



Statement on the Kamloops Residential School CBAC Indigenous Relations Working Group

June 2nd, 2021

The recent news of the discovery of a mass grave for Indigenous Children at a Residential School in Kamloops, BC, is a stark and uncomfortable reminder of the very real horrors of a legislated attempt to eradicate Indigenous language and culture from Canadian society. There will no doubt be more such discoveries. How do we respond? In some ways, no words could possibly be adequate, and yet silence and inaction is also an inappropriate response.

The pastors and congregations of the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada have committed to reconciliation. We've said the words. We've expressed our desire to affirm the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to support the implementation of the 94 Calls to Action that came out of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation process (2015). We have figuratively "lowered the flags." We have felt the sting of shame that comes with the knowledge that our governments, denominations, and ancestors believed that "killing the Indian in the child" was a way to solve the challenges of living together on this land, in peace and friendship. Assimilation seemed like the best - or the easiest - path forward, at least for those who adjudicated such things.

We understand that the current conditions facing many Indigenous people (on "reserve" and off) on Turtle Island are horrid on many levels. We feel frustration when various levels of government commit to a better future, but then fail to bring about significant improvements. It seems that despite our collective desire to "make things right," the daily lives of Indigenous peoples continue to reflect the partial success of the Indian Act — that is, the Residential School System caused a deep and life-threatening wound in the heart of Indigenous languages, cultures, and worldviews. For decades the Federal Government has provided a sort of basic "life support" system, but perhaps with the assumption that the patient would eventually succumb to their injuries.

Opportunities have always been given for those who want to assimilate or integrate, but we have had no vision for co-existence. We have not honoured the treaty obligation for self-determination, and have consistently failed to practically recognize overlapping sovereignties of land. We celebrate those individuals or communities who are able to thrive despite the

challenges we continue to impose on Indigenous peoples of this land we now call Canada. Is this the best we can do?

Many of us have come to understand that Indigenous perspectives and practices may actually help us cope with some of the ravages we're facing as a result of our (sometimes) reckless over-development of industry and the environmental and mental health costs of a disembodied way of life. So on the one hand, we feel pity for those who have been victimized by the Indian Act in its various guises, but we also recognize the beauty and wisdom in the glimpses we have of the focus in Indigenous cultures on ceremony and the role of elders and traditional leaders in promoting a more integrated and balanced life.

So, as we ponder the challenges and opportunities that can be teased out of the present moment, how can the Indigenous Relations Working Group of the CBAC help to guide us? How can our theology and our faith help us see and understand the past and lead us as we pick our way carefully forward?

This is not a "problem to be solved" by a few policy tweaks here or there or by making more commitments that aren't kept for one reason or another. We can't wish the problems away and there are no quick fixes. The issues have very long roots. And if simply dedicating more money was going to help, surely we would have chipped away at problems like lack of potable water on reserves or decent housing by now. Our response — both as individuals and as a denomination — requires more wisdom and patience.

Here are some thoughts:

1. James 1:5 says: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."
2. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) could help us orient our spirits for the work before us as we seek to respond appropriately to the very uncomfortable truths about our history.
3. There is so much for us to learn about that history and there are lots of resources to help us. The IRWG has curated a lot of material and put it in the form of a course: <https://courses.baptist-atlantic.ca/course/walking-in-a-good-way-with-our-indigenous-neighbours/>. Completing the course will take about 20 hours. It's free and can be done individually and at your own pace or as part of a small group.

This is a time for lament. We mourn the deaths of these children in Tk'emlúps te Secwépem (Kamloops), and we recognize that as Canadians and as Christians, we have helped perpetuate the residential school through our ignorance and inaction.

To that end, we invite you to join other CBAC churches in keeping a moment of silence this week. We, as the Indigenous Relations Working Group, would like to offer a few

resources to assist you; please use them as you see fit (these resources can be found at: <https://baptist-atlantic.ca/news/responding-to-kamloops-residential-school-discovery/>)

Indigenous Relations Working Group of the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada