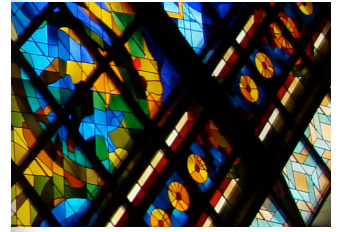




# 40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



## Decolonizing Discipleship: A Settler Colonial Reckons with History

DAY 21

Sara Stratton



### Learning

Sara Stratton

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Many of us have participated in the [KAIROS Blanket Exercise](#), where we imagine Indigenous Peoples' experiences of colonization. But how many of us have tried to understand our settler family's experience, and how it continues to reverberate in society?

As a settler colonial, I have been exploring this experience in my family for a few years. It started with a desire to know more about the place that I loved. What is it that connects me to the land? Who was in "my place" before me?

Thus began a deep dive into my family history. It's been part of a process of decolonizing not just myself but my discipleship—my stance of learning and of following Jesus' call to build right relations. I come from a long line of New-



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The KAIROS blanket exercise powerfully shows how settlers took away land—and with it, rights and dignity—from Indigenous peoples.

foundlanders, almost all from Bonavista North. My parents grew up in the small settlement of Safe Harbour, which until the early 1950s was a significant fishing community.

It was also home to my aunts, uncles, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Tracing the family of my maternal grandmother, Flora Hounsell Osmond, I found that her great-grandfather Richard Hounsell came to Pin-

chard's Island by way of Bridport, England, in the late 1810s or early 20s, and married Grace Perry. They had William, who married Louisa Way of Fair Island. William and Louisa had Enoch, who married Lucy Lush. Enoch and Lucy had six children in Safe Harbour, including Flora. Flora married Wilfred Osmond of Gooseberry Island, and they had six children, including Sophie. Sophie married Jack Stratton of Safe Harbour, and they had four children, including me.

All those Hounsell men participated in Newfoundland's fishing, sealing, and lumber economy. I have found four more generations of Flora's family in Dorset, who would also have been part of the migratory English West Country fishery off the coast of Newfoundland. The same would be true of generations of men on my father's side. Places like Safe Harbour, Pinchard's Island, Gooseberry Island, and Fair Island existed to provide workers for the cod fishery.

Life in the fishery was cruel and difficult. My grandfather Wilfred, for example, worked on a boat owned by the merchant family to whom he was indebted for the staple foods his family required and the materials he needed to fish. In what is known as the truck system, he settled up with the merchant at the end of the fishing season, walking away either more indebted or with only a small amount of cash. In the winter he could make money sealing or cutting lumber for Newfoundland's paper mills. It was a hard and dangerous life, and I was always amazed to see how my family survived and rose out of it through sheer hard work.

The Newfoundland fishery was the backbone of the British Empire. It fed sailors and soldiers in the wars of the 18th and 19th centuries. It fed enslaved people in the Caribbean, and brought sugar and rum back in return. And as coastal Newfoundland was settled, the Indigenous Beothuk people were forced to the interior. Their traditional ways of hunting, fishing, and gathering were confined

to smaller areas as settlers moved in to take land and resources; they lost access to foods they had always relied upon; and despite their efforts to avoid the settlers, they were killed in conflict and by disease.

In tracing this history and making these connections, I have begun to decolonize my learning. Having dug into my own past, I can see my family in the forces that played out in the colonization that continues today. We live on land taken from Indigenous peoples, and we continue to learn in schools, work in companies, and worship in churches enabled by that displacement.

I've known this history my whole life: my family history, the history of the Atlantic trade triangle, the history of the Beothuk. Somehow I never quite put these narratives together until a few years ago.

Why didn't I? Maybe I didn't want to see this connection; maybe I enjoyed the hard luck story of my family as it rose to the middle-class privilege that I have always enjoyed. The truth is that my family didn't just work hard; it was for generations part of a colonial system that created and was enriched by slavery, and by the displacement and extinction of an entire people.

This makes us what Métis writer Chelsea Vowel calls "settler colonials"—people of European descent who continue to benefit from colonization. As settlers, not only do we continue to benefit from the systems set up by our forebears, we help to perpetuate them, and the dispossession of others.

My childhood identity as the offspring of hardworking Newfoundlanders profoundly shapes who I am. And so does the more accurate and nuanced identity of settler colonial. The question is how will it shape me as a follower of Christ. Although it is contested terrain these days, I remain committed to reconciliation and right relationship. I continue to advocate for and follow the principles of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the way forward. And I will continue to learn my settler story, to name it, and to decolonize my discipleship.

Safe Harbour has an almost mythical hold on the people who were raised there, and their descendants. We always want to go back. I didn't ever live there, but I visited in summers when I was a child. It holds a place in my heart which I find difficult to explain. I tried to go back last summer, but the boat I had hired broke down. We drove to Pool's Island, the closest place we could get by road, and gazed across.

It seems an apt metaphor. The past can be a very difficult place to reach, but it continues to ripple through the present, and must be reckoned with.



## Faith Reflection

*Sara Stratton*

### A Settler Colonial's Prayer

God of our past, our present, and our future—

help us to find our way as we seek relationships rooted in justice.

Help us to understand that our past shapes the present,

whether that is one person's position of privilege or another's experience of racism.

Help us to know this without guilt but with responsibility

so that we might embrace with integrity the ministry of reconciliation you have given us.

Inspire us to cast aside the comfort we so easily carry

and give us the courage to cede our power to others.

In the name of our sibling Jesus, who calls us to repair and restore relationship,

Amen.



## Children's Activity

*Alana Martin*

Younger children can watch [Nih!](#) [KIDS TALK about Decolonization](#).

In this video, the Executive Director of the Commission on Decolonization, Melvin Won Pat-Borja, sits down with kids and teens in Guam to talk about what a colony is, how colonization affects their island, why decolonization is important, and more.

**Background:** The Indigenous people of Guam, the Chamoru, have lived there for thousands of years. After centuries of Spanish colonization, the island of Guam was captured by the United States in 1898, during the Spanish-American war. The US formally took control of the island in 1899. Guam is a key military base for the United States. After World War II, the Guam Organic Act of 1950 established Guam as

an unincorporated organized territory of the United States.

After watching the video, discuss these questions together.

- What did you learn from this video?
- How does this make you feel?
- What do you know about the situations faced by Indigenous children in Canada?
- What similarities and differences can you describe between the reflections of these children and Canada?
- After hearing about what decolonization is, how do you think it might happen in Canada?
- What can you do to participate in decolonization?

Older children can watch [Your Decolonization](#), a video produced

by Indigenous Youth Wellness. Indigenous youth talk about their views on decolonization and how they work on decolonizing themselves.

After watching the video, discuss these questions together.

- What do healthy relationships with others and the natural world look like to you?
- How can you learn to see things in different perspectives?
- What have you unlearned, or relearned? What would you like to unlearn or relearn?
- What do you know about the situations faced by Indigenous youth in Canada?
- How can/will decolonization make a real difference in Canada?



## Group Commitment

Sara Stratton

I participated in a Decolonizing Discipleship gathering at the Bartimaeus Institute, where settler colonials explored family history in relationship with the Indigenous peoples of North America. Here are some questions, derived from that institute, to get you and your family started on the process.

**Pick one ancestral line that you can trace.** It could be the one that you have the most connection to, or the one you know the most (or the least) about.

**Where did they come from?** What was the land like in their homeplace? What drove the economy? Were they pushed to migrate through circumstances like famine, or were they pulled by forces like economic opportunity?

**Where did they land and settle?** Did your people move on from their landing place? Why? To where? Did they have access to land or employment? Were they indebted by their journey?

**Who were the Indigenous people where your people settled?** How were they affected by your peoples' migration? Is there a treaty?

**Where do you live now?** How far is it from where your family originally settled? What pushed or pulled you to move? Who are the Indigenous people where you live now? What are the issues facing them? Are you involved in their struggles?

If you want to dive even deeper, including theological reflection, read Elaine Enns' and Ched Myers' new book, [Healing Haunted Histories](#).



## Advocacy

Sara Stratton

Part of the work of confronting settler colonialism is confronting the structures we have build that uphold it. Often, that is through advocacy with the federal government. In the recent federal election, the United Church shared suggestions for ways that voters could engage with their candidates on issues

related to ongoing colonization and Indigenous peoples. Just because the election is over doesn't mean that you can't continue to engage with your representative and the relevant ministers on these issues. Learn more at [Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice in the Federal Election](#).



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**Alana Martin** is a Diaconal Minister in The United Church of Canada, and is the Minister to The GO Project, a ministry that inspires children and youth to put their faith and love into action in the world. Alana feels a deep call to creating accessible resources for young people to discover and deepen their faith in a way that compels them to follow in Christ's model of love, anti-racism, humility, and respect.

