

INDIGENOUS IN CANADA

by Peter Bush



Participants and friends of the 2017 Healing and Recon

The Confession of the Presbyterian Church in Canada as adopted by the General Assembly, June 9th, 1994 will be given through this resource.

Let us confess:

The Holy Spirit, speaking in and through Scripture, calls The Presbyterian Church in Canada to confession. This confession is our response to the word of God. We understand our mission and ministry in new ways in part because of the testimony of Aboriginal peoples.

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Opening Prayer:

O God, by your Holy Spirit, guide our conversation, that we might move past the uncertainty, fear, and resistance we have to talking about the church and Indigenous Peoples. May we listen to each other well, but more importantly may we listen well to you.

Give us open ears and soft hearts that we might be willing to reflect again and anew on the history of the church's mission activity with the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Reconciliation Tour.

A Brief History of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island:

The relationship between the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and The Presbyterian Church in Canada is long-standing—dating back almost 250 years. The contexts in which the relationship was forged have changed over time, yet a single question has demanded answers: What gospel was The Presbyterian Church in Canada proclaiming?

The church has a story to tell, the good news of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation and transformation offered to all who declare, “Jesus is Lord.” As the church carries that message to people of other cultures, the question arises, how much of the church’s message is the gospel and how much of the message is cultural baggage? These questions, complicated enough when missionaries travel to another country, are much more complicated when the people of the other culture are the first inhabitants of the land on which Christians are settling, establishing farms, towns, and schools.

The following highlights the challenges faced by Presbyterians sharing the gospel with the First Nations Peoples of Turtle Island.

- Is teaching First Nations People to read and write English part of sharing the good news (assisting in reading and understanding the Bible in English and facilitating worship) or is it part of culture (assimilating the Indigenous People into the English-speaking culture)?
- When does evangelization (so people meet Jesus and become part of the church of Jesus Christ) slip into trying to make Indigenous People into persons with European-Canadian values and way of life?
- Since gospel and culture are so interconnected, should the church simply choose to not follow the instructions of Jesus, “Go and tell,” and not tell Indigenous People in Canada about the good news of Jesus?

UPCOMING
STUDIES will
look at our WMS/
PCC work in
Canada and
Taiwan with
Indigenous
Peoples.

Early Contact

James MacGregor arrived in Pictou County, Nova Scotia to minister to Scottish immigrants in 1786, and quickly came in contact with the Mi'kmaq. He developed a friendly relationship with Chief John Lulan and learned the ways of the woods from the Mi'kmaq this was critical to his survival as he travelled his pastoral charge. MacGregor quietly challenged the paternalistic ways with which many government officials and merchants treated the Mi'kmaq. MacGregor's friendship with the Mi'kmaq and advocacy on their behalf served as examples to

other Presbyterians. Since most of the Mi'kmaq in the region were Roman Catholic, MacGregor was hesitant to launch an evangelistic endeavour among them.

Presbyterians—being late to the Canadian mission field is one of the reasons little work was done by Presbyterians with Indigenous People in eastern Canada. The more hierarchical structures of the Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists allowed those denominations to respond more quickly to their mission call to serve the Indigenous community. The relationship between Presbyterians and Indigenous People between the 1780s and 1850s was rooted in congregational ministry and outreach, as congregation members made connections with these Indigenous People in and around their community.

Settlers Move West

The arrival of Presbyterian clergy in western Canada in the 1850s and 1860s changed the story. John Black arrived in Kildonan (Manitoba) in 1851 to consolidate the fledgling Red River Settlement congregation, and before the end of his third year had married Henrietta Ross (a Metis woman). Scottish Presbyterians, prominent among the traders and post managers of the Hudson Bay Company, and later the North-west Company, married Indigenous women and their children were raised on the “catechism and oatmeal.” With these traders and their children, early Presbyterian congregations in the west had significant numbers of Metis on the membership rolls.

John Nisbet joined Black in 1862 to minister in the Red River Settlement. Shortly after arriving Nisbet felt called to go further west to minister among the Indigenous People near present-day Prince Albert, SK, where a mission was built which became a base for work with Chief Mistawasis on the Mistawasis



One of the earliest images of our Residential School history in the Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives, G-1741-FC-1

reserve. Frequently, the Nisbet story is told without acknowledgment of the important role played by George Flett and John McKay. Flett and McKay, both Metis, served as translators and associates with Nisbet. McKay was noted for his ability on a horse and his hunting, which gave him the opportunity to bridge the gap between Settler and Indigenous cultures. Flett eventually left the Prince Albert mission and moved to Okanase in western Manitoba as a solo missionary, a ministry that later grew to cover five reserves. Flett was ordained a minister in 1875.

Tensions between the Dakota (Sioux) and the American government began in the 1860s and culminated in Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876. During these troubled times, the Dakota people travelled north to Canada to safety. In Canada, they were treated as refugees, for while they

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1. We, the 120th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, seeking the guidance of the Spirit of God, and aware of our own sin and shortcomings, are called to speak to the Church we love. We do this, out of new understandings of our past not out of any sense of being superior to those who have gone before us, nor out of any sense that we would have done things differently in the same context. It is with humility and in great sorrow that we come before God and our Aboriginal brothers and sisters with our confession.

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were Indigenous People they were not the original inhabitants of the land on which they were living. The Presbyterian Church in the United States had a long history of building connections with the Dakota people and operated a training school in the Dakota language. As increasing numbers of Dakota people arrived, the Presbytery of Manitoba requested that the Rev. Solomon Tunkasuiciye, an ordained Dakota Presbyterian minister, be seconded to the PCC and serve the Birdtail (Dakota) Reserve in western Manitoba. Through Tunkasuiciye, three young men became involved in the ministry. Peter Hunter, Jason Ben, and John Thunder, who upon completing training, expanded the Presbyterian ministry among the Dakota people at Pipestone, Oak Lake (Canupawakpa Dakota First Nation), and Dakota Tipi reserves. In 1902, an elder from the church on the Birdtail Reserve, Chanske Hanska, wrote to the Foreign Missions Committee asking that a Dakota speaking pastor be sent to Birdtail, “We knew it from the beginning that having the gospel spoken with native tongues was the work of the Holy Spirit.” Sadly, no Dakota speaker was available to be sent.

The 1885 Northwest Rebellion stands as a watershed moment in the relationship between settlers and Indigenous People. Two patterns of land use clashed on the parklands of central Saskatchewan as railroad surveyors staked quarter-sections through farmed land divided in strips along the river system. The competing land claims led to threats and violence which drew a response of lethal force. Presbyterians stood on both sides of the debate. Some, including prominent clergy, enlisted in the military units to fight Riel and his allies, others sponsored a General Assembly-adopted recommendation and place the blame for the violence squarely on the Government of Canada. Presbyterians were among both the prosecution and defence teams at Riel’s trial. The 1885 Rebellion revealed Canada’s willingness to use force against Indigenous People who resisted the will of the settlers.

The Schools

Education frequently has a prominent place in the mission efforts of Presbyterians, including Canadian Presbyterian mission work on the prairies. In



Birdtail

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Creek

of people from The Presbyterian
Canada spent time in June 2017,
to the stories of First Nations and
ple in Winnipeg, Kenora, and
n. Pictured is the group saying grace
aring a meal at Birdtail Creek, MB.

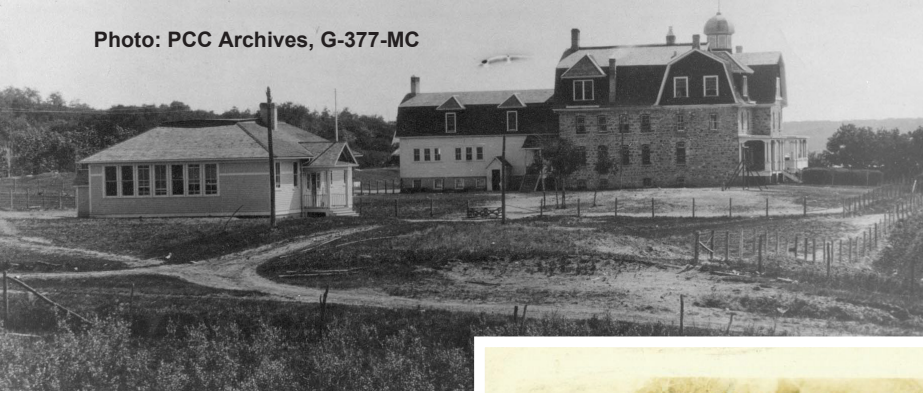
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2. We acknowledge that the stated policy of the Government of Canada was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to the dominant culture, and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada co-operated in this policy. We acknowledge that the roots of the harm we have 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. As part of that policy we, with other churches, encouraged the government to ban some important spiritual practices through which Aboriginal peoples experienced the presence of the creator God. For the Church's complicity in this policy we ask forgiveness.

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the 1880s, day schools were started by missionaries like the Rev. Hugh McKay. The day schools evolved over time into places where on stormy days students stayed overnight rather than going home through the dangers of a prairie blizzard. Then it became convenient for students to stay at the school during the week and go home for the weekends. When the government got involved in funding these schools, residential schools were born. This pattern was lived out at Round Lake, SK; Crowstand, SK; and Portage-la-Prairie, MB. Later, the church and government would plan and build purpose-built residential schools.

As residential schools arose, day schools remained important to the education system. The legendary Lucy Baker taught at the one-room school at Makoce Waste (near Prince Albert), SK, from 1894 to 1904. No complete list of day schools connected with the PCC seems to exist, which is not surprising as day schools were often short-lived. Day school teachers were appointed by a range of bodies including local school boards and church groups, further complicating the ability to determine which schools had Presbyterian connections.



Top: Birtle Residential School, old school, c.1920s

Bottom: Cecilia Jeffrey School, old school, c. 1931



Photo: PCC Archives, G-6-SB-1

Between 1884 and 1969, the PCC was involved in operating nine different Indian Residential schools. Two closed before 1925: the Regina Indian Industrial School, SK, and the short-lived Crowstand Indian Residential

School, SK. Five of the schools became part of the United Church of Canada in 1925: Portage-la-Prairie Indian Residential School, MB; File Hills Indian Residential School, SK; Round Lake Indian Residential School, SK; Alberni Indian Residential School, BC; and Ahoushat Indian Residential School, BC. This article pays little attention to the BC schools. Historical research on the BC schools, pre-1925, would deepen our understanding of the Residential School experience within the PCC. Two schools remained the responsibility of the PCC until 1969 when the Government of Canada took complete responsibility for all residential schools in Canada.

The schools were doomed from the beginning as former staff argued that the government was not prepared to contribute funds sufficient to make these schools effective educational institutions, and the church was not prepared to commit the energy to make them effective spiritual institutions. The schools were operated by the church, but largely funded by the government. Within the Presbyterian Church, the WMS was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the schools. While the Government of Canada paid for the construction and maintenance of the school buildings and provided a per diem for each child enrolled in these school, those funds were insufficient to provide adequate

housing, food, or education to the students. The church was forced to find ways to make up the difference. The schools operated large gardens, in some cases farms, with the produce not only supplementing what students ate, but also being sold to fund school expenses. As students reached higher grades, they spent less and less time in the classroom and more and more time supporting the functioning of the institution of the school. Older students could be found in the gardens and barns, in the kitchen and washhouse, working as unpaid labour for an institution that was theoretically dedicated to their education. Not surprisingly then that students in upper grades often took two years to complete a grade level since over half their “education” experience was spent working for the school.

Disease and death were common in the schools where over-crowding was endemic. Dr. Peter Bryce, Chief Medical Officer in the Department of Immigration and a public health expert, wrote a stinging report in 1907 indicating that between 14% and 24% of students in Residential Schools had died in the previous three years. Bryce, a Presbyterian, was forced to take early retirement to silence him.

Some examples of the living conditions: Kate Gillespie at File Hills, SK, (1907) had no choice but to put the oldest boy’s dormitory outside in a tent. She wrote to her superiors suggesting it was unacceptable to have students sleeping in a tent during a prairie winter. While Presbyterian schools missed the worst of the food experiments conducted on students in the 1960s, the leadership of the Presbyterian Church and the Cecilia Jeffrey School were complicit in the enriched flour project which experimented on children.

Abuse, both physical and sexual, occurred in Presbyterian schools. The principal of the Crowstand School (SK) used disciplinary practices considered extreme even in his time. When he brought students who had escaped from the school back to the school, he would ride in a wagon with these students tied to ropes behind and they were forced to run at the speed of

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3. We recognize that there were many members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who, in good faith, gave unstintingly of themselves in love and compassion for their Aboriginal brothers and sisters. We acknowledge their devotion and commend them for their work. We recognize that there were some who, with prophetic insight, were aware of the damage that was being done and protested, but their efforts were thwarted. We acknowledge their insight. For the times we did not support them adequately nor hear their cries for justice, we ask forgiveness.

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4. We confess that The Presbyterian Church in Canada presumed to know better than Aboriginal peoples what was needed for life. The Church said of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, "If they could be like us, if they could think like us, talk like us, worship like us, sing like us, and work like us, they would know God and therefore would have life abundant." In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned, and because of our insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures, we have demanded more of the Aboriginal people than the Gospel requires, and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ who loves all peoples with compassionate, suffering love that all may come to God through him. For the Church's presumption we ask forgiveness.

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the wagon or be dragged along. A teacher at Cecilia Jeffrey School in the 1930s near Kenora, ON, wrote to the WMS staff in Toronto complaining about the excessive discipline meted out to students. She reported that the principal had thrown a child through a wall in the school.

In the 1950s, the Ontario Provincial Police

investigated reports of sexual abuse at Cecilia Jeffrey. They discovered that older male students regularly visited female classmates after lights out at night. They further discovered that a female teacher, in an effort to cover up an affair she was having with a male staff member, had seduced a number of older male students, providing them with their first sexual experiences.

Bishop Reynald Rouleau, Roman Catholic Diocese of Churchill-Hudson Bay, spoke for all churches when he noted the sin at the heart of the Residential School system was the prideful belief that the church and Canadian society could be better parents than Indigenous parents would be to their own children.

A Shift in Mission Thinking

Between 1910 and 1913, a major shift in thinking took place at the PCC. A gathering of Presbyterians working among Indigenous People was held in 1908; the group made up of both Indigenous People and settlers agreed that all settlers coming as missionaries to serve among Indigenous People should learn their language. Further, aspects of the Indigenous culture were consistent with the gospel and those elements should be celebrated. Finally, the Government of Canada should protect Indigenous People from those settlers whose actions

harm and cheated these people. Indigenous culture was important and should be protected and nurtured. The work that the church was engaged in was cross-cultural and it should make use of the tools and approaches of cross-cultural ministry.

Gifted and energetic, the Rev. W. W. McLaren arrived in 1905 to become the principal of Birtle Indian Residential School. A student at the school, Suzette Blackbird, caught his attention and he arranged for her to attend Ewart College for a year (1910–1911). Shortly after her return to Manitoba, Blackbird and McLaren were married. The newly married couple asked to have an apartment in



The TRC Bentwood Box reflects the strength and resilience of residential school survivors and their descendants, and honours those survivors who are no longer living.

The Confession

Space does not allow for a detailed discussion of the road leading to the Confession of the 1994 Assembly. In 1990, the release of the movie, “Where the Spirit Lives” and Manitoba Grand Chief Phil Fontaine’s interview with Barbara Frum put the Indian Residential Schools on the public agenda. Presbyterians were present at a special gathering of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops held in Regina in 1991. Leadership within the Presbyterian Church was convinced this was a Catholic problem until the Rev. Ian Morrison spent a couple of days in the Presbyterian Archives. That led to a trio of listeners—Morrison, the Rev. Richard Sand, and June Stevenson,

editor of *Glad Tidings*—travelling to Birtle and surrounding reserves and also Kenora to listen.

From their listening came the first draft of the Confession which went to the 1992 Assembly.

At that Assembly, it was clear most Presbyterians did not know that the church had operated Indian Residential Schools, let alone where the schools were located. The Confession was sent back for more work to be brought forward again in 1994 and adopted by the General Assembly. In October of that year, the Rev. George Vais, Moderator of the 120th General Assembly, presented the Confession to Grand Chief Phil Fontaine.




Kenora Fellowship Centre (Anamiewigummig) and Flora House.

the school building, rather than living in the principal's house, in order to be closer to the students. The leadership of the WMS was adamant in its opposition, fearing Blackbird would side with the students against the staff and would use her influence over McLaren to make things difficult for staff seeking to teach settler ways. McLaren was removed as principal, and died of appendicitis in 1915. Blackbird, with the couple's two children, returned to the Riding Mountain Band where she had been raised, and her children attended the residential school.

Through the first years of the 1910s, denominational leaders in the burgeoning denominational bureaucracy in Toronto came to regard all work among Indigenous People in Canada as Home Mission rather than Foreign (cross-cultural) Mission. By 1913, when the Women's Foreign Missionary Society and the Women's Home Missionary Society merged to create the Women's Missionary Society (WMS), there was no longer a vision to support and celebrate Indigenous culture. To be Christian was to be a settler Canadian; this truth applied as much to Ukrainians arriving in Canada as it did to the Indigenous People of Turtle Island. The church was an agent of Canadian social religion, rather than a proclaimer of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rise of Inner City Mission

During the 1960s, denominational leaders recognized that the Government of Canada was less and less interested in funding residential schools, and the time was fast approaching when these schools would be no more. Unwilling to lose contact with the Indigenous Peoples, the PCC imagined new ways to



carry on ministry. The primary idea arrived at was the institutional mission or inner city mission. In the late 1960s, missions were started in Kenora (Kenora Fellowship Center) and Winnipeg (Anishinabe House and Flora House). These missions were followed by projects in Vancouver (Hummingbird Center) and Edmonton (Edmonton Inner City Mission).

By the 1980s, it was increasingly difficult to staff ministries on the reserves, and the end of the Ordained Missionary system (which had provided some staff to the reserves) made staffing reserves almost impossible. Presbyteries responsible for maintaining connections with these missions on reserves found the task impossible, and began to close these missions indicating to the Chief and Council of the bands that the PCC was no longer going to do ministry on the reserves. Available denominational energy and resources were put into the inner city missions and the reserves were largely abandoned. Mistawasis in Saskatchewan is the notable exception to this pattern. (The Nazko ministry (Cariboo) in BC is a newer ministry and is not part of the long-standing Presbyterian work on reserves.)

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5. We confess that, with the encouragement and assistance of the Government of Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada agreed to take the children of Aboriginal peoples from their own homes and place them in residential schools. In these schools, children were deprived of their traditional ways, which were replaced with Euro-Canadian customs that were helpful in the process of assimilation. To carry out this process, The Presbyterian Church in Canada used disciplinary practices which were foreign to Aboriginal peoples, and open to exploitation in physical and psychological punishment beyond any Christian maxim of care and discipline. In a setting of obedience and acquiescence there was opportunity for sexual abuse, and some were so abused. The effect of all this, for Aboriginal peoples, was the loss of cultural identity and the loss of a secure sense of self. For the Church's insensitivity we ask forgiveness.
6. We regret that there are those whose lives have been deeply scarred by the effects of the mission and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. For our Church we ask forgiveness of God. It is our prayer that God, who is merciful, will guide us in compassionate ways towards helping them to heal.
7. We ask, also, for forgiveness from Aboriginal peoples. What we have heard we acknowledge. It is our hope that those whom we have wronged with a hurt too deep for telling will accept what we have to say. With God's guidance our Church will seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God's people.

Is a New Chapter Opening?

While settlers in the Presbyterian Church continue to struggle with their legacy in the Residential Schools, some Korean members in the church have got about the business of crossing the cultural lines to walk with the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. From large urban congregations sending mission teams to remote reserves, to Korean congregations raising funds to support long-term mission work among Indigenous People either on reserves or in urban contexts, to Korean-born clergy leading settler congregations into engagement with their Indigenous neighbours, the story is repeated again and again.

Korean Presbyterians have a deep desire to connect with the Indigenous People of Turtle Island. Koreans based in Neepawa, MB, made connections which nurtured the new life at the Birdtail Reserve; just as it was Koreans based in Brandon who have made connections with Canupawakpa Dakota First Nation (Oak Lake Reserve). The question has yet to be answered: Will the Korean church be more able to set aside culture as they live out the gospel than was the Euro-Canadian church? If they are able to do that, maybe they can be the model for the Euro-Canadian church on how to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ free from culture.

General Questions

- What did you learn from this article?
- What surprised you?
- What feelings/emotions did you have while reading the article?

Other Resources

Presbyterian Church in Canada resource on Healing and Reconciliation can be downloaded from: www.presbyterian.ca/resources/resources-hr



Scripture

Read Psalm 15

- Note the words of verse 4b: “who stand by their oath/promise even to their hurt”?
- The Psalm invites us to keep our word/promises. In what ways have Canadians kept or not kept the promises we made in the treaties and to the parents and children of the Residential School system?

Read 1 Corinthians 2: 1–5

- Paul sought to preach only Christ and Christ crucified when he took the good news to the Corinthians.
- What was Paul’s attitude when he preached the gospel? (A question to ponder: Does speaking with humility mean that we don’t believe? Does speaking with humility mean we doubt the truth of what we are saying?)
- What attitude did the Presbyterian Church portray when it preached the gospel to the Indigenous People?
- What did Presbyterians add to that gospel when they brought the gospel to the students in residential schools?



Monument in the memory of the children who attending the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School.

Read Colossians 3: 9–11

- Paul’s point starts back in Colossians 1:15 where he talks about the role of Christ in reconciling all things. By the time he gets to these verses in chapter 3, he is trying to be practical. He says to get rid of the old cultural practices and put on new practices that come from God the Creator; cultural practices that recognize Jesus Christ is at the center.
- What cultural practices does your congregation have that make people from other cultures feel like outsiders? What might be done to remove those cultural barriers?