

***Expression of Reconciliation from The Canadian Council of Churches
to be presented at the final National Event
of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
in Edmonton, Alberta – March 27-30, 2014***

To survivors and former students of Residential Schools, our First Nations, Inuit and Métis brothers and sisters and their descendants, wherever they may be:

On behalf of the 25 member denominations of The Canadian Council of Churches who together represent 85 percent of Christians in Canada, as President of The Canadian Council of Churches, I address you in a spirit of humility and repentance, and of promise and hope.

As Christians we base our lives and all our relationships on our experience of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ to God, one another and all creation (2 Corinthians 5:18). Our faith calls us to love and serve in the same manner that Jesus loved and served, to be messengers and ambassadors of reconciliation. We are called to break down walls that divide and to welcome all we meet as fellow citizens.

In the long history of the relationship of Indigenous Peoples in Canada with other Canadians, it is painfully clear that we, as Christian communities, have often fallen short of living the love and service of Jesus.

When our ancestors in the faith arrived on these shores from their European homelands, they were often welcomed and shown how to survive in a new environment by you, the Indigenous Peoples they met. Gratitude for this welcome was not always reciprocated and, at times, replaced by an attitude of superiority and domination.

Exploitation occurred by those professing the Christian faith, and traditional cultures were often not viewed with the respect they rightly deserve. Even when you adopted the beliefs, practices and ways of the settlers, you were not always welcomed in the heart of our communities or included in partnership arrangements to share in the rich resources of this vast land. Our failures fill us with deep regret.

As Christians, we have been part of communities and governments that brought tremendous pressure to bear on you, and through actions of privilege, prejudice and discrimination sought to assimilate the Indigenous Peoples in this country. One of the most destructive of these actions was the creation of Indian Residential Schools, a system of assimilation in which a number of the member churches of The Canadian Council of Churches played a prominent role. We know that, despite some well-intentioned and even caring and loving school staff, the system had disastrous effects on students, their families and communities.

Through their membership in The Canadian Council of Churches, Christian denominations who were not involved directly in the creation and running of Indian Residential Schools are also represented here today. As willing or unintentional accomplices to the terrible effects that so-called Christian attitudes and policies had on your life and the lives of your peoples, we, too live with the legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada.

As Christian communities we take seriously the challenge of reconciliation, to deepen bonds of friendship and solidarity, to strive to “walk together” in the present and future, and to consult with you about how we can take that journey together.

We commit to promote and facilitate ongoing research into the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, and to be open and forthcoming about our roles in it.

We commit to undertake education programs in our churches aimed at increasing our knowledge and awareness of the past; in particular, the actions and attitudes which contributed to past wrongdoings against you. We also vow to make the changes in actions and attitudes that are necessary to create and promote a genuine partnership with you, Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

We commit to respect the right and freedom of Indigenous communities to practise traditional spirituality and teachings.

We commit to value the gifts of Indigenous traditional teachings in Christian worship and pastoral practices, where appropriate, in consultation with your elders.

We commit to recognize and combat racism, discrimination and unearned privilege wherever they may be found in churches in Canada and the wider society.

May the Creator who sees all and knows what is truly in our hearts bring us together in mutual respect and friendship.

Lt. Colonel Jim Champ
President
The Canadian Council of Churches

Co-signed by the leaders of member churches of The Canadian Council of Churches:

The Most Reverend Fred Hiltz
Archbishop and Primate
The Anglican Church of Canada

† Adolfo Robert Rodriguez Fernando, OMJF, DD
Archbishop, Archdiocese of North America – USA and Canada
Apostolic Catholic Church Incorporated

The Rev. Dr. J. Daniel Gibson
President
Atlantic Baptist Fellowship

The Rev. Tim McCoy
Executive Minister
Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec

The Rev. Jeremy Bell
Executive Minister
Canadian Baptists of Western Canada

+ Paul-André Durocher
Archbishop of Gatineau and
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Susan K. Stevenson
Clerk
Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Rev. Richard E. (Rick) Hamilton
Interim Regional Minister
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada

Ben Vandezande
Director of Canadian Ministries
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The Rev. Fr. Marcos Marcos
Protopriest
The Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada

L.K. (Rev. Fr.) Messale Engeda
Head Priest and Administrator of
The Ethiopian Orthodox Church of Canada

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius
Diocesan Episcopa, North American and Europe Diocese
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The Rev. Willard Metzger
General Secretary
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S.E. Irénée (Rochon)
Bishop of Québec
Administrator of the Archdiocese of Canada
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Rev. Zbigniew Kozar
Polish National Catholic Church of Canada

The Rev. Dr. David W. K. Sutherland
Moderator of the 139th General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Commissioner Brian Peddle
Territorial Commander
The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda Territory

The Rev. John Kapteyn
Clerk
Regional Synod of Canada, Reformed Church in America

His Grace the Most Reverend Lawrence Huculak, O.S.B.M.
Archbishop of Winnipeg and Metropolitan
Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada

The Right Rev. Gary Paterson
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