

## From Apology towards Reconciliation Reflection Process for Conference and Presbytery Meetings

At its November 2015 meeting, General Council Executive passed a proposal from the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools that the 30th anniversary of the United Church's Apology to First Nations People be recognized at all Conference annual meetings (or in Conferences where there is no annual meeting, at presbytery meetings) in the spring of 2016.

Meetings are asked to put aside a half-hour to

- read the 1986 Apology to First Nations Peoples
- read the 1988 Response from the Indigenous Church
- reflect on the Apology and Response in light of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Please find below the text of the 1986 Apology and the 1988 response, and a series of questions for group or silent reflection.

An order of service for use at meetings or in communities of faith on June 5 or 12 has also been prepared (search "apologies" at [united-church.ca](http://united-church.ca)).



### 1986 Apology to First Nations Peoples

*At the 31st (1986) General Council in Sudbury, in response to requests from Indigenous members of the church, Moderator Bob Smith met with the Elders in a tepee to deliver this official statement of apology.*

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured.

We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality.

We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.

We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel.

We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the

Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be.

We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

—1986 Record of Proceedings, p.85



The Meeting of the Eagle and the Dove by Mervin Meekis, an artist from Sandy Lake Reserve who died in 2000, was presented to the 31st General Council 1986 during the consideration of the Apology to First Nations.

## Response to the 1986 Apology

*At the 32nd (1988) General Council in Victoria, Edith Memnook, a representative of the All Native Circle Conference constituted at that assembly, responded to the Apology.*

The Apology made to the Native People of Canada by The United Church of Canada in Sudbury in August 1986 has been a very important step forward. It is heartening to see that The United Church of Canada is a forerunner in making this Apology to Native People. The All Native Circle Conference has now acknowledged your Apology. Our people have continued to affirm the teachings of the Native way of life. Our spiritual teachings and values have taught us to uphold the Sacred Fire; to be guardians of Mother Earth and strive to maintain harmony and peaceful coexistence with all peoples.

We only ask of you to respect our Sacred Fire, the Creation, and to live in peaceful coexistence with us. We recognize the hurts and feelings will continue amongst our people, but through partnership and walking hand in hand, the Indian spirit will eventually heal. Through our love, understanding and sincerity the brotherhood and sisterhood of unity, strength and respect can be achieved.



The Native People of The All Native Circle Conference hope and pray that the Apology is not symbolic but that these are the words of action and sincerity. We appreciate the freedom for culture and religious expression. In the new spirit this Apology has created, let us unite our hearts and minds in the wholeness of life that the Great Spirit has given us.

—1988 Record of Proceedings, p.79

## Questions for Reflection

1. Is this your first time hearing the Apology? Is it your first time speaking it?
2. What did you feel as you heard or spoke these words? Do you feel a sense of commitment towards them?
3. Had you ever heard or read the Indigenous response to the Apology?
4. What did you feel as you heard or read these words? Do you feel a sense of responsibility towards them?
5. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has issued a challenging set of Calls to Action, including
  - complying with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
  - educating congregations about the church's role in colonization and residential schools and reaffirming a commitment to reconciliation
  - training church leaders to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right
  - funding community-controlled healing, language revitalization, and relationship building projects
  - commemorating children who died at the schools
  - holding an inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and their disproportionate victimization
  - making the residential school legacy, Treaties, and past and present Indigenous contributions to this country a mandatory part of the school curriculum

In the church's journey of Apology and Reconciliation, how might these calls help us live out the words of the Apology in "action and sincerity"?

6. What is the next step that you are able to take in this journey?