

Why Work To Decolonize?

An Interim Study Guide Engaging the National Inquiry's Final Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Produced for The Presbyterian Church in Canada
in collaboration between the National Indigenous Ministries Council
and The Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries)



Preparation

In preparation for this study, read the brief selection from the section on justice in *Living Faith* below, and then go to the art gallery section of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. You can use the arrows on the side of the screen to look through some of the art the Inquiry collected. Featured artwork submitted to the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls can be found here: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/artists-list>; please do be aware that viewing the artwork can be distressing for some people, so give yourself some time and emotional space to engage with it.

We encourage you to set up all discussion in this study to take place in a circle rather than at tables or desks, in order to facilitate more communal listening and discussion.

*Justice involves protecting the rights of others.
It protests against everything that destroys human dignity.*

*... It seeks the best way to create well-being in every society
[and] is concerned about employment, education, and health
as well as rights and responsibilities.*

Living Faith, 8.4.2 – 8.4.4

Once you've spent some time looking at the artwork and reflecting on the section from *Living Faith*, ask yourself or discuss in your group:

- 1) Why do you think one of primary ways the authors of *Living Faith* framed justice was in terms of creating well-being? What does well-being mean to you?
- 2) What were some of the things that struck you as you looked through the artwork on the gallery of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Inquiry's webpage? Were there particular pieces that stood out to you, and if so why?

After discussing or reflecting on these questions, you can begin reading and working through the study below.

The origin and purpose of this study guide

This study is adapted from what was a report to the 2020 General Assembly produced collaboratively by the National Indigenous Ministry Council and Justice Ministries. Since the 2020 General Assembly was cancelled due to pandemic, the report was released as an interim report and this discussion guide was adapted from it.

This guide engages the overall themes of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. More resources engaging specific sections and findings of that report are forthcoming, but in the meanwhile, we hope that this discussion guide can be used as an orienting resource and catalyst to read and work through the National Inquiry's final report.

The guide is meant to be worked through two sittings, though it can also be split into four if that is better for your group. It is best done in a group but can be used for personal study as well, if

finding a discussion group is prohibitively difficult. If you are using two sittings to work through this guide, we recommend you end the first session after finishing the discussion questions for “Callused interactions: colonialism, racism and life and death.” If you are doing four, we recommend pausing after the section on genocide and after the section on four pathways as well.

The material in the Inquiry’s final report, and therefore in this discussion guide, is very difficult. You will hear stories recounting lived experiences of abuse, assault, neglect, racism, and the death of loved ones stemming from a long history of colonialism. What is colonialism? In the words of the Inquiry’s final report, “Colonization refers to the processes by which Indigenous Peoples were dispossessed of their lands and resources, subjected to external control, and targeted for assimilation and, in some cases, extermination.”¹ Colonialism is systemic, shaping all of us in varying ways. It is only in acknowledging the intense harm it has already done and continues to do, and allowing that knowledge to change our hearts and minds, that we can truly work to end anti-Indigenous racism stemming from colonialism.

These stories will raise many different emotions in your discussion group, or in yourself if you are working through this on your own. It is important to acknowledge and work through these emotions, and for everyone in the discussion group to treat each other respectfully, even if disagreements or difficult emotions arise.

Before you begin

Take some time in quiet reflection to consider these two questions *privately*, not in group discussion. Be honest with yourself, as doing so will help you work through this guide, but remember here and throughout the reflection and discussion to treat yourself and all those around you with healing, care, compassion, and understanding:

1. How much do you think you know about the effects of colonialism and how much are you really hoping to learn and change, in order to end the destructive effects of colonialism?
2. A quote from *Living Faith* that makes some claims about the nature of justice frames this study. How important to the practice of your faith do you think seeking justice, as that quote describes it, is?

After taking some time for everyone to consider those questions themselves, come together to open with prayer and begin the study.

“Believe me. Pray for me. Don’t forget me.”

– Cee-Jai, one of the women who testified about her sister’s murder and the violence that has shaped her life as well.²

1 Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Executive Summary, 17.

2 Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 599.

Some background

In June 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released its final report, *Reclaiming Power and Place*. The report contains 231 recommendations, called “Calls for Justice,” divided into several segments, and worked to determine how the crisis came to be, why it has been allowed to continue, what can be done to stop it and steps Canada needs to take to support healing. In particular, the Inquiry highlighted the need to recognize and respect the agency of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people³ and the ongoing need for core funding models (rather than project or grant-based models) for centres and programs supporting the rights and lives of Indigenous people.

The Inquiry heard from more than 700 Survivors and family or friends of those missing or murdered either in private or community interviews, as well as from community members, expert witnesses, front-line workers in areas such as health care and social work, and police officers or workers in child welfare agencies. In total, more than 2,380 people participated in the Inquiry.⁴ It also studied earlier regional, provincial and federal reports on related issues. From the testimony, the stories, and the learnings from previous reports, the Inquiry determined several things that can be summarized in three basic points:

- that there are four “pathways” maintaining the violence the Inquiry examined and that supporting four types of rights would disrupt those harmful pathways;
- that the violence was targeted based on gender and that targeting violence in this gendered way has its roots in colonialism and certain interpretations of Christian theology; and
- that the violence as it has unfolded over the years has amounted to a genocide that is still underway.⁵

Drawing on stories Survivors shared with the national inquiry in the final report, we will briefly look at each of these three points. We hope that doing so will help you prepare to read the final report yourself and engage its findings more deeply. We also encourage you to take the time to look through the footnotes, as they contain additional information and resources.

3 The acronym “2SLGBTQQIA” stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual. As the Inquiry began to address its task, it decided to include in its study the experiences of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people, since it became clear that that group of people are also targeted for increased levels of violence—including murder or disappearance—resulting from colonialism. We will discuss how colonialism impacted 2SLGBTQQIA Indigenous people in the section on the church and gendered oppression below.

4 Executive Summary, 1.

5 In the words of the Executive Summary of the Inquiry’s report, “Colonial violence, as well as racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, has become embedded in everyday life—whether this is through interpersonal forms of violence, through institutions like the health care system and the justice system, or in the laws, policies and structures of Canadian society. The result has been that many Indigenous people have grown up normalized to violence, while Canadian society shows an appalling apathy to addressing the issue. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls finds that this amounts to genocide.” Executive Summary, p. 4.

Genocide

The part of the findings of the National Inquiry that has received perhaps the most attention is this last point—that Canada engaged in, and continues to engage in, Genocide against Indigenous people, especially Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. The report states:

“The violence the National Inquiry heard about amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures, evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations.”⁶

The Inquiry laid out its reasoning for coming to this conclusion in a supplemental report to the final report called “A Legal Analysis of Genocide.” There, they note that

“Genocide is defined in the Genocide Convention as: [...] any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”⁷

We know from the words of federal bureaucrats such as Duncan Campbell Scott⁸ that the stated goal of governmental policy for many years was assimilation and erasure of identity until there was no longer any “Indian” group. Knowing that assimilation and erasure was the stated goal and setting that goal in the context of actions the government, in some cases with the help of the church, took leaves no room for any conclusion other than genocide by the definition of the 1948 United Nations Convention. These actions include:

- forced relocation off ancestral land to unfamiliar or difficult to inhabit land;⁹
- placing Indigenous people on reserves in crowded conditions with inadequate housing and (in some cases) a lack of clean drinking water¹⁰

6 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, Volume 1a, p. 50.

7 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 9 December 1948, 78 UNTS 277 (entered into force 12 January 1951), article 2 [Genocide Convention]. Cited on p. 3 of “A Legal Analysis of Genocide.”

8 Library and Archives Canada, RG10, volume 6810, file 470-2-3, volume 7, Evidence of D. C. Scott to the Special Committee of the House of Commons Investigating the Indian Act amendments of 1920, (L-2) (N-3).

9 As just one example of this practice, see the government issued apology: <https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2010/08/government-canada-apologizes-relocation-inuit-families-high-arctic.html>

10 As of February 5, 2020, there are 60 long-term drinking water advisories in effect on reserves. An advisory is designated “long term” when it has been in effect for at least one year. See <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660>.

- Forced sterilization of Indigenous women¹¹
- Forcibly transferring Indigenous children away from their parents and communities to be raised by non-Indigenous people, whether in residential schools, through the Sixties Scoop, or through continued statistically higher rates of apprehension into the foster care system¹²

All these and other actions make it clear that most, if not all, of these five acts legally defining genocide through the 1948 United Nations Convention have been committed in Canada against Indigenous people—and some of them continue to happen.

Through the continuation of these policies and practices over generations, serious bodily and mental harm has been and continues to be inflicted on Indigenous people. We continue to see the lethal effects of such harm in the increased rates of death, disappearance and suicide that the National Inquiry's report cites.

The numbers can feel numbing, but the devastating reality is that each incident in these “increased rates” is a name; a person with family, friends and community who mourn them, like sixteen-year-old Delaine Copenace, of Treaty Three territory, who disappeared one February night four years ago and whose body was discovered about a month later.¹³ Her family and community are still searching for answers.

11 For a discussion of cases of forced or coerced sterilization of Indigenous women, see <https://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/womens-human-rights/sterilization-indigenous-women-canada-without-consent>; <https://windspeaker.com/news/opinion/opinion-ending-forced-sterilization-indigenous-women> and <https://globalnews.ca/news/5733717/forced-sterilization-indigenous-women-canada/>.

12 The numbers of Indigenous children taken from their families continue to be staggering. According to government data, “In Canada, 52.2% of children in foster care are Indigenous, but account for only 7.7% of the child population according to Census 2016. This means 14,970 out of 28,665 foster children in private homes under the age of 15 are Indigenous.” See <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1541187352297/1541187392851>. For information on Presbyterian run Residential Schools, see <https://presbyterianarchives.ca/2018/08/17/narrative-history/>. For information on the Sixties Scoop, see for example, <https://www.cbc.ca/cbcdocspov/features/the-sixties-scoop-explained>.

13 The first coroner who investigated Delaine's death ruled that there was no foul play, but this finding was later overturned by a second, regional coroner and was disputed by both her family and community members, who believe she was murdered. Delaine Copenace is listed on CBC's spotlight on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which reports of some of the details of her case. These include that police “did not bother to look for her” for three days, telling her mother “oh she probably just ran away”; that her face and lips still appeared to have colour when her body was found and her skin did not appear very wrinkled from water, despite the investigation concluding that her body had been in the water from the time she went missing; her mother stating that it looked like Delaine's wrists had been bound; and also stating that the area where her daughter was found “had been searched at least 100 times by family, friends, police dogs, and even police divers” and adding “There were no reported holes where her body was and the water is not very deep in that area... there was no current around the shores.” See <https://www.cbc.ca/missingandmurdered/mmiw/profiles/delaine-copenace>. For more context, see also a news article interviewing Delaine's mother after the first coroner's findings were made public, which mentions stereotypes about Indigenous youth that community members, including Delaine's mother, believe “led police and the coroner to the incorrect conclusion that her daughter was depressed and engaging in risky behaviour on the ice.” Jody Porter, “‘She was murdered’: Mother of teen found dead in Kenora believes police got it wrong” posted May 11, 2016, see <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/she-was-murdered-mother-of-teen-found-dead-in-kenora-believes-police-got-it-wrong-1.3575743>. It is important to understand that phrases like “engaging in risky behavior” is prejudicial language rooted in colonial attitudes often used by authorities and media to describe missing or murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people as a means to dismiss parents or friends trying to report when they go missing, and demean the missing or murdered person, placing blame on them for any violence, rather than fully investigating causes.

At a federal level, Prime Minister Trudeau accepted the findings of the National Inquiry and the government has said it will “develop and implement a National Action Plan to address violence against Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ and two-spirit people.”¹⁴ The National Indigenous Ministry Council (NIMC) of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and Justice Ministries have spent the past year studying the report’s findings and reviewing its considerable material. As of June 2020, a year later, no Government of Canada plan yet exists for responding to the Inquiry’s Calls for Justice.

The findings of the Inquiry’s report are significant and convincing and the National Indigenous Ministry Council of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and Justice Ministries have worked in collaboration to produce an interim report and this study guide for the church to consider. Further resources for study are being produced, and recommendations for church action that flow from the interim report will be brought to the next General Assembly.

Discussion questions

- 1) The national inquiry’s final report was not the first report to use the word “genocide.” Have you heard what happened here in Canada with Indigenous people called a genocide before?
- 2) What emotions or thoughts arose for you when reading this section? How do you think your response would differ if your identity as either Indigenous or non-Indigenous were reversed?
- 3) In what ways do you think the church contributed to this genocide? In what ways do you think the church could have resisted it, and how can we do so now? We will look at this question more fully below, but take some time now to think about this question before we cover that material.

¹⁴ See <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2019/06/03/prime-minister-welcomes-final-report-national-inquiry-missing-and>

Calloused interactions: colonialism, racism, and life and death

A recurring theme of the report is the systemic callousness that pervaded so many interactions of service, police, or health care providers with Indigenous women, girls, or 2SLGBTQQIA people and their families or loved ones in moments of crisis or need. Colonialism shapes precisely this kind of callousness, as in the testimony Robin R. gave the Inquiry about her young daughter's murder and the lack of care shown by the medical professionals who arrived while her daughter still lived.

The final report states, "In her testimony, Robin R. described how, after finding her two-year old daughter badly beaten by her partner, she called an ambulance. However, as Robin described, when the emergency responders arrived, they refused to take her daughter to the hospital until she found her daughter's health card. *'[The] ambulance came into my house and they checked my daughter's vitals. They went to get a stretcher and they asked for her care card. I didn't know the number of her care card off the top of my head and we didn't have a family doctor. But the ambulance insisted that they needed the care card before they drove her to the hospital. And it was like, they refused to leave my house unless I had her care card to go to the hospital. So I went into every drawer in my house and I ripped everything else out of the drawers. I ripped everything off the shelves. I ripped everything open. I was panicked. I was scared. And my house was in disarray after. I ripped apart my house looking for the [] care card because the ambulance said they wouldn't leave unless they had that number.'* Robin's daughter later died of her injuries. In addition, detectives interpreted the disarray caused by her looking for the care card as her house being 'strewn with garbage'—a characterization that Robin believes contributed to her losing custody of her other child."¹⁵

Take a few moments of silence, and try to imagine something like this happening to you or someone you love. And then remember it happened to Robin R.

The genocide described in the final report is not the kind of genocide we are used to hearing about; instead of happening over a few months or years, as with the 1994 Rwandan Genocide or the Holocaust, it has unfolded over centuries as part of the project of colonialism. Colonial genocide happens through millions of acts and inactions that target and traumatize Indigenous people, furthering the conditions for more trauma, and more death.¹⁶ It cultivates a set of racist attitudes, structures, practices and priorities that are used to justify systemic blindness to injustice while devaluing the knowledge and identity of Indigenous people—and devaluing Indigenous lives. It cultivates callousness.

¹⁵ Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 470.

¹⁶ The supplement "A Legal Analysis of Genocide" discusses this distinction but notes that a colonial-type genocide is still a genocide.

The Inquiry's interim report noted that colonialism produces "internalized and externalized thought patterns that support this occupation and subjugation"¹⁷ and this insight is echoed throughout the final report. By this, the Inquiry means that colonialism teaches everyone—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—that Indigenous people are worth less or should have less rights than non-Indigenous people. Such attitudes are internalized and become the often-unconscious assumptions guiding our actions, whether we are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. To put it another way, colonialism is *inherently* exploitative and violent, not accidentally so. Its ideological goal is to keep people apathetic or blind to racism, in themselves and in society, and callous or blind towards the inherent violence that goes with that racism.

Colonialism depends on dehumanizing Indigenous people; it creates and maintains the conditions that allow deaths and family separations such as what happened to Robin, her two-year-old daughter, and her other child whom she lost custody of. When people talk about "decolonizing" they are talking about fundamentally changing society in ways that end the conditions colonialism creates which allow genocide to continue.

Given these goals it should come as no surprise, though it should still be shocking, that one of the effects of colonialism is to enforce social apathy or even tolerance of disappearances and murders of Indigenous women and girls, who are targeted in particular because patriarchal and misogynist values are a primary driving force of colonialism, as we examine later below. The National Inquiry's Final Report makes clear that this crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people did not come out of nowhere, but instead is the *direct result* of policies, practices, and attitudes that stem from colonialism.

While it is easy to see how some policies and practices, such as forced relocations or forced sterilizations, contribute to violence and ultimately genocide, not all policies are that "visibly" violent, nor do they all operate at a federal, provincial/territorial or municipal level. Policies and practices within institutions can be considerably less "visible" and yet still contribute directly to deaths. Some of these policies and practices that lead to violence and death can be as mundane as not issuing taxi vouchers, as a matter of course, to those who need them upon release from the hospital. Ensuring that someone who has just been through a medically significant and possibly traumatizing event has safe transportation home is one way of ensuring they actually arrive home safely. Conversely, leaving people without access to safe transportation creates conditions for violence and death. This is echoed in stories like Melissa's, who shared her testimony with the Inquiry.

"I was visiting a cousin in the northwest area of the city. There was just the two of us, and we were watching a hockey game. A woman showed up and she provided me with marijuana that had been laced with something, and I didn't know. I overdosed. I stopped breathing. I had a grand mal seizure, and I was transported to the [deleted] hospital. Despite the fact that I had no jacket, no shoes, no money, I was asked to leave at 6:30 a.m. on that cold fall ... morning. It was dark and it was cold and I was alone. Nobody knew where I was. And I lingered in the entrance because when I went outside, I was so cold, and I had no shoes, and I didn't know what I was supposed to do or where I was supposed to go. So, I went back and I begged them to help me. And the worker at that time only got annoyed with me, but I was persistent, because I didn't want to go walking by myself. I still had the

¹⁷ See Interim Report, p. 8.

heart monitor stickers attached to me. After a lot of begging and asking, I was granted a taxi slip.... The next month, they found a body right where I was, where I was supposed to walk by.... And they told me that I had to walk with no shoes and no money.”¹⁸

Take a few moments of silence and try to imagine something like this happening to you or someone you love. And then remember it happened to Melissa.

Other stories heard by members of the National Indigenous Ministries Council and Justice Ministries echo this story in cases where Indigenous youth were brought in not for overdoses but for self-harm, and were then released, alone, at night, and told to go wait for a bus in a dark secluded area—or, like fourteen year old Azraya Kokopenace were simply allowed to walk out of the hospital unaccompanied, despite being under the care of child services at the time of her hospitalization, and despite the agency’s awareness of her struggle with suicidal ideation. She was found dead of apparent suicide two days later in a wooded lot just across the street from the hospital she left.¹⁹

These kinds of institutional actions and inactions demonstrate the types of policies and practices that contribute to conditions for violence and death, and also increase the likelihood that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people won’t seek help from places like hospitals.

Once we understand colonialism and how it functions as an exploitative, life-devaluing ideology manifesting in behaviors, actions and policies that harm and kill, it is clear that Christians cannot support such an ideology, since it runs counter to the Gospel. In the Gospel we are told what the two greatest commandments are, that sum up all the law and prophets: to love God, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. The actions described here could never be described as in any way loving God, or loving neighbours. And so the answer to the question, “why work to decolonize?” also becomes clear. Christians must work to decolonize because the harmful ideology of colonization is infused in our own lives and in the society in which we live, but is ultimately incompatible with the Gospel.

Discussion questions

1. If you are not Indigenous, have you ever encountered attitudes and actions towards you or your loved ones like the ones spoken of in this guide, where a child was refused to be taken for critical emergency treatment until an identity card was located, or a woman was turned out of the hospital after treatment in the dark with no shoes? If you have not, why do you think you have never encountered this? If you have, what was your reaction?

¹⁸ Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, 462-63.

¹⁹ For an in-depth look at several cases involving failures in child services, one of them Azraya Kokopenace’s, see https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/nem7zk/report-slams-ontarios-child-welfare-system-for-failing-to-prevent-12-deaths-8-of-them-indigenous. That report also notes that the hospital she walked out of was the same hospital where she had attended her brother’s death when he died earlier of mercury poisoning, the result of toxic materials dumped into the river near their home. For more information on Grassy Narrows and mercury poisoning, see <https://aptnnews.ca/2019/04/03/decades-of-promises-but-little-action-as-mercury-still-takes-lives-in-grassy-narrows/> and <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-for-grassy-narrows-families-mercury-is-an-intergenerational-trauma/>. The mercury levels in Grassy Narrows have also become a focus of Amnesty International: see <https://www.amnesty.ca/category/issue/grassy-narrows>.

2. What do you think is meant when we say, “colonialism is *inherently* exploitative and violent, not accidentally so”? How do you feel about the definition of “decolonizing” we offered above?
3. Jesus lived and preached in a colonial context, with Rome as the colonial power. Take some time to think back to the stories and parables Jesus told his disciples in that context in the Gospels. What do they teach us about love and care? Are there any parables that stick out to you as having meaning you may not have noticed before, if you think about Jesus as someone who experienced colonization?
4. Have you seen callousness or apathy toward racism in those around you, or in yourself? What do you think contributes to that callousness and apathy and what do you think could change it?

If you are taking two sessions to work through this guide, this is a good place to break until next session. Make sure you take some time for self care, as you will need to process the material you just worked through. When you come back for discussion remember to treat yourself and all those around you with healing, care, compassion, and understanding.

Four pathways maintaining violence; four rights to disrupt it

There are four pathways that the National Inquiry identifies that maintain historical and contemporary colonial violence, which must be countered if we wish—as we must—to decolonize. These four pathways are:

- Historical, multigenerational and intergenerational trauma
- Social and economic marginalization
- Maintaining the status quo and lack of institutional will
- Ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people

The Inquiry also stated that these four pathways can be disrupted by supporting four kinds of rights: the Right to Culture, the Right to Health, the Right to Security, and the Right to Justice. In order to understand some of the ways these pathways play out in the lives of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, (and conversely, how supporting the four rights named would disrupt that violence and move Canada toward decolonizing) we'll look briefly at the testimony of a woman named Cee-Jai.

One of the women whose testimony weaves throughout the chapter in the final report on the Right to Security is a witness named Cee-Jai. The report explains, "Like many of the witnesses, Cee-Jai experienced repeated acts of physical, sexual, and psychological violence throughout her entire life. From witnessing her father stab her mother when she was very young, to witnessing her mother being physically beaten and abused by men as a young girl, to repeated sexual and physical abuse and neglect in various foster homes, to the sexual assault and physical violence she experienced as a teenager and adult, violence permeates Cee-Jai's life story, and her relationships reflect a truth that is unfortunately not uncommon. She shared, 'I feel like my spirit knows violence,' summarizing what many Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people experience as the almost constant presence of violence that contributes to an overall absence of basic human security."²⁰

The Final Report details the trauma Cee-Jai suffered from devastating experiences that were an intentional part of the process of colonization. It also highlighted ways in which that trauma has been passed from one generation to another through intergenerational or multigenerational trauma. Families like Cee-Jai's who were disrupted and broken by removal of children to residential schools, through the Sixties Scoop, or through child welfare agencies are often unable to form family bonds, and unable to give children the tools to thrive. In fact, many witnesses

²⁰ Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 504.

drew parallels between ongoing child apprehension into foster care and residential schools. Specifically, it highlighted the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma.

To better understand what intergenerational trauma is, consider the following quote: “From our families of origin, we learn foundational life skills and ways of coping, inherit genes and knowledge, and much more. In this way, we figuratively stand on their shoulders as we keep building upwards. But what happens when the ‘shoulders’ of one generation have been damaged by devastating experiences? How much does this damage matter to the success of future generations?”²¹

The final report of the national inquiry shows in detail that it matters a great deal. Unless healed, devastating experiences tend to beget more devastating experiences in an ongoing and growing cycle. The final report noted for example that the ongoing impacts residential schools had on many of the students who were forced to attend them—the effects of trauma, which significantly increases a person’s chance of developing severe mental health or medical difficulties—are being used as reasons to apprehend children today. Rather than working to heal the harm a residential school Survivor suffered and develop tools for building healthy families, many social systems are primed to further harm both Survivors and their children by simply taking the children. This continues to disrupt families, communities, and access to culture. It leaves another generation of children growing up isolated from their families and communities, further enabling cycles of violence and exploitation.

This cycle is active in so many of the stories and lives the Final Report examined. Later in the report, we learn for example that Cee-Jai’s mother was a residential school Survivor. Cee-Jai speaks about being a child and seeing her mother drinking only to begin talking, and crying, about her experiences in the residential school. She identifies that she believes it was the experiences her mother had in the residential school that left her mother prone to exploitative and violent relationships, which were then the context in which Cee-Jai and her sister grew up. It is in the context of the violence that happened to Cee-Jai’s mother when she was a young child that Cee-Jai spoke about the first time she herself internalized the idea that violence was just something she should expect and accept:

“I was playing in the playground and I remember this little boy, same age as me, he wanted me to sit on his lap and go down the slide. And I didn’t want to. I wanted to go on the slide by myself. He ended up beating me up. I was in kindergarten. And I got a big, black eye. And I remember crying and running home, running home to try to get the—my parents—my mom, or somebody to protect me. And all they said was—all the adults around me said that, ‘Look how cute. Her boyfriend beat her up.’ And they all laughed, and thought it was funny, or cute. And maybe that was the first time I really believed that it was okay for someone to beat me up, and hurt me. So today, I know that’s—was wrong. I would never have my nieces, I would never do that to my nieces today. It was instilled in my—my mind, and in my memory, my belief system, that this was okay to—to be hurt. Another way of

21 Evan Adams, MD, MPH & Warren Clarmont, “Intergenerational trauma and Indigenous Healing” *Visions Journal*, 2016, 11 (4), p. 7

not giving me my voice. And learning that ... the people that I think are going to protect me, are not going to do that.”²²

Take a few moments of silence and try to imagine something like this happening to you or someone you love. And then remember it happened to Cee-Jai.

What Cee-Jai describes as “instilled in my mind and in my memory, my belief system” is a lesson from intergenerational trauma. In truth, Cee-Jai’s life shows the presence of all four of the pathways of harm the final report describes, targeting her for physical, sexual, and psychological violence. As the daughter of a residential school Survivor, multigenerational and intergenerational trauma shaped her life; we learn from the report that when her mother took Cee-Jai and her sister and left the home to escape her violent partner she and her children were left socially and economically marginalized. In that marginalized position more violence entered Cee-Jai’s life and she was sexually abused.²³ As they grew, Cee-Jai’s sister was unable to get the help she needed and ended up living on the streets where she was eventually murdered;²⁴ Through all this, Cee-Jai herself identifies “not giving me my voice”—not respecting her agency—as a significant part of the problem, which she works to overcome. She notes that she would not treat her nieces in the way she was treated. She would listen to them.

Despite all these elements, Cee-Jai was eventually able to find help and housing—an important part of meeting her Right to Security—and is working to break the patterns of intergenerational trauma and colonial violence that harmed her. She now has a job as an outreach worker, helping women who are going through what she has gone through.²⁵

The report also identified at several points that while it is crucial to support Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people who are the targets of so much violence, Indigenous men and boys have also experienced trauma and violence through colonialism, and also need support. This is a truth we have heard as members of the NIMC-Justice Ministries reading group as well. In the words of the report, “Men and boys are important as well; they need programs and support.”²⁶

22 Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 510.

23 “I think my mom took us off the reserve, and she left the reserve because of my dad and his family, which is my family. She brought us to Prince George and same thing, violence. I learnt that. I learnt how to be afraid at such a young age. I remember my mom, being a single mother, she would have boyfriends. And they weren’t very nice men that came into our home. My mom being vulnerable. Must have been hard for her. Think we lived off welfare all my life, in poverty.” Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 514. See also p. 511.

24 The report notes, “For many Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, poverty makes access to any form of housing impossible, and they are forced to live in shelters, on the street, or in other forms of precarious housing. In sharing the circumstances leading up to the disappearance or death of their loved one, many family members described how their loved one was homeless or precariously housed at the time of her disappearance or death. For example, Cee-Jai explained that it was when her sister was living on the street that she was murdered. Despite Cee-Jai’s efforts to protect her sister, the vulnerability she faced as an Indigenous woman living on the street was too great.” Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 543-544.

25 Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 598.

26 Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 24.

Discussion questions

- 1) In what ways do you see the four pathways to violence in the story Cee-Jai shared of her life?
- 2) How do you think supporting the four rights the inquiry names— the Right to Culture, the Right to Health, the Right to Security, and the Right to Justice—would have kept violence and harm from happening to Cee-Jai?

A guide on intergenerational trauma, which includes a list of additional resources, is forthcoming.

The church and gendered oppression

Cee-Jai identified to the Inquiry that it was a church worker—a pastor—who first helped her and her partner find adequate housing, setting her on a path to recovery and security. But the church has also been a source of trauma in many Indigenous people's lives, and the Inquiry noted that it was Christian missionaries and teachers who helped instill patriarchal and misogynist ideas and practices in Indigenous communities. This is to say that at least part of the roots of the violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people stems from the missionary work and theological teachings of the Christian church.

The Final Report of the National Inquiry is very clear that Christian missionaries introduced patriarchal ideals and values of what it means to be male or female (and the belief that those are the only two acceptable options) and imposed these beliefs on Indigenous cultures. The report noted that many Indigenous cultures did not have a strict hierarchy of gender, with male persons valued more than female persons, prior to European contact and that many Indigenous Nations did not confine gender to only male or female.²⁷ Sexual orientation, in many Indigenous cultures, was also not limited to heterosexuality as the sole acceptable orientation.²⁸ However, when Christian missionaries began to evangelize and work among Indigenous peoples, supported through the Doctrine of Discovery, they often taught strict beliefs about gender, sexuality, and marriage as core aspects of their mission work. Speaking of Métis experience as one example, the report says,

“Christian doctrine was instrumental in forcing Métis women into roles defined by gendered European expectations. Church fathers saw the husband as the head of the family and expected women to adhere to masculine authority. Catholic priests, in particular, related women to biblical Eve and constructed a view of them as naturally sinful. These gendered ideas would have a negative impact on the position of women in Métis society. In this world view, the position of women was

27 In the words of the report on colonization and its effects on gender diversity in Indigenous cultures, “The belief that there were only two genders—therefore erasing an entire spectrum of people who had lived in communities since time immemorial—was racist, colonial, and incredibly harmful.” Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p 239. The report also detailed how practices in residential schools relied had devastating effects on inter-gender relationships: In the reports words, “Christian dogma reinforced a patriarchal system that envisioned God as male and women as a secondary creation meant to keep the company of men... Overwhelmingly, schools were separated by the sexes—boys and girls had different dormitories, entrances, classes, chores, recesses, and playgrounds. This separation had many effects. Families were separated—brothers, sisters, and male and female cousins were forbidden from interacting with each other. Not only were children taken from their parents, extended families, and communities to attend school, but they were then forbidden from finding comfort with their relatives of other genders while they were there. This practice was completely foreign to Indigenous children's experiences at home, and it undermined the development of basic skills for maintaining healthy multigendered relationships.” Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a p. 263.

28 See for example Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a p. 264.

domestic: they belonged in the home and in a marriage. Priests often counselled women to remain subservient in a marriage, no matter the conditions of the marriage, including abusive relationships.”²⁹

Beliefs on the position of women similar to those described here were noted, (though rejected as encouraging or belittling violence), in a 1994 report on sexuality made to the General Assembly of the PCC: “Some aspects of Christian tradition have added unhelpful principles and priorities for the Church in its response to sexual violence. The ancient propensity to identify womankind with ‘the flesh’ and its ‘evil’ desire sets up women as targets of that desire who can then be interpreted to deserve or even enjoy what they get. The view of woman as temptress feeds a tendency to blame the victim, ignoring the suffering of those who experience acts of sexual violence. Attitudes about the rights of the husband within marriage have caused the Church to ignore or under-estimate the effects of violence within the home on both women and children.”³⁰

Since the teachings the report describes the missionaries bringing into Indigenous communities were based on understandings that women were of less value than men, they disrupted pre-existing relationship structures in Indigenous communities. Patriarchal teachings destabilized Indigenous women’s leadership and were aimed at making Indigenous communities easier to dominate. In the report’s words, “The imposition of patriarchal European values meant that exerting control and dominance over Indigenous women was an important aspect of colonization. The freedom and self-determination exercised by Indigenous women was seen as contrary to Christian values and ‘a great obstacle to the faith of Jesus Christ.”³¹

The Presbyterian Church in Canada was not immune to attitudes and beliefs shaped by colonialism, as we have acknowledged in our Confession: “We acknowledge that the stated policy of the Government of Canada was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to the dominant culture, and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada co-operated in this policy. We acknowledge that the roots of the harm we have done are found in the attitudes and values of western European colonialism, and the assumption that what was not yet moulded in our image was to be discovered and exploited.”³²

While practices varied across denominations and even across individual missionaries, beliefs such as these shaped the work of many early Christian missionaries and helped contribute to the roots of the crisis of violence faced by many Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people today.

29 Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 285.

30 Acts & Proceedings, 1994, 267-269.

31 Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 238.

32 The Confession of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, paragraph 2. For the entire Confession and a downloadable study engaging it, see <https://presbyterian.ca/healing/>.

Discussion questions

- 1) The report claims that “The freedom and self-determination exercised by Indigenous women was seen as contrary to Christian values and ‘a great obstacle to the faith of Jesus Christ.’” From what you know of early missionaries, in which ways do you think this quote is accurate? In what ways could the church give a different witness today?
- 2) The Presbyterian Church in Canada has confessed its role in assimilation and colonialism, which the final report of the National Inquiry names as significant contributors to the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls it names. Have you read the Confession prior to today? How much do you think that Confession, repenting of colonialism, has shaped the way your congregation acts today?

When you are finished with this study, we encourage you to take some time to go read the Confession and consider how the things it names are reflected in many ways in the final report of the National Inquiry discussed here. We also encourage you to think about ways your congregation could live out the Confession more fully, and shape a better future. A study on the Confession which includes the text of the Confession itself, can be accessed here:

<https://presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/indigenous-justice/>

Respecting and supporting rights: moving forward

With the Final Report of the National Inquiry before us, the church, and Canadian society, are at a moment of encounter. We need to choose to contradict the destructive values and visions of colonialism and embrace pathways of love and justice instead. In order to support the rights the Final Report outlined and work to disrupt the pathways to violence the report identifies, there are several actions the church can take, and Presbyterians can also become involved as individuals, through responding to Calls for Justice through their personal or professional life, where there are calls aimed at professions, or through building relationships with Indigenous ministries and Indigenous community groups. Relationship building can include actions such as contributing time, money or resources to help meet the needs groups are experiencing which are a direct result of colonialism. All such efforts and relationship building, as the report emphasizes, must recognize and respect the agency, experience, and expertise of Indigenous people.

Healing and reconciliation can only happen through substantially transforming social structures and relationships such that genocidal policies and practices end and their effects are redressed. As the Church had a place in contributing to those policies and practices, so also it has place in helping bring them to an end. While we will bring recommendations for actions to The Presbyterian Church in Canada at the next General Assembly, we encourage everyone to read the National Inquiry's final report in the meantime (available at <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/>) and consider how to respond to its Calls for Justice.

Closing discussions

1. As a group, identify the most important learnings you took from engaging this report. List them. Then make a list of ideas or concepts that you found challenging. These can serve as points for further group research and discussion. Consider meeting again later to discuss those things you found challenging and how you could share what you learned with others.
2. As one of the first discussion questions in this guide, we asked, "In what ways do you think the church contributed to this genocide? In what ways do you think the church could have resisted it, and how can we do so now?" Has your understanding changed over the course of engaging this material?
3. What actions can you think of that would support the four rights the national inquiry identified?
4. This guide shared the stories three different women told the national inquiry of terrible harm and trauma they experienced. If you could speak to those women today, what would you say?

***“It’s striking too, all their stories.
They show how fragile we are, and at the same time,
how strong we are. And it still continues today.
That’s what strikes me, and how resilient we are.”***

– Pénélope, one of the Grandmothers guiding the National Inquiry,
on the experience of hearing the stories brought to the Inquiry³³

Close with Prayer

When closing the gathering in prayer, recall the feelings, concerns and themes that were expressed during the gathering and/or use the prayer below. Be sure to take time for self care after finishing the study, as you will need to process the material and emotions this study has raised. The first prayer could be used as part of the closing of the gathering, and the second prayer might be used in your daily prayer life.

For more information on colonialism, racism, and ways you can support Indigenous rights, please see our Social Action Hub at <https://presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/>.

Loving and healing God,
You have called us by name,
you know each of our needs,
the stories of our hearts, minds and bodies,
and know when any one of your beloved creations is hurting or harmed.

Where we have been complicit in trauma or caused harm,
we repent and seek to change our actions.

We need healing;

those of us who have lost loved ones to the violence this report names
those of us who live with the trauma of colonization and genocide on our families
and those of us who grew up without daily witness of the harm in which we too
have been complicit.

Bring healing to grieving families missing their loved ones with an ache too fierce to be borne
Help us change systems that cause violence, trauma, and death
Guide us as we pursue instead supporting those rights to Culture, Health, Security and Justice
for Indigenous people that are named in this report.

We recognize, loving God, that one more murder, one more disappearance, is already too much
and was too much with each life already lost.

We ask you give us the strength and will to seek justice and create safety, and well-being.

In your name,
Amen

³³ Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls vol 1a, p. 44.

Creator God,
We know that we live and love imperfectly.
You called us to love our neighbour as ourselves
But collectively we have not, and individually we often fall short.
We say we all reflect your image
But when we act, we do not always show it.
For those of us living with pain or grief caused by racism and colonialism,
we ask you, God, for healing and strength.
For those of us living with privilege and wondering what to do
Help us learn to listen and work to end systems that oppress.
As you came to set captives free
Free us all from those ways of thinking, speaking and acting
That belittle or harm any of your beloved creations
And show us again how to live in your love.
Amen.

(adapted from a prayer written for a PCC study guide on racism and hate in Canada).



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