



The Anglican Church of Canada

“An Apology for Spiritual Harm”

BY ARCHBISHOP FRED HILTZ ON JULY 12, 2019

“An Apology for Spiritual Harm” offered by the Primate on behalf of the Anglican Church of Canada

For a number of years, since the Indigenous Covenant of 1994, there has been a call for an apology for spiritual abuse endured by Indigenous Peoples through the era of colonial expansion across the Land, and particularly through the era of the Indian Residential Schools.

In the Apology to survivors of the Residential Schools delivered on August 6, 1993, Archbishop Michael Peers expressed his remorse on behalf of the Anglican Church of Canada that “we tried to remake you in our own image”.

Today, I offer this apology for our cultural and spiritual arrogance toward all Indigenous Peoples – First Nations, Inuit and Métis – and the harm we inflicted on you. I do this at the desire of many across the Church, at the call of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, and at the request and with the authority of the Council of the General Synod.

I confess our sin in failing to acknowledge that as First Peoples living here for thousands of years, you had a spiritual relationship with the Creator and with the Land. We did not care enough to learn how your spirituality has always infused your governance, social structures and family life.

I confess our sin in demonizing Indigenous spiritualities, and in belittling the traditional teachings of your Grandmothers and Grandfathers preserved and passed on through the elders.

I confess the sin of our arrogance in dismissing Indigenous Spiritualities and disciplines as incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus, and insisting that there is no place for them in Christian Worship.

I confess our sin in acts such as smothering the smudges, forbidding the pipes, stopping the drums, hiding the masks, destroying the totem poles, silencing the songs, stilling the dances, and banning the potlatches. With deep remorse, I acknowledge the intergenerational spiritual harm caused by our actions.

I confess our sin in declaring the teachings of the medicine wheel to be pagan and primitive.

I confess our sin in robbing your children and youth of the opportunity to know their spiritual ancestry and the great wealth of its wisdom and guidance for living in a good way with the Creator, the land and all peoples.

For such shameful behaviours, I am very sorry. We were so full of our own self-importance. We followed “too much the devices and desires of our own hearts” (Confession, p. 4, Book of Common Prayer). We were ignorant. We were insensitive. We offended you. We offended the Creator.

As we look to you today, we have come to acknowledge our need to repent.

As we turn to God, we say:

“We have offended against thy holy laws, We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, And we have done those things we ought not to have done...” (Confession, p. 4, Book of Common Prayer).

I know that an important part of repentance is sincere lament, and that an important part of lament is our intention to “lead the new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in God’s holy ways...” (Invitation to Confession, p. 76, The Book of Common Prayer).

With humility, I ask our Church to turn to the Creator seeking guidance and steadfastness of will in our efforts to help heal the spiritual wounds we inflicted. Let us commit ourselves to learning how traditional Indigenous practices contribute to healing and to honour them.

I remind our Church of our solemn responsibility to honour the Calls to Action from Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, notably, Call #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.”

I pray the General Synod will be united in directing the Council of the General Synod to establish a committee to strategize and guide the ongoing work of truth, justice and reconciliation, including the building and supporting of a network of ambassadors for reconciliation from dioceses and regions. Working in consultation with the National Animator for Reconciliation, a significant part of their mandate would be to forge paths for: enabling healing for all who were deeply hurt by spiritual arrogance; helping the whole Church to learn from the spiritual wisdom of the elders and to listen with a heart to the spiritual hopes of Indigenous youth; and restoring spiritual teachings and ceremonies that were lost and celebrating them as a vital part of a gospel-based life.

I also remind our Church of our solemn responsibility to honour General Synod’s 2010 public endorsement of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), drawing particular attention to Articles 12 and 25.

Article 12 declares:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.”

Article 25 declares:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.”

I call the whole Church to pray for the Vision Keepers, commissioned at General Synod 2016 to hold our Church accountable in respecting the right of Indigenous Peoples to be self-determining.

I call our bishops, clergy and lay leaders to draw elders into conversation regarding the practices of the past. At one time, we banned expressions of Indigenous spirituality in Christian worship. Having seen the error of our ways we are now encouraging such expressions. Many of the elders have followed the former bans out of loyalty to a church they love. Many of these have, at the same time, kept alive the values, ideals, and teachings of their own elders. Today, they are an essential guide both to the underlying teachings that are embodied in the practices of the past, as well as the

teachings of our own faith. Today, we ask them, with great respect, to help guide us to honour the wisdom and practice of the past and to live into a truly Indigenous expression of our faith in the future.

I have heard a number of elders speak of how the children and youth of this generation, and the seven to come, are in great need of the opportunity to be grounded in a spirituality that is true to their Indigenous identity. Let us stand with the elders in encouraging the youth to lay claim to that spirituality as their right, in their pursuit of health and happiness.

I call the Church, in consultation with the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP), to grow the educational resources in *A New Agape* (2001), a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in the Anglican Church of Canada.

I ask the whole Church to be extraordinarily generous in building up the Anglican Healing Fund, and its support for initiatives that advance the healing of language and culture abuse, oppression and the intergenerational trauma and learning of traditional knowledge and cultures. This is in the effort to further deepen one's understanding for the spiritual ways – of celebrating Indigenous identity, and embracing the reality that Indigenous Peoples can enjoy everything God created them to be.

I call the whole Church to fully endorse the Anglican Council of Indigenous People's intention to move forward with their Plan for Ministry shaped by the teachings of the elders, Gospel-based discipleship and a commitment to "Prophetic Pastoral Care" rooted in "wholeness and healing in Indigenous community, freedom and joy".

Finally, I call us to renew our commitment to our baptismal covenant, especially our vow "to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being". In living this vow in a good way, let us embrace the Seven Grandfather Teachings: love, respect, truth, honesty, wisdom, courage, and humility.

I offer this apology in the name of Jesus Christ, the great Pain Bearer and Peace Maker. I have hope that through Him, we will be able to walk together in newness of life.

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