# **Untwisting into Reconciliation: A Settler Service for National Indigenous Day of Prayer, 2025**

*This service was written to mark the 10th anniversary of the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action.*

*Prepared by the Rev. Emma Seamone. Emma is descended from Protestant German immigrants to NS and the Empire Loyalists of NB on the unceded territories of Wabanaki Peoples, and says she was “raised on Nova Scotia's North Shore by Three Harbours Pastoral Charge, and greatly influenced by the work of Tatamagouche Centre.” She is committed to community, inclusion, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and has worked closely with the Wabanaki Confederacy. Emma was ordained by Fundy St Lawrence Dawning Waters in 2021 and currently serves Carberry United Church in Manitoba, Treaty One Territory. She lives in Carberry with her husband Jason, toddler Erica, mother-in-law Ann and furry dependents Buddy, Sassy, and Arlo.*

## Land Acknowledgement

As we prepare for worship, take a moment to think of where you are. Acknowledge to yourself where and with whom you live. Think about the relationship you do or do not have with the land, the people, the treaties. Think about what your responsibilities are to the land, the people, and the treaties. How will you honour that, today and every day?

## Call to Worship

We come together as one in Christ

**We are not all the same**

Our diversity is our blessing

**We are all welcome here, no one better than the other**

All gifts from all cultures treasured

**We are One and Many, Let us Worship God**

## Prayer of Approach

*This prayer is adapted from the text of the United Church’s 1986 Apology to Indigenous Peoples*.

Mystery that surrounds us,

Untwist us, bring us clarity today,

Help us to recognize the image of Creation in us all.

Help us to understand the depth and richness of many cultures.

Soften our hearts so that we never again confuse our ways for the full breadth, length, and height of Christ Jesus.

Journey together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that all your peoples may be blessed and the fullness of creation healed. Amen.

## Prayer of Confession

*This prayer is adapted from the text of the United Church’s 1998 Apology to Residential School Survivors and their families and communities.*

God, we sometimes shy away from taking responsibility for the scars or blame for horrendous periods in Canadian history. We would much rather take credit for the many blessings from our ancestors and neglect their burdens.

God, we are sorry.

We seek your forgiveness and healing grace as we take steps

toward building respectful, compassionate, and loving relationships with First Nations

peoples.

In the midst of a long and painful journey towards repentance, reconciliation, and healing, commit us to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power and misguided attitudes of superiority to hurt others.

## Words of Assurance

We are all in different places in the journey of Truth and Reconciliation. God rejoices each and every time we work together with sincerity. God is with us on this journey. Thanks Be to God!

## Offering Prayer

*This prayer is adapted from the text of the 1988 All Native Circle Conference’s Response to the 1986 Apology.*

May these gifts be more than symbolic, but lead us to sincere words and actions. May our offering present opportunities for partnerships of love, understanding, unity, strength, and respect with all our siblings. Amen.

## Pastoral Prayer

*I grew up in Migmagi and have been blessed to be able to learn from Mi’kmaq relations. This pastoral prayer is written with the Mi’kmaq teaching of the seven stages of creation in mind. I was first taught the seven stages by Eliza Knockwood of Epekwitk or Prince Edward Island. I thank her for her friendship and her willingness to share her cultural understanding with me.*

Creative Spirit,

We give thanks that you are continuing to create among us, the skies continue to bless us with rain that restores, sun that warms, and clouds that lead to wonder. Your mysteries never cease to amaze us, and your ways never cease to confound us. For the glimpses of your greatness we perceive and the unknowns that lead us toward faith—we give thanks.

We recognize the full cloud of witnesses and ancestors who came before. We give thanks for their stories, some captured in sacred texts, others shared in circles since time immemorial. We recognize the influence the past has on us, the difficulty of breaking intergenerational cycles. We ask you to travel with us, as we come to terms with the harms of colonization including residential institutions. Help us to be able to discern the knowledge and traditions to pass on and the harms and bad theology to eradicate. Keep us centered in your love, and the love of those who followed in faith before us.

Creator we thank you for the earth. For the diversity of flora and fauna that encapsulates your creation. For the drum that calls us to remember her heartbeat, for feet that get to experience grass, sand, and soil between toes. We recognize that all creation is relation, we give thanks for all who continue to maintain biological diversity around the globe. Create in our hearts a fuller understanding of stewardship, of relationship to Earth.

For infancy, for the wonder that comes from discovering this world anew, for the beginning of faith journeys, for baby giggles and smiles—and even for cries and sleepless nights—we give thanks God. For that time of vulnerability without defensiveness, for that trust that sometimes is broken by the bitterness of maturity, we give thanks. Help us to understand the legion of harms that continue to be afflicted by separating children from their communities, help us to discern how to care for the youngest among us so everyone might grow to know they are created in your image and surrounded by your love.

For the elderly and the lessons we learn from our grandparents, for the wisdom that comes from experience we give thanks. Help us to advocate for more equitable health care systems, to live into the promises of [Jordan’s Principle](https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824), and ensure the full health of all communities. Help us to advocate for clean water in every community and an end to boil water advisories in Indigenous communities.

For teens, their ambition and insight, for the way they stretch out of their comfort zone and challenge the status quo, we give thanks. Help us to create a world, God, where Indigenous teens do not have to travel alone to pursue formal education, where they don’t go missing at disproportionate rates. Help us to foster a sense of pride and belonging, and be with those that feel alone. Help us to examine the lack of mental health supports that lead to the high suicide rates Indigenous communities are facing, and enable us to offer support.

For our parents and caregivers, the ones who love us first, for the lessons they pass along to us, the balance they do between creating safe boundaries and allowing us to explore the mess of this world, we give thanks. We give thanks for adults who volunteer and care for others. We give thanks for the multitude of gifts you have given us and the diversity of vocations available to us. We pray that we might soften our hearts to value other ways of knowing, other languages, other cultures, and the gifts you have bestowed upon them.

Creator, for everything above, center, below, west, south, north and east of us we give thanks, especially today we celebrate Indigenous peoples of every continent even as we acknowledge the ongoing sin of colonization.

We braid these prayers together and add to them the one we were taught….(Lord’s prayer using the language of choice)

Amen.

## Commissioning

May God open you to fullness of the divine image through all of creation

May Christ journey with you as you learn more about the first people of this place

May the Spirit call you into the continuing ministry of reconciliation.

## Sermon Notes

* I would caution any use of Galatians 3:23–29 that concludes “we are all the same.” A good discourse could be made around this pericope about what Paul really meant—not a *sameness* but an equity of treatment within the church and an acceptance of different cultural practices.
* From Luke 8:26–39, the idea of a Legion being demons that hold us back could be used to explore both perspectives in the ongoing Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) work. First, the magnitude of the trauma perpetuated against Indigenous Peoples in hopes of garnering compassion for the struggles still often faced in the light of trying to overcome that trauma. It can also be used to explore how we are “twisted and blurred” as was stated in the 1986 apology, by our legion of sins around superiority, racism, and colonization.

I offer this short personal reflection without scriptural reference to form part of a sermon, or to be adapted and used in whole or in part for any worship service on this topic.

I was recently sitting in a Brandon Manitoba courthouse. As I sat in there, many Indigenous People were sentenced, and in each sentencing report there was mention of residential institutions (IRS): the individuals themselves, their parents, the extended family that raised them—all IRS survivors. It’s been ten years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) final report was released. Ten years later, and we’re still so affected as a society from the horrors of that system that, in the name of “assimilation” led to violence and harm to Indigenous Peoples.

Ten years after the TRC, I hear negative complaints about land acknowledgements, and I had someone walk out when I was preaching about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). We, as settlers, get “overwhelmed” and we express that as a “tiredness” of hearing about it. That is an expression of our privilege. What about the tiredness of living it, and the overwhelming feeling that no one cares that these injustices are happening to you and your community?

TRC Call to Action 59 states, “We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church’s role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities were necessary.”

So every time we acknowledge Indigenous Peoples and their stories, their theology and spirituality, their struggles, we are working on but one action of 94, one small part of the bigger picture towards right relations. I think of the concerted effort that will have to go into all 94 becoming reality, and I think that as we work for justice, we also need to take the time to learn about the history and contributions of Indigenous Peoples in our country and globally.

I often think how easy it would be for Indigenous siblings to give up on our relationship. I recognize how I have benefited from the grace and generosity of Indigenous people in my life and work. In my own community and at global gatherings like the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, I learned about their work to protect biodiversity, to hold on to languages that are on the precipice, and to resist the continuing pressures of colonialism.

Ten years later, there’s still so much to do, there’s still so much to learn, I think often on the description that Right Rev. Bob Smith gave in the 1986 apology: “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.” The work of untwisting, and bringing into focus who we are, who God is as seen through our images, is the hard ministry of reconciliation. It’s a ministry we as settlers are continually called upon to join, because it’s not just Indigenous Peoples who are affected by these injustices—it’s all of us and the fullness of the body of Christ that is obscured from our view.

## Hymn Suggestions

VU 678 *For the Healing of the Nations*

VU 600 *When I Needed a Neighbour*

VU 266 *Amazing Grace* *(there are Cree, Mohawk, Ojibway, and Inuktitut versions available in Voice United; with the right planning and resourcing singing this well-known hymn in an Indigenous Language, even if by a soloist or choir, helps to establish that Indigenous languages have value*)

VU 588 *Many are the Lightbeams*

VU 602 *Blest Be the Tie that Binds*

VU 117 *Jesus Christ is Waiting*

MV 178 *Who Is My Mother*

MV 41 *O Beautiful Gaia*

MV 37 *Each Blade of Grass*

MV 62 *There Is Room for All*

MV 74 *When Painful Mem’ries*

MV 144 *Like a Healing Stream*