

Call to Worship – Territorial Acknowledgement

National Indigenous Peoples Day

Leader: Creator God, our source, and Loving Parent.
Creator God, who lived among us as sibling, teacher, and Lord Jesus.
Creator God, our constant companion and guiding Holy Spirit.

*All: We gather before you as a people reconciled with you through Jesus Christ.
Open our ears today to hear your voice.
Open our hearts today to know your presence.
Open our hearts today to recognize the presence of our neighbours.*

Leader: We acknowledge before you and to one another ...

*All: we and all people are gifted by you.
The earth and all its sustenance and beauty are a gift from you.*

Leader: We acknowledge before you and to one another ...

All: the land we occupy and worship on is part of the traditional territory of Indigenous people, the [insert specific Indigenous nations of your territory] who have lived here for thousands of years before we arrived, whose culture and wisdom we have too often ignored or hidden.

Leader: We celebrate the courage of people who are now declaring their Indigenous heritage ...

*All: insight gathered over thousands of years of living
in recognition of their relationship with all your Creation,
artistic skills passed down from generation to generation,
family and clan systems that give a deep sense of belonging.*

Leader: We commit to respectfully listening and learning

All: from Indigenous neighbours as we travel the path of reconciliation.

Why do we mark Indigenous Peoples Month (June) and specifically Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21) as part of our worship?

Non-Indigenous peoples of Canada have long assumed and been taught that Indigenous people were “savages” without honourable culture or values before the arrival of the civilizing influences of Europeans and Christianity.

Through hundreds of years of assimilation and land “dispossession”, the true gifts and strengths of Indigenous nations have been hidden. The relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada exists but is broken by histories that have led to deep individual and cultural trauma, distrust, lack of understanding and lack of respect.

Recent movements of Indigenous peoples (e.g., Idle no More), the revelations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and ongoing work by non-Indigenous allies are bringing to light what has been hidden: the rich cultural histories and the strength of spirit and resilience of Indigenous people in the face of attempted erasure and assimilation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called upon churches to take actions that lead to hearing the truth so that reconciliation can happen between Indigenous peoples and Canada. Reconciliation is the healing of a broken relationship.

Indigenous People’s Month and Day call to mind and celebrate the true strength of Indigenous people and the gifts of their cultures that have been hidden and actively suppressed.

Such acknowledgement and celebration are worthy of mention in our worship because the Christian church was often active in the oppression of Indigenous culture and values. Therefore, it is now fitting for the Christian church to participate in reconciliation by celebrating and supporting the resilient Indigenous people and cultures that are in resurgence.

This work of reconciliation and justice is part of our contemporary fulfillment of Jesus’ ministry which he proclaimed in Luke 4. See Luke 4:18-19.

When Jesus was asked to summarize the Law, and offer guidance for the way of life pleasing to God, he said love God and love your neighbour as yourself. See Matthew 22: 37-40.

According to Paul, we have a specific call as Christians to the work of reconciliation. See 2 Corinthians 5:18-19.

Following the pattern of Jesus' teaching on the first and second commandments of love, we recognize that reconciliation with God is accompanied by the reconciliation of broken relationships with others, including Indigenous neighbours.

We mark Indigenous Peoples Month and Indigenous Peoples Day to participate as Christians in Jesus' work of proclaiming the good news of reconciliation. We mark Indigenous Peoples Month and Indigenous Peoples Day to celebrate and honour the peoples who are indigenous to the land we occupy.

Ron Flaming (Canada), 2023. Mennonite Church Eastern Canada Truth and Reconciliation Working Group.
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