fabric pieces, buttons, beads and fabric markers/paints.
- Review the optional suggestions in the "Responding" section and choose which ones the group will consider, bringing the necessary information and materials.

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# 1 Opening

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Welcome participants, giving opportunity as necessary for people to introduce themselves. Review the purposes for this session (as outlined above). Picture Maya women at their looms weaving and then read this prayer poem about bringing about God's reign of love for all.

We'll weave a love that holds the despised,  
the stranger who wanders, the focus of lies.  
We'll stand sure as mountains with earth's victimized,  
Together, my friends,  
we'll weave on, we'll weave on.  
A love that heals, friend, that bends, friend,  
that rising and turning then yields friend,  
like a mountain to rain, or frost in the spring,  
or darkness that turns with the dawn.  
It's by turning, turning, turning my friend,  
by turning that love moves on.

(Lyrics by Carolyn McDade from "Song of Community" on the CD *Rain Upon Dry Land*, 1984. Used with permission. To order Carolyn McDade's CDs go to [www.carolynmcdademusic.com](http://www.carolynmcdademusic.com).)

Place the woven material on the central table. Set out the study's front cover picture of the Maya woman carrying her child in a *chuj'ubál* and read aloud the following:

*In the Quiche culture of the Guatemalan Mayas in the western highlands, mothers carry their babies on their backs in a hand-woven shawl called a chuj'ubál ("chook ew bal"). In the distinctly woven coloured lines of this cloth are the symbols of the unswerving faith and hope of Maya people who know that God walks with them. In the purple colours in the weaving of the chuj'ubál that holds the baby close to her mother's body we see the purple of anticipation, longing, birth, change, death and new beginnings.*

The Maya people consider bread and corn as gifts from God. Place the bread and corn on the table. These are symbols of God's gift of life meant to be available and shared by all.

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## 2 Introducing activity: How is wealth distributed in Canada?

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Turn to a partner and briefly discuss the following:

Imagine that ten chairs represent all of Canada's wealth (i.e., each chair represents 10%). Now imagine that Canada's population is represented by ten people. How do you think the chairs — that is Canada's wealth — would be allocated to those people?

After sharing your discussions with the group, look below for the answer.

How wealth is distributed in Canada:

1 person has 6 chairs to sit on, or to lie across! (10% of our population has 60% of the wealth.)

1 person has 1 1/2 chairs to sit upon. (10% of our population has 15% of the wealth.)

1 person has 1 chair to sit upon. (10% of our population has 10% of the wealth.)

1 person has about 5/8 of a chair to sit upon (10% of our population has 6.9% of the wealth.)

6 people have 1 chair to share! (60% of our population has 10% of the wealth.)

If there are 10 or more people in your group, have them demonstrate this representation of the distribution of wealth in Canada.

(Source: 2005 Statistics Canada Survey of Financial Security)

### Canadian Aboriginal People and Poverty

- Aboriginal people in urban areas are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as non-Aboriginal people.
- 52.1% of all Aboriginal children are poor.
- Only 8% of the 25-34 age group of Aboriginal people have a completed university degree, while 28% of all Canadians do.
- 68% of Aboriginal youth are in school, compared to 83% of non-Aboriginal youth.
- Median pre-tax income of Aboriginal people is \$13,526, or 61% of the median income for all Canadians (\$22,120).

(Source: Canadian Council on Social Development)

## Poverty in Guatemala

Go around the circle taking turns reading the following paragraphs.

**Reader 1:** In Guatemala the poverty and inequality rates are among the highest in Latin America, whether one quantifies poverty using measures of consumption, income or unmet basic needs. Guatemala's figures reveal it as one of the countries with the greatest incidence of poverty in Latin America. Although Maya communities make up almost half of the population, they account for less than a quarter of Guatemala's total income and consumption. They have extremely limited access to basic services.

**Reader 2:** Poverty is most extreme in rural areas and among indigenous communities. About 5 million people, almost 60 per cent of the population, live in rural areas, and 81 per cent of those people are Maya. Within the poor rural Maya communities the most vulnerable groups are women and children. Both were severely affected by the armed conflict. Many women were widowed and left to provide for their households. Large numbers of children were orphaned.

**Reader 3:** One of the main causes of poverty in the country is lack of access to productive resources, especially land and water. Land distribution in Guatemala is extremely unequal. Over the centuries, and particularly during the coffee production boom, large parcels of land were taken from the indigenous population. At present more than half of the agricultural land in Guatemala is controlled by only 2.5 per cent of the country's farmers. The majority, or 88 per cent, of farms occupy only 16 per cent of the land. If rural poor people own land it is generally fragmented or of small dimensions, on average only 1.5 ha. About 40 per cent of the rural population does not own any land.

(Source: The International Fund for Agricultural Development)

### Garbage Dump community

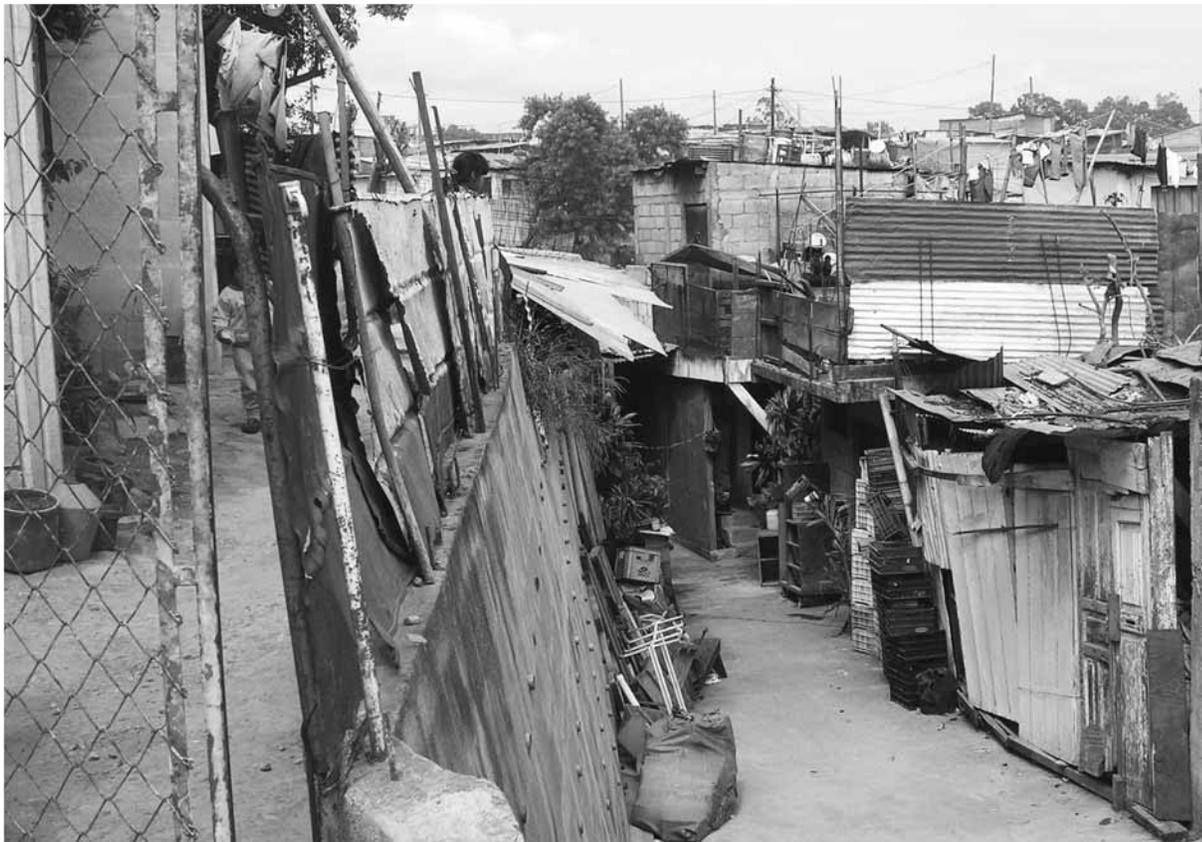


Photo: Faye Wakeling

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### 3 Considering our context: Distribution of wealth in Canada

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Material wealth is one important indicator of power in any country or society. Invite the group to follow the instructions to construct a visual representation of the distribution of wealth in Canada using the concept of a “pyramid of power.” The position of most power is at the top of the pyramid.

1. Place the illustration of the large pyramid (triangle shape) outline in front of group.
2. Give each participant 1 or 2 cut-out figures or faces (from newspapers, magazines, photos, or drawn freehand) that represent people — rich and poor — of different demographics in Canadian society.
3. Invite participants to talk in pairs for a few minutes about the representation(s) they received and where these might fit in the social structure of wealth and power.
4. Ask participants, one at a time, to stick a pictured person on the newsprint shape and explain why they have that position on this “pyramid of power.” (Use a small amount of glue stick so that the figure can be moved if necessary.)
5. Invite the whole group to discuss whether they agree with the placements or would request any changes of position relative to other figures in place. Ask for explanations for any changes. (This discussion and exchange is an important part of the activity as it reflects an understanding of who has more or less influence, economic and decision-making power in Canadian society).
6. What general observations can be made about the completed picture?

Have one participant read “Poverty in Canada” on page 28.

- Does this editorial surprise you? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?
- How does this compare to the representation on the “pyramid of power”?

Read the box “Canadian Aboriginal People and Poverty” on page 21. What questions or concerns do these statistics raise for you?

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### 4 Hearing a story from Scripture

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Jesus taught about God’s reign through storytelling, often using parables. Some parables are short; others are longer with several characters and elaborate details, as in Luke 19:11-27. Jesus’ parables do not give detailed instructions about what we are to do next. Those who hear these stories are called to listen and make up their own minds about the meanings. We come to any Scripture reading with the perspective of our own life situation and personal experience but every encounter with Scripture is an opportunity to learn and grow in understanding. As we listen to this reading we can also try to put ourselves in the shoes of Maya peasants working in difficult conditions on a coffee plantation under the control of a wealthy absentee landowner.

Read aloud Luke 19:11–27, “The Parable of the Gold Coins.” Share your understandings and reactions to this story.

#### Understanding Parables

Some Canadian theological students were part of the Maya biblical study of “The Parable of the Gold Coins.” They marvelled at the Maya women’s ability to interpret such a parable. One Maya woman replied with a smile: “Parables are easy for the poor to understand.” If you had been present, what would you have said to this woman?

## A Native Ministry: Winnipeg Inner City Missions (WICM)

Anishinabe Fellowship Centre and Flora House make up Winnipeg Inner City Missions, a ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Both focus on ministering to the four aspects of well being: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. They provide safe, nurturing and peaceful spaces for children, youth and adults, the majority of whom are Aboriginal. Both centres rely heavily on the work of volunteers; they are the ones who keep the food banks operating, take care of the clothing store, provide the emergency food and keep the centres clean. WICM faces many unique challenges on a day-to-day basis as it deals with the complex social needs of its community. It offers hope and opportunity for children, youth and adults who are living in poverty. WICM is presently building housing for those on the streets in north Winnipeg.

## 5 Hearing partner stories

Ask three participants to read aloud, or re-tell in their own words, the following stories.

### Story 1

The women participating in a study course sponsored by the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterians looked at “The Parable of the Gold Coins” from the perspective of their own lives and struggles in Guatemala. They saw the “rich man” who became king as the ruling elite in their country — a small group of wealthy landowners who have seized the land of others and abused their tenants and workers. These women spoke of the struggle to secure ownership of their land to be able to make a living. They spoke of the enormous personal and societal cost of the resistance in the 36-year civil war when 200,000 people were killed or disappeared, 83% of them were Maya.

Many of the women had been domestic servants or worked in sweatshops. They understood the fear of the servant who hid the wealthy man’s money and they marvelled that he spoke the truth knowing he would pay the cost. Many people in these women’s communities had been killed because they organized to resist oppression. The violent end of the parable was very close to their experience. They were not surprised that those who co-operated with the corrupt king were rewarded for making him even wealthier. However, these women found hope in the courage of the servant to speak out and in the declaration by the community that they did not want this hated man to be their king. Standing up to the rich and powerful is gospel — and it is also costly.

Friends gather at Anishinabe Fellowship Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba



Photo: Courtesy of Anishinabe

## Story 2

A group of women taking a pastoral ministry course sponsored by the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterians on “Community Participation and Values” were engaged in a very painful discussion about their own childhood in poverty. This experience had left indelible marks and they were determined that life would be different for their children.

This produced a very tough and agonising discussion with the whole group. The women spoke of the fact that families couldn’t survive if the children didn’t work and those children had the right to the basic necessities of life. The women were faced with an impossible dilemma as they wrestled, on the one hand, with their deep commitment to find ways to assure that their children had an education and, on the other hand, the need to work to survive. Many of these women have good memories of times when their whole family, including their small children, worked together picking coffee. It was very hard and demanding work, but it meant there was money for enough to eat. In the past few years, hundreds of thousands of workers in Guatemala have lost their jobs and their homes, chased off the land when the coffee plantations have closed because of the drastic drop in coffee prices on the global market. The women wondered, how could they speak against child labour when children picking coffee ensures enough money to put food on the table?

### A Native Ministry: Anamiewigummig

Kenora Fellowship centre (KFC) is also called Anamiewigummig (an Ojibway word meaning “House of Prayer”). KFC is a place of refuge, sanctuary and hospitality for those marginalized by poverty, addictions and alienation in the Kenora area of northern Ontario. This ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada operates as a drop-in centre and provides medical, housing, legal and detoxification services with the help of agencies in the community. It offers homeless people a 24-hour shelter during the winter and other services as needs become apparent. KFC also has a regular Sunday worship and Bible study during the week.

## Story 3

“Lustre? Lustre?” “Shoeshine? Shoeshine?” Early in the morning two little seven or eight year-old tykes walk the streets calling out to offer a shoeshine to anyone passing by. They are just beginning a very long, hard day of work — a day not fit for little children. They do a great job and charge very little, but most of them have to hand over the larger portion of their earnings to those who supply them with the shoebox of materials, the tools of their trade.

Children’s income is a necessity for the survival of the majority of Guatemalan families living in dire poverty. Most of the street children have families to go home to and their labour is not an option. A local organisation that offers opportunities for education and skills training for adolescents recognises the importance of working with these families to try to find alternatives that allow the children to attend school and at the same time to continue their vital contribution to the family’s survival. A third of primary school children dropped out of school last year because they had to work and this does not take into account the majority of children, who are working and have never gone to school.

### Engage in group discussion:

1. What do you think of the Maya women’s interpretation of “The Parable of the Gold Coins”? How does it compare with your earlier interpretation? Given the Maya interpretation, who might Aboriginal Canadians feel the king and the servants represent?
2. What is an important learning for you about Guatemala from these stories?
3. Read the three boxes about ministries with urban Aboriginal people living in poverty in Canada. Through these ministries, the stories, and the Luke 19 parable, what connections or challenges are you seeing with the church’s mission at home and abroad?

### A Native Ministry: Edmonton Urban Native Ministry (EUNM)

According to Census Canada, there are 43,000 Aboriginal people within the City of Edmonton. That is the second largest Native population in a metropolitan area in Canada (next to Winnipeg). A large percent of this group are on social assistance or are low income families. Very few have any knowledge or experience of Christ’s love and the Christian faith. EUNM’s programming consists of a drop-in centre, emergency food bank, clothing bank, counselling, hot meals, Sunday worship service, vacation Bible school, healing workshop, discipleship, leadership, music, sports and crafts. EUNM is a ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

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## 6 Responding

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### Story Stoles

Lay out all the stoles that were begun last week along with additional lengths of fabrics. Read over the box “Story Stoles” on page 8. Invite newcomers to choose a piece of fabric and other participants to continue working on their stoles. Talk together about the themes, images and symbols of this session that might be reflected in the stoles. Set out all the materials and invite participants to work on their stoles while continuing to talk about the information, stories and issues raised in the session.

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### Additional Options

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#### Joining the KAIROS anti-poverty campaign

The Canadian Assembly of First Nations has identified poverty among Aboriginal people as a national priority for corrective action and has encouraged involvement in the “Make Poverty History” campaign sponsored by KAIROS, of which The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a supporting member. KAIROS believes that poverty in Canada and elsewhere is “neither inevitable nor acceptable.” Contact Justice Ministries for information and suggestions of actions and regional contacts. Talk about what you can do as individuals, as a group and as a church to make a positive contribution towards making poverty history. How will you share these ideas with your congregation?

#### Working with our partners

Projects in the *Something Extra* booklet (see page 70 “For Further Study”) provide resources to help Canadian Aboriginal and Maya people to overcome poverty. Read about these projects and plan to raise funds for one of them from amongst yourselves and members of your congregation. What information will you share about the efforts of our partners to overcome

the effects of decades of poverty and powerlessness on their people?

#### Supporting fairly traded coffee

Our partners’ stories in this session refer to coffee plantations as a source of income for many families in Guatemala. The work is hard and the pay is low. Read “Squeezing Coffee Farmers to the last drop” on page 29. Then plan to investigate how the purchases of “Fair Trade” coffee and other products can help combat poverty. Visit [www.fairtrade.org](http://www.fairtrade.org) and contact Justice Ministries for information. Plan ways to promote the local and global benefits of using fairly traded coffee and other products at church and at home.

Photo: Claire Borel Christen



Coffee beans

## 7 Closing

### Making tortillas

Gather around the table with the woven cloth, the basket of bread\* and corn, and the study's front cover picture of the Maya woman carrying her child in a *chuuq'ubál*. Sing together "When the poor ones" #762 in *The Book of Praise* (1997).

\*substitute tortillas or bannock if you wish

**Reader 1:** Then [Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said;  
Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom  
of God.  
Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.  
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.  
(Luke 6: 20-21).

Share the bread in the following liturgy:

**Reader 2:** (Hold up the basket of bread and corn, saying:)  
This is the bread of life;  
a symbol for us of the Christ who gave all;  
It is a reminder that Jesus broke bread  
and shared it with those who would follow.  
(Return the basket of bread and corn to the table.)

**Reader 1:** (Hold up the basket, saying:)  
Corn is a staple of life for the Maya people.  
For too many in our world,  
these portions of bread and corn  
mark the difference between life and death.  
(Return the basket to the table.)

**Reader 2:** As we share this bread we pray  
that God's bounty may be shared by all.

(Reader 1 picks up the basket and holds it for Reader 2 who breaks off  
a piece of bread.)

**Reader 1:** God, give bread to all your people.

(Reader 1 takes the basket and holds it for the next person. The basket  
of bread is passed, with each person in turn breaking off a generous  
piece and saying:)

**One by one:** God, give bread to all your people.

**All:** *Give us this day our daily bread*

Close with *The Lord's Prayer* said in unison.



Photo: Claire Borel Christen

### Make Poverty History

In 2006 the 132nd General Assembly requested that presbyteries and congregations draw attention to the Make Poverty History campaign and encourage support for this initiative  
(*The Acts and Proceedings*, 2006, p. 280).

Make Poverty History is an international campaign initiated in February 2005 with organizations in over 80 countries participating. For more information see:

<http://www.makepovertyhistory.ca/e/home.php>

## Poverty in Canada

As Canadians, we like to think we live in a just society, one that gives fair treatment and opportunity to individuals and groups and a rightful share of our common wealth. But how just and inclusive is a society where children go hungry, some working people cannot earn a living wage, and the homeless crowd into shelters because they cannot afford a place to live?

Is it just that single mothers must live on social assistance payments that are below subsistence levels with no access to affordable daycare? Or that a disabled person who cannot work receives even less? Or that working people lose their jobs and cannot collect Employment Insurance?

A society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. But in Canada, after more than a decade of economic prosperity, the gap between the richest and poorest grows ever wider. It has become a national shame...

Stark poverty indicators show some 6.7 million Canadians now eke out an existence on less than \$20,000 a year, half the average income. Some Canadians, the richest one-fifth, have close to 50 per cent of all income in the country and hold three-quarters of the wealth. The poorest fifth get by on 4.6 per cent, have no net wealth and are falling behind.

Indeed, Canada's poorest are no better off today than they were 25 years ago. Social assistance incomes are so low they now "bear no relationship to the actual cost of even subsistence living," warns the National Council of Welfare, the federal government's own advisory body.

The results are sadly evident: A total of 14,150 Canadians were living in homeless shelters at the time of the 2001 census, the first time they were ever counted, and their numbers are growing.

(Excerpt from "Tackling Poverty Benefits all Society," editorial, *Toronto Star*, January 13, 2007)

# Squeezing coffee farmers to the last drop

**F**or most Americans, drinking coffee is a daily ritual. And whether you're drinking gourmet blend or freeze-dried instant, the price is about the same from one day to the next. For coffee farmers it's a different story. A price crash in the world coffee market has pushed farmers into bankruptcy, with thousands losing their lands, and starvation looming all too close.

Specialty coffee, which retails for about \$10 a pound, has recently taken a dive in world export prices from around \$1 to less than 50 cents a pound. Farmers generally receive less than half of the world price — way below the cost of production. This has caused a giant upheaval for 20 million farmers and workers around the world who depend on coffee for their survival. To protect the livelihood of millions of farmers and their families, a dramatic restructuring of the coffee industry must take place, and those who have profited in the midst of mass impoverishment must contribute to the solution.

Until 1989, the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) helped stabilize prices by regulating world supply. The US worked to abolish the ICA in 1989 in favor of a “free market” in the coffee trade. Many countries have since then worked to expand their coffee exports to generate foreign revenues to help finance debt. The result is a worldwide coffee surplus that has led to a crash in market prices and huge profit growth for coffee companies at the expense of farmers around the world.

The coffee crisis gives new urgency to efforts to promote the alternative — Fair Trade. Fair Trade corrects market imbalances by guaranteeing a minimum price for small farmers' harvest, and encouraging organic and sustainable cultivation practices. Fair Trade farmer cooperatives are assured a minimum of \$1.26 per pound. With a fair and stable income, coffee growers are able to invest in their families' health care and education. The Fair Trade system currently benefits 550,000 farming families in 20 countries.

The big players in the coffee industry, however, don't seem to be that concerned with finding solutions to the crisis. Perhaps that's because while it is a crisis for farmers, it is a bonanza for multinational companies. While some companies have increased their purchasing of Fair Trade, many, like Starbucks and Sara Lee, are still offering only one Fair Trade line. And the big three, Folgers, Kraft, and Nestle, haven't even begun to address the crisis.

Jerónimo Bollen, Director of a Fair Trade coffee cooperative in Guatemala, says, “With world market prices as low as they are right now, we see that a lot of farmers cannot maintain their families and their land anymore. We need Fair Trade now more than ever.”

(From Global Exchange, San Francisco, California, 2001)

# Session Three

## God's Living Water

*Water as a sacred gift*

Photo: Faye Waking

### Purposes

1. To reflect on water as a sacred gift, a part of God's creation.
2. To learn about the crisis of water through the experiences of Aboriginal people in Guatemala and Canada.
3. To consider our stewardship role and responsibility as Christians.

### Materials

- Read information on "Shared Leadership" on page 7.
- A piece of colourful woven cloth (from Guatemala if possible) and a central table.
- A picture of water (e.g. waterfall, river, lake or sea scenery) mounted in the centre of a large sheet of paper.
- Jug of tap drinking water, a large basin, a small clear glass for each participant.
- Copies of "Drinking Mindfully" on page 32 for eight readers.
- Copy page 40 "Water Drop Statistics" and cut out the "drops"; tape or glue stick.
- The "Story Stoles" begun in earlier sessions and the materials for adding to them: a variety of soft fabric pieces (16cm x 1.5m or 6in. x 80in.) one for each participant, scissors, fabric glue, needles and colourful threads, yarns, fabric pieces, buttons, beads and fabric markers/paints.
- Review the optional suggestions in the "Responding" section and choose which ones the group will consider, bringing the necessary information and materials.

# 1 Opening

Welcome participants, giving opportunity as necessary for people to introduce themselves. Review the purposes for this session (as outlined above). Begin the session by reading “A Psalm of Living Water.”

**Leader:** You are like a mountain spring  
O Fountain of Living Water:

**All:** I sip from the deep down freshness  
of Your never-failing love.

**Leader:** You are like a summer rain  
O Sudden Benediction:

**All:** drench my soul  
and quench my thirsting spirit  
with Your peace.

**Leader:** You are like a raging sea,  
O Storm Upon My Ocean:

**All:** breaking to bits  
my fragile bark  
as I learn to lean  
on You.

**Leader:** You are like a waterfall,  
Oasis in My Desert:

**All:** source of my heart’s survival  
in the press  
and stress  
of life.

**Leader:** You are like a cleansing flood,  
River of Reconciliation:

**All:** washing away  
the selfish  
self-serving signs  
of my sinfulness.

**Leader:** You are like a bottomless well,  
O Cup of Lifegiving Water:

**All:** full up to overflowing,  
Praise be to You, O God.



Photo: Faye Waking

Basic Pila for water, Labor de Falla

(Miriam Therese Winter. From *Woman Word*. © Medical Mission Sisters 1990. Used with permission.)

Place the woven material on the central table. Put the basin and pitcher of water on the cloth. Set out the study’s front cover picture of the Maya woman carrying her child in a *chuq’ubal* and read aloud the following:

*In the Quiche culture of the Guatemalan Mayas in the western highlands, mothers carry their babies on their backs in a hand-woven shawl called a chuq’ubal (“chook ew bal”). In the distinctly woven coloured lines of this cloth are the symbols of the unswerving faith and hope of*

## Canadian Legislation and Water Policy

The Canada Water Act says it provides for “the management of the water resources of Canada, including research and planning and implementation of programs relating to the conservation, development and utilization of water resources.” But in point of fact the Act has never been wholly proclaimed or implemented and cannot be guaranteed to safeguard the public trust. In order to support the necessary changes in social and economic structures to improve water equity, Canada, and the world community as a whole, needs to develop new fundamental principles ... to sustain essential natural resources — especially air, freshwater and the oceans.

*Maya people who know that God walks with them. In the blue colours in the weaving of the chuq'ubál that holds the baby close to her mother's body, we see the blue of creation, lakes and rivers, the skies and seas, water and air that cleanse, baptize and nourish us. We see water and water is life.*

Pour a little water into the basin while the following words are read:

Water is the source of all life — healing, revitalizing,  
cleansing and quenching the thirst of all living beings.  
Water cannot be substituted, nor multiplied; water is unique.  
Water is an indispensable element of Earth's integrity,  
which we are called to responsibly administer and preserve.

(From *Air, Water, Earth, Fire: Grounded in Justice, Sustaining Earth Community*, by Joy Kennedy. Geneva and New York: World Council of Churches, 2002)

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## 2 Introducing activity: Drinking mindfully

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Place an empty glass before each participant. Pour water into each glass.

**Reader 1:** Take a sip of water, focusing on how it feels as it enters your mouth and as you swallow. (*Pause*)

**Reader 2:** The hydrogen that makes up your water existed at the beginning of the universe. It is older than the earth itself. Water now covers three quarters of our planet. The first living cell, earth's first life, swam in primordial waters. Just as water travels the earth, the water in our bodies moves from cell to cell, carrying necessary nutrients and removing wastes. Water is essential to life.

**Reader 1:** Take another sip, and reflect on the miracle of water. (*Pause*)

**Reader 3:** Imagine waking up on a bright, sunny morning. You turn on the kitchen tap, but nothing happens. You check another and another. The taps are all dry. A major accident has happened in your town. A state of emergency has been declared. Roads are closed. You and your family will have to walk over two kilometres for water.

**Reader 1:** Take another sip, reflecting on how you have taken water for granted. (*Pause*)

**Reader 4:** Aboriginal people in Canada are exposed to high levels of water contamination on reserves. Large hydro dams have flooded Aboriginal lands without adequate compensation for the communities. Indigenous people have had to struggle to have historic Aboriginal title and treaty rights to water resources respected.

**Reader 1:** Take another sip and reflect on Canada's responsibilities toward Aboriginal people. (*Pause*)

**Reader 5:** In most of the world, having enough water to survive is a constant worry. Women and children are responsible for getting the household water. This can take as much as six hours a day, leaving little time for schooling, earning money or caring for one's family. Carrying heavy loads of water can cause serious health problems. In some places, private companies control the water supply, charging prices that exceed the capacity of poor families to pay. In certain regions, access to water is a major source of conflict among countries.

**Reader 1:** Imagine you have just walked six hours, barefoot, in the hot sun to fetch the water in your glass. Now take another sip. (*Pause*)

**Reader 6:** Water brings life, but it also brings disease and death through poor sanitation. Pollution compromises the quality of water throughout the world. Climate change affects water sources. Wells are inundated with salt water on islands and in coastal regions that are subject to rising sea levels. Hurricanes leave communities without drinkable water.

**Reader 1:** Imagine the water in your glass is contaminated. Lift the glass to your lips, but don't take a drink. Reflect on the conflict between your thirst and your fear of illness. (*Pause*)

**Reader 7:** Water gives many gifts. Water sustains life. Our souls are fed by the magnificence of a waterfall, the serenity of a lakeside sunset, the companionship of a gurgling stream. In the covenant of baptism, water helps us celebrate God's grace, welcome new members to the community and reaffirm our faith.

**Reader 1:** Take a sip from your glass, reflecting on the sacredness of water. (*Pause*)

**Reader 8:** Water has profound ecological, spiritual and ethical value. We must use it respectfully. We must seek to ensure that others have equitable access to safe water.

**Reader 1:** Listen to words from the last book of the Bible: "And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift" (Revelation 22: 17). Now take a last sip and give thanks to God for the sacred gift of water.

(Adapted from "Drinking Mindfully: A Group Reflection on the Value and Wonders of Water" by Marika Ince, Development & Peace member, Burlington, Ontario in *Scarboro Missions Magazine*, September, 2004)

### Indigenous Water Rights

"Our ancestors have inhabited the Great Lakes Basin since time immemorial, long before the current political boundaries were drawn. Our spiritual and cultural connections to our Mother Earth are manifest by our willingness to embrace the responsibility of protecting and preserving the Waters. Traditional teachings and modern science combine to strengthen our historical understanding that Water is the life-blood of our Mother Earth. Indigenous women continue their role as protectors of the Waters. Ceremonial teachings are reminders of our heritage, they are practices of our current peoples, and they are treasured gifts that we hand to our children. When considering matters of great importance we are taught to think beyond the current generation. We also are taught that each of us is someone's seventh generation. We must continually ask ourselves what we are leaving for a future seventh generation."

(Excerpt from the *Great Lakes Water Accord*, signed November 23, 2004, by the Indigenous Nations of the Great lakes, reported in "Water is Life: Life Before Profit, Preserving the Public Good," *The Global Economic Justice Report*, Volume 4, No. 3, KAIROS, Toronto, October 2005)

## 3 Considering our context: Canadian waters

Set out the sheet of paper with the picture of water. Distribute the "water drop" statistics among participants. Take turns reading out the statistics and talking about the implications. After each statistic has been read and discussed, tape the "water drop" on the paper around the water picture. Afterwards quietly look at the display of all these statistics. Have two people read the boxes "Canadian Legislation and Water Policy" and "Indigenous Water Rights." Then reflect on the impact of this information.

## 4 Hearing a story from Scripture

### Water in Scripture

*"Come, everyone who is thirsty — here is water!"* Isaiah 55:1

*"He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters."* Psalm 23:2

*"But those who drink from the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."* John 4:14

*"There is no difference between the one who sows and the one who waters; God will reward each one according to the work each has done. For we are partners working together for God, and you are God's field."* I Corinthians 3:8-9

Some people say that the words of the prophets and Jesus do not relate to the environmental challenges today. Yet, their words are full of references to the natural world of creation, particularly to water, as sacred. The above quotations are among the many references to water in the Bible. What biblical stories or phrases connecting to water come to your mind? How do you think Jesus might have felt about the water crisis today?

Read aloud John 4:3-30, the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. At the time of Jesus, Jews were bitter enemies of the Samaritans and considered them impure (vs. 4:9). The legitimate place of worship was at the base of their enmity, with the Jews claiming the Temple site in Jerusalem and the Samaritans worshipping at a shrine on Mount Gerizim.

Some scholars suggest this story is a scandalous conversation. Being both Samaritan and a woman, the woman at the well knew that a Jewish rabbi should not speak

to her. Also, it was likely very unusual to be at a well drawing water in the heat of noon-day. Water was usually drawn in the cool of the early morning or evening. The time of day may indicate that the woman's disgraced social position made her unwelcome to draw water with others. Communities guarded the right to their well, its history and purity. Was this woman an outcast from the community?

Jesus was thirsty, needed water and asked for help. At the same time, the woman's question to Jesus about why he would break tradition and speak to her (also asked by the disciples in vs. 27), opened up the opportunity to go beyond the practical need and to engage in a theological discussion about water. Through their conversation, the woman recognized Jesus as a prophet and the one who could respond to the key question that separated their cultures, "Where should we worship God?" (vs. 20)

### Discussion:

What surprises you or draws your attention in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman?

## 5 Hearing partner stories

Divide into groups, with each group exploring one of the following stories. Afterwards bring the groups together and have them present a summary of their story and their feelings about it in whatever method or combination of methods they wish — such as through words, drama or images.



Photo: Faye Wakeling

Claudia & Vivien, 11 and 8 yrs old, carrying water, village of Labor de Falla.

## Story 1

It all began when a major earthquake in 1976 levelled most of the city of Chimaltenango and surrounding areas and destroyed the water source for the villages of Labor de Falla and Cerro Alto. After that, there was no drinkable water for the villages. The women had to walk great distances down the mountainside, carrying their washing in large baskets on their heads. However, villagers were proud of the small wood-slat school that they had built themselves for their children. Determined to find a way to provide the much needed water for the whole community, they were ready to take on this next challenge. Partners from overseas helped raise seed money for the well project.

In 2000 the first stage of the Well Project began with the involvement of 27 households in Labor de Falla. The first well provided only two

barrels of water twice a week — not enough, of course, so the struggle continued. In 2001, the community dug another well, but the loose soil required expensive tubing to prevent the well from caving in and this project had to stop. In 2003, a plot of land was purchased to dig a new well alongside the current community garden. However, this still did not bring water up the mountain to their homes.

Finally, along with the community of Cerro Alto, a partnership was negotiated with the municipality to dig a mechanical well. Men, women and children of the communities provided the hard labour to dig out and haul huge rocks up the mountain for the connecting system that would bring water to their homes. Now all those who participated in the project have a pipe that brings water to their homes. Now five barrels of water come to each house three times per week. It is enough to drink, bathe, wash clothes and dishes — a big change in the daily lives of people in Labor de Falla!

The women speak with pride of what they and their husbands have been able to do for their community over the past eight years. They speak of how their participation in study groups of the *Fraternidad* of Maya Presbyterians helped them learn to value themselves, to speak, to participate and surmount the many obstacles they were faced with in order to provide water for their community. At one point, when negotiations with their municipality were bogged down, a Canadian organization offered money to get the project finished. But the people were willing to take whatever time was necessary to convince the municipality that water is a right for all people and that it must accept its responsibility for providing this in partnership with the people. The patience and faith of the people is rooted in their belief in both their rights and responsibilities as partners in the care of God's creation.



Photo: Faye Waking

**Women — Veronica, Lucille, Isabelle, Elena, Anna & Vilma, with children Lily & Miriam — around the well, Labor de Falla.**

## Story 2

### High Risk Water in Canadian Native Communities

In May 2000 Canadian communities were horrified by the tragedy in Walkerton where the young and old in a small Ontario town were dying from drinking town water. The news made headlines and resulted in changes in legislation to protect water supplies. However, in 2005 the break-out of E-coli at the Kashechewan reserve in Northern Ontario revealed that this was a common occurrence in First Nations communities — one they had been dealing with for years. Canadian media reported that 76 First Nations reserves were under boil-water advisories and had been for years. The people relied on bottled water for drinking, cooking and brushing their teeth, and some residents said the water was too dirty even for bathing. In Ontario, 47 per cent of native communities' water was classified as "high risk" with the statistic in Atlantic Canada being 78 per cent.

Eighteen women with their babies and children are crammed into a small adobe house in the mountains. They have come to learn more about diarrhoea, a basic problem that kills so many babies here. We spoke a lot about water — water that is contaminated and carries diseases, water that is scarce but so essential for good hygiene, and water that makes up more than half of our bodies; and that we must find ways to protect or replace water at all costs.

The water in the nearby rivers is contaminated. It is so easy to say that it is essential to boil water for 20 minutes (this increased time is necessary at the 2500 metre altitude where they live) and so hard for the women to gather or chop the firewood and keep the fire strong enough to have safe water for a sick baby.

As the workshop ended, the women began to talk about how they could organize to improve the quantity and quality of water in their community. There was a tumultuous downpour as they set out for their homes. Although many had ahead of them a 45 minute walk on muddy, mountainous roads with only a sheet of plastic as protection, they were content and thankful for the nourishing rains that were drenching the soil.

## Story 3

We drove on winding, rough roads through the high mountains amidst towering trees, passing small hamlets of simple adobe houses. With a turn in the road a different scene opened up before us. The trees were gone, the ground was scraped bare. Without any houses the landscape looked more like a desert than the beautiful highlands of the Mam people in the San Marcos region. Behind the steel chain-link fence, a towering chute of the Marlin Project rose up and spewed out the tumbling raw material of gold and silver.

Photo: Faye Wakeling



Marlin Project lake

By mistake, we turned down a six-lane road that has been bulldozed out of the virgin forest and a scene of scarred-earth opened up before us. As we travelled further, we were shocked to see a dark green artificial lake that we learned had been created from the water wastes of the gold production. These waters ran into the Cuilco River that flows through the surrounding villages.

My companion, Roberto Morani, explained that they had been testing the water of this river since 2003 and the sulphuric acid levels have been rising each month. 465,000 litres of water per hour are used in the gold-separation process — water that comes from a drilled well down to the water table. The communities around lack access to water and the people say that the little they have is now decreasing in volume. This is a Canadian mine owned by Goldcorp which has exploration rights to expand into the Sipakapa region. An extraordinary agreement provides for only 1% of the profits for Guatemala — 99% of the profits that come from this rich Guatemalan resource leave the country!

Roberto is an organizer with the Maya Cultural Centre in Sipakapa which has helped the local people analyze the effects of the mine, explore their rights to protect the land, seek alternative sustainable development possibilities, and carry out a consultation about the proposed mine in all of the 13 surrounding villages. Even though the Marlin Project promises jobs for the people and some much-needed community services, the decision of 11 of the 13 communities was a resounding NO!

### Engage in group discussion:

1. What connections do you see between the Bible study and the partner stories?
2. What is significant to you about each story? What can we learn from it?
3. How do you reconcile the tensions between resource industries, environmental impacts and the stewardship of creation?
4. Knowing about these situations, what does it mean for us to live faithfully? How can we respond as a community of faith?

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## 6 Responding

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### Story Stoles

Lay out all the stoles that were begun in earlier sessions along with additional lengths of fabrics. Read over the box “Story Stoles” on page 8. Invite newcomers to choose a piece of fabric and other participants to continue working on their stoles. Talk together about the themes, images and symbols of this session that might be reflected in the stoles. Set out all the materials and invite participants to work on their stoles while continuing to talk about the information, stories and issues raised in the session.

### Canada’s Global Mining Presence

According to the federal Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade statistics, almost 60 per cent of the world’s mining and exploration companies are listed in Canada, accounting for over 40 per cent of the overall investment in mining-related activities worldwide. That translates into 3,200 “mineral properties” in more than 100 countries and accounts for \$50 billion in investments.

### Impacts of Canadian Mining Firms

From metals to minerals, we all need natural resources brought up from the earth through mining. But mining can have a huge environmental impact, and some companies are giving the industry a bad name around the world — with Canadian firms being some of the biggest offenders. Our federal government offers a variety of incentives, tax breaks and other types of assistance to Canadian mining companies working in other countries. These mining companies are often assumed to be abiding by international human rights and environmental standards that have been adopted by Canada. But the reality is something quite different. Since the federal government has no mechanism to monitor or enforce these standards, they’re usually left up to the host country to enforce. However, most of these host countries are developing nations, which often lack the resources or the political desire to enforce standards against large corporations that provide their governments with much-needed revenue.

(Excerpt from “Time for the mining industry to clean up its act” by David Suzuki in *Science Matters*. The column *Science Matters*, from the David Suzuki Foundation, is published weekly in magazines and newspapers across Canada.)

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## Additional Options

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### Becoming a water activist

Continue the KAIROS water campaign. Learn about the initiatives in Canada to challenge the privatization of water or to demand criteria for Canadian mining companies abroad. Check the KAIROS website ([www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org)) or call Justice Ministries to obtain additional information and resources.

### Committing to water for life

Virtually all religious traditions consider water to be a sacred gift for the whole of Creation, to be cherished for all generations. Liturgies and prayers have always embedded that belief in the values and lives of people across all cultures and times. As author and environmental activist, Vandana Shiva of India has said, “Water is the matrix of culture, the basis of life. . . Water has been central to the material and cultural well-being of societies all over the world.”

Study and discuss the World Council of Churches declaration “Water for Life” found on page 41. Plan a proposal with specific first steps to help your congregation participate in “debate and action on water policies.”

### Learning about bottled vs. tap water

Have one person read aloud the true story “Water — Tap into It” on page 42. Have another person ask participants the questions for the quiz. Check your answers and then talk about the popularity of bottled water. Share research from the websites at the bottom of that page. Decide on a course of action for educating your congregation, and possibly the broader community, about the issues related to bottled water.

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## 7 Closing

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Sing together “Come let us sing to the Lord our song” # 412 in *The Book of Praise* (1997). Then pray together:

**Leader:** Creating God, how magnificent are the works of your hands. We remember how you created the waters of the earth and out of these waters you created life.

**People:** Creating God, help us never to forget.

**Leader:** We remember how you sent rains upon the earth to cleanse it. We remember how you sent the rainbow as a sign of promise each time it rains.

**People:** Creating God, help us never to forget.

**Leader:** We remember how you created a new people by having them pass through the sea with a “wall of waters on their right and on their left.” We remember how you provided water that was sweet for forty years in the desert.

**People:** Creating God, help us never to forget.

**Leader:** We remember how the Psalmist called the sheep of his flock to find pasture beside the still waters. We remember how the Prophets announced a time when the wilderness would blossom forth with new life, and justice would flow like a mighty river.

**People:** Creating God, help us never to forget.

**Leader:** We remember how Jesus calmed the waters of Galilee. We remember how he invited all to come and drink from a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

**People:** Creating God, help us never to forget.

**Leader:** We also remember how the waters of this land were once pure and clean. We remember how the lakes and rivers and streams sustained the first peoples of this land. We remember how our ancestors settled along the waterways of this land gaining livelihood from the water.

**People:** Creating God, help us never to forget.

**Leader:** But we did forget. We took your water for granted. We polluted it. We wasted it. In places like Walkerton, we became sick from it and some even died from it.

**People:** Creating God, help us never to forget.

**Leader:** But we did forget. We took your water for granted. We polluted it. We wasted it. In places like Walkerton we became sick from it and some even died from it. Some of us have even gone to other lands like Guatemala, polluted the waters there, and left behind in their rivers and lakes chemicals that threaten to harm their people and their lands.\*

**People:** Creating God, help us never to forget.

**Leader:** May the waters run clean again. May we respect your Creation and your gift of water — the gift of Life. God, help us all never to forget. Amen.

\* This sentence was added for this study.

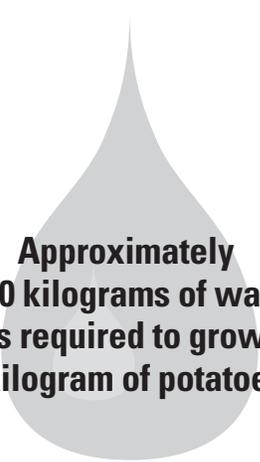
(From the Sunday ecumenical worship service for the first anniversary of the water crisis in Walkerton, Ontario, produced by the Walkerton and District Ministerial Association, May 2001.)

### **KAIROS Water Campaign**

In September 2005, KAIROS launched the two-year campaign *Water: Life Before Profit!* Year 1 of the campaign focused on water privatization issues and urged the Government of Canada to recognize access to clean drinking water as a human right. It stressed the need to maintain public ownership of water and avoid the commodification of water.

Year 2 of the *Water: Life Before Profit!* campaign focuses on the impact of Canadian corporations' activities on communities in different regions of the world and on the water and the watersheds these communities depend on for survival. In June 2005 the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Development of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade released a report that acknowledged the impact of Canadian mining and resource corporations. The report noted that Canada does not yet have laws to ensure that the activities of Canadian mining companies in developing countries conform to human rights standards and recommended measures to address this. Year 2 of the *Water: Life Before Profit!* urges the Government of Canada to develop legislation to address this gap, and not to support any Canadian venture that violates international human rights and environmental standards.

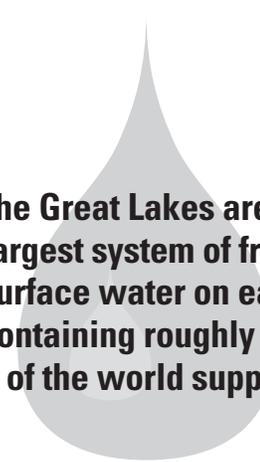
# Water Drop Statistics



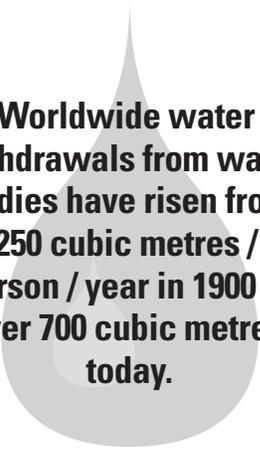
**Approximately 1000 kilograms of water is required to grow 1 kilogram of potatoes.**



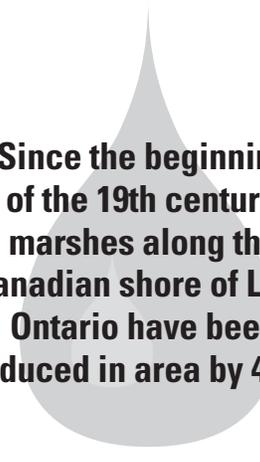
**One out of every three Canadians and one out of every ten U.S. residents depend on the Great Lakes for their water.**



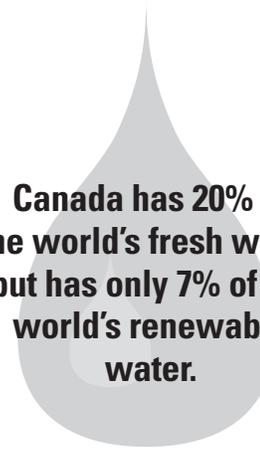
**The Great Lakes are the largest system of fresh, surface water on earth, containing roughly 18% of the world supply.**



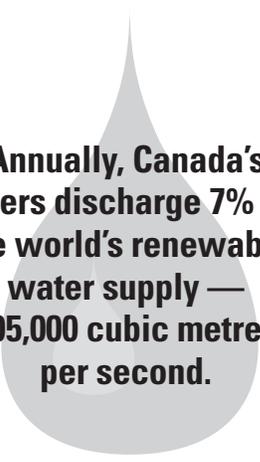
**Worldwide water withdrawals from water bodies have risen from 250 cubic metres / person / year in 1900 to over 700 cubic metres today.**



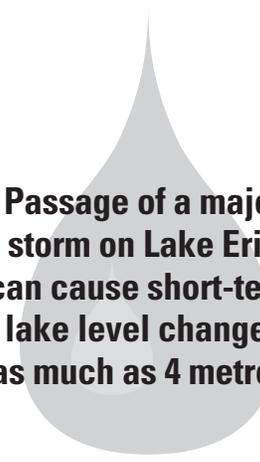
**Since the beginning of the 19th century, marshes along the Canadian shore of Lake Ontario have been reduced in area by 40%.**



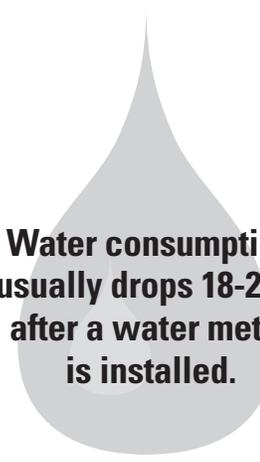
**Canada has 20% of the world's fresh water, but has only 7% of the world's renewable water.**



**Annually, Canada's rivers discharge 7% of the world's renewable water supply — 105,000 cubic metres per second.**



**Passage of a major storm on Lake Erie can cause short-term lake level changes as much as 4 metres.**



**Water consumption usually drops 18-25% after a water metre is installed.**

*(From "Water is Life: Life Before Profit," The Global Economic Justice Report, Volume 4, No. 3, KAIROS, Toronto, October 2005)*

# Water for Life

## **1 Water is a symbol of life.**

The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life, an expression of God's grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation (Gen 2:5ff). It is a basic condition for all life on Earth (Gen 1:2ff.) and is to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and the wider creation. Water is the source of health and well-being and requires responsible action from us human beings, as partners and priests of Creation (Rom 8:19 ff., Rev 22). As churches, we are called to participate in the mission of God to bring about a new creation where life in abundance is assured to all (John 10:10; Amos 5:24). It is therefore right to speak out and to act when the life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat.

## **2 Access to freshwater supplies is becoming an urgent matter across the planet.**

The survival of 1.2 billion people is currently in jeopardy due to lack of adequate water and sanitation. Unequal access to water causes conflicts between and among people, communities, regions and nations. Biodiversity is also threatened by the depletion and pollution of fresh water resources or through impacts of large dams, large scale mining and hot cultures (irrigation) whose construction often involves the forced displacement of people and disruption of the ecosystem. The integrity and balance of the ecosystem is crucial for the access to water. Forests build an indispensable part in the ecosystem of water and must be protected. The crisis is aggravated by climate change and further deepened by strong economic interests. Water is increasingly treated as a commercial good, subject to market conditions.

## **3 Scarcity of water is also a growing source of conflict.**

Agreements concerning international watercourses and river basins need to be more concrete, setting out measures to enforce treaties made and incorporating detailed conflict resolution mechanisms in case disputes erupt.

## **4 Christians bear witness.**

Both locally and internationally there are positive and creative responses to raise the profile of Christian witness to water issues.

## **5 Ecumenical water action.**

Churches in Brazil and in Switzerland, for instance, have made a Joint Ecumenical Declaration on Water as a Human Right and a Common Public Good — by itself an excellent example for ecumenical co-operation. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew states that water can never be regarded or treated as private property or become the means and end of individual interest. He underlines that indifference towards the vitality of water constitutes both a blasphemy to God the Creator and a crime against humanity. Churches in various countries and their specialised ministries have joined together in the Ecumenical Water Network in working for the provision of freshwater and adequate sanitation and advocating for the right to water. Access to water is indeed a basic human right. The United Nations has called for an International Decade for Action, Water for Life, 2005 to 2015.

## **6 Wider cooperation is essential.**

It is essential for churches and Christian agencies to work together and to seek co-operation with other partners, including other faith traditions and NGOs, and particularly those organizations that work with vulnerable and marginalized populations who hold similar ethical convictions. It is necessary to engage in debate and action on water policies, including dialogue with governments and multilateral or corporate institutions. This is essential to promote the significance of the right to water and to point to alternative ways of living, which are more respectful of ecological processes and more sustainable in the longer term.

*The "Water for Life" statement was adopted at the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 13-26, 2006.*

# Water — Tap into it!

## The True Story

The Water Man went a prospectin' in northern Ontario. He wasn't looking for silver and gold like in the days of old. The new prize was WATER. The thirsty millions in the great cities of the south didn't like their tap water. The water in the cities was fine but still the cry rose up: "Give us bottled water." Perhaps the sophisticated city folk were affected by corporate advertising. Whatever the reason, the demand was there. And so the Water Man came to Sprucedale in Northern Ontario.

There was a spring bubbling in Sprucedale and the town owned it. The Water Man wanted it, at least a lot of it. Some in the town protested. One of the protesters was the Rev. J. Palin, a local minister. "What about the water table? What about the wells?" But the Town Council said: "This town needs jobs!" No doubt, but at what cost? The people of Sprucedale were about to find out.

The Water Man started pumping water, the wells started going dry. The minister had no water.

The townspeople said the Water Man was to blame but he retorted, "Prove it." That was not so easy. A hydrologist could probably make a determination but it was a determination that would cost \$100,000. The minister wasn't poor but she wasn't that rich either. A new, deeper well would cost \$10,000. Even that was too much for the church.

For two years the manse in Sprucedale had no running water. The Water Man kept pumping from the spring and the reverend drank bottled water.

(This true story was recounted by Rev. J. Palin at the KAIROS Regional Meeting in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Region as reported by John McLellan of Markham Ontario.)

## True or False Quiz

1. Some bottled water comes from tap water.
2. My bottled water is expensive.
3. Water is expensive.
4. The market for bottled water is growing.
5. My bottle pollutes the earth.
6. Bottled water companies promote recycling.
7. Bottled water is safer.

**Why do you buy bottled water instead of using safe tap water?  
Try using re-usable water bottles that you refill with tap water.**

**For more information visit the following web sites:**

[www.devp.org](http://www.devp.org)  
[www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org)  
[www.insidethebottle.org](http://www.insidethebottle.org)  
[www.presbyterian.ca/justice](http://www.presbyterian.ca/justice)

Quiz Answers: 1. T, 2. T, 3. F, 4. T, 5. T, 6. F, 7. F

# Session Four



Photo: Faye Wakeing

## Purpose

1. To introduce Maya and Canadian Aboriginal spirituality.
2. To reflect on the encounter between Aboriginal spirituality and Christian spirituality.
3. To consider how the encounter with other spiritualities may change us.

## Materials

- Read information on “Shared Leadership” on page 7.
- A piece of colourful woven cloth (from Guatemala if possible) and a central table.
- A large Christ candle and matches; four strips of fabric or crepe paper (one each of yellow, black, red and white).
- A drum or items that can be used for drumming out a beat.
- Flipchart, markers, newspaper paper.
- The “Story Stoles” begun in earlier sessions and the materials for adding to them: a variety of soft fabric pieces (16cm x 1.5m or 6in. x 80in.) one for each participant, scissors, fabric glue, needles and colourful threads, yarns, fabric pieces, buttons, beads and fabric markers/paints.
- Review the optional suggestions in the “Responding” section and choose which ones the group will consider, bringing the necessary information and materials.

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# 1 Opening

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Welcome participants, giving opportunity as necessary for people to introduce themselves. Review the purposes for this session (as outlined above).

Gather in a circle around a central focus on the floor or on a table. The Aboriginal people of Canada open their gatherings with prayers to the Four Directions. Let us respect this tradition and honour the first people of the land in which we live. As part of the opening prayer, as each direction is named, have someone lay out the corresponding coloured strip on the floor or table, radiating from the centre of the circle in the direction mentioned.

Staying in a circle, stand (if you are able) and as you offer these prayers, turn to face each direction as it is named:

Creator, we long for wholeness in our families, for honest, open communication to say what we need to say in safety and without fear.

Creator, we give thanks for the knowledge you give in all traditions of the world. Help us to honour the gifts of all traditions.

**Teach us to know how to love and live.**

We give thanks for new life, for youth, represented by the eastern direction (*lay out the yellow strip*). We give thanks for new learning, for the sun which rises to begin each new day, and for the teachings of the peoples of the east, and yellow-skinned peoples.

**Teach us to know how to love and live.**

We give thanks for the south (*lay out the black strip*), for the black-skinned peoples of the world, for the growth of the summertime in our lives, the learnings of our adult lives, to be kind and accept ourselves. Teach us as parents to love and respect our children, to care for the elders and those who cannot care for themselves.

**Teach us to know how to love and live.**

We give thanks for the west (*lay out the red strip*), for the gifts of Aboriginal peoples of the world, for understandings of care of the earth, for teachings about rocks, leaves and trees, for the knowledge we have in our own teachings, all of these given by our Creator. Help us to use our understandings to bring joy and new life to our communities.

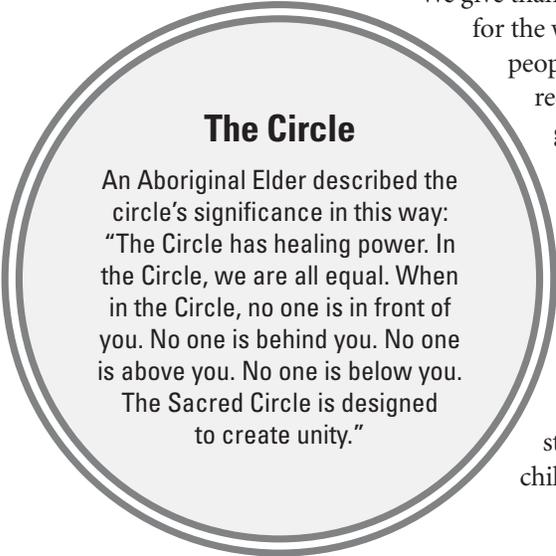
**Teach us to know how to love and live.**

We give thanks for the northern direction (*lay out the white strip*), for the white-skinned peoples of the world, and white-haired peoples in our families and communities. Help us to receive gifts of wisdom from all peoples. Help us to grow our roots deeper through life's journey, that we may grow in kindness to ourselves and each other.

**Teach us to know how to love and live.**

(From *The Dancing Sun*, Volume VII, a United Church of Canada/Anglican Church of Canada resource for First Nations communities)

Place the woven material on the central table. Set out the study's front cover picture of the Maya woman carrying her child in a chuq'ubál and read aloud the following:



## The Circle

An Aboriginal Elder described the circle's significance in this way: "The Circle has healing power. In the Circle, we are all equal. When in the Circle, no one is in front of you. No one is behind you. No one is above you. No one is below you. The Sacred Circle is designed to create unity."

*In the Quiche culture of the Guatemalan Mayas in the western highlands, mothers carry their babies on their backs in a hand-woven shawl called a chuq'ubal ("chook ew bal"). In the distinctly woven coloured lines of this cloth are the symbols of the unswerving faith and hope of Maya people who know that God walks with them. In the white colours in the weaving of the chuq'ubal that holds the baby close to her mother's body, we see the white of the Spirit's dove, the dazzling light of angels, the hope that brings meaning in the darkness.*

## 2 Introducing activity: The circle of spirituality

Using colourful large markers print the word "Spirituality" in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Draw a circle around it as big as the sheet allows, saying simply that spirituality is a word with many meanings. Have one person read aloud the box "The Circle." Have another person read aloud the box "The Medicine Wheel."

Invite everyone to think about words and phrases or visual images that describe and represent the meaning of spirituality to them. After a moment, ask them to take a coloured marker and write words and phrases and draw images around the word "spirituality" inside of the circle on the newsprint sheet. Afterwards give the group time to look quietly and reflectively at the sheet. Close with a word of prayer offering these thoughts to God.

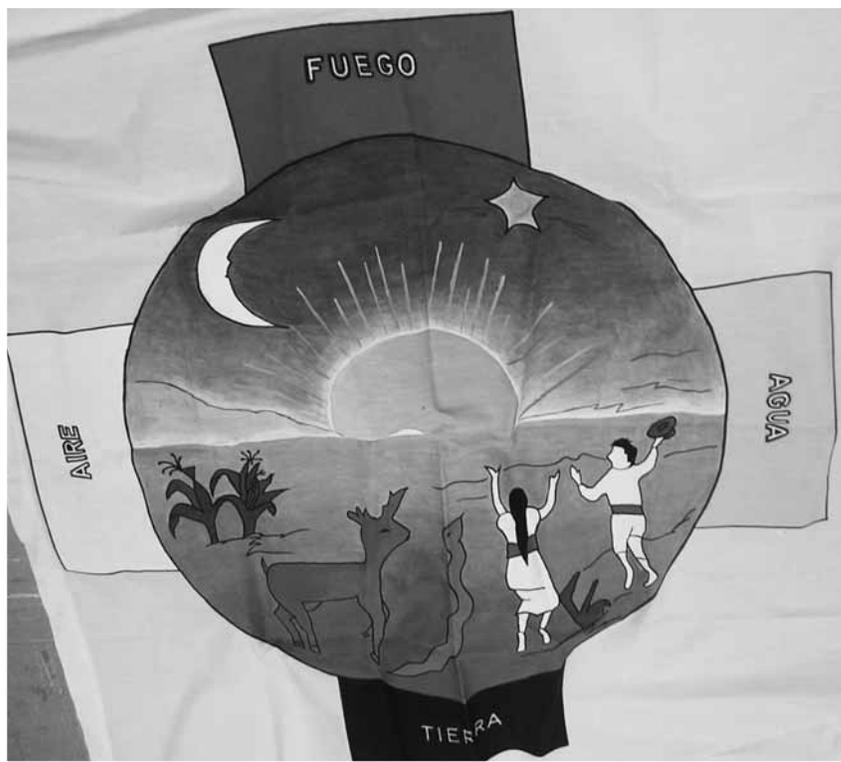


Photo: Faye Wakeling

### Four Directions brought to Canada by Catarina Morales of the Fraternidad

#### The Medicine Wheel

The Medicine Wheel is an ancient symbol used by almost all Aboriginal peoples of North and South America. It is sometimes named the Four Directions. As a visual depiction it makes the concept of sacred space more real and visible. Most Aboriginal people of the Americas share the common principle that life is a Circle and that the Four Directions represent the diversity and inclusivity of all people. In the Circle, the Four Directions are associated with colours: east and yellow, west and red, south and black, north and white.

The designation of Medicine Wheel acknowledges that a healthy human journey around the Circle of life results in a "whole" or complete person, living with all aspects of life in balance: emotional, physical, mental and spiritual.

"A Medicine Wheel is a physical manifestation of Spiritual energy, an outward expression of an internal dialogue. It is a mirror in which we can better SEE what is going on within us. It is a wheel of protection that enables us, and allows us to gather surrounding energies into a focal point... It is a place of knowing that we are all connected to one another. And by showing us the intricacies of the interwoven threads of life, we can better see what is our part in it all." *Marjorie Beaucage, Metis of Red River, Manitoba*

### 3 Considering our context: Our spirituality

Keeping the “Circle of Spirituality” sheet from the previous exercise before you, read in unison the following excerpt from *Living Faith*:

Some whom we encounter belong to other religions  
and already have a faith.  
Their lives often give evidence of devotion and reverence for life.  
We recognize that truth and goodness in them  
are the work of God’s Spirit, the author of all truth.  
We should not address others in a spirit of arrogance  
implying that we are better than they.  
But rather, in the spirit of humility,  
as beggars telling others where food is to be found,  
we point to life in Christ.”

(From *Living Faith — A Statement of Christian Belief*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984, Section 9.2.1, p. 26)

Talk about how the words of *Living Faith* address, or don’t address, the issues of spirituality raised in the Aboriginal concepts of the Circle and the Medicine Wheel and in your group’s own Circle Spirituality.

Today an increasing number of Aboriginal youth are turning to spiritual Elders in their community as they seek to understand their identity within this modern era. Many churches see

this as a rejection of Christianity and find it difficult to be open to make a place for Aboriginal ways in their own spiritual practises. And of course it was not very many decades ago when the Canadian government and Canadian churches, including The Presbyterian Church in Canada, had a policy to assimilate Aboriginal young people into Canada’s European cultural and religious ways.

Our church now recognizes God’s love at work in the lives and rituals of Canadian Aboriginal people. In 1994 the church confessed its complicity in the government’s policy to “ban some important practices through which Aboriginal peoples experienced the presence of the creator God” and that it had presumed “to know better than Aboriginal peoples” what was needed for “life abundant” (*The Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada*, June 9, 1994). Today the church seeks ways to renew relationships with Canadian Aboriginal people. Read the box “Bible and Feather.”



Photo: Faye Wakeling

Aboriginal Day Celebration Winnipeg 2005

## 4 Hearing a story from Scripture

Read aloud Matthew 15:21-29, “The Canaanite Woman’s Faith.”

The Canaanites were the native inhabitants of the land that was promised to Abraham’s descendants, so there was historic cultural and religious “distance” marked by great animosity between Canaanites and the Jews in Jesus’ day. Jesus, a Jew, enters into Canaan and the encounter with the Canaanite woman recalls the original struggle between the Hebrews and the indigenous population of the land. The woman is a stranger, indigenous, considered pagan by the Jews. She is also the mother of a child said to have a demon (which was the usual way of explaining a mysterious illness). Therefore, the woman was likely marginalized as “impure” because of her sex, race, religion and social status.

When Jesus insists that his mission is limited to the Jews (“children”) and not to the dogs (“Gentiles”), the woman does not take offence or deny their racial and cultural differences. Instead, she recognizes Jesus’ place as a spiritual leader and pleads that even those outside of his religion be allowed to be fed by him. Acknowledging her faith and her insight, Jesus heals her daughter. In the discussion with the Canaanite woman, it seems that Jesus learns something very significant about the direction of his mission — he recognizes that his mission must extend beyond the people of Israel.

Re-read Matthew 15:21-29 as a dramatic dialogue. Have one participant read the Narrator part and another the disciples’ part (verse 23). Divide the rest of the group in half with one group reading Jesus’ words (in verses 24, 26, 28) and the other group reading the Canaanite woman’s words (in verses 22, 25, 27). Option: Add movements and actions.

### Discussion:

What have you learned from this encounter?

## 5 Hearing partner stories

Divide into groups, with each group exploring one of the following stories. Afterwards bring the groups together and have them present a summary of their story and their feelings about it in whatever method or combination of methods they wish — such as through words, drama or images.

### Story 1

“Spirituality is life! It is in everything — in relationships with God, myself, others, community and nature.” The speaker was one of the women gathered in a simple adobe home to share the many ways they are working together in their community. They are part of the

Eddie Mann, Elder Jerry, and Tyler Ketchum (left to right) holding an eagle feather during a traditional Aboriginal retreat.



Photo courtesy of Vivian Ketchum

### Bible and Feather

Picture Tyler Ketchum, an Aboriginal Christian, standing tall and holding an eagle feather in one hand. At 20 years of age, he has just hunted and fished, experienced his first sweat lodge and received his traditional name, Medicine Bear. These activities were part of a two-day traditional retreat with a Native Elder and made possible by the Anishinabe Fellowship Centre, a mission and outreach program of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Previously Tyler knew little about his ancestors’ traditions. As Tyler’s mother said, this retreat “demonstrates how willing the church is now to accept my traditional beliefs, beliefs that I consider to be a very important part of myself — a part of myself that is spiritual.” Now she can picture Tyler “standing with a Bible in one hand and an eagle feather in the other.”

(From the bulletin insert “Renewing Relationships,” Healing and Reconciliation program, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2007)



Spirituality workshop

Association of Kekchi\* Women, which has been organized and supported by the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterians in the Cantel region. They were using posters with pictures to illustrate that all aspects of their lives are a living out of spirituality — in church, in the family and in the community. They had been taught that spirituality is only in the church, where women have no role and have been treated as though they have nothing to contribute. Now they see things differently and they speak of the integrated nature of spirituality in their work. They lead Bible studies, animate sessions on gender equality, workshops on self-esteem and promote ecological projects in the community like composting to replace chemical fertilizers.

These women are reclaiming Maya values and cultural practises. They are claiming their right to be treated with respect as Maya people and not “Indios”

(a derogatory name). The women continue to share their thoughts: “Spirituality is everything we do. Each person is given a gift by God. If something is created with love, then it is part of spirituality. We need to leave behind our egocentric

way of being. Individualism is a problem. If we get rid of our self-centredness, we will work together in our community. God made the world for all, not just for us.”

\* Kekchi is one of the Maya cultural groups.

## Story 2

Ronaldo, a Maya spiritual leader and a lay leader in the Presbyterian Church in Guatemala, describes Maya spirituality in this way:

“Maya spirituality has taken thousands of years to develop. Like all of nature, there will be growth, adaptation and evolution and so it must change in this modern era. There are those

who say that Maya ideas are disappearing, but that is not true. Maya spirituality is in a process of transformation and a new period of growth.

“The Maya calendar marks the rhythm of life of our people and we are approaching the beginning of a new era, a time we know as Vaktun. We are seeing changes in the worldwide struggles of indigenous peoples as they gain confidence to speak out. We are being given signs that we must share and we are seeking the wisdom of our ancestors to understand. We are bringing together similar interests as indigenous people and as Christians. We are very happy to be engaging in relationships with other religions and to talk with Buddhists, those of other oriental and indigenous religions, to see what points we have in common. In the end, we share the same humanity and history.

“It is a good time to begin to talk. This moment has begun, like a very tender plant. It is a young plant, not only a seed in the ground that we cannot see.

### Merging Spiritualities

Reuben, a Maya Christian, has been taking courses at Evangelical Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America, known as CEDEPCA, a Guatemalan partner of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. “When I was growing up,” Reuben says, “I was taught that God is a punishing God of anger and not a God of love, but later on, I had the opportunity to meet theologians of other cultures and I discovered a different theology.” Reuben continues, “I began to reflect on the practices of my grandparents and what I learned from them. Each mid-day when the church bells rang in the town, we would kneel under the tree and pray, not just for ourselves, but for everyone. I had learned that the Maya culture was pagan and had left these practises behind. But now from courses with CEDEPCA, I have found that all that we have received remains a part of us. For me, there is no longer any contradiction between Maya spirituality and Christian spirituality.”

We must encounter more than differences, but those things that we share in common. In many regions of the world, people are experiencing these same signs and this is bringing us together. Maya cosmivision is about the function of all that exists in the world. For example, we share the same air so what happens in one part of the world is going to affect the whole world. The Maya cosmivision brings together faith and science as one unit. The Maya mission is to be a sacred human being, seeing our faith as part of the economy, culture and politics. We seek the same unification of faith and engagement in the world in our church.

“The principles of Maya spirituality are faith, tolerance and peace. Peace must come through individual tranquility and an opportunity to grow in all aspects. Seek peace in order to provoke justice. Peace is a meaning, a word, a sentiment and a profound principle for indigenous people.

“How can we succeed in making the church in our land an instrument of peace, justice and unity? The Holy Spirit is giving us the signs that we are called not to be enclosed in our church, but to break down the barriers of skin colour, culture, language and faith. All this is part of this time in which we are living.”

### Story 3

“We try to help people understand they don’t have to give up their traditional roots and culture when they become Christians.” [Canadian Presbyterian Aboriginal minister Stewart] Folster says, “We ask people to respect and be sensitive to native spirituality and the beliefs of the people. I don’t see a contradiction in this. Most people here have met Jesus at some time in their lives. We are all worshipping the same God. And the teachings of faith, honesty, kindness, caring, sharing, love, honour and respect are the same in both beliefs. In the Native Circle, we emphasize respect, love and kindness.”

At Sunday afternoon worship services, the congregation sits in a circle around a low table. The candle at its centre represents Christ the Light. At the four corners of the table are a Bible with a smooth, round Talking Stone on top, a ceramic smudge pot, a native drum, and an offering basket. Worship services always begin with a traditional smudging ceremony where sweet grass and sage are burned. “For native people, plant life represents kindness,” Folster explains, “and the smudging ceremony is one of cleansing and purification. It is the first thing that happens in our worship service. It is another way to pray.”

Services follow the common liturgy of The Presbyterian Church: call to worship, hymns, prayer of confession, the Lord’s Prayer, Scripture readings, meditations and offering. But there are added features. “After a short meditation, I pass the Talking Stone to the person on my left, following the path of the sun. I invite that person to share his or her feelings about the message, Scripture readings, or anything else spiritual that is happening in his or her life. That person can share or pass the stone to the next person. We go around the circle.”

During the pastoral prayer, individuals also have the opportunity to pray aloud or silently while holding the Talking Stone. Folster says the rock is doubly symbolic. In native spirituality, rock has always symbolized faith; in Christianity, it reminds us that Christ is the Rock, the foundation of our faith.



Photo: Wilma Welsh

Stewart Folster

“I’m not trying to blend two religions,” he says. “I don’t believe I have to give up any part of my native spirituality to be a Christian and follow Christ to the fullest. Most of the people who come to this church believe the same way.”

(Excerpts from “Stewart Folster: The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s only active, ordained native minister” by Darlene Polachic in *Presbyterian Record*, July/August 2001, pp. 35-36. Rev. Folster is the minister of the Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry.)

### **Engage in group discussion:**

1. What understanding of spirituality do you find in each of these stories?
2. How are these stories similar to the biblical story about the Canaanite woman? How are they different?
3. What challenges, troubles or excites you about what you know about Aboriginal spirituality?
4. What additional information or experiences related to Aboriginal spirituality would you welcome? Consider doing more than one of the responding options below to help you continue exploring this theme.

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## **6 Responding**

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### **Story stoles**

Lay out all the stoles that were begun in earlier sessions along with additional lengths of fabrics. Read over the box “Story Stoles” on page 8. Invite newcomers to choose a piece of fabric and other participants to continue working on their stoles. Talk together about the themes, images and symbols of this session that might be reflected in the stoles. Set out all the materials and invite participants to work on their stoles while continuing to talk about the information, stories and issues raised in the session.

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## **Additional Options**

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### **Learning about Aboriginal cultural heritage and spirituality**

Aboriginal communities across Canada celebrate their heritage and spirituality throughout the year. Consider attending such a celebration or inviting an Aboriginal elder to visit your community. For example June 21 is National Aboriginal Day in Canada and pow wows are commonly held in the summer into the autumn. Obtain information about National Aboriginal Day from Indian Affairs and Northern Affairs Canada at [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca) or contact Justice Ministries. Consider ways to connect with Aboriginal people and their communities to learn more about their cultural heritage and spirituality.

### **Movie viewing**

Organize a showing of the video *Sharing the Journey: Native Spirituality* (available through The Book Room of The Presbyterian Church in Canada 1-800-619-7301, [ww.bookroom@presbyterian.ca](mailto:ww.bookroom@presbyterian.ca)). Afterwards discuss Aboriginal spirituality as it relates to Aboriginal culture, past and present.

### **Connecting with Aboriginal spirituality**

*Something Extra* projects (see page 70 “For Further Study”) provide resources for Maya women to study the Bible and connect it with their spirituality. Another project provides resources for the Cariboo Ministry to Nazko children who are learning to celebrate and

honour their culture. Read about these projects, choose one and plan to raise funds from amongst yourselves and members of your congregation. What information will you share about Aboriginal spirituality?

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## 7 Closing

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Gather in a circle around the central table and light the Christ candle. Sing “O Great Spirit” #447 in *The Book of Praise* (1997). The singing could be accompanied by the soft beating of a drum or the hands on a vessel. This hymn by Doreen Clellamin is the only hymn in the hymnal composed by a Canadian Aboriginal person.

Invite one person to read aloud the following quotation:

“The call to make disciples of all nations needs to be understood in a more respectful way. A disciple is a learner. All nations, all cultures, have much to learn from the Christ spirit. The Christ spirit does not belong to Western civilization but can be found among peoples and cultures all over the world. Our culture has difficulty learning this. Perhaps for us, discipleship to Christ must involve learning to sit humbly with brothers and sisters from many parts of our world and learning what they have to teach.”

(From *The Wounds of Manuel Saquic: Biblical Reflections from Guatemala* by Jim Manley, The United Church Publishing House, 1997, p. 85)

Pray together:

O Great Spirit,  
whose voice is heard in the soft breeze  
and whose breath gives life to the world,  
we need your strength and wisdom.  
May we walk in beauty. May our eyes  
ever behold the red and purple sunset.  
Make us wise so that we may understand  
what you have taught us.

Help us learn the lessons you have hidden  
in every leaf and rock.  
Make us always ready to come to you  
with clean hands and straight eyes  
so that when life fades, as the fading sunset,  
our spirits may come to you  
without shame. Amen.

(From the 1981 *World Day of Prayer* worship service written by North American Aboriginal women)

### Go Forth:

Go now and carry your faith and spirituality into the world,  
all the time asking for God’s deliverance —  
*from the cowardice that dares not face new truth,*  
*from the laziness that is contented with half-truth, and*  
*from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth.*  
Good Lord, deliver [us]. Amen.

(Italicized words are Kenyan and anonymous. See #397 in *The Book of Praise*, 1997.)

### Aboriginal Songwriter

Doreen Clellamin, an Aboriginal leader in B.C., passed away suddenly on Monday, August 7, 2006 of pneumonia. Doreen was travelling in the United States as a guest elder on a ceremonial canoe trip when she became ill. No surprise to those who know her, Doreen was dancing just minutes before she was first taken to hospital. Doreen provided strong leadership in her home community of Bella Coola, as well as in the United Church of Canada on a regional and national level. Doreen’s huge heart, passion and kindness were well known throughout the church and her hymn “O Great Spirit” was included in hymnals of a number of denominations.

# Session Five

## Teach me God

*Ways of learning and knowing*

Photo: Paul Jeffrey

### **Purposes**

1. To recognize how informal learning experiences have contributed to the development of our identity.
2. To reflect on the significant role of non-formal learning and oral tradition in the continuation of cultural identity of Aboriginal people in Guatemala and Canada.
3. To consider the educational needs of all people in order to promote personal and community development that will further the building of God's kingdom.

### **Materials**

- Read information on “Shared Leadership” on page 7.
- A piece of colourful woven cloth (from Guatemala if possible) and a central table.
- Flipchart and markers.
- The “Story Stoles” begun in earlier sessions and the materials for adding to them: a variety of soft fabric pieces (16cm x 1.5m or 6in. x 80in.) one for each participant, scissors, fabric glue, needles and colourful threads, yarns, fabric pieces, buttons, beads and fabric markers/paints.
- Review the optional suggestions in the “Responding” section and choose which ones the group will consider, bringing the necessary information and materials.

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# 1 Opening

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Welcome participants, giving opportunity as necessary for people to introduce themselves. Review the purposes for this session (as outlined above). Have one person read Psalm 78:1-4:

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.

(Psalm 78:1-4)

Place the woven material on the central table. Set out the study's front cover picture of the Maya woman carrying her child in a *chuuq'ubál* and read aloud the following:

*In the Quiche culture of the Guatemalan Mayas in the western highlands, mothers carry their babies on their backs in a hand-woven shawl called a chuq'ubal ("chook ew bal"). In the distinctly woven coloured lines of this cloth are the symbols of the unswerving faith and hope of Maya people who know that God walks with them. In the yellow colours in the weaving of the chuq'ubál that holds the baby close to her mother's body, we see the yellow of life-giving grains and sunlight, the harvest of corn laid out to dry under the sun, corn that is life-giving for Maya people.*

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## 2 Introducing activity: Remembering learning

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Divide into small groups. Take turns sharing briefly your responses to each of these questions:

1. Who passed on to you stories about your parents and grandparents and cultural heritage?
2. Who was most influential in helping you develop your faith as a child, adolescent and adult?
3. What was one of the most important things (e.g. a value, a skill, a way of being) you learned as a child or an adolescent? What or who helped you learn it?
4. How do you feel about your experience/your children's experience of formal education?

Come together and take turns sharing the responses and the discussions that evolved in the small groups. Write or draw on the flipchart any significant points that the group wants to note.

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### 3 Considering our context: Learning to walk in beauty

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Have four participants read the “conversation” below about traditional indigenous education.

**Reader 1:** What is traditional education? In keeping with Aboriginal worldviews — including conceptions of the world in which all exists in fluid relation to all else — traditional education lasts a lifetime.

**Reader 2:** Jeannette Armstrong [an Okanagan Indian writer, educator and artist] writes that it is ... *a natural process occurring during everyday activities ... ensuring cultural continuity and survival of the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of the cultural unit and of its environment.*

**Reader 3:** Vicki English-Currie was brought up as a member of the Blackfoot nation in what is now called Alberta. She writes, *“At the gatherings, there was no separation of the children and the adults. It was an extended family. All of the talk was comprehensible so the children were included in the conversation, although the adults did most of the talking... I remember spending many days walking with my grandfather in the woods or down the road. Many of the stories he told me were turned into a life-lasting informal education of values.”*

She goes on to say: *“The Indian people’s non-directive approach is a way of guiding offspring. It determined a basis for a future lifestyle. We matured rapidly and we became adept at determining our own actions and making our own decisions, while being sensitive to the expectations of the collective and of our elders.”*

**Reader 4:** Rita Jack, a member of the Secwepemc Nation in the interior of the current British Columbia writes: *The methods used to teach skills for everyday living and to instil values and principles were participation and example. Within communities, skills were taught by every member, with Elders playing a very important role. Education for the child began at the time he or she was born. The child was prepared for his role in life whether it be hunter, fisherman, wife or mother. This meant that each child grew up knowing his place in the system...Integral to the traditional education was the participation of the family and community as educators.*

**Reader 1:** The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies advocates for the inclusion of indigenous traditional education in all elementary and secondary schools across Canada. The Coalition envisions that the outcome of this would be a country whose people know how to get along with each other in a kind, sharing, honest and respectful way, listening, learning and knowing about each other; as Canadians we would know how to conduct ourselves in right relations with all of creation, including our relations of the natural world; conduct ourselves respectfully towards people from all the four directions on Mother Earth. The Navajo Nation of south-western United States of America talk about this concept as “walking in beauty.”

(Excerpts from *Learning about Walking in Beauty: Placing Aboriginal Perspective in Canadian Classrooms*, The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002, pp. 10-12)

#### **Discuss:**

1. What strikes you about the ways of learning and teaching described in these readings?
2. How different do you think Aboriginal experiences of learning (as described in these readings) are to non-Aboriginal experiences?
3. How would you feel about non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal children alike being part of an educational process based on the principles described?

There are many non-Aboriginal people in our churches as well, whose way of learning is oral and experiential, that do not learn from the printed word. This is a challenge to the church, not only in the preparation of resources, but more importantly in valuing oral tradition as another lens, another worldview, through which we can understand relationships and the world around us.

### Discuss:

How do those in your congregations whose learning strength is experiential feel about their ability to communicate or participate with those whose learning strength is the written word? What obstacles or barriers do they encounter in your services, committees and activities?

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## 4 Hearing a story from Scripture

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Read aloud Luke 13:18-21. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. According to the writer of Luke, Jesus had an awareness that every moment of teaching was precious. He used every opportunity through his travels and healing ministry to teach. Jesus was a person with a mission, persistently trying to convey his knowledge and wisdom — his “kind of knowing,” to use words from *The Message* in Luke 13:27 — about God and God’s kingdom before it was too late.

From The Good News Bible, read aloud again “The Parable of the Yeast”:

*Again Jesus asked, “What shall I compare the kingdom of God with? It is like this. A woman takes some yeast and mixes it with a bushel of flour until the whole batch of dough rises.”*

Perhaps Jesus had seen gatherings like those of Maya women who came from their small mountain villages to share their work and their dreams. They would gather in the courtyard of their Presbyterian church preparing a huge cauldron of hearty soup and cooking tortillas, an essential part of any meal and probably not unlike the unleavened bread eaten by the Jews during Passover. The cornmeal that the Maya brought to the gathering seemed to yield a limitless supply of tortillas.

*“A woman takes some yeast . . .”* She takes the life-giving elements of her work. *“[She] mixes it with a bushel of flour. . .”* It is hard work to mix and knead the large quantity needed to feed the whole community.



Photo: Iancerio Lopez

Women cooking

### The Parable of the Rising of Community

The women from Maya communities came from near and far to participate at the end-of-year General Assembly of the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterians. Many travelled long distances, walking for hours on mountainous paths, taking pick-ups and buses all day to bring the “fruit of their labours” to share with others, to offer encouragement through their stories of working together to bring about change, to hang their beautiful weaving all around to fill the place with the colours, the creativity and symbols of their people. Some women came carrying baskets of potatoes from their work project, others large Pepsi bottles filled with milk from their cow project. They prepared meals together, they slept on the floor side by side, and they laughed, talked, sang and prayed together. It was a celebration of life and a vision of the kingdom of God.

“*The whole batch of dough rises . . .*” The ingredients are nourished by the leavening agent just as whole Maya communities have been filled with the Spirit to become the builders of God’s kingdom here and now.

### Discussion:

1. Share ways in which you have experienced this “rising up” in your community.
2. Discuss the significance of the woman’s actions, reflecting on what the dough and the yeast could be in your context.

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## 5 Hearing partner stories

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Invite three people to read or re-tell in their own words these stories.

### Story 1

Today some Maya women have economic projects like growing potatoes, raising cows, weaving. They can receive a loan from the Revolving Loan Fund of the Fraternidad, which they must pay back, without interest, within one or two years, depending on the project. Then they are able to receive another loan if needed. They also take part in courses with the Ministry of Women Program. The women spoke of the importance of the courses on self-esteem in helping them to value themselves and their skills. In the sessions on indigenous values they shared what is important to them as Mam\* women and they talked about these values — such as the Mam language, traditional dress, special foods, grinding their own corn and eating the healthy traditional food of their people.

The Ministry of Women Program includes sessions on Christian values such as love and living out faith. The studies of the Bible bring the participants new understanding of a God who loves them, who yearns for their families to have healthy lives with dignity and calls them to participate in the care of Creation. One woman said; “We do a lot of work — weaving, making clothes, preparing food and working in the fields. We need to work with our husbands to get enough money for our families.” It is a challenge to take time for education; the groups meet in the afternoon after finishing a long day of work in the fields

on their projects. The women understand now that this sort of education is a part of life and survival.

\*Mam is one of the Maya cultural groups.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey

A Mam woman — Maria Augustin Cortes — doing back-strap weaving

## Learning to survive

"I work in the project and now I have my own cow," said one Maya woman. She continued, "I have learned to compost with the household garbage and to nourish the land. We don't need to use chemical fertilizers for our cornfield. The agronomist has taught us how to make a liquid to give to our cows, pigs and chickens to get rid of their parasites. We have learned to use all the materials from around here to reduce our work and to be able to benefit from what is around us."

We have learned that we must not cut trees for our needs. We need the firewood, so if we do cut trees, we must plant more in order to protect the land and to bring rain."



Stirring compost

## Story 2

Leadership development has been a priority of the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterians since its beginnings. The majority of Maya women have had no opportunity for formal education and have reaped great benefits from education that starts with their experience and wisdom. The grandmothers have traditionally been responsible for education which is a part of the everyday living of a child through seeing, hearing the wisdom of the ancestors and relating to the world around. Using popular education methods, women have gained confidence, gained knowledge through their shared experiences, learned new tools of analysis and have studied the Bible from their perspective as Maya women.

Carmelina Sam de Yac is a Quiche woman and a young grandmother with Grade 5 formal education. For the past seven years Carmelina has participated in the Fraternidad's Biblical studies and courses on the ministry of women. She was the first woman to receive her Diploma in Pastoral Studies from the Universidad Biblica Latinamericana of Costa Rica, which has accredited the work of women who have completed courses with the Fraternidad, even for women who learn from experiential learning and do not read or write. Carmelina is now a staff member of the organization and is responsible for the Ministry of Women Program. She continues her studies through courses offered by the Evangelical Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America, known as CEDEPCA, a Guatemalan partner of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Carmelina is very engaged with others in training new animators that can teach in their communities in their own language. They are now reaching out to 24 women's groups in various regions of the country. This educational process is like a stone that is tossed in a lake, making ripples that expand and reach out further to touch more lives.

## Learning to live

The Maya women participating in the Fraternidad's courses came together at first to take part in a project. They have found so much more — self-esteem, new skills, recuperation of indigenous values, how to work in a co-operative and management skills. One Mam woman said, "Now we have learned how to manage our project and how to handle the small amount of money we can earn. We have increased our awareness of important issues such as Free Trade and how it will affect us and nutrition. As Mam women we are reclaiming our ancient traditions, such as being guided by the moon to know when to harvest."

## Story 3

### Learning to make connections

Rebecca, a Maya student in one of Karla's university-level course at CEDEPCA said, "Through courses with CEDEPCA and other organizations, I have connected to Latin American theology and made connections with our reality. A course on Creation and Culture raised many questions for me in relation to the society, the economy, the context of our country and Maya creation stories in the sacred book, the Popul Vuh. This helped me greatly to make the connections with Maya practises. Through participation in one of the Fraternidad's courses, I reflected on gender issues and the place of women. It is very difficult for women to open spaces for themselves in the church. There is much prejudice in the church and we must work on this ourselves."

"Our dreams are bigger now." The comment came from Julia Giron, one of the twenty-five women who finished the "It's Wonderful to Be a Woman" course offered by CEDEPCA (the Evangelical Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America), a Guatemalan partner of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. At the beginning of the course five months earlier, the women shared their dreams with their teacher, Karla Koll, a minister with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and CEDEPCA professor. "Most spoke of wanting to see their children get through school and establish families," said Karla. She continued, "Then we studied Mary's dream from Luke 1:46-55, about the powerful being thrown from their thrones and the hungry filled with good things. Big dreams, indeed! During the course we explored the contrast between the way society discriminates against women and God's desires for our lives as God's daughters. Biblical stories, such as the tales of the women who conspired to save baby Moses' life, fed our reflection. The participants began taking seriously Paul's exhortation to be transformed (Romans 12:2). This course provided a rare opportunity for women from different cultures to learn from one another."

### Engage in group discussion:

1. How do the experiences described in these stories remind you of the parable of the yeast and kingdom building? What experiences have you had that are similar?
2. List the various ways of learning that you have heard in these stories. Share comments.
3. What do you think are some of the strengths and weaknesses of these kinds of approaches to learning? Refer to information in the boxes.
4. Would you like informal learning and oral tradition to play a more significant role in education for the members of our families and communities, including our faith communities? Why or Why not? If so, how could this happen?

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## 6 Responding

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### Story stoles

Lay out all the stoles that were begun in earlier sessions along with additional lengths of fabrics. Read over the box "Story Stoles" on page 7. Invite newcomers to choose a piece of fabric and other participants to continue working on their stoles. Talk together about the themes, images and symbols of this session that might be reflected in the stoles. Set out all the materials and invite participants to work on their stoles while continuing to talk about the information, stories and issues raised in the session.

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## Additional Options

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### The rising of community

Plan a community celebration for your congregation — perhaps a fellowship evening or an after-church lunch — to help others connect to our Maya partners. Consider including in the event these elements:

- A dramatization of one of the study's scripture stories
- A re-telling of one or more stories from our Maya partners
- Your group's story of this study told through your handcrafted stoles
- Hymn singing in English and Spanish
- A Maya poem or prayer
- A communal meal with tortillas and refried beans. (See recipes in *Partners — Meeting Maya Friends in Guatemala*, a resource listed in "For Further Study" on page 70.)

## The strengthening of community

Find out what resources or materials are available for Presbyterian congregations that will assist in respecting and including those who learn experientially or do not find the printed word useful. Use or create such materials if this would meet a need in your community.

## Walking in beauty

Both the Guatemalan Maya and Canadian Aboriginal people have been oppressed by the formal education systems of their countries. Browse through a copy of the document *Learning about Walking in Beauty* by the Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies. (See "For Further Study" on page 70 for information on obtaining a copy.) Choose one of the four main chapters to read and discuss:

North: Wisdom, Elders, Aboriginal Worldview	South: Many Stories
East: Experiences of European Colonization	West: Time of Renewal

## Canadian Aboriginal oral tradition

Canadian Aboriginal people have a great tradition of story telling. (See "Grandmother Moon" on page 19.) Contact an Aboriginal community nearby or inquire from Justice Ministries (1-800-619-7301) about ways to connect with an Aboriginal Elder who might share some of his or her people's stories with your church. Talk about how you would welcome and offer hospitality to this visitor.

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# 7 Closing

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Gather around the table and light the Christ candle. Listen as one person reads:

How is it that we hear, each of us,  
 in our own native language,  
 speaking about God's deeds of power?  
 What does this mean?  
 God declares I will pour out my Spirit upon everyone.  
 And your sons and your daughters will proclaim my message.  
 Your young people will see visions and  
 your old people shall dream dreams.

(Based on Acts 2:8,11-12,17)

Sing "Teach me God to wonder, teach me God to see" # 704 in *The Book of Praise* (1997).

Pray in unison:

Grant us, God, the humility to become learners of Christ.  
 Give us the discipline and insight to see the spirit of Christ  
 in other people and other cultures.  
 We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

(From *The Wounds of Manuel Saquic: Biblical Reflections from Guatemala* by Jim Manly, p. 85)

# Session Six

## May the God of hope



*Solidarity and hope*

Photo: Paul Jeffrey

### Purposes

1. To reflect on the meaning of solidarity.
2. To find hope in the faithful witness of our Aboriginal partners in Guatemala and Canada.
3. To act in solidarity with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters in Guatemala and Canada.

### Materials

- Read information on “Shared Leadership” on page 7.
- A piece of colourful woven cloth (from Guatemala if possible) and a central table.
- A large Christ candle and matches; four strips of fabric or crepe paper (one each of yellow, black, red and white).
- Coloured markers, flipchart and writing paper.
- Write on a flipchart the Spanish words on page 61 for the first verse of hymn #709 “What does the Lord require of you?”
- Molding clay or plasticine in a variety of colours in sufficient quantity for the size of group.
- The “Story Stoles” begun in earlier sessions and the materials for adding to them and for completing them: scissors, fabric glue, needles and colourful threads, yarns, fabric pieces, buttons, beads and fabric markers/paints.
- Review the optional suggestions in the “Responding” section and choose which ones the group will consider, bringing the necessary information and materials.

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# 1 Opening

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Welcome participants, giving opportunity as necessary for people to introduce themselves. Review the purposes for this session (as outlined above).

Pray together:

Loving God,  
We are different from one another in race and language,  
in material things,  
in gifts,  
in opportunities,  
but each of us has a human heart,  
knowing joy and sorrow,  
pleasure and pain.  
We are one in our need of your forgiveness,  
your strength,  
your love;  
make us one in our response to you,  
that bound by common love,  
and freed from selfish aims,  
we may work for the good of all  
and the advancement of your kingdom. Amen.

(From the 1993 *World Day of Prayer* worship service, written by Guatemalan women)

Sing “What does the Lord require of you?” #709 in *The Book of Praise*. Sing it again, singing the first verse in Spanish, if possible, in solidarity with our brothers and sisters of Guatemala.

Verse 1:       ¿Qué el Señor espera de ti?       ¿Qué el Señor espera de ti?

Place the woven material on the central table. Set out the study’s front cover picture of the Maya woman carrying her child in a *chuj’ubál* and read aloud the following:

*In the Quiche culture of the Guatemalan Mayas in the western highlands, mothers carry their babies on their backs in a hand-woven shawl called a chuj’ubál (“chook ew bal”). In the distinctly woven coloured lines of this cloth are the symbols of the unswerving faith and hope of Maya people who know that God walks with them. In the brown and green colours in the weaving of the chuj’ubál that holds the baby close to her mother’s body we see the brown of Mother Earth’s fertile soil and the green of verdant grasses and foliage; the roots, tree trunks and corn stalks. These are the foundations of faith seen in flora and fauna that bring forth seeds of solidarity of God’s people and support the hope of new life.*

Remembering that the Aboriginal People of Canada open their gatherings with prayer to the Four Directions as a way of recognizing God’s presence in all of creation, we place the four colours on our table to represent the Four Directions and the sacred Medicine Wheel. (Place four strips of material or crepe paper radiating in the four directions: yellow to East, black to South, red to West, white to North.) We place a candle in the centre and light it to represent Christ, present with us. (Light the candle.)

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## 2 Introducing activity: Solidarity in symbols

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Print the word “solidarity” in large letters on the flip chart. Consider what this word means to participants based on their own experiences and what they know of the experiences of others. Form small groups and take turns sharing an experience that has helped you understand the meaning of solidarity. This could be an experience within the family or congregation, in the local community, or involvement with a national or international coalition or project. As experiences are recollected, give everyone the equivalent of a fist-size ball of modeling clay or plasticine with an invitation to use it to sculpt a symbol or visual representation of solidarity.

Afterwards come together with each group presenting points from their discussion. Invite each participant to place their sculpted symbol within the circle of the medicine wheel on the central table, introducing or explaining their symbol if they wish to do so.

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## 3 Considering our context: Solidarity in words

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Invite three participants to read the following three quotations:

**Reader 1:** A Guatemalan refugee leader said, “Solidarity is mutual support, where we carry the weight of a problem between us and this lightens the burden.”\*

**Reader 2:** A Canadian Aboriginal said, “We’re working on our own healing. Heal yourselves. We all need healing, but yes, talk with us, let’s listen to each other and help each other. Healing can happen when one’s heart and mind is open to listening and learning and appreciating and accepting each other. Healing happens when the heart is right and attitudes change behaviours.”\*\*

**Reader 3:** Another Guatemalan refugee leader said: “Solidarity is a two-way process. We are in solidarity with you as much as you are in solidarity with us. You have supported us not only by your physical presence but on some occasions by your economic presence, material presence, providing clothing and other things the community needed. When we help you in your spiritual life through our culture and through sharing with you the value of struggle, that too, is solidarity.\*

\*From *Weaving Relationships: Canada-Guatemala Solidarity*, Kathryn Anderson, Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2003, pp.201, 209

\*\* From the Vancouver Consultation held by the Healing and Reconciliation Design Team, The Presbyterian Church in Canada

With these quotations in mind and the sculpted symbols in view, ask group members to consider whom they are in solidarity with, encouraging recall of the learning experiences of this study and their own personal experiences. (It may be helpful to recall the titles and stories of the previous five sessions.)

Set out the writing paper and coloured markers. Invite participants to write a message of solidarity with a local community, congregational, Aboriginal partner or global audience in mind. Display these messages around the meeting space.

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## 4 Hearing a story from Scripture

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The Gospel of Luke pays special attention to those who suffer injustice and have little or no power in the community. Jesus tells the following parable to his disciples on their way to Jerusalem at the end of his ministry. He has warned them of what lies ahead and he seeks to

offer hope to them and others who feel powerless. Jesus shares the parable with them that they “should always pray and never lose heart” (or in other translations “never become discouraged”). Jesus’ compassionate understanding of what his followers will face is very moving as he seeks to bring them hope, through the powerful story of a widow’s struggle for justice. The widow in biblical times was the most vulnerable person in society, with very limited legal rights, protection or community support. Judges of the time were notoriously corrupt and protected their own.

Read aloud Luke 18:1-5 “The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge.”

### Discussion:

1. Share stories from your own experience about change that has come about from those who are seemingly powerless in their struggle for justice.
2. How does this parable challenge you? How does it give you hope?

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## 5 Hearing partner stories

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In workshops on gender issues and women’s strengths, the parable of the widow who seeks justice from the unjust judge is a source of challenge and hope for Maya women who participate in study groups of the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterials. The women have used drama to powerfully relate this story to their own context and have gained new insights into what the story means to them.

Have the following partner stories read aloud or re-told by three different people.

### Story 1

A group of Kaqchikel\* women prepared a drama based on the Luke 18:1-5 scripture passage as a reflection on their long-term experience in community organization and engagement in social struggle. A dozen “widows” confronted a dozen “judges” with their collective request for land so that the widows and their families could survive. The “judges” had perceptively appointed a secretary as gate-keeper to protect them from such direct contacts and with every new visit by the “widows” to the “judges” this bureaucratic position became an ongoing statement of the inaccessibility of the people to those in power. The “widows” were finally able to confront the “judges” because the secretary demanded that something had to be done about all these women that kept coming and interrupting the work of the office. The “widows” collectively claimed their rights as women and families, their rights guaranteed in the Peace

Accords and the obligation of the judges to be at the service of the people. The drama went on for 45 minutes with the “widows” remobilizing and strategizing each time their request was refused. They finally wore the “judges” down. It was a powerful parable of collective strength!

\* Kaqchikel is one of the Maya cultural groups



Widow Drama

Photo: Faye Waking

## Encouragement

A group of Mam women, who had had little previous opportunity to express themselves, were very timid in their preparation of this drama. One group was asked to be the widow in this parable and the other the judge. “The judge” was seated behind a desk looking exceedingly powerful and unapproachable. The group that prepared “the widow” to approach had to keep encouraging her to find the courage to even speak to him in the drama. At one point she asked in a whisper if it was alright for her to carry her Bible with her and with this help she was able to shyly ask once more for justice. This group offered a whole new understanding of this parable, focusing on how much encouragement was needed and the tremendous cost for vulnerable women to speak out.

## Story 2

Catarina Morales is the co-ordinator of the Fraternidad. She has walked with the people in their struggles throughout her life, holding strong to a vision for a just society in which Maya people will live full lives, with dignity. She guides the organization through its integrated program that seeks to offer growth and development in all aspects of life — physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual. She is a widow who has raised her three children from a young age on her own. Catarina was one of the first ordained female elders in the Guatemalan Presbyterian Church and the first in her congregation. She was a leader in the struggle for women’s ordination and has continued to support other women to take their place in the church. She integrates Maya culture, spirituality and tradition with her Christian faith. Her commitment to work ecumenically in communities, including all women who want to work collectively, runs counter to her presbytery’s strong resistance to ecumenism. She is a role model for women in the Fraternidad who have been guided by her capable leadership, strong faith and belief in the collective power of the Maya people to bring about the transformation of a hurting and violent society.



Photo: Faye Wakeling

Catarina Morales and Julia Ordonez,  
Fraternidad de Presbiteriales Mayas natural medicine

## Story 3

On December 15, 2006, the Assembly of First Nations, the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada, issued this press release:

“Today’s court ratifications are a victory for the tens of thousands of Residential School system survivors,” said Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Phil Fontaine. “It means that we are on track for payments to be made out sooner than we expected. The Common Experience Payment (CEP), which benefits all residential school survivors, will likely begin in the summer of 2007.

“As you may know, I have worked tirelessly for an early resolution to this historic \$4 billion plus settlement,” said National Chief Fontaine. “Today, we are happy that the courts have found it to be fair and just and have responded quickly to the certification applications. This early resolution of the certification requirement shows the courts realize the importance of getting this deal completed, especially for the elderly and the sick,” added the National Chief. “We expect court decisions in NWT and Nunavut will be rendered positively in the coming days.”

CEP payments are based on attendance at a residential school and will be calculated on the basis of \$10,000 for the first year or portion of a year attended, and \$3,000 per year or portion of subsequent years attended. The total amount of this fund is \$1.9B.

The much improved process for compensation for individuals who suffered abuse will start at the same time. The new process no longer discriminates between survivors depending on their geographic location or religion. It will compensate for more harms; it will be gender neutral; and it will provide more compensation than the present Alternate Disputes Resolution process.

“The courts certification also means the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be starting its work next summer,” noted National Chief Fontaine. “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will ensure that all Canadians will understand the significance of the serious harm done to our people. First Nations are determined to send the message to the world that ‘Never Again’ will such a racist agenda be tolerated in Canada.”

The remaining piece in the ratification process is the ratification by the survivors themselves. They get the last word. They will have 6 months to review the deal to decide if they want it. The AFN has strongly recommended that they accept the deal. The AFN and the Indian Residential Schools Commission will soon begin a comprehensive communications campaign to inform survivors of their rights to compensation.

(Source: Assembly of First Nations  
<http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=3234>)

### Engage in group discussion:

1. How do these stories seem to relate to the parable of the widow and the unjust judge?
2. Identify the expressions of solidarity in each story. (See also “Hummingbird Ministries.”)
3. What message of hope do you receive from each story?

### Hummingbird Ministries

Hummingbird Ministries was initiated in February, 2005, with support from Canada Ministries, the Synod of British Columbia and the Presbytery of Westminster. At first most of the work took place at the Tsawwassen First Nation in Delta, BC, but other sites have been added since that time. Mary Fontaine, who is certified for ordination in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, works with an Advisory Committee made up of people from the Synod of British Columbia, the Presbytery of Westminster, churches in the presbytery, Vancouver School of Theology and from the ministries themselves. Hummingbird Ministries envisions establishing healing circle ministries to restore hope, freedom and justice for Aboriginal healing socially, politically and spiritually and, where the peace of the Spirit of God would prevail, in the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Church.

(Hummingbird Ministries is one of seven native ministries supported by The Presbyterian Church in Canada.)

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## 6 Responding

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### Story stoles

Lay out all the stoles that were begun in earlier sessions along with additional lengths of fabrics. Read over the box “Story Stoles” on page 8. Invite newcomers to choose a piece of fabric and other participants to continue working on their stoles. Talk together about the themes, images and symbols of this session that might be reflected in their stoles.

With this being the last session of the study, the stoles will be part of a closing ritual. Talk about how the stoles will be finished and used after this. Consider continuing this activity as a project. For example, stoles could be made for people in your congregation who are in need of prayer or for a particular group of marginalized people to whom you want to offer encouragement and support.

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### Additional Options

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#### Significant Days

There are two days of particular significance to the church with regards to our relationship with Aboriginal peoples. May 26th has been designated National Day of Healing and Reconciliation and June 21st has been designated National Aboriginal Day. National Aboriginal Day is in recognition of the Aboriginal people and all they have contributed to our communities. This is a day for all Canadians to celebrate the heritage and traditions of Aboriginal people. The National Day of Healing and Reconciliation Day is “an initiative meant to effect healing and reconciliation among all races, creeds, and denominations now residing in Canada.” It provides an opportunity for many organizations to spend time and effort working at the healing that is needed and the reconciliation that can result from our efforts to reach out to each other, person-to-person, community-to-community and nation-to-nation.

The 130th General Assembly adopted a motion declaring that the Sunday before National Aboriginal Day be designated as Aboriginal Sunday commencing June 19, 2005. The 132nd General Assembly adopted a similar motion for the Sunday before National Day of Healing and Reconciliation.

#### Retelling Scripture in drama

Maya women attending the Fraternidad courses have learned that drama is an effective teaching vehicle. Talk about how your community context connects with The Parable of the Unjust Judge. To whom would you like to present this story? Plan to present a dramatic retelling of this Scripture story with a contemporary context.

#### Opportunities to act in solidarity

The Luke 18:1-5 parable and the stories from Aboriginal peoples in Guatemala and in Canada call us as Christians to be in solidarity with those who are marginalized and impoverished. What are some local issues where the support and encouragement of the Christian community might help make a difference in transforming attitudes or actions: a refuge for battered women; a community project to reintegrate the disadvantaged into local society; providing safe shelter for runaway youth; speaking out against unjust employment practices? Not everyone may feel called to support the same issue, but a small group could take on the task of posting up-to-date information on local issues, with details of how to become involved. Include these issues regularly in prayer times during worship.

#### Prayer vigil

Organize a prayer vigil, inviting congregational and community participation, as an expression of spiritual solidarity with Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Guatemala. The vigil could include prayer requests such as the following:

- For healing and reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and the general population in Canada and Guatemala for wrongs committed against the indigenous peoples.
- For openness to the re-birth and recovery of Aboriginal culture and to indigenous expressions of Christian faith.

- For the gifts of life that we receive from God’s Creation and for wisdom as we care for our Mother Earth.
- For our churches and our leaders that they might lead us with wisdom to find healing and wholeness through reconciliation.

## Walking forward together

If your group has not yet connected with a nearby Aboriginal community or an Aboriginal Elder, read over “Walking Forward Together: Things you can do” on page 69 or contact Justice Ministries. Help your congregation take its first step forward.

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## 7 Closing

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Gather with your stoles of hope around the table with the woven cloth. Set out the study book cover picture and re-light the Christ candle. Divide into two groups for reading this affirmation of faith.

**Group 1:** God carries the new creation in a *chuaq’ubál* (“chook ew bal”).

**Group 2:** Carrying a baby in a *chuaq’ubál* is a heavy daily responsibility. Maya women carry their babies on their back in a *chuaq’ubál* as they work in the fields, grind their corn by hand on stones, prepare tortillas and spend long days in the market selling their produce.

**Group 1:** The *chuaq’ubál* carries new life and symbolizes the hope that this child will be able to go to school and will grow up in a country free from war.

Members of a Maya women’s group.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey

- Group 2:** In the *chuaq'ubál*, children are always close to their mother's warmth and nourishment, carried on the long walks along the roadside, in pick-ups, and during those precious opportunities to share in workshops with other women.
- Group 1:** Carrying the *chuaq'ubál* shows the creativity of women who live in extreme poverty.
- Group 2:** Despite their material poverty, Maya women follow their tradition of weaving their clothing in the brilliant rainbow of colours that reflect the beauty of the creation around them.
- Group 1:** The colours of creation, suffering, passion, struggle, Spirit and love are seen in the *chuaq'ubál*.
- Group 2:** These colours are symbolic of the faith and the hope that is so strong in the Maya people who know that God walks with them.
- Group 1:** They believe that God's promise will be fulfilled, that God's kingdom of justice will come, that the poor of Guatemala will be lifted up and live in dignity.
- Group 2:** They believe that change will come, if not for them, then for their children or their grandchildren.
- All:** That is hope, the patient faith that God's justice will prevail.

Sing together "May the God of hope go with us" # 726 in *The Book of Praise* (1997). If possible, sing all the verses.

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### **Litany for giving and receiving story stoles**

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Stand in a circle around the central table with each participant holding their story stole. Note that part way through the litany you will be placing your neighbour's stole on their shoulders. Pray together:

- One:** As we are gathered here we think of those with whom we stand in solidarity of heart, mind, soul and Spirit.
- All:** We pray your blessing, God, upon the stories we have heard from Aboriginal people in Canada and Guatemala.
- One:** We pray your blessing, God, upon the stories we have shared with one another in this circle of caring.
- All:** We pray your blessing, God, upon the stories represented in these stoles — stories to be shared about our life together as your people.
- One:** We put a stole on each other as a way of giving and receiving your hope, your strength, your joy, your peace.

In Aboriginal tradition one person begins, others follow, going *left* around the circle. The first person takes the stole of the person on the left and places it over their head and around their shoulders, offering a prayer, saying aloud these words.

**One by one:** (Name the person), go with God to tell God's story.

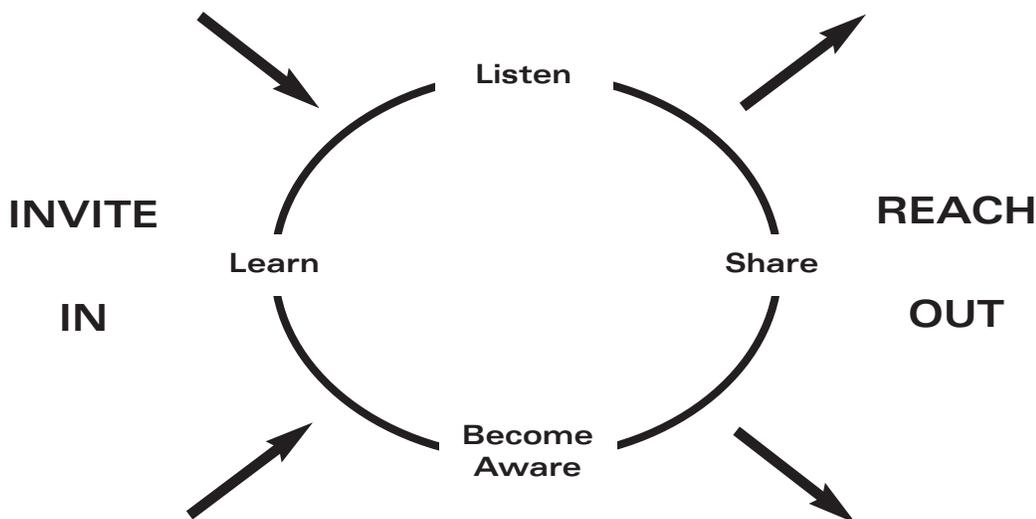
When everyone has their stole in place, the group says the closing of the prayer together.

- All:** With all God's people,  
we go with God,  
to tell God's story. Amen.

# Walking Forward Together

From February 2004 to June 2004 The Healing and Reconciliation Design Team listened to and spoke with Aboriginal people in Sharing and Healing Circles across the country. What emerged from these consultations was a clear picture of communities coming to grips with the nightmares of years past. Healing has begun for many Aboriginal People in this country. Some closure is experienced as the story is told and as the broader Canadian society becomes aware of what happened to Aboriginal people in Canada.

“...the victim and the perpetrator both have to be healed.” — Maritime Consultation



## Things you can do:

- Become aware! Education is of first importance in understanding the issues and the relationship between the church and Aboriginal People.
- Ask your minister, your session, your WMS/AMS to initiate programs and studies for you and your congregation. Use the church's online resource *Making Connections: Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*.
- Read *The Acts and Proceedings of The Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 1994, p. 365 ff. to begin to understand the relationship of The Presbyterian Church in Canada with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada from the church's point of view.
- Visit a First Nations community, an Aboriginal Friendship or Cultural Centre. Most pow wows are cultural and social events and open to everyone (and a lot of fun!).
- Be open to, and listen to, the stories of Aboriginal people without judgment, shame, or blame. Honesty and respect are absolutely essential in creating awareness. It starts with, "I need to hear your story."
- Encourage your church to develop a relationship with a First Nations community based on common concerns and interest — children, environment, education, spirituality, etc. Co-sponsor educational events for the larger community.
- Invite speakers to your church from First Nations communities, from the former staff of the Residential Schools, from the WMS and AMS, from The Healing and Reconciliation Design Team, or from Justice Ministries.

(From The Healing and Reconciliation Design Team, The Presbyterian Church in Canada)

# For Further Study

## Articles in publications of The Presbyterian Church in Canada

(Available online at [www.presbyterian.ca](http://www.presbyterian.ca))

Book Five “The World” of *The Social Action Handbook*, Justice Ministries. See articles like

“Corporate Responsibility,” “Trade,” “Peacemaking,” “Human Rights,” “Protests, Violence and Civil Strife.”

“Fair Trade” issue of the *Presbyterian Record*, May 1995.

“Guatemala Journals” and “Sharing Mayan Spirituality” in *Glad Tidings*, January/February 2007, Women’s Missionary Society.

Partners activities in *PWS Developments*.

Project descriptions in *Something Extra* (download from the web site or order from

The Book Room, [bookroom@presbyterian.ca](mailto:bookroom@presbyterian.ca), 1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111).

## Books for Study (from retail book stores)

*Weaving Relationships: Canada-Guatemala Solidarity* by Kathryn Anderson, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 2003.

In the early 1980s, 200,000 Maya men, women and children fled across the Guatemalan border into Mexico, seeking refuge. A decade later, many of the refugees returned to their homeland along with 140 Canadians who were acting in solidarity. This book relates the story of “Project Accompaniment.” It presents the act of solidarity not as a work of charity apart from or “for” them, but as a bond of mutuality, of friendship and common struggle, with those who are marginalized, excluded and impoverished in this world. The book speaks of a spirituality based on community and justice.

*Re-enchanting the World: Mayan Protestantism in the Guatemalan Highlands*

by C. Mathews Samson, The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 2007.

This book documents the processes whereby some Maya have converted to new forms of Christianity and the ways in which the Maya are incorporating Christianity for their own purposes. It provides a unique portrait of social movements, cultural and human rights, and the role that religion plays in relation to the nation state in post-conflict political processes.

## Church school curricula

*Partners — Meeting Maya Friends in Guatemala*. A mission learning/sharing experience for children and youth. The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2007. Includes stories, activities and recipes. Download from the web site or order from The Book Room, [bookroom@presbyterian.ca](mailto:bookroom@presbyterian.ca), 1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111. Also available, a video or dvd, *Hola drom Guatemala*.

*The Dancing Sun* curriculum was developed in the First Nations community and honours the unique cultural gifts and faith stories of First Nations communities. It first presents both Biblical and traditional stories, then connects with our own experience and understandings, and finally helps us to vision a new story, new possibilities within our own communities.

The oral storytelling tradition is affirmed throughout. “The Dancing Sun” is for children, youth and adults. Material can be adapted for use in worship, healing circles, community groups, vacation Bible school, Sunday school, children’s and youth groups, and adult study groups. There are 8 volumes, priced at \$3.50 each and available from the United Church Resource Distribution. Call toll free 1-800-288-7365 or locally 416-253-5456.

## Film with study guide

*Precarious Peace* (Vision Video, 2003, DVD/Video, 72 minutes, with study guide) was produced by organizations and people working in Guatemala including the Presbyterian Church (USA) and CEDEPCA. This film describes through interviews, stories and news clips the profound impacts on the Maya people of the civil war and the challenging task of peace-making for leaders including church leaders. (Note: Some footage from the civil war is gruesome.) Available for loan from The Book Room, [bookroom@presbyterian.ca](mailto:bookroom@presbyterian.ca), 1-800-619-7301 or 416-411-1111.

## Internet research

Research the impact of war and peace-making in Guatemala on its women citizens. Go to the Guatemala page of the United Nations Development Fund for Women at <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/guatemala/guatemala.htm>. Print the ten pages for study and/or follow the links to the country profile, reports and fact sheets on Guatemala.

## Meditations

*The Wounds of Manuel Saquic: Biblical Reflections from Guatemala* by Jim Manley, United Church Publishing House, 1997.

Following the death of Guatemalan Maya pastor and human rights worker Manuel Saquic from thirty-three stab wounds, Jim Manley went to Guatemala as part of a group of Canadians who provided accompaniment for one of Saquic’s co-workers who was also receiving death threats. These 33 short meditations reflect Manley’s reflections while in Guatemala. Proceeds from the sale of the book go to continuing human rights works in Guatemala. Order from The Book Room, [bookroom@presbyterian.ca](mailto:bookroom@presbyterian.ca), 1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111.

## Study documents

*Learning about Walking in Beauty: Placing Aboriginal Perspectives in Canadian Classrooms*, Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (CAAS) with funding support from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2002.

In 2000-2001, the CAAS conducted a national Student Awareness Survey, measuring awareness, attitudes and knowledge of facts about Aboriginal Peoples’ histories, cultures, worldviews and current concerns. The *Learning about Walking in Beauty* report includes the findings from this survey, together with pedagogical, social and historical analyses. The report offers a pedagogical framework and proposals for learning about “walking in beauty” together. It gives an Aboriginal perspective on the current approach to education in our schools and suggests ways of creating classrooms and a society with citizens who respect one another and the natural world we inhabit. Obtain a copy at the public library or by contacting Canadian Race Relations Foundation at 1-888-240-4936 or [info@crr.ca](mailto:info@crr.ca). Download the full report at [www.crr.ca](http://www.crr.ca). Click on “Publications,” on “Reports” and then on “CRR Reports.” Scroll down to the document’s title and click on it.

### *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*

The Commission was established in 1991 and spent four years holding consultations, researching and reflecting. The report is recommended reading for all Canadians, particularly non-Aboriginal people. This five volume report concerns government policy, past and present, with regards to the original historical nations of Canada. It proposes that the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada be restructured fundamentally and grounded in ethical principles in which all participants subscribe freely. For more information, contact Justice Ministries at 1-800-619-7301 or download the full report from [www.aincinac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/rpt/index\\_e.html](http://www.aincinac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/rpt/index_e.html).

## **Workbooks and worship materials**

*KAIROS 2006-2007 Water: Life before Profit* campaign materials.

*Water Works*, a 16-page booklet containing information, action and education ideas for the second year of the campaign.

*Counting on Water*. This is a general introduction to this year's campaign.

A poster introducing KAIROS with suggested prayers and liturgy on the back.

A copy of *Counting on Water* and the poster has been sent to all congregations. Limited numbers of free resources are available from The Book Room at 1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111. Bulk quantities may be ordered directly from KAIROS at [orders@kairoscanada.org](mailto:orders@kairoscanada.org)

## **Contacts**

For information about other resources, contact these offices of The Presbyterian Church in Canada at 1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111 or by email.

**The Book Room** [bookroom@presbyterian.ca](mailto:bookroom@presbyterian.ca)

**Justice Ministries** [sallen@presbyterian.ca](mailto:sallen@presbyterian.ca)  
(KAIROS, Healing and Reconciliation)

**Education for Mission** [kplater@presbyterian.ca](mailto:kplater@presbyterian.ca)  
(Canada Ministries, Native Ministries,  
International Ministries, *Presbyterians Sharing...*)

**PWS&D** [pwsd@presbyterian.ca](mailto:pwsd@presbyterian.ca)

**WMS** [amckeown@presbyterian.ca](mailto:amckeown@presbyterian.ca)

### **Note:**

At the time of writing, the active partnerships of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in Guatemala are with:

- The Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterials
- Centre of Evangelical Pastoral Studies in Central America (CEDEPCA)
- Francisco Coll School