

What is the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation?

“Each year, September 30 marks the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The day honours the children who never returned home and Survivors of residential schools, as well as their families and communities. Public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the reconciliation process. ...

Both the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and *Orange Shirt Day* take place on September 30. Orange Shirt Day is an Indigenous-led grassroots commemorative day intended to raise awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and to promote the concept of “Every Child Matters.”

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/national-day-truth-reconciliation.html>

Why do we mark the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation as part of our Worship?

Because it Acknowledges Truth

When Europeans began arriving to colonize the Americas in the late 15th century they came with assumptions of superiority to the Indigenous people and divine right to claim sovereignty and control of land that had been occupied by people for millennia. These assumptions were declared and ratified by several popes during that time period in a series of documents which have come to be known as “The Doctrine of Discovery.”

The national system of Indian Residential Schools was a logical outgrowth of such attitudes of superiority and right to control Indigenous people and their land. “*Residential schools were government-sponsored religious schools that were established to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture.*” <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools>

Assimilation or “enfranchisement” was intended to end Indian “status,” Indigenous claim to treaty promises and traditional lands, as well as to “progress Indians into civilization.”

“The Government will in time reach the end of its responsibility as the Indians progress into civilization and finally disappear as a separate and distinct people, not by race extinction but by gradual assimilation with their fellow-citizens.” Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1931 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/10-quotes-john-a.-macdonald-made-about-first-nations>

Indian Residential Schools tried to accomplish such assimilation by separating children from their family and community in order to disrupt the transmission of traditional family teaching, values and culture.

“When the school is on the reserve the child lives with his parents who are savages; he is surrounded by savages ... He is simply a savage who can read and write...”. John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister, May 9, 1883 http://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debat.es_HOC0501_02/369?r=0&s=1

An unknown portion of children suffered physical and sexual abuse and even death while in custody of Indian Residential Schools. Children sent to such schools suffered the traumas of mandated removal from family, the disruption of family life traditions, and the humiliation of being told the way of life of their parents and ancestors was inferior and even evil.

Why was this system created by the Canadian government and churches? Some say there was wrongful intent to destroy peoplehood and take possession of land. Some say there was laudable intent to teach Indigenous children the better ways of the Euro-Canadian civilization, including the Christian faith.

Indigenous people who survived these attempts at cultural genocide are now reviving their cultures and thriving with the help of elders who were able to retain traditions through the darkest times.

Because We are Embarking on the Path of Reconciliation

Jesus said our highest calling is to love God and love our neighbour (Matt 22:35-40). The Christian call to reconciliation is rooted in 2 Corinthians 5:18. Reconciliation is love in action. Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada of the 21st century is guided in practice by the *Calls to Action* of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Calls #49 & #58-#61 speak specifically to churches. (https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-8-2015-eng.pdf)

Marking the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation acknowledges the long denied and hidden truth of painful events in Indian Residential Schools, a system perpetrated in partnership by government and Christian churches. Marking the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation acknowledges the long denied and hidden truth of intergenerational **trauma** impacting families and entire communities.

To mark the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation is to stand in solidarity with Indigenous people to honour the children who were dishonoured. We acknowledge the pain felt by individuals and communities for generations, as well as the strength and dignity of those who remember and rebuild their rich heritages and cultures.

Acknowledging truth is the first step towards establishing a right relationship between Indigenous people and Canada. Renewed, right relationship is the active work of reconciliation. Reconciliation to right relationship is the paradigm of our ministry (2Corinthians 5:18).

May our minds and our eyes be open for opportunities to establish right relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler/new comers. May our hearts and hands be ready to engage in the active work of truth and reconciliation.

Ways to Mark the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation in Your Congregation

Learn about Residential Schools and wear an orange “Every Child Matters” t-shirt (there are many resources on-line and at your nearby library, below is a short sample list)

Every Child Matters: Truth – Act One (46 minute video)

@ <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/23251>

Every Child Matters: Reconciliation – Act Two (48 minute video)

@ <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/23252>

Indian Residential Schools in Canada (Plain Language Summary)

@ <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools-in-canada-plain-language-summary>

Indian Residential Schools Timeline

@ <https://nctr.ca/exhibits/residential-school-timeline/>

Mennonite Church Canada Resolution on Residential Schools, June 2010

@ <https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/32883/>

Seek out and attend a public event hosted by a local Indigenous group marking the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation or Orange Shirt Day.

Join the march for *Free Grassy Narrows* on September 27 in Toronto (<https://freegrassy.net/>)

If you do not do so regularly, offer a land and territorial acknowledgement recognizing the Indigenous nation/s whose traditional and treaty territory you gather on. To prepare for land acknowledgement, you might refer to these resources:

“Land Acknowledgement” *Voices Together* #878

“Land Acknowledgement” Niagara East MCEC Truth and Reconciliation Working Group

@ https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/31030/Land_Acknowledgement.pdf

“Indigenous Land Acknowledgment for Children”

@ <https://leadinginworship.com/2020/11/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-for-children/> (see the no-cost copyright instruction)

“Land Acknowledgement Guide” Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition

@ <https://dismantlediscovery.org/resources/land-acknowledgement/>

(see the suggested donation)

“Land Acknowledgement can be a Bridge with Indigenous Peoples”

@ <https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/we-gratefully-acknowledge/>

Incorporate into worship a prayer or psalm of lament committing to solidarity with Indigenous nations traumatized by the lasting impacts of the Indian Residential School System via disruption of individual lives and generations of family life and cultural teaching.

“Lament is not despair. It is not whining. It is not a cry into a void. Lament is a cry directed to God. It is the cry of those who see the truth of the world’s deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace. It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are. The journey of reconciliation is grounded in the practice of lament.” <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/a-cry-to-god-2023-04-19/>

For example:

“The Aftermath” a prayer by Carol Penner

@ <https://leadinginworship.com/2022/07/the-aftermath/>

(see the no-cost copyright instruction)

For example:

Prayer for National Day of Truth and Reconciliation

Holy God of Truth and Justice,
God our Creator, Source of all Life,
God incarnate in Jesus, our Redemption and Reconciliation,
God present with us as the 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
of Canada’s Indian Residential schools on Indigenous peoples.
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.

(Mark 4:23; Luke 8:8)

We cannot fully 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 were buried in unmarked graves.

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

We lament our stubborn brokenness in this world.
Why do we continue in actions and lifestyle we know are unjust?
Our prayer consists of longings we cannot put into words,
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.

(Romans 7:15)

(Romans 8:26)

By Ron Flaming
(Feel free to use or revise)