

## **National Truth and Reconciliation Day 2022**

*A call to action in worship from the Truth and Reconciliation Working Group of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada:*

On September 30<sup>th</sup> Canada marks National Truth and Reconciliation Day.

Faithful people from various churches, including Mennonite churches, were motivated to work in Canadian Indian Residential Schools by their desire to help Indigenous children adapt to a changing world. But the structure in which the schools were created was oppressive to Indigenous peoples, and the Christian staff workers were influenced by the oppressive structures, often unconsciously.

Following the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in June 2015, all Canada now knows truths that were long suppressed about Indian Residential Schools.

There is a very painful side to the truth. Children were taken from their families and forced by intimidation and punishment to be ashamed of or to forget what their parents and home community had taught them. Generations of school children and their families and communities were deeply traumatized by the cruel experience.

Today Indigenous peoples of Canada continue to carry deep personal and community pain, one of the lasting impacts of the Indian Residential School System. One deep and raw pain is that many children died and did not return to their families while in custody of the schools.

By acknowledging and commemorating the children who went to Indian Residential Schools, especially those who did not return home, we participate in the truth-telling stage of "Truth and Reconciliation".

September 30 has also been marked as "Orange Shirt Day" by Indigenous people in Canada since 2013. Learn about the origin and meaning of Orange Shirt Day at <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/phyllis-story.html>.

We offer the attached prayer and two litanies for possible congregational use. The longer version of the litany is accompanied by several footnotes with links providing background information.

We suggest these readings, adapting them or creating something new, be used on a Sunday near September 30, National Truth and Reconciliation Day. Congregational members could also be encouraged to be aware of and participate in broader community events that might occur to mark the day. School children may be wearing Orange Shirts on September 30. The congregation could be invited to wear orange in solidarity for the worship service.

## Prayer for National Day of Truth and Reconciliation

Holy God of Truth and Justice,  
God our Creator, Redeemer and Source of all Love,  
God incarnate in Jesus, the Great Reconciler,  
God present with us as your Holy Spirit,  
God in whose Image all our brothers and sisters  
are made. All of them ...  
those in our family and those of other  
cultures, nations and faiths.

When our relationship with You is broken by sin  
your Son Jesus provides The Way back to a right relationship with you.  
You reconciled us to yourself through Jesus Christ  
and entrusted the work of reconciliation to us. *(2Corinthians 5:18)*

You have given reconciliation as the model for the healing of relationships.  
Help us to be seeds of reconciliation in the broken relationship  
between Indigenous peoples and the country of Canada.  
Help the church to truly reflect in concrete ways your Great Love  
which includes Indigenous peoples in their beauty, strength and resilience.

Help us to listen with “ears to hear” the truth of the full impact *(Mark 4:23; Luke 8:8)*  
of Canada’s residential schools on our Indigenous neighbours.  
For it is when truth is acknowledged the path of reconciliation can begin.  
Help us always to be open to learning what we do not yet know.

We cannot truly comprehend the pain of Indigenous people and communities  
resulting from generations of forced attendance at residential and day schools,  
resulting from generations of forced separation of children from their parents,  
resulting from abuse suffered by children at the hands of their care givers,  
resulting from grief when children did not return home but remained in unmarked graves.

We cannot truly comprehend the grief,  
but we commemorate their grief with our respectful silence and prayer.

Our prayer consists of longings we cannot put into words, *(Romans 8:26)*  
longing for healing, longing for respect, longing for resurgence.  
May your Holy Spirit work through the longings of all people  
to bring us to the path of reconciliation opened for us by Jesus.

Amen.

## **(Short) Litany for National Truth and Reconciliation Day**

One: Today we mark National Truth and Reconciliation Day.

**All: Why do we recognize this as a special day?**

One: We mark this day with Canadians all across this country because every child matters. Today we remember that many children disappeared in Canada's Indian Residential School System.

**All: Why did those children go to Residential Schools?**

One: It was the law in Canada that Indigenous children had to be taken away from their parents and sent to schools where they lived separated from their family. How would we feel if authorities took our children away because our teaching was judged to be savage and inferior? At the schools, students were coerced to forget their own language and culture, and expected to take on Canadian culture and values. However, many of the school buildings also had cemeteries right beside them.

**All: Why were there cemeteries? What kind of school has a cemetery beside it?**

One: Children died while at the schools. Some died of disease spread in crowded sleeping conditions. Some died of malnutrition because the schools were poorly funded. Children also suffered physical punishment and abuse. Some died because they ran away and encountered harsh wilderness conditions. Too often, when students died they were buried beside the school instead of being returned to their families. Many parents were not told their child had died. Families were left to mourn, not knowing for sure why their child did not come home, hoping they would return at some point.

**All: It's a good thing Residential Schools ended in 1996.**

One: Yes, that is a good thing. However, for generations the schools enforced the suppression of cultural values and separation from parents and a home community. As a result, generations of children grew up in the culture of an institutional system that was harsh and demeaning. When they did return home, students had been cut off from their language and culture. They were hurting emotionally and brought the abuse they had learned at school to their home communities.

The painful impact of Residential Schools did not end in 1996. It ripples through the generations to this day. But now because of the revelation of hundreds of unmarked graves across Canada and because of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Canadians are hearing the pain of Indigenous peoples who say, "That was wrong!" Indigenous peoples are healing in their own communities and teaching the true history of Canada.

**All: How can we mark National Truth and Reconciliation Day today?**

One: We are speechless in the face of such pain that is generations deep. We mark this day in support of Indigenous peoples and communities with our respectful silence acknowledging: the children who did not come home from residential school, acknowledging the families and communities who mourn their disappeared children.

**All: Yes, every child matters.**

**Silence**

One: create a Closing Prayer

## **(Long) Litany for National Truth and Reconciliation Day**

One: Today we mark National Truth and Reconciliation Day.

**All: Why do we recognize this as a special day?**

One: We mark National Truth and Reconciliation Day because we want know the truth and we yearn for reconciliation. Jesus demonstrated once and for all that reconciliation is God's way of shalom, of healing all relationships that are hurt or broken<sup>1</sup>.

**All: What relationship is hurt or broken?**

One: The relationship between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians is broken. Indigenous peoples have been at home on this land for thousands of years. This rich history has not been honoured by the settler peoples, those who have come within recent generations and call this land "Canada".

**All: How did that relationship get hurt or broken?**

One: It is complicated, because it did not start out broken ... for example, the fur trade was an often successful economic partnership between Indigenous peoples and European merchants<sup>2</sup>. And Indigenous warriors were powerful military allies of the British during the War of 1812<sup>3</sup>.

It is complicated, because in other ways it started out broken ... those first settlers did not consider the Indigenous people equals in humanity<sup>4</sup>; those first settlers did not honour the different forms of society, agriculture, government, peace-making and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous peoples they encountered. The settlers considered the Indigenous peoples to be primitive and uncivilized and so felt justified in seizing the land which had been their home for thousands of years<sup>5</sup>. European churches and political powers justified the theft of Indigenous lands and the domination of Indigenous peoples.

**All: Did the newcomers stop at taking the land?**

One: No. Canada wanted "Indians" to stop being distinct peoples with their own cultures. Those in the dominant culture wanted them to assimilate into Canadian society.

**All: What is the place of Indian Residential Schools in that relationship?**

One: The Prime Minister at the time said the Indian schools were intended to civilize Indians. Canada funded Indian Residential Schools operated by Christian churches across the country from 1883 until 1996. Many people who worked in the schools were motivated to do what they understood to be good mission work, helping Indigenous children.

While that sounds positive to our ears, what it actually entailed was an evil, violent disruption of ancient family and community systems. At the schools, Indigenous children were forced to be separate from their family and not allowed to learn their culture or values. Children were punished if they spoke the language their parents taught them because it was deemed inferior to Canadian languages and culture. Many of these Residential Schools had cemeteries beside them.<sup>6</sup>

**All: What kind of school has a cemetery beside it?**

One: Many children died at these schools, from illness<sup>7</sup>. Children died of malnutrition because the schools were poorly funded. Children died from injuries caused by physical<sup>8</sup> and sexual abuse<sup>9</sup>. They died because they ran away from the school and encountered harsh wilderness conditions. Too often, the bodies of children who died were not returned to their families nor were their

families notified.<sup>10</sup> Families and communities grieved their children who did not return and could only hope to see them again.

**All: It is a good thing the residential schools are all closed now; it is a thing of the past.**

**One:** Yes, thankfully they are closed. The last one closed in 1996. However those schools, paid for by Canada and operated by Christians, left lasting pain for those who attended as children, for their children and their communities. The schools tried to teach them Canadian language, culture and religion while forcing them to abandon their ways, their heritage. Young children were captive for years where they grew up without the love of parents or grandparents. When they were older and no longer at the school, they had little understanding of how to be strong and whole Indigenous adults, how to be loving parents. They had much pain in their spirits and bodies. And so, the pain of being deprived of a loving family life was passed on to future generations. Several generations were hurt in the Residential Schools. It will take generations for families and communities to heal from the pain and loss inflicted by Canadian Residential Schools.

**All: How can we help?**

**One:** The very name of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission declares that the first step we must take is to acknowledge truth, not only truth we like to hear, but also truth that is hard to hear. Canada has started to listen. While hearing hard truth is difficult, taking real steps on the path of reconciliation will be another level of difficulty.

As we mark the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation we show our respect with this time of silence. We promise never to forget the painful truth of those children who went missing and to respect the grief of families and communities who mourn them.

## Silence

**One:** create a Closing Prayer

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## Endnotes

### <sup>12</sup> Corinthians 5

<sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

### <sup>2</sup> <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fur-trade>

"Early in the 16th century, fishermen from northwest Europe were taking rich catches of cod on the Grand Banks off Newfoundland and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Drying their fish onshore took several weeks. During that time, good relations had to be maintained with Indigenous people, who were eager to obtain metal and cloth goods from the Europeans. What they had to offer in exchange were furs and fresh meat. The fishermen found an eager and profitable market in Europe for the furs."

"Indigenous peoples were important partners in this growing fur trade economy. From roughly 1600 to 1650, the French forged alliances of kinship and trade with the Huron-Wendat, Algonquin and Innu. These peoples helped the French collect and process beaver furs and distribute them to other Indigenous groups throughout their vast trade network, which was established well before the arrival of Europeans."

### <sup>3</sup> <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1338906261900/1607905474266>

Federal Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs website

"During the War of 1812, First Nations warriors and Métis fighters played important roles in the defense of these British territories against invading American forces. Thousands of First Nations warriors and Métis fighters fought beside British troops and Canadian settler militias during the war."

"First Nations warriors from the Ojibwa and Dakota fought at the Battle of Michilimackinac. The Ojibwa, Odawa, Pottawatomie and Shawnee fought at the capture of Detroit. Six Nations warriors fought during the battles of Queenston Heights and Beaver Dams. The Algonquin, Mohawk, Huron and Abenaki fought at the Battle of Châteauguay.

According to several British commanders, these important battles were won in large part because of the participation of their Indigenous allies."

<sup>4</sup>[https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debate.HOC0303\\_03/792](https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debate.HOC0303_03/792)(p.751)

Hon. David Laird, MP, Minister of the Interior on March 21, 1876 in Parliament of Canada debate about the *Indian Act*

"Nothing would redound more to the credit of the Minister of the Interior than to show the possibility of raising the Indian to the place of manhood."

<sup>5</sup>[https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/assets/pdfs/Inter\\_Caetera\\_Modrow&Smith.pdf](https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/assets/pdfs/Inter_Caetera_Modrow&Smith.pdf)

Papal Bull "Inter Caetera", May 4, 1493 issued by Pope Alexander VI

"...with the authority of the Almighty God bestowed on us in our [succession of] St. Peter and of the Vicariate of Jesus Christ that we execute on earth and with the consent of the people present, we give, grant and assign in perpetuity to you and your heirs and successors, the kings of Castile and Leon, all the islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered..."

<https://dofdmennon.org/>Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery

A Movement of Anabaptist People of Faith

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFinFW3\\_shs&t=226s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFinFW3_shs&t=226s)The Spiritual Cost of the Doctrine of Discovery

A Mennonite Central Committee USA webinar with Mark Charles

<sup>6</sup>[https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Volume\\_1\\_History\\_Part\\_1\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Volume_1_History_Part_1_English_Web.pdf)

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "Volume 1 History, Part 1" p. 140

"Every off-reservation boarding school had its own cemetery."

<sup>7</sup><https://archive.org/details/reportonindiansc00bryc/page/18/mode/2up?view=theater>

"Report on the Indian Schools of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories", 1907 by Peter H Bryce, Chief Medical Officer, Department of Indian Affairs , p. 18

Speaking about a representative sample of data from residential schools he wrote: "It suffices for us to know, however, that of a total of 1,537 pupils reported upon nearly 25 percent are dead, of one school with an absolutely accurate statement, 69 percent of ex-pupils are dead, and that every where the almost invariable cause of death given is tuberculosis."

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/peter-henderson-bryce>The Canadian Encyclopedia

"The Department of Indian Affairs did not publish Bryce's report. It was leaked to journalists, however, prompting calls for reform from across the country. Despite this public outcry, the residential schools were not closed. Bryce's recommendations were largely ignored. Indigenous children continued to die of tuberculosis and other diseases at alarming rates."

[https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Volume\\_1\\_History\\_Part\\_1\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Volume_1_History_Part_1_English_Web.pdf)

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "Volume 1 History, Part 1" p.376

"According to that analysis, for the period from 1867 to 1939, there were 1,328 reported deaths on the Named Register and 1,106 deaths on the Unnamed Register, for a total of 2,434 identified deaths for this period. It should be stressed that these figures are likely to represent an under representation of the number of student deaths that occurred during this period.<sup>6</sup>"

*NOTE: 2,434 was the number of deaths that were identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 based on the deaths that had been documented in Indian Residential School records. With the verified discovery of unmarked graves beside the former Kamloops residential school in May 2021, Canada became undeniably aware that there are undocumented deaths of children in addition to the more the 2,434 documented deaths.*

<sup>8</sup>[https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Survivors\\_Speak\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Survivors_Speak_English_Web.pdf)

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "The Survivors Speak"

"Margaret Plamondon was naturally left-handed. However, at the Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, school, her teacher forced her to use her right hand. "I kept still trying to use my left hand, and then she'd sneak up behind me, and hit me on the left. That's when my finger were broken when she hit me on this finger, and she broke my hand, and I'm, well, I just stayed in class like that." (p. 129)

"Ricky Kakekagumick said that students at the Poplar Hill, Ontario school were often disciplined at night. You try and sleep, you just hear that noise of somebody crying. I don't know how long, maybe a month later, that's when I finally found out what was going on. Whoever was bad, didn't listen, well, the, the ones they wanted to punish, they'd come and get them in the middle of the night, when everybody's asleep, that's what they did, that's why I kept hearing this whimpering and crying at night. They came and got them at the night, took them down, wherever they wanted to strap them, and they brought them back. (p.139)

"Ron Windsor had strong memories of being punished for laughing at the dining-room table at the Alert Bay school. "I didn't know what he was gonna do. He grabbed my hair, put his knee in my back, and held me right on the floor, and I tried to tell him my neck is sore, and I was crying. And he caught me off guard, I didn't expect that. Now, why would you do [that] to a little boy like me at that time?" (p.141)

<sup>9</sup>[https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Survivors\\_Speak\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Survivors_Speak_English_Web.pdf)

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "The Survivors Speak"

"As a student at the Fort Frances school in the 1960s, Richard Morrison said he was called into a change room by a staff member. Once he was in the room, a bag was put over his head and his clothes were removed." (p. 154)

"Leonard Peter Alex was abused at the Alberni school. The abuse began one night when a staff member tapped him on the shoulder and told him it was time for him to take a shower." (p.154)

<sup>10</sup>[https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Volume\\_4\\_Missing\\_Children\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Volume_4_Missing_Children_English_Web.pdf)

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "Missing Children and Unmarked Burials"

"The practice throughout the system's history was to keep burial costs low, and to oppose sending the bodies of students who died at schools back to their home communities." (p.118)

<https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AAA-Hamilton-cemetery-Final.pdf>

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Highlighted Report, "Where are the Children Buried?"

"Most of these children died far from home, and often without their families being adequately informed of the circumstances of death or the place of burial." (p. 2)