



CHRISTIAN
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CHURCHES
IN CANADA

Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada *Call to Action #48*
Christian Reformed Churches in Canada
March 30, 2016

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Commissioners Justice Murray Sinclair, Chief Wilton Littlechild and Dr. Marie Wilson:

The Christian Reformed churches in Canada affirm the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) as a framework for reconciliation. The Declaration is unique because Indigenous people are its authors and, in their articulation of these human rights, demonstrate a respect for human dignity and diversity that is a powerful vision of reconciled relationships. We embrace the Declaration as a hopeful vision for reconciled relationships. We honour the Declaration's expression of Indigenous perspectives on justice and right relations that have, too often, been missing and ignored in the shaping of our collective lives. Oppression has diminished the wholeness of all. Thus, as followers of Christ-the-reconciler, we celebrate the Declaration as a call for Indigenous justice, and wholeness in our shared lives. We take these steps with utmost humility, recognizing that the journey of reconciliation, and the need for it, is built on generations of faithfulness and failings of people. However, we also take these steps confidently because God our Creator has inspired the sacred journey of reconciliation.

This time of sacred opportunity for reconciliation calls for honest reflection: The current relationship between Indigenous people and settlers is shaped by a broken past, and contemporary policies and attitudes that are not fully respectful of Indigenous peoples, their relationship with the land, and their rights. The Christian Reformed Church is part of the Christian community that has engaged in spiritual violence and systemic racism in the *settlement* of North America. This was manifest in residential schools; in broad assumptions of European superiority in church and culture; related beliefs that Indigenous cultures were backward and incompatible with Christianity; and by deeming Indigenous people to be sub-human. The Christian Reformed Church was established in this context and is complicit in these sins. The TRC explains: "That Christians in Canada, in the name of their religion, inflicted serious harms on Aboriginal children, their families, and communities was in fundamental contradiction to what they purported to be their core beliefs. For the churches to avoid repeating their failures of the past, understanding how and why they perverted Christian doctrine to justify their actions is a critical lesson to be learned from the residential school experience." (pg 272, TRC Summary Report)

The integrity of our commitment to reconciliation rests on knowing the past in all of its terrible and beautiful complexity. God, our Creator shows a good way: by making Indigenous people and cultures resilient; in causing their cries for justice, truth and reconciliation to be heard; in challenging people in Canada to understand that Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation are the responsibility of all; and by inspiring Indigenous leadership for truth and justice as manifest in the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the United Nations Declaration of Rights on the Indigenous Peoples.

On June 1, 2015 The Christian Reformed churches in Canada expressed a commitment to *Action for Reconciliation* at the closing ceremonies of the TRC. This solemn commitment was in continuity with our signing of the *New Covenant with Aboriginal People* (1987/2007) that honours (among other things): distinct Indigenous identity and self-determination; the special connection of Indigenous people to land; and affirming the moral and spiritual nature of covenant and Indigenous rights as "touching the



very soul and heart of Canada.” In the spirit of these sacred commitments, in reliance on God our Creator, and in relationships with our Indigenous neighbours, the Christian Reformed Church will:

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

We are blessed that God our Creator can take our sin and brokenness and work them to his glory and the good of all – this is the reconciliation of *all things* promised in the book of Colossians (1:15-20). The Christian Reformed Church can truly lament with Indigenous people and the Christian community and work together for the journey that is healing and reconciliation.

Signed:

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Cc: Perry Bellegarde, Natan Obed, Clément Chartier, Dwight Dorey, Dawn Lavell-Harvard, Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Trudeau, Hon. Rona Ambrose, Thomas Mulcair, Rhéal Fortin, Elizabeth May, Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Cathy McLeod, Charlie Angus.

This statement was developed in conversation with the Christian Reformed Churches’ Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee and the Centre for Public Dialogue’s oversight committee and was approved for submission by the CRCNA Canada Corporation on 24 February, 2016. World Renew is a development agency affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church. Diaconal Ministries Canada supports the justice and mercy work of deacons in the Christian Reformed Church. For further information on this statement and the Christian Reformed Churches’ efforts for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation visit: crcna.org/aboriginal or crcna.ca/publicdialogue

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