

Responding to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

STARTING THE
CONVERSATION

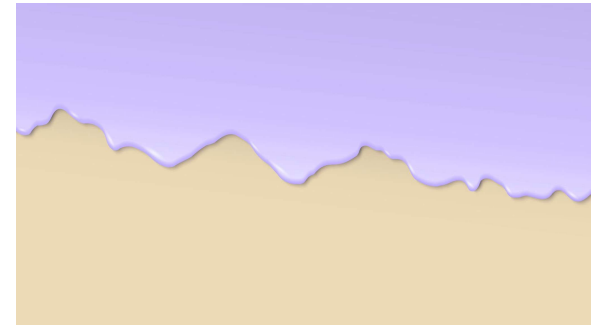
BLOOMINGDALE
MENNONITE CHURCH,
FEBRUARY 20, 2022



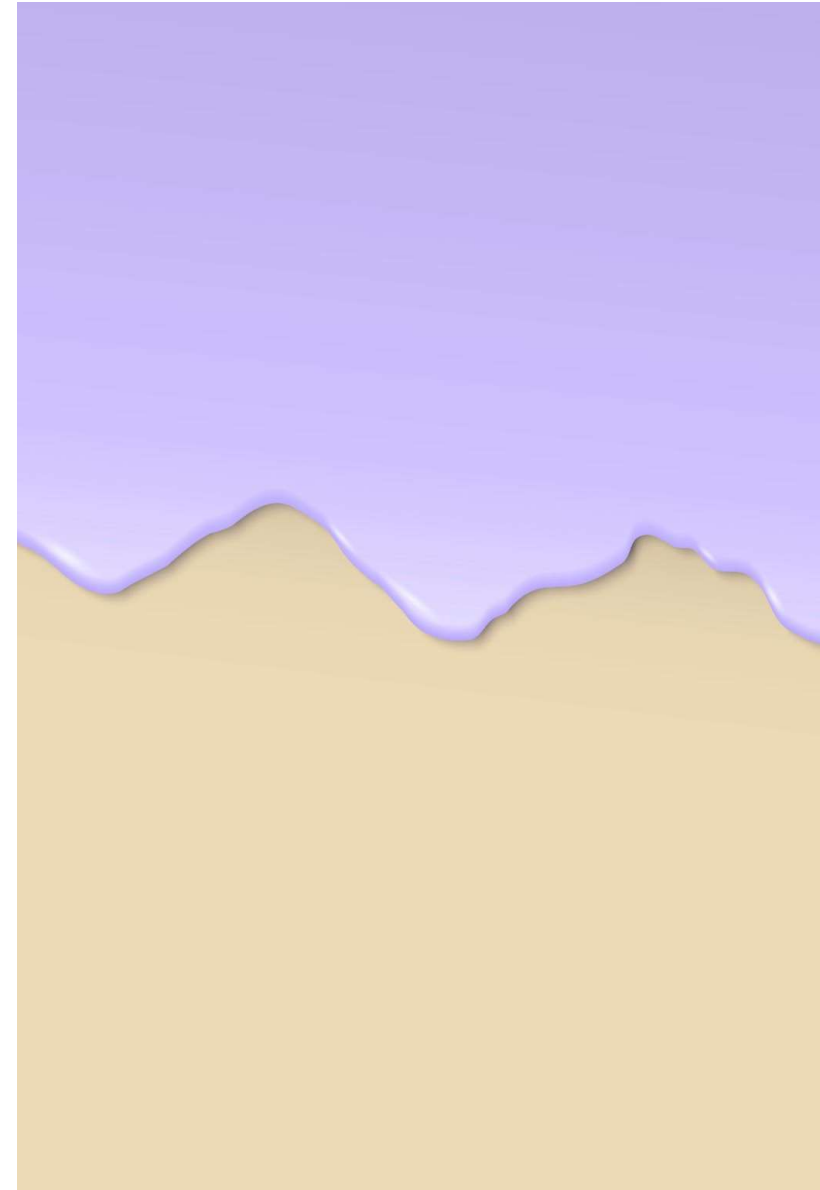
Truth and
Reconciliation
Commission of Canada



Mennonite
Church



Ministers of Reconciliation?
Ambassadors of Christ?:
Reflections on 2 Corinthians
5:14-20 and the *TRC*.



The TRC



- *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* was constituted and created by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in 2008.
- Over the course of six years, the Commission travelled all over Canada hearing from Aboriginal people who had been taken from their families and homes as children, many times forcibly, only to spend much of their childhoods in residential schools.
- Mandated to “reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools...” and “guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation within Aboriginal families, and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, governments, and Canadians generally. The process was to work to renew relationships on a basis of inclusion, mutual understanding, and respect.” (From *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 1, P.23*)

Mennonite Involvement in the Residential School System

Mennonites were latecomers (residential schools began in the late 1800s), but we too were a part of the "Indian School system" that included residential schools, day schools and boarding homes.

- 1939-1945: During World War II, Mennonite Conscientious Objectors were placed as teachers in Manitoba Day and Residential Schools.
- 1950s and 60s: Mennonites were running 'Indian' schools and homes in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario.
- 1948 - 1968: Mennonites operated Day Schools on the Sunchild Cree Reserve and at Fort Vermillion in Alberta, and in Pauingassi and Bloodvein in Manitoba
- 1955: the Department of Indian Affairs estimates that between 1/3 and 1/2 of all teachers in the 'unorganized territories' are Mennonites.

Above statistics from: https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/19042/2012_MCCan_TRC_handout.pdf

Mennonite Involvement in the Residential School System

- 1962 - 1989: In Northwestern Ontario three Residential Schools are operated by Mennonites: Poplar Hill, Wahbon Bay Academy/Stirland Lake and Cristal Lake. During this time, the lives of more than 600 children in 18 First Nation communities living in the far north were affected. These schools are now part of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement.
- 1973 - 1990: Mennonite volunteers serve at the Montreal Lake/Timber Bay Children's Home in Saskatchewan. The home was for indigenous children whose parents were away on the trap lines; children were legally bound to attend school by the Canadian government.

Above statistics from: https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/19042/2012_MCCan_TRC_handout.pdf

The Legacy of the Residential School System

- "The impacts of the legacy of residential schools have not ended with those who attended the schools. They affected the Survivor's partners, their children, their grandchildren, their extended families, and their communities." (From *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 1*, p.136-137)
- - "Residential schools are a tragic part of Canada's history. But they cannot simply be consigned to history. The legacy from the schools and the political and legal policies and mechanisms surrounding their history continue to this day. This is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians." (From *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 1*, p.136)

Calls to Action of the TRC



Truth and
Reconciliation
Commission of Canada

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made 94 calls to action.
- These calls are addressed to Federal and Provincial Governments, directly to the Prime Minister, to the courts (legal system), to pre- and post-secondary Institutions, to leaders in the Canadian health-care system, to churches and seminaries, and to more parties.
- 6 Calls to Action specifically addressed to Churches

Calls to Action Directed At Churches (#'s 48-49, 58-61)

#48 - We call upon the church parties to the Settlement Agreement, and all other faith groups and interfaith social justice groups in Canada who have not already done so, to formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a framework for reconciliation.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/decl_doc.html

- UNDRIP was adopted in September 2007.
- Contains 46 Articles describing the rights of Indigenous peoples.
- Recently made part of Canadian law through Bill C-15 which received Royal Assent on June 21, 2021

*In our response time, Michele B. noted the important fact that while Bill C-15 is part of Canadian law, it is not part of the Charter.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Important highlights from UNDRIP noted in call to action #48 of the TRC, which was directed at Churches:

- i.)** That church institutions, policies, programs, and practices comply with UNDRIP.
- ii.)** That churches respect Indigenous people's rights to self-determination in spiritual matters
- iii.)** That churches engage in ongoing public dialogue and actions to support UNDRIP
- iv.)** That churches issue a statement...as to how they will implement UNDRIP

Paul's Advice (Interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:14-15)

Let the love of Christ urge you on in recognizing and advocating for the rights of Indigenous peoples. Remember, Christ died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. And what does it mean to “live no longer for yourselves? It means not to prioritize your own well-being at the expense of the well-being of others. And what does it mean to “live for him who died and was raised for them?” It means to live like the one who gave himself for others. Therefore, serve God by loving your Indigenous neighbours and respecting their rights.

Calls to Action Directed At Churches

#49 - We call upon all religious denominations and faith groups who have not already done so to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*.

Doctrine of Discovery

- Doctrine of Discovery - The Doctrine of Discovery originated in a series of formal statements from the Pope in the 1400s
- "Inter Caetera" (1493) - This Bull stated that any land not inhabited by Christians was available to be "discovered," claimed, and exploited by Christian rulers and declared that "the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself."

(source: <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primarysource/doctrinediscovery1493#:~:text=The%20Bull%20stated%20that%20any,and%20that%20barbarous%20nations%20be>)

Doctrine of Discovery

- "Discovery was used as legal and moral justification for colonial dispossession of sovereign Indigenous Nations, including First Nations in what is now Canada. During the European 'Age of Discovery', Christian explorers 'claimed' lands for their monarchs who felt they could exploit the land, regardless of the original inhabitants. This was invalidly based on the presumed racial superiority of European Christian peoples and was used to dehumanize, exploit and subjugate Indigenous Peoples and dispossess them of their most basic rights."

Source: <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/18-01-22-Dismantling-the-Doctrine-of-Discovery-EN.pdf>

Terra Nullis

- A Latin expression meaning literally: "Land Belonging to No One"
- An expression used by explorers in conjunction with the doctrine of discovery to claim that no one owned the land prior to "the assertion of European sovereignty."

Source: <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/18-01-22-Dismantling-the-Doctrine-of-Discovery-EN.pdf>

Paul's Advice (Interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:16-17)

The doctrine of discovery is a doctrine of the old creation. It is based on a law that enslaves. It is a human point of view that divides peoples into those who are superior and those who are savages and that divides land into the 'owned' and the 'empty.' You cannot regard your Indigenous neighbours and their land from this or any other human point of view like it. In Christ all things are being made new, so treat each other with kindness and share the land.

Calls to Action Directed At Churches

#58 - We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools.

Mennonite Church Apologies?

- **In 1970** the Conference of Mennonites in Canada offered a litany of confession at its annual Assembly that confessed the significant failing of our own faith community in relating to "Indians," seeing them 'as converts' but not as children of God, in recognizing them by the 'colour of their skin but not as fellow human beings, friends, and brothers' (and sisters) in Christ.

- **2010 Resolution:** Be it Resolved that Mennonite Church Canada congregations and individual members recognize and confess our complicity in the failing of the Christian Church and its role in the tragic physical, emotional, mental, and sexual abuse, denial of culture, language, and peoplehood of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In recognition of this past failing, and in acknowledgement that destructive individual attitudes, such as paternalism, racism, and superiority are still present among us, we as Mennonite Church Canada congregations and as individuals will seek renewed opportunities to walk with Aboriginal people of Canada, opening our hearts, minds, and ears to engage the pain resulting from the legacy of the Residential Schools, and strive to recognize each other as sisters and brothers created in the image and likeness of one God.

Paul's Advice (Interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:18)

The Gospel is about God reconciling us to God and God reconciling us to each other. One reconciliation cannot exist without the other. You have wronged your Indigenous neighbours. Your ancestors sought them out with a "ministry of reconciliation" that was in truth a ministry of death. But praise God, for God has given courage and strength to your Indigenous neighbours and they have called you to hear the truth about the past and to reconcile with them by establishing relationships of justice with them. Will you respond to the call of God spoken through the *TRC*?

Calls to Action Directed At Churches (#'s 59-61)

#59 - We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church's role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities were necessary.

Calls to Action Directed At Churches

#60 - We call upon leaders of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement and all other faiths, in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders, Survivors, schools of theology, seminaries, and other religious training centres, to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy, and all clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities, on the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right, the history and legacy of residential schools and the roles of the church parties in that system, the history and legacy of religious conflict in Aboriginal families and communities, and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence.

Calls to Action Directed At Churches

#61 - We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement, in collaboration with Survivors and representatives of Aboriginal organizations, to establish permanent funding to Aboriginal people for

- i. Community-controlled healing and reconciliation projects.
- ii. Community-controlled culture- and language revitalization projects.
- iii. Community-controlled education and relationship building projects.
- iv. Regional dialogues for Indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss Indigenous spirituality, self determination, and reconciliation.

Paul's Advice (Interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:20, 6:4-7)

Be reconciled to God. Be reconciled to God through being reconciled with your Indigenous neighbours. Say you are sorry and heed their call to right what is wrong in your church community's attitudes and teachings regarding Indigenous peoples. Finally, use what resources you have to advocate for justice for your neighbours. Through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left, support their well-being, for the glory of God.

What is MCEC doing?



- TRC Working Group (<https://mcec.ca/programs/truth-and-reconciliation>)
- Supporting Land Defenders
- Education and Advocacy - EXs. through the Settler-Indigenous Relations program of MC Canada (Steve Heinrichs). See the many resources available through *CommonWord* bookstore as well as the online "Treaty as Sacred Covenant" Video Series at <https://mcec.ca/programs/truth-and-reconciliation>
- Building Local/Contextually appropriate Relationships

What about BMC?



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