

Addressing Spiritual Violence Against Indigenous Peoples in Canada

Ethical Guidelines and Calls to Healing



An Ecumenical Collaborative Project

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The United Church of Canada | L'Église Unie du Canada

Spiritual Violence against Indigenous Peoples in Canada: Ethical Guidelines and Calls to Healing



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1. Why This Resource?

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24)

This document responds to Indigenous Christians who ask that their relatives in Christ help them address ongoing spiritual violence in their communities, violence that is being committed by Christians. This document, and the ethical guidelines it recommends, are borne out of a conviction that Christians are called to love others, to do everything possible to prevent harm to others, and to help others heal from harms that they and churches have caused.

Spiritual Violence against Indigenous Peoples in Canada

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) found that spiritual violence was common in residential schools.¹ Spiritual violence occurs when “a person’s spiritual or religious tradition, beliefs, or practices are demeaned or belittled” or when a person is made to feel shame for practising their traditional or family beliefs.²

This violence continues to occur against Indigenous Christians, including some who are also recovering, exploring, maintaining, or deepening traditional Indigenous spiritual practices. This violence occurs against Indigenous people who are interested in exploring Christianity while maintaining Indigenous spiritual traditions. And this violence occurs against Indigenous people who are not Christians.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are the ways that spiritual violence has been described in your own tradition?
2. What are some of the notorious moments in history where spiritual people have committed spiritual violence?
3. What do we hear from the recipients of spiritual violence?

¹ 1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation*, vol. 6 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), 96.

² 2. *Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation*, 96.

Spiritual Violence and Christian Mission

The concerns raised in this document relate directly to the central question of how Christians witness to their faith, or, as many would put it, how Christians interpret the Great Commission that concludes the Gospel of Matthew:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18–20)

This document is concerned with *how* the Christian message is shared and, in particular, how it is shared among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, who may practise or be interested in practising the spiritual traditions of their Indigenous ancestors.

For centuries, the Great Commission has been used to justify all manner of efforts to convert others to Christianity. In recent decades, Christians have repented of the more overtly violent and egregious ways in which evangelism has been undertaken in the past. However, churches still struggle with the call to witness to Christ among people who follow other spiritual beliefs and traditions. Some even suggest that Christianity should only be shared with those who come from Christian families. However, as an Indigenous Christian observed, this is a paternalistic approach.³ It assumes that non-Christians cannot exercise their own judgment on whether to respond to the Christian message.

This document therefore takes the view that Christians will continue to witness to Christ. It further assumes that there will continue to be interest in hearing the Christian message. The practice of witnessing to Christ, of course, includes Indigenous Christians who wish to share the Christian message with other Indigenous Peoples. This document also examines how Christians and institutional churches respond to Indigenous Christians who are practising or who wish to recover, explore, or deepen their practice of traditional Indigenous spiritual ways of being.

Mission to me is the deep rumbling with the hard stuff. If it's truly not our mission but God's mission, then we cannot ever say with certainty that what we are doing is the right thing.⁴

³ Dr. Ray Aldred, in conversation with the authors of this document, November 17, 2020.

⁴ The Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne in conversation with the authors, April 26, 2021, citing Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958, p.83.

2. The Need for Ethical Guidelines

On June 21, 2016—observed in Canada as National Indigenous Peoples Day—the Very Rev. Stan McKay wrote a letter to then Moderator of The United Church of Canada, the Right Rev. Jordan Cantwell. (You can read his letter in Appendix A.) McKay was the first Indigenous person to hold the position of Moderator of the United Church and is respected widely as an Elder of the church and of Indigenous Peoples.

McKay wrote from personal experience of how Christian mission and ministry has been and is being carried out in Canada. He observed:

The first wave of mission had moved through Turtle Island⁵ by the beginning of World War II and a Canadian census in 1956 stated that the missioning churches had baptized 96% of the Indigenous population of the Prairie Provinces. Denominational divisions were evident as missions attacked those who maintained traditional spiritual teachings and ceremonies. A spiritual vulnerability was created as residential and day schools separated children from their parents. The mission activities left a legacy of confusion about truth and self-worth for many Indigenous people.

As I completed my time in residential school, I recognized a second wave of mission and I witnessed its impact on communities. There were large tents erected on many reserves every summer and “crusades” were held. The message was again very pointed in its attack on traditional spirituality and a pattern of adult rebaptism was established....

I have a proposal.... The goal is to make the [church apologies to Indigenous Peoples] incarnate through the ecumenical organization of delegations to visit regions and communities with the purpose of engaging local spiritual leaders and youth in the conversation about the negative impacts of mission activity and the options before us....

United Church of Canada staff invited an ecumenical staff group to discuss McKay’s letter and recommendations. The ecumenical group agreed that there remains a legacy of spiritual violence and Christian supremacy in Indigenous communities that needs to be addressed. They noted deep divisions within communities along denominational lines sown by church mission strategies. They also affirmed a need for dialogue on Indigenous spirituality as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which would proceed on a nation-to-nation basis. The group began to widen the conversation to grassroots Indigenous ministry leaders, holding an initial meeting in Winnipeg in June 2018. Follow-up conversations occurred

⁵ Turtle Island is the term used by some Indigenous groups in Canada to refer to the land now encompassed by North America.

by teleconference, and plans were tentatively made to return to Winnipeg in early 2020, plans that were halted when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are some examples of genuine dialogue on Indigenous spirituality that your community has participated in or witnessed?
2. How does dialogue differ from other forms of engagement?

The ecumenical group's conversations suggested that dialogue across denominations about the spiritual violence resulting from Christian mission and ministry among Indigenous Peoples would benefit from theological reflection and analysis. Further, in keeping with common practices in international mission, they identified a need for a set of principles or guidelines, or even a code of conduct, for Christians who carry out mission and ministry among Indigenous Peoples in Canada that would help those Christians attend to the impacts of spiritual violence and prevent such violence in the future.

Members of the ecumenical group suggested individuals who could be asked to engage in theological analysis and draft principles for mission and ministry. Biographies of the members of the group that emerged, the authors of this document, can be found in [Appendix B](#).

The idea for a code of conduct or set of principles was inspired by the *Report from Inter-Religious Consultation on Conversion* in May 2006.⁶ This report specifically encouraged efforts to address the issues raised during the consultation locally, nationally, and internationally. The authors of this document on spiritual violence against Indigenous Peoples believe we must look at issues related to religious conversion in our own Canadian context. We also drew inspiration from *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, a 2011 publication of the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance.⁷

In conversation with the authors of this document on spiritual violence, Stan McKay observed that Christians need to re-mission their practices of sharing the gospel. The notion of "re-mission" suggests healing from the spiritual harm that has occurred from the churches' failures to witness to Christ as Christ the Wounded Healer calls us to do.

⁶ Organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City, and the Office on Interreligious Relations & Dialogue of the World Council of Churches, Geneva (May 12–16, 2006), oikoumene.org/resources/documents/report-from-inter-religious-consultation-on-conversion.

⁷ oikoumene.org/resources/documents/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are some of the wounds you encounter in people and communities today?
2. What are some of the ways your church or denomination thinks about participating in Christ's comfort of the wounded?
3. Does this count as mission/re-mission?

Methodology

While writing this document, our group worked through a process of discernment through dialogue. Each member wrote portions of the material, which were critiqued and honed through ongoing conversation. Guests were invited to meetings as we wrestled with the subject matter, where we listened to each other and asked questions.⁸ This approach allowed our group to come to a consensus on what to include in the text. It was truly a community effort.⁹

We asked Ray Aldred, Carmen Lansdowne, and Stan McKay to read the initial draft and offer critical comment. Indigenous church leaders Margaret Mullin, Adrian Jacobs, and Murray Pruden provided comment on later drafts. Some remaining members of the ecumenical staff group (Peter Bisson and Paul Gehrs) also provided feedback on these drafts.

Our Invitation

The intent of this document is to support practical engagement by Christians in Canada in the material discussed. We invite Christian denominations and institutions in Canada to study and reflect on the [Ethical Guidelines](#) proposed for witness and ministry among Indigenous Peoples in Canada. All Christians and their institutions are invited to continue the conversations we have begun and to carry our common journey of spiritual discernment and healing forward. Theological reflection on God's call to churches and their members requires honest reflection, contextual nuance, ongoing dialogue, and prayerful discernment, the goal of which is concrete action. To this end, we have included questions for discussion and reflection to prompt further reflection and dialogue on the issues we raise, and to invite additional responses.

May we grow together in a good way.

⁸ These guests were the Very Rev. Stan McKay, former Moderator, The United Church of Canada; the Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred, Director, Indigenous Studies Program, Vancouver School of Theology; Mark MacDonald, former National Indigenous Archbishop, Anglican Church of Canada, and the Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, Moderator of The United Church of Canada.

⁹ There are over 50 distinct Indigenous Nations in Canada and a wide range of Indigenous views on matters of theology and spirituality. While we've shared quotes from Indigenous leaders we conversed with that readers may find helpful, care should be taken not to assume that all Indigenous theologians hold the same views.

3. Foundations for Christian Witness

*Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*¹⁰ affirms seven key statements about the nature of Christian mission and how it is expressed in ministry. The last two of these statements are particularly relevant to Christians witnessing among Indigenous Peoples in Canada:

6. If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others. Such departures call for repentance and remind us of our need for God's continuing grace (cf. Romans 3:23).
7. Christians affirm that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47). They recognize that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. John 3:8).

This section draws on these two statements to suggest a framework of discernment and solidarity in the practice of Christian witness among Indigenous Peoples.

Discernment

God is the principal and ultimate agent of Christian witnessing, and God's action in creation transcends our ways. The Christian faith does not limit the ways that God acts in the world, which go beyond our understanding. Thus, our own biases and prejudices can interfere with our ability to give authentic Christian witness. Recognizing this invites us to explore more deeply what we already hold true (the Christian faith) and to grow in our understanding of other faiths and ways of knowing. Refusing to do so can make Christians become obstacles to the unexpected ways the Spirit moves. Eagerness to learn, though, must be accompanied by an attitude of abandonment to God. Ironically, the biggest challenge to Christian discernment is our own attachment to what we know and hold most dear, especially around our relationship with God and our efforts to discern God's action in our lives.

Failing to notice and face our own attachments can result in self-centredness and smugness, which in turn are produced by our own fears of losing control over what is most dear to us. When this fear settles in our hearts, God is replaced with our fears and we turn suspicious and overly protective. Though this might not be the only source of evil acts, it plays a key role in the human capacity for doing and justifying irresponsible acts in the name of "God" or "love." This is something well-known to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christians in the post-TRC Canadian context. Discernment requires, then, a continuous desire for learning and abandonment to God. All Christians must cultivate these attitudes, but especially church leaders and members working with Indigenous Peoples.

¹⁰ oikoumene.org/resources/documents/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world

The idea of resolving every spiritual debate with some simple answer is not the way of Indigenous people. We take mystery very seriously. When we hear a teaching or a story that is very insightful, we respond and say mamaskat (phonetically spelled) which means, “isn’t that amazing.... I really appreciate the mystery of what you have shared!” That’s an attitude that would help us in the churches move from historic mission and the limits we have placed on the vast truths from the Creator.¹¹

Solidarity

In any form of solidarity, the priority has to be the other and not the self. This is central to the very concept of solidarity, but it is also part of the Christian message in its emphasis on Christ’s presence in the vulnerable, and on the Christian imperative to act in the world to relieve suffering (Matt. 25:34–46). This focus on the other means that solidarity is not primarily about becoming the voice of the voiceless but rather about making it possible for the voiceless to have *their own* voice.

Doing so is not merely incidental to Christian living—it is the point of being a Christian. Concrete action to alleviate human suffering and oppression is sharing the good news of the gospel by bringing life. So, Christian witnessing among Indigenous Peoples must occur within a framework of solidarity with the Indigenous struggle for greater freedom, resurgence, and self-determination in all areas. Particularly important for Christians is the need to respect and support Indigenous freedom and self-determination in spiritual matters.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are some of the ways that your church or tradition has amplified the voices of others?
2. What kind of “others” has your community shone a light on?
3. What is an example of freedom and self-determination from your ministry context?
4. Are there stories or skills that your community has that would be useful as others learn to do this more respectfully and intentionally?

¹¹ The Very Rev. Stan McKay in conversation with the authors, October 5, 2021.

Connection to Indigenous Values

Discernment and solidarity are also in line with traditional Indigenous values. The writings and lives of Indigenous Christians and non-Christians speak of the importance of embodying a sacred, holistic connectedness. Indigenous values such as reciprocity, balance, harmony, and mutuality find their roots in this experience of sacred interrelatedness. More specifically, self-actualization, or discovering and taking one's place in the world—highly valued in Indigenous thought and tradition—depends on proper discernment and calls one to solidarity with the whole of creation, in the spirit of right relations with all.

4. Speaking about the Gospel across Cultures

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" Then Peter began to explain it to them.... "The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the gentiles the repentance that leads to life."
(Acts 11:1–18)

The account of Peter's meeting with Gentiles who heard and encountered the gospel clarifies the important distinction between *hearing* the teachings of Jesus Christ and *receiving and expressing* those words. We might think of the gospel as a seed sown in the soil of varied cultures, which receive the seed differently in diverse contexts. It is the same gospel, yet when received by diverse peoples, it grows and develops in unique ways. The distinctive fruit of the seed sown (witnessed in the concrete living of the community) adds to a depth of ways of understanding, of communicating, and of living out the New Testament message.

The encounter between Indigenous Peoples and Christianity, in many cases, emerged as an active participation in a uniquely contextual way. Despite the at times brutal manner Christian faith was communicated and the ways it was conflated by almost all European Christians with their particular culture, some Indigenous people experienced in their own ways and on their own terms a lifegiving encounter with Jesus and his message. The soil receiving the seed that is the gospel message was already rich.

Spirituality in Indigenous Cultures

Long before Christian missionaries arrived in North America, Indigenous Peoples thrived on their land. They lived a good life in community, with a profound understanding of the interrelatedness of all things. Spiritual life was not just one aspect of being human; rather, the spiritual *included* the physical, the intellectual, and the emotional. For Indigenous Peoples, spirituality was the apex of human living. This spiritual life existed and developed for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. The multitude of Indigenous Nations that existed lived and expressed differently their understanding of creation, the Creator, and the Creator's gifts. While there are more than 630 First Nations communities in Canada, representing more than 50 Nations and 50 Indigenous languages, there are common aspects among their traditions. Most have a creation story, a rich tradition with strong social structures, a spiritual worldview, and a deep sense of connection with all of existence.

Many Indigenous ceremonies cause concern among non-Indigenous Christians and create tension among Christian Indigenous people and within their communities. Yet, different cultural traditions and contexts will celebrate and worship Jesus and the Christian message in a multitude of different ways. For many years now, theologians and biblical scholars have pointed out the historical and cultural gap between the Jewish movement around Jesus and the faith that much later became known as Christianity. That faith changed as it became predominantly non-Jewish, and again changed and was assimilated as it spread around the world, including what was to become Europe. Those nations made the faith their own, adapting language, symbols, festivals, and expressions for the faith that were familiar to them. In short, Christianity has always been inculturated—adapted to and by various cultures.¹²

This is part of what the passage from Acts is pointing toward. Not to recognize the validity of different expressions of the Christian faith is spiritual imperialism, similar to the social, political, and economic imperialism that has haunted Indigenous Peoples for so long. Indigenous ceremonies such as the sweat lodge, the smudging ceremony, and the pipe ceremonies, expressions of Indigenous spirituality among Indigenous Christians continue to have important significance, a significance that now incorporates the gospel message.

¹² Christianity has always received and transformed the symbols of its immediate context. Some denominations call this contextual Christianity. We tend to think that the version of Christianity we practise is not inculturated because our cultural ways of being are so ingrained that we cannot see or examine the influences of our own contextually specific assumptions. We recognize culture when it is attached to “the other” but not to ourselves. The early Christians understood that revelation (God revealing) had been universal and ongoing throughout human history, leading to the ultimate revelation in Jesus as the Christ. For these followers of God, wherever truth appeared, it could be received by Christianity. We see this in the Christian reception of Greek philosophical categories, such as inspiration (Skepticism), transcendence (Platonism), or Logos (Stoicism), or in the symbol of the Celtic cross that sits, unquestioned, in many Western churches. Early Christians recognized that all symbols and expressions for understanding God have limits and need to be examined, no matter whose culture. But they did not need to be rejected as cultural rather than Christian. There was no such division.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Think about a worship space that you have recently visited. It might be your own, or something from a different denomination. Can you recall the way the physical space was arranged? What was the visual focal point? Did the layout indicate what was of great value to the community? What kind of symbols were visible? What kind of values were communicated by those who spoke?
2. Now think of a worship space you have visited in a culture not your own. How are things differently arranged or symbolized or communicated? How does your culture value money, property, relationships, mistakes, virtues? Does this affect the symbols and message of your church?

Settler Oppression and Disruption

When the European missionaries arrived in North America, they brought not only the New Testament teachings but also the message within a European cultural context. Still, Indigenous Peoples were able to understand and resonate with the value of the teachings of Christ despite the at times oppressive carriers of the message and the oppressions of the systems the colonizers brought with them. Indigenous leaders insist that it is important to recognize how the Indigenous people received the Christian message. That reception is significantly different from the European acceptance. This must be acknowledged so that Indigenous Christians can live their faith in authenticity.

The Elders all talk about how they went through this process of how they heard about this new teaching, and decided as a people that they would receive the Christian faith and decided that they'd accept it; this is different from those who were forced to convert. I get the impression from some of the Blackfoot that they were forced to convert; but it's not the Stoney Nakoda's story; they thought about it, as did the Tsimshian and the Nisga'a and the Cree in the middle of Saskatchewan, the southern not so much; it depends on the people....

What's different on the west coast, maybe because there are places that are more secluded, harder to get to, that when these people received the gospel, they really did Indigenize it rather quickly and how it furthered their own values for their society. They didn't see a problem. At the same time all of the violence was directed at them by the church. Though the church in some places became like a big house; missionaries still insisted on saying who was in, who was out, which was not the Indigenous way. This may be key to spiritual violence: some people in, some out.

West coast people seemed to hold their spirituality separate, i.e., they went to a church Anglican or Catholic and kept their culture as well, holding their

traditions side by side, and they didn't see any problem. Is it violent to erase the space between them?

The classic liberal approach...which said what Indigenous people had was good enough, that's paternalistic too, and is a kind of violence, because again the missionary church has decided for Indigenous people what they should think about Christianity.¹³

The devastating disruption that came with the Christian missionaries is part of the legacy of spiritual violence. The teachings of Jesus were distorted because the Christian missionaries could not differentiate between the gospel message and their own cultural expressions of that message. We continue to live with the fallout of first encounter. The TRC's Call to Action #60 names the spiritual violence that continues to be committed by non-Indigenous Christians who are ignorant of the legitimacy, enrichment, authenticity, and beauty of the gospel seed planted and expressed in Indigenous cultures.

Indigenous Peoples, in their relation to and reception of the Christian message, interpret the teachings of Jesus through the lens of Indigenous experience. This means taking into consideration the spiritual violence inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples by European missionaries and settler colonizers. A new understanding and practice of Christian mission is needed in light of the abuse and violence. We saw in the passage from Acts the uncertainty around how the teachings of Jesus should be spread. In fact, the Book of Acts expresses the struggles with understanding the Christian churches' mission in relation to a diversity of cultures. What becomes clear is that "God is revealed to many peoples in many ways...and that salvation is possible in many ways."¹⁴

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. It is just as true for us as it was for the early Christian missionaries that we have a hard time seeing our own culture in the expression of the Christian message.
 - a. How would you describe the differences between your own culture and the Christian message?
 - b. What are some of the ways Western values have enmeshed with the Christian message as it is encountered in popular culture today?

¹³ Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred, in conversation with the authors, November 17, 2020.

¹⁴ *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation*, from a presentation that Mark MacDonald gave at the Beyond Dream-Catchers: Aboriginal Theology and Spirituality in the Canadian Context conference, Concordia University, Montreal, January 2014.

5. Preventing and Healing from Spiritual Violence

Responsibility for addressing the legacy of spiritual violence among Indigenous Peoples as well as ongoing spiritual violence committed in the name of Christ rests with those who attend to spiritual matters. Indigenous spiritual leaders engage in this work every day. All Christian leaders, as spiritual leaders, are called to lead work to address spiritual violence. Governments may support this work by funding healing programs, but as secular bodies they cannot be expected to take a leading role. Churches are called to focus on what their teachings require of them to respond to the legacy of spiritual violence they have committed and may continue to commit.

TRC Definition of Spiritual Violence

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report provides many helpful starting points. The TRC found that spiritual violence was common in residential schools, that the effects of this spiritual violence have been profound, and that these effects *did not end with the schools*.¹⁵

According to the TRC:

Spiritual violence occurs when

- a person is not permitted to follow her or his preferred spiritual or religious tradition;
- a different spiritual or religious path or practice is forced on a person;
- a person's spiritual or religious tradition, beliefs, or practices are demeaned or belittled; or
- a person is made to feel shame for practising his or her traditional or family beliefs¹⁶

The impacts of this after generations of spiritual violence include

- spiritual confusion and confusion about identity
- impaired healing from the legacy of residential schools and colonialism more generally
- spiritual fear for loved ones and others who may choose other spiritual paths
- family divisions, conflict, and the breakdown of relationships, including across Indigenous communities, as a result of spiritual conflict

The TRC defined reconciliation as "coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a mutually respectful and healthy relationship between

¹⁵ *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation*, 96.

¹⁶ *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation*, 96.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.”¹⁷ The TRC also said that “in order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior.”¹⁸ This is a definition of repentance.

Acknowledging the harm includes acknowledging church complicity in cultural genocide.¹⁹ According to the TRC,

Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most importantly...families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.²⁰

The church was and is complicit in these colonial policies.²¹ This complicity extends to past and current practices that in any way disparage traditional Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices. It extends to any ways in which the church has acted to discourage or actively prevent Indigenous families from transmitting their cultural and spiritual values and therefore Indigenous identity from one generation to the next. For these reasons, the TRC said,

[T]he churches, as religious institutions, must affirm Indigenous spirituality in its own right. Without such formal recognition, a full and robust reconciliation will be impossible. Healing and reconciliation have a spiritual dimension that must continue to be addressed by the churches in partnership with Indigenous spiritual leaders, [residential school] Survivors, their families, and their communities.²²

¹⁷ *Canada's Residential Schools, Reconciliation*, 3. Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, says “aboriginal peoples of Canada includes the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada.” “Aboriginal” was still commonly used in Canada to describe Indigenous people at the time the TRC report was written.

¹⁸ *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation*, 96.

¹⁹ While the TRC called what happened in residential schools “cultural” genocide, others have called what happened “genocide” without qualification. Federal Members of Parliament passed a motion made by Leah Gazan during Oral Questions that stated, “That, in the opinion of this House, the government must recognize what happened in Canada’s Indian residential schools as genocide, as acknowledged by Pope Francis and in accordance with article II of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” (Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 44th Parl., 1st Sess., Vol. 151, No. 119, 27 October 2022).

²⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 1.

²¹ Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, “A Worse than Useless Custom: The Potlach Law and Indian Resistance,” *Western Legal History* 5, 2 (Summer/Fall 1992): 187–216.

²² *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation*, 105.

Healing and Reconciliation from Spiritual Violence

Churches need to address spiritual violence and conduct work in the following areas:

- Pastoral care of their Indigenous members
- Theology of ministry and mission and its practice in relation to Indigenous spiritualities and their recovery and resurgence in Canada
- Support of Indigenous clergy, lay leaders, and their ministries
- Churches' baptismal covenant with Indigenous Peoples in areas no longer actively served by respective churches
- Accountability in witnessing to Christ among Indigenous Peoples and on Indigenous lands

Drawing on the insights of Elders, knowledge keepers, theologians, and practitioners, the following are proposed ethical guidelines for Christian communities that seek to address the legacy of spiritual violence in Canada. These guidelines are only a beginning. And, although every Christian denomination has a different authority structure, it is hoped that all will take up, refine, and expand upon these ethical guidelines with a common determination to move their communities forward toward spiritual healing and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and communities.

UNDRIP as a Framework for Reconciliation

Many Canadian churches—including The United Church of Canada—have adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for reconciliation in keeping with TRC Call to Action 43.²³ Article 12.1 of the Declaration is directly relevant to the issue of spiritual violence:

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.

²³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action* (Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), Call to Action 43: “We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation.”

Also relevant is Article 25:

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 to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.²⁴

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are Indigenous members of your church and/or members of your local Indigenous community(ies) saying about the significance of UNDRIP to them? If you don't know the answer to this, is there someone you can ask?
2. How is UNDRIP being implemented across your church denomination, in your province/territory, and at the national level?

6. Ethical Guidelines and Calls to Healing

On the Spiritual Significance of Land and Our Relationship with Creation

The pressing needs are around the impact of colonial mission, of denying the value and identity of Indigenous Peoples, of removing the very ground of our being, by failing within Christian theology to uphold thanksgiving and humility on the earth, that the earth and the waters are sacred, that the removal of those elements from Christian theology's presentation of mission without a balance has left the Indigenous community very much adrift. The weakness of the TRC's Calls to Action is that there is not a component there about the need to address right relations with the earth as part of reconciliation; it's both about the binding of peoples together and about binding the earth and each other. The mission of the churches has largely been based on the concept of the fallenness of creation.

To respond to UNDRIP there would have to be from within the society and within the faith communities of the denominations some way of engaging in discussion about the Indigenous philosophy of life, the balance of life in nature and in communities, and our embracing our spiritual traditions. Many in our communities say our spiritual traditions are demonic; UNDRIP challenges this.... [We] need to look at doctrinal differences however dangerous and frightening it is to engage in conversation about our basic faith statements, but I think that's

²⁴ United Nations (General Assembly), *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* (2007).

where we can start.... to look at how we've limited the truth of how we understand what it is to be faithful [and] to do some reconstruction of what it is to be faithful.²⁵

Land is central to all Indigenous spiritual traditions and identity. Indigenous relationships with land and place are akin to relationships with family and community. The relationship with the earth is analogous to the relationship with the body and mind.

The land is where Indigenous Peoples live and have their being in food, play, polity, and spirituality; hold ceremony; and encounter Creator in prayer.

Colonial relationships with the land symbolize claim, ownership, and economic security that under legal fiction can be stolen or bought, traded, and saved for a specific familial relation. The colonial process of land conveyance breaks down the agency of Indigenous Peoples as they relate and respond to life.

The violent act of removing people from land and space is the erasure of their ability to relate and respond to life in the chaotic abundance of Mother Earth. This results in various social issues, such as poverty and physical and mental illness.

Relating to the abundance and responding to the chaos of Creator's world is similar to the idea of caring for creaturely existence and subduing or soothing the commotion of species, weather, and natural landscape.

We often think of the subduing process through a colonial mindset shaped by a Judeo-Christian Creation story of God giving Adam or humankind dominion over all the earth. Yet Indigenous people see this process as a relational, not hierarchical, structure. Indigenous Peoples cultivate plant life and domesticate animals, not for the purpose of harm or destruction. Indigenous Peoples care for community and creation not for their own gain but rather because of their love of Creation. Indigenous Peoples share in the abundance Creator gives to all people, and create community with the medicines they use and the plants and animals they eat. The land is not subjugated to humankind but rather welcomes human beings to use her in ways that sustain and give life.

With this in mind, Christians may begin to grasp the significance for Indigenous Peoples of their historical removal from their traditional lands, and the historical and ongoing destruction of these lands. When traditional lands are destroyed by development projects, it can be, for Indigenous Peoples, as if their churches are being destroyed and even as if their relatives are being violated or killed.

The second act of creation, which is the incarnation, is too an affirmation of that first act of creation: God creates out of love. It's strong in the Cree translation of John 3:16, "God so loved the land"... in the incarnation you see the coming

²⁵ The Very Rev. Stan McKay in conversation with the authors, October 5, 2020.

together of Creator and Creation. For Indigenous People, Christ really was present with them before the missionaries came; and in the Eucharist, especially if you affirm real presence, you see the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist; this is a better understanding of land claims; real stories take place in real places; this is the importance of “real presence.” Christ really did come and he really was present in our land, in our territory; so then, it goes back to taking responsibility. And in that Eucharist we see the goal of coming together of Creator and Creation. So that’s what I mean by evangelism and mission as having the Eucharist and Baptism being in harmony with the traditional understanding of harmony and all my relatives.²⁶

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What is the history of the land that your church building or gathering place is located on?
2. What are your congregation’s stories of how you came to be where you are and what led you to your current location?
3. Do you know the Indigenous stories related to the land that you are now on? What kind of plants and animals made their home there? How were these used as medicines? What was necessary for harmony?
4. How could you begin to weave the original story of the land into your story?

Ethical Guideline 1

Adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which acknowledges the inherent sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples, including their spiritual lives. Accept that issues related to land are part of the ongoing legacy of spiritual violence.

²⁶ The Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred in conversation with the authors, November 17, 2020.

Calls to Healing

- Learn the history of the land your local church currently occupies. Learn whether your church is on unceded territory or territory bound by Treaty. Be familiar with the terms of the Treaty and how the Treaty parties viewed Treaty.
- Support and encourage church members to become familiar with the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which speaks to the nation-to-nation relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples and remains relevant in Canadian law to this day. Support and encourage parishioners to learn how the destruction of traditional Indigenous lands involves the history and use of the Doctrine of Discovery, the reserve system, the pass system, Treaty making, and Treaty implementation. Loss of culture, language, ceremony, ancestors, children, stories, and access to capital are bound up in the colonial appropriation of land.
- With Indigenous theologians, develop a theology of Treaty and a doctrine of creation that is less centred on human domination. Use this as the basis for learning about and advocating for land justice in a way that is supported by Indigenous people.
- Renounce *terra nullius* and the Doctrine of Discovery.

On Disparagement of Ancestral Beliefs

For perpetrating spiritual violence, the Christian churches came under judgment by the TRC. The churches have been called upon to examine the beliefs that led to this kind of violence to prevent their repeating such practices in the future.

That Christians in Canada, in the name of their religion, inflicted serious harms on Aboriginal children, their families, and their communities was in fundamental contradiction to what they purported their core beliefs to be. For the Churches to avoid repeating their failures of the past, understanding how and why they perverted Christian doctrine to justify their actions is critical knowledge to be gained from the residential school experience.²⁷

Because of their Christian education, some Indigenous people are fearful or ashamed of the spiritual traditions of their ancestors. For example, some Indigenous parents believe that to teach traditional cultural or spiritual beliefs to their children is to propagate evil. Others believe that their ancestors or their relatives who are not Christians may be damned. This spiritual fear can be internalized over several generations and become difficult to shed.

Spiritual fear has led some Indigenous church members, including pastors, to criticize and even ostracize family members who want to learn about the spiritual beliefs of their ancestors. Not so long ago, Ouje-Bougoumou, an overwhelmingly Christian Cree community in northern Quebec, proceeded to tear down a sweat lodge and to ban all forms of traditionalist spirituality,

²⁷ *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation*, 98.

claiming that shamanism was a form of evil witchcraft.²⁸ Spiritual fear can lead to acts of spiritual violence.

As the experience at Ouje-Bougoumou attests, however, the results of prior evangelization within Indigenous communities in Canada demand that churches navigate the subject of how Indigenous Christians express their faith today with immense pastoral care and respect so as not to inflict more violence.

For some the Christian story came into their lives at a point where colonization had so deeply disrupted their traditional ways of life that the story was salvific as it was the story that provided hope for redemption from all that colonialism brought, e.g. introduction of alcohol, new forms of warfare, diseases.²⁹

In short, churches are called to support their Indigenous members in their own spiritual journeys that may *or may not* seek to incorporate Indigenous spiritual and cultural traditions. Church leaders in these communities therefore may face the especially challenging task of having to support healing from the existing spiritual fear and conflict among their members. Similarly, church leaders at the regional and denominational level need to think through how they support local leaders in navigating this challenge.

In some communities, Indigenous Peoples have stopped using words like “church” and “Anglican” to describe themselves. Sometimes church language does not speak to Indigenous identities. They are leaving traditional church worship services because they have been taught a theology that comes from a dangerous combination of Western “superiority” and Calvinistic “piety”³⁰; the interpretation is a dangerous combination of a limited atonement mindset that holds them hostage to a belief that their inherent nature is wrong and must be cleansed through the “civilizing” forces of the Western interpretation of scripture. This spiritual violence has contributed to the social facts of suicide and abuse of self and others among Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Anglican leaders in various dioceses have organized “spiritual circles,” gatherings of healing, that have attracted strong attendance from Indigenous Peoples. Those leading the circles, and other Indigenous Christian leaders, have become very mindful of the language they use in speaking about “church” and in describing Christian theology.

²⁸ Mark Blackburn, “Cree community bans FN’s spirituality,” APTN National News (Jan. 17, 2011), aptnnews.ca/national-news/crees-ban-sweat-lodges-fns-spirituality-from-community.

²⁹ The Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne in conversation with the authors, April 26, 2021.

³⁰ John Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life* [translation of *De vita hominis Christiani*] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952), 23.

The language of circle has become very important to many Indigenous people and Indigenous leaders as they look to explain how language demonstrates or deconstructs their understandings of Creator, their faith, and their spiritual growth. Indigenous Peoples use expansive language, allowing their words to centre the gospel, instead of creating boundaries. Their language organizes the ways in which they view community, creation, and the Spirit. Even something as straightforward as how Indigenous Peoples pray for their Nations as opposed to their country or for their communities instead of their city or town, and how they offer blessing and thanksgiving in the style of their Indigenous Nations, putting gratitude and a sense of abundant life always at the forefront, gives Indigenous Peoples the space to decolonize and decentre European or colonial ways of knowing and being, and to deconstruct the ideologies they have been handed in the use of language.

Together, spiritual circles discern Western liturgical movements and sacramental theology in this way: Ceremony (liturgy) is a vehicle to administer the Medicines (sacraments). As Indigenous members of the Body of Christ travel along such new and different paths, the church is being called to allow the Spirit to work in unexpected ways.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How is the Spirit wild?
2. How does the Spirit work in your life?
3. How do you experience the gifts of the Spirit?
4. How have other ways of knowing and being influenced your spiritual trajectory?

The TRC reminded us that the knowledge that comes from the languages, stories, practices, and ceremonies of Indigenous Peoples was withheld for generations from all people—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. All people have suffered as a result of this loss. Recognizing that non-Indigenous Christians, too, are wounded by policies of Indigenous assimilation is the beginning of what it means to be reconciled peoples.

Accepting Indigenous forms of Christian theology and practice is to understand that all expressions of Christianity are embedded in culture. In the West, many Christians have normalized Western Christianity without acknowledging that it, too, is a particular cultural expression of Christianity. Theologically, we understand that cultural expressions are inherently ambiguous—capable of being used for good or for harm. We encourage Christians to understand how Western values and practices have, can, and will influence Christianity in this land.

Indigenous Christian theologians need support from church leaders and institutions. Support means encouragement, space, and time to work through the issues raised by the return of Indigenous Peoples to traditional Indigenous spiritualities. Theologies of creation, sin,

revelation, and conversion; theodicy; and Christology all need to be thought through and talked through in the rich tradition of dialogic theology. The processes of Indigenizing and decolonizing extend to theologies as much as they do to practices.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. There is a difference between Indigenizing and decolonizing. What is your understanding of the difference between the two?
2. How do the ideas of freedom and self-determination help us understand what matters—and to whom—when we aspire to see both the Indigenization and decolonization of theologies and practices?

Ethical Guideline 2

Church leaders—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—act to address the kinds of spiritual fear that lead to spiritual violence and correct the distortions of the gospel that lead to ongoing spiritual violence.

Calls to Healing

- Accept the cultural and spiritual value of Indigenous languages, practices, and ceremonies, and accept the diversity of Indigenous culture in Canada.
- Accept that languages, stories, practices, and ceremonies belong to Indigenous Peoples and are a gift not only to their own communities but also to the world at large.³¹
- If Indigenous people come to adopt a Christian identity, support a contextual, culturally determined expression of Christianity.

Respect for Indigenous languages, stories, practices, and ceremonies is essential to addressing the spiritual harm that has already taken place and to determining direction for ongoing and new ministry among Indigenous Peoples. These topics are interrelated and will be the subject of the next several Ethical Guidelines and Calls to Healing.

³¹ The *Indian Act* sought to eradicate Indigenous language, story, practices, and ceremonies.

On Rivalry between Different Denominations

The history of Christian mission in Canada is one of competition among denominations for presence and influence within Indigenous communities. This extended to competition for baptism and to bring Indigenous children to residential schools. Survivors have attested to how they were schooled to believe that the particular form of Christianity they were taught, whether Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and so on, was the only valid form of Christianity. Similarly, there is ongoing pain and deep divisions in Indigenous communities along denominational lines because of the hostility with which denominations spoke of each other and their differing Christian teachings for decades. Stan McKay observed: “The apologies from denominations do not even mention how Indigenous Peoples have been and still are being harmed by this “broken” Gospel.”³²

Competition, mistrust, and “sheep-stealing” between the churches were particularly abhorrent forms of spiritual violence by Indigenous spiritual leaders. These not only contradicted Jesus’ prayer (John 17:21) that his disciples remain “one,” but have also over several generations eroded the social fabric of Indigenous communities. Families and individuals have been torn and divided over which is the authentic path to follow Jesus.

Healing from the spiritual violence of denominationalism that has divided Indigenous families and communities demands that Christian denominations respect one another. This healing can best be accomplished by cooperation across denominations to support healing among Indigenous Peoples. A specific practice that sows spiritual fear and confusion is the practice of rebaptism, which meets the definition of spiritual violence.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. The legacy of Christian division has left a violent scar on the fabric of Indigenous communities. Elders speak of how this competition exacerbated the divisions created by the colonial project.
 - a. What kind of co-operation and collaboration can your church or community model that will help bring diverse people of Christian faith together?
 - b. Where can we work together and find common ground?

³² E-mail of August 8, 2022, to Lori Ransom from the Very Rev. Stan McKay commenting on an earlier draft of this document. At the TRC’s Northern National event in Inuvik, NWT, in 2011, as an Expression of Reconciliation, representatives of the Anglican Church of Canada and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith apologized to each other for their mutual disrespect during the residential school era and the negative impacts this had on the lives of Indigenous Peoples in the north.

Ethical Guideline 3

Diversity of religious truths across denominations should never be used to justify a position of spiritual superiority or supremacy. Christian witnessing should be rooted in our behaviour, not in a competition of beliefs.

Calls to Healing

- Recognize how passing judgments on the spiritual value of other traditions, whether Indigenous or Christian, can result in spiritual violence.
- Prioritize work to research, learn about, and appropriately acknowledge how the history of church mission in Canada has caused destructive divisions within Indigenous communities and within Indigenous families.
- At the Indigenous community level, contribute to the Indigenous-led work of healing church-related factions within Indigenous communities and families by modelling respect and collaboration across denominations rather than allowing denominational differences to continue to divide and dominate families.
- Discontinue the practice of rebaptism.³³

On Witnessing to Christ among Indigenous Peoples Today: The Dilemma of “Mission”

A recurring theme in all of our conversations about spiritual violence was the subject of “mission.” Indigenous Peoples’ experience of Christian mission has often been destructive to individuals, families, communities, and Nations. Many stories, both past and present, include missionaries telling Indigenous people that their practices are pagan or demonic. Residential school testimony bears witness to this as we hear former students recount how their language was called “the devil’s tongue” or their traditional items or practices were cast out as “evil.” The Nisga’a Nation remembers that Methodist ministers came in and burned all their regalia.³⁴

The assumption of evil has become so embedded in a contemporary Christian understanding of difference that many Christians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, become suspicious of or fear what they do not recognize or understand. The idea that the demonic is elsewhere should be replaced with the Christian understanding that the demonic hides itself in the Holy.³⁵ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada unearthed the demonic distortions within Western Christian thought and practice. We are called to be communities that recognize the presence of evil and good within our own cultural version of spiritual practices. Faith

³³ Rebaptism is the practice of baptizing someone who has already been baptized in a different Christian tradition or denomination.

³⁴ Oral history relayed to the authors by the Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred in November 2020.

³⁵ Paul Tillich is an example of a theologian who weaves this understanding into his theology.

communities need to practice discernment with a gaze toward their own practices and habits of mind.

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (Matthew 7:3–5)

Indigenous Christian leaders have voiced concerns about ongoing efforts by some Christian missionary enterprises, including some based outside Canada, to enter Indigenous communities for the purpose of evangelizing in ways that continue to disparage Indigenous spiritual traditions.³⁶ These leaders identify this as spiritual violence. This does not mean that Christians have to cease witnessing to Christ or sharing the gospel with Indigenous Peoples, but it does demand a high ethic and an understanding of how spiritual violence occurs and how to prevent it. Christians are called to recognize that the Holy Spirit has been at work among Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial, before European contact, and continues to be present and active in Indigenous communities. Outsiders must be invited to come into a community and rely on the community's discernment of what is needed. Christians are called to respect Indigenous Peoples' capacity to receive, interpret, and reconcile the Christian message with their own traditional teachings and relationship with the Creator.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What kind of spiritual practices or consolations does your church or tradition provide when you encounter something that makes you uncomfortable?
2. Are there insights from the discipline of intercultural competence that can help you navigate your own uncertainties and fears?
3. What are some scripture passages that address fear?

³⁶ For example, the Very Rev. Stan McKay in conversation with the authors, October 5, 2020.

Ethical Guideline 4

Assume and trust Indigenous autonomy and agency. Consult the Indigenous group or community you are interested in partnering with before offering programs or services; guard against making assumptions about what Indigenous people need. Amplify the vision, efforts, and leadership of the community rather than or in addition to bringing ministry to the community.

Calls to Healing

- Encourage churches to rethink/review their understanding of “mission” in terms of their practices of witnessing to the gospel and offering and providing service.
- Cease all activities within Indigenous communities that are meant to convince Indigenous Peoples to abandon their traditional spiritual practices and adopt a Western form of Christianity.
- Recognize that traditional and Christian Indigenous communities determine what is best for themselves and what resources and support are needed from those outside their communities.
- Encourage practitioners and theologians engaged in ministry with Indigenous people to support the role of Elders and Knowledge Keepers and to incorporate the voices of children and youth. All of these voices are integral to the discernment process.³⁷
- Attend and, when invited, participate in Indigenous-led initiatives, and amplify the voices of Indigenous leaders.
- Offer service because of a desire to see communities flourish and not because of a desired outcome.
- Accept that Indigenous communities, traditional or Christian, can discern the difference between good and evil in their own context, including in their own ceremonial practices. Identifying “evil” influences and spirits must be entrusted to the local spiritual community.
- Prioritize and support the agency and capacities of Indigenous Peoples to reflect effectively whenever conflict arises on spiritual matters.

³⁷ Our consultants, including the Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, the Rev. Rosalyn Elm, and the Very Rev. Stan McKay, each from a different Indigenous Nation, have spoken of the central place of children and youth as teachers.

On Pastoral Care for Church Members Who Are Victims of Spiritual Violence

The pastoral care of members is a hallmark of Christian ministry. So, churches are called to be sensitive to the specific pastoral needs of Indigenous members who have experienced any of the kinds of spiritual violence discussed in this document and to take steps to learn how best to respond. This need applies to all denominations working within Canada. Indigenous members who have experienced spiritual violence can be found within many Christian denominations, not just within the historic mission churches and churches involved in running residential and day schools. Those churches that have a clear history of engaging in spiritually violent practices bear a special responsibility to attend to the pastoral needs of their Indigenous members.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What resources does your community have from trauma-informed practitioners that can expand your understanding of how the legacy of spiritual violence seeps into the present?

Ethical Guideline 5

Emphasize support for the pastoral care of Indigenous members to recover from spiritual violence.

Calls to Healing

- Prioritize financial support for healing programs and pastoral care workers for Indigenous communities of faith.
- Ensure clergy serving in Indigenous communities and Indigenous Peoples in other ministries are trained in trauma-informed pastoral care.
- Support community-driven, culturally appropriate healing activities designed to support recovery from systemic spiritual violence, such as that related to residential and day schools.
- Advocate for government support for professional healing programs that address deep psychological and emotional effects of spiritual violence.
- Support Indigenous communities that wish to search for unmarked graves at the sites of former residential and day schools and, under Indigenous communities' direction, support care for and commemoration of residential and day school burial grounds.

On Structural Barriers to Indigenous Self-Determination in the Church

As churches seek to decolonize or Indigenize their ministries, they need to understand how the historical development of Indigenous ministries was rooted in systemic discrimination. This discrimination challenges Indigenous people who feel a call to ministry and impedes the growth of self-determining Indigenous communities of faith. It directly affects the capacity of denominations to address spiritual violence.

There are two types of Indigenous ministry to consider here. The first is ministry in Indigenous communities. The second is ministry within an urban setting that is focused on Indigenous people. As both types of ministry developed, they typically came to depend on their denominations for funding. This, in turn, has had implications for the relative position and voice, or lack thereof, that these ministries have within overall church governance structures.

As the church raised ministries on reserve where Indigenous Peoples were forced to live, the economics of the reserve system led denominations to treat these ministries as missions or other forms of ministry dependent on the charity of the settler-colonial church. This dependence persists to this day as many Indigenous Peoples continue to face obstacles to raising their own revenue and are likely to continue to face challenges for some time. Colonization led to limited opportunities in many remote and isolated reserves for education, employment, and access to markets and the inability to own property on reserve to serve as collateral for loans.

Reserve life is not normal. Churches helped normalize that through their policies.³⁸

Many churches operate within a system that requires them to be member-supported in order to have full standing within the denomination when it comes to decision-making. Member-supported churches have the right to be represented at local, regional, and national decision-making bodies of the denomination. Indigenous ministries do not always have the same right to participate in denominational decision-making because they are aid-receiving missions and are structured differently from typical congregational or parish churches. Even where representation of Indigenous ministries is equal to that of any other ministry in a denomination, Indigenous voices generally have to compete with a majority of non-Indigenous voices. The result is that the needs of Indigenous faith communities are often neither understood nor met. In other words, Indigenous representatives are not treated as responsible partners.

Ministries that cannot support themselves often fall into a class of “mission” or “outreach” enterprises that exist on the charitable gifts of the member-supported churches and must meet criteria for funding determined by the denomination. This sets up inequitable relationships of dependency where the receiving missions must routinely argue for their survival in the form of grant submissions. Budgets are not allocated based on the needs of these ministries but on

³⁸ The Ven. Rosalyn Kantlaht’ant Elm during meeting of the authors on March 1, 2021.

what the denomination determines it can afford. This parallels the inequities of the colonial relationship between First Nations and the Crown. The result today is that the staff of Indigenous ministries often find themselves hired for part-time positions that demand full-time service. In some denominations, there are problems with equitable payment between those serving Indigenous communities of faith versus those serving off reserve; sometimes this is explained by citing differing academic requirements—ironically, established *in recognition of* barriers to Indigenous participation in post-secondary education—even though the job being performed is very much the same and in equal or more challenging contexts. And, unquestionably, there are limits to what clergy serving in an Indigenous community can earn versus what clergy may be offered in wealthy urban settler churches. As churches currently operate, the earning opportunity for church staff is ultimately related to the economic power of the local community of faith and is not solely a function of the complexity of the job being performed. How and why Indigenous churches and ministries have been left in the position of being aid-receiving ministries, with their attendant disadvantages, has tended to be overlooked in the work of reconciliation to date.

The current methods for allocating resources to Indigenous ministries do not conform to the principle of subsidiarity, which upholds empowerment of local communities. In other words, they are not well informed by the people most affected by these decisions. This can become a form of spiritual violence. The potential for violence to Indigenous perspectives is therefore high when there are no efforts to decolonize decision-making structures and to address the systemic issues that prevent Indigenous people from exercising authority over Indigenous ministries.

The relative poverty of Indigenous ministries on reserve meant that some were treated as training posts for student ministers, in-country short-term mission opportunities, or first calls for ministers to gain experience before taking on more well-paid, prestigious posts in settler churches. Over time, some of these ministries were abandoned³⁹ or, in some cases, taken up by Indigenous clergy. Denominational support to Indigenous clergy as they assumed these posts, however, often changed. As United Church minister John Thompson explained to one of the authors, non-Indigenous clergy who served remote communities up to the early 1970s were supplied with snowmobiles for winter, boats for summer, and funds for two trips a year to a large urban centre to shop and visit family. As Indigenous clergy took over these posts, the denomination no longer supplied the snowmobiles, boats, or extra funds.⁴⁰

Listening to Indigenous clergy reveals a real disparity between their working conditions and those enjoyed by clergy in most settler contexts. Indigenous clergy deal routinely with a cycle of trauma in communities that extends back to residential schools and forward to the intergenerational impacts of trauma on Indigenous identity, including high instances of

³⁹ See the section below on the church's obligation to those they baptized in Indigenous communities abandoned by their respective denominations.

⁴⁰ The Rev. John Thompson confirmed this account by e-mail to one of the authors, Lori Ransom, on October 24, 2022.

substance abuse, family violence, and suicide. Indigenous clergy, who may be residential school survivors or intergenerational survivors themselves, are on the front line of providing support to individuals and families in crisis. There is no relief for these Indigenous clergy. They don't get to go home to families that are not dealing with intergenerational trauma. Such a state of affairs leads to burnout and depression, resulting in the loss of committed Indigenous clergy who know their communities and understand their people's needs. Inadequate funding for ministry, limited professional development opportunities, and limited pastoral care for clergy who deal regularly with trauma are also forms of spiritual violence.

We in Indigenous territories are living in fairly extreme poverty, we've been made dependent on governments, our economies have been undermined.... This poses a challenge in terms of vision of what communities of faith might look like. Those of us who are survivors of residential schools and day schools are living with trauma, sometimes very extreme, and others in our communities are recovering from trauma. We need counsellors, spiritual counsellors, we need people who will help the entire community find health and healing and that help us regain confidence in ourselves and be whole human beings.⁴¹

To what degree have those denominations that ran residential schools thought through the questions of what their obligation is to fully resource an appropriate pastoral response to the intergenerational trauma within the Indigenous communities they already serve, and what is the extent of that appropriate response? Have they thought through their obligations to support their own Indigenous clergy economically, emotionally, spiritually, and physically as front-line providers of that pastoral response?

These questions are particularly important to the future of Indigenous ministries. To provide the best possible culturally relevant and trauma-informed ministry in Indigenous communities on and off reserve, churches need to think through strategies for supporting Indigenous people who may feel a call to ministry.⁴²

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What strategies can be used to ensure Indigenous peoples, and those who lead Indigenous ministries, have an appropriate voice in decision-making about resource allocation within denominations to address the inevitable imbalances in terms of their numbers?
2. What is your theology of reparations for historical wrongs? How is that being applied with respect to Indigenous ministries within your denomination?

⁴¹ The Very Rev. Stan McKay in conversation with the authors, October 5, 2020.

⁴² Non-Indigenous people continue to lead ministries serving Indigenous Peoples on and off reserve, and questions related to appropriate support of these ministries apply to them as well.

Ethical Guideline 6

All denominations that have Indigenous ministry need to reflect on the historical and ongoing systemic discrimination these ministries have faced and what this means for the process of reconciliation. This includes repentance, atonement, and recovery from that form of spiritual violence that has devalued Indigenous approaches to Indigenous ministry leadership, governance, and ultimately the growth of these ministries among Indigenous Peoples.

Calls to Healing

- Prioritize the decolonization of church policies and practices to move Indigenous ministries from positions of dependency to agency in determining their own future.
 - Redistribute denominational resources to make reparation for historical inequities in Indigenous ministry support on and off reserve.
 - Emphasize in planning and budgeting support for Indigenous leaders creating new forms of Indigenous-led ministry designed by and for Indigenous Peoples on and off reserve.
 - Maintain the church structures on reserves; well-kept, functional buildings are imperative to meeting churches' obligation to the baptized.
 - Equip Indigenous ministries with personnel, training, and other resources to carry out healing ministries and address health crises related to historical trauma.
 - Work to decolonize pay structures. Remunerate Indigenous staff and clergy in an equitable way and at the rate of a living wage. Work to support equitable pay structures that take into account the disparity in economies on and off reserves so that there is no acute gap between employees. Examining how on-reserve clergy are paid has to take into account that reserve economies are different from off-reserve economies.
 - Stop hiring part-time staff and clergy for full-time work.
- Provide equitable training and support for Indigenous leaders.
 - For churches that have historically engaged in mission in Indigenous communities, establish scholarships for Indigenous students in religious education and education for lay and ordained ministry.
 - Invite denominations and theological schools to provide professional development opportunities for Indigenous clergy.
- Provide intercultural competence resources and anti-racist resources to clergy and church members to facilitate moving forward in relationship and ministry in a good way.

On the Baptismal Covenant with Indigenous Peoples No Longer Served by Churches

Some Indigenous people in communities no longer served by churches continue to describe themselves as Christian, and even identify with specific denominations. Some long for the return of active Christian ministry in these communities. Churches have a covenantal obligation to continue to provide pastoral support to those they baptized in these communities. Recognizing that there are obstacles to raising new churches, what other strategies or creative initiatives might churches employ to care for those who may have felt abandoned by the churches that baptized them?

Ethical Guideline 7

We call on denominations to have a renewed theology of baptism and a renewed sense of what it means to be in a spiritual kinship relationship through baptism.⁴³

Calls to Healing

- Learn the history and current condition of communities where the church has had but no longer has a presence.
- Reach out to community members whose baptismal covenant has not been honoured and so feel abandoned by the church.
- Find out what is needed to be in solidarity with those who long for a connection to the church but currently do not have it.
- Conduct needs assessments and develop plans of action in consultation with Indigenous people.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Are there practical ways to participate in the healing of Indigenous communities who have been forgotten by the denominations that converted them?

⁴³ Mark MacDonald spoke to the authors on this issue in November 2020. We would like to note that many evangelical denominations are engaging in missionary activity with Indigenous Peoples and may have a different theology of baptism. For some Evangelicals, conversion is the new baptism. If that is the case, we extend responsibility to those they have led through a conversion process.

On the Spiritual Well-Being of Indigenous Youth

While many Elders in Indigenous communities, and even their immediate children, still identify with Christianity or at least are familiar with Christian beliefs, a growing number of young adults, adolescents, and children have had little or no faith education. Without a strong sense of identity or purpose in life, in a post-colonial context, and as intergenerational survivors of residential school, Indigenous youth are particularly vulnerable to pressures coming from both within and outside their communities that can lead to drug and alcohol addiction, violence, and suicide. This is especially true in contexts marked by poverty, underemployment, and family breakdown. The lack of Indigenous people engaged in youth and family ministry and the lack of programs that speak to the hearts and minds of Indigenous young people mean that the needs of a whole generation are being neglected. This also is spiritual violence. To attend to the spiritual needs of Indigenous youth, the TRC asked churches to fund regional dialogues for Indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss Indigenous spirituality, self-determination, and reconciliation.⁴⁴

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How does your community and/or culture think of the role of children and youth? How do they contribute to the life and thought of the community?
2. What's at stake if we leave children and youth out of discussions about reconciliation, reparations, and church life?

Ethical Guideline 8

We encourage practitioners and theologians engaged in ministry with Indigenous people to support the role of Elders and knowledge keepers and to incorporate the voices of children/youth, as both are integral to the discernment process.

Calls to Healing

- As per TRC Call to Action 61, provide programs that speak to the spiritual needs of Indigenous youth by funding regional dialogues for Indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss Indigenous spirituality, self-determination, and reconciliation.
- Provide resources for Indigenous people to engage in youth and family ministry. The church needs to decolonize its relation to youth.

⁴⁴ Call to Action 61.

Conclusion

In the spirit of friendship, may we consider these guidelines, argue about them, consider them, add to them, and honour the spirit in which they were written, that we may learn to walk together—all of us—in a good way.

Appendix A: Stan McKay Letter

Manitoba – The Creator’s Resting Place

June 21, 2016

An Open Letter to the Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell
Moderator of The United Church of Canada

Our calendar indicates that this is National Aboriginal Day. In the 1970’s it was claimed as the National Day of Fasting and Prayer by a group in Saddle Lake, Alberta. I have decided to send a letter to you, which is intended to create conversations among the leaders of churches.

I place before you Article #59 of the TRC’s Calls to Action, along with my understanding of the urgent need to address the present realities. I also raise the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which has been adopted by Canadian churches and which reminds us of rights of Indigenous Peoples to “cultural and spiritual identity.”

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.

The first wave of mission had moved through Turtle Island by the beginning of World War II, and a Canadian census in 1956 stated that the missioning churches had baptized 96% of the Indigenous population in the Prairie provinces. Denominational divisions were evident as the missions attacked those who maintained traditional spiritual teachings and ceremonies. A spiritual vulnerability was created as residential and day schools separated children from their parents. The mission activities left a legacy of confusion about truth and self-worth for many Indigenous people.

As I completed my time in residential school, I recognized a second wave of mission and I witnessed its impact on communities. There were large tents erected on many reserves every summer and “crusades” were held. The message was again very pointed in its attack on traditional spirituality and a pattern of adult rebaptism was established.

As a child I heard a song that began with an opening line, “This world is not my home, I’m just a-passing through.” The chorus was “The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door and I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.”⁴⁵ This song and many others do not reflect the spiritual

⁴⁵ “I Can’t Feel at Home Anymore” by Anonymous. In the public domain.

understanding of our Knowledge Keepers. The teaching of futility and despair with life on earth has been on my mind and heart as I listen to reports from Attawapiskat and Pimichikamak.

I have a proposal that is a specific call to action, which could be undertaken by churches in Canada. The goal is to make the apologies incarnate through the ecumenical organization of delegations to visit regions and communities with the purpose of engaging with local spiritual leaders and youth in the conversation about the negative impacts of mission activity and the options before us in light of the TRC and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

One year after the TRC Calls to Action and a generation after the apologies of the churches, many Indigenous Peoples are not involved in the conversations and many Christian communities of faith are unaware that there are matters of peace and justice to be addressed.

I am writing this letter as an individual. I am motivated by the fact that I was baptized as an infant into the Christian Church, but was not taught about the value of my culture in the church, the Indian day school, or the residential school. I have worked all my life in the church on projects of reconciliation, and my involvement is based on what I learned from the people of my village and from Elders who I met in my travels.

On this day of “Prayer and Fasting” I envision that the churches undertake immediately the difficult task of addressing the legacy of mission and the present context of division, depression, and injustice. KAIROS could coordinate the project in collaboration with the Canadian Council of Churches. I believe this to be a non-Indigenous initiative, which will engage Indigenous leaders as the protocol of the regions is followed. This is a spiritual journey to healing for all the Nations on Turtle Island. The Elders say the journey toward reconciliation is about Spirit.

Respectfully,
Stan McKay

Appendix B: About the Authors

The importance of identity—of individuals and of peoples—is a theme in this document. Accordingly, the authors believe it is important to tell readers about our identities so you will know what perspectives we write from. Collectively, we come from different streams of Christian experience and thought. Some of us are settlers and some of us are Indigenous Peoples.

Christina Conroy is a settler who was raised in the woodlands of Treaty 6 and the grasslands of Treaty 4. She lived in the U.S. before moving to the Treaty 7 territory in Calgary, Alberta, where she is Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Ambrose University. While studying in Atlanta, Georgia, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) formed. As a graduate student, Christina had the privilege of being a volunteer witness to the TRC events, including the release of the final report in Ottawa in 2015. She continues to participate in Indigenous-settler dialogue and truth-telling. At Ambrose University, Christina teaches in the area of constructive theology, with courses in residential school history, trauma theory, and contemplative theologians. She serves on the executive of the Canadian Theological Society. If you can't track her down at work, you might try the hills of southern Saskatchewan where she will be exploring native wildflowers with her family.

Christine Jamieson is a member of the Boothroyd First Nation in British Columbia. Her paternal grandfather was a respected Elder among the Boothroyd First Nation and among the people of the Nlaka'pamux Nation in the Fraser Canyon, British Columbia. She earned a PhD in Christian Ethics from Saint Paul University in Ottawa. In 1998, she was hired by the Department of Theological Studies, Concordia University in Montreal, and continues to teach courses in ethics, bioethics, Indigenous spirituality, and Lonergan studies. In 2009–2010, during a sabbatical year, Christine earned a Certificate in Organizational and Clinical Ethics, working in hospitals in the Greater Toronto Area. This experience grounded her teaching in bioethics. She earned an Indigenous Educators' certificate in Indigegogy from Wilfrid Laurier University in 2018. She has taught a course titled *Indigenous Spirituality* each year since 2015, leading to a deeper exploration of her own Indigenous roots.

Rosalyn Kantlaht'ant Elm serves the Diocese of Huron as Archdeacon for Reconciliation and Indigenous Ministry, and the National Indigenous Church, Anglican Church of Canada, as Director of Indigenous Ministry. She is the priest for the Parish of the Six Nations, as well as Chaplain to Her Majesty's Royal Chapel of the Mohawks, in addition to being Assistant Chaplain at Renison University College. Ros is from the Oneida First Nation and has deep roots in both Indigenous and Anglican life. Her mother Olive is a hereditary clan mother, an elected First Nation Council official, and a teacher of the Oneida language and has served on various committees as well as the Synod of the Diocese. Ros's late father, Leslie, was an elected First Nation Council official and also served as Synod delegate. They are descended from the Elm Williams family that donated land for the Anglican Church on the Oneida settlement in the 1800s. Ros helped facilitate qtopc (queer and trans people of colour) on the Renison campus,

along with speaking on numerous occasions about Indigenous history, theology, and culture from a Haudenosaunee perspective.

Benjamin Luján was born and raised in Peru and is of Spanish, Italian, and Chinese ancestry. He is a Peruvian-Canadian who lives in Toronto. He is a doctoral candidate in theological studies at the University of St. Michael's College, focusing on Indigenous–Christian relations, liberation theology, philosophical theology, and ecumenical and interfaith engagements. Benjamin is an active participant in ecumenical and interfaith engagements for Indigenous justice in Canada and works as an adjunct professor in a liberal arts program at Seneca College. He has also taught in the diploma in interfaith dialogue program at the University of St. Michael's College and at the Indigenous ministry ecumenical training program at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre. Benjamin has published on the area of Indigenous–Christian relations in the journal *Critical Theology*. He holds an MA in theology from the University of St. Michael's College, and a BEd and a BA(Hons) in philosophy and religious studies from the University of Toronto. His dissertation is entitled *Christian and Indigenous Life Ways: Toward a Catholic Affirmation of Spiritual Equality drawing on Indigenous Resurgence Thought, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Bernard Lonergan*.

Brian McDonough was born in 1951 of a French-Canadian mother and a father of Irish descent, Brian grew up in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve working-class district of Montréal, which historically was known to Kanien'kehà:ka speakers as *Tiohtià:ke*. After receiving a BA in Communication Arts from Loyola College in 1972, he lived for several years first in France, then in Calcutta (India), at l'Arche, an international network of communities founded by Jean Vanier, where intellectually handicapped and non-handicapped persons strive to learn from each other. Brian returned to Montréal to study both civil and common law at McGill University and was called to the Québec Bar in 1984. In September 1995, he was named director of the Social Action Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of Montréal. In that capacity, he was heavily involved in human rights, restorative justice, protection for refugee claimants, and North–South issues. In 2012, he was named to the Regional Advisory Committee for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission regarding Indian Residential Schools. He is an active member of the Saint Francis Xavier Mission located on the Mohawk Territory of Kahnawake. In 2000 Brian completed a Master of Arts degree in Theological Studies at Concordia University. Since 2001, he has been a sessional lecturer in the Theological Studies Department of Concordia University, teaching undergraduate courses entitled "Faith, Reason and the Religious Sense," "The Christian Understanding of God," and "Justice and Reconciliation." He has taught courses on social action ministry at the Grand Seminary of Montreal, at the Institut de pastorale des Dominicains, and at Laval University. Father of four and grandfather of four, Brian lives by the river in Verdun, where he makes photographs, listens to Indian classical music, and tries to write poetry.

Lori Ransom is a Christian from the Presbyterian tradition who believes the Creator's Spirit has moved in her professional life to reconnect her with some of the traditional spiritual practices and teachings of her Indigenous ancestors and of other Indigenous Peoples of Canada. Her spiritual life has been enriched by many opportunities to learn from Christians of many denominational backgrounds while working for social justice ecumenically, both domestically

and at international conferences. Lori is a member of the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation (near Eganville, Ontario) who has lived off reserve all of her life (Toronto, Ottawa, and Regina). She is of mixed heritage, having ancestors who settled in Canada from Scotland, Ireland, England, Denmark, and Prussia. Lori did not plan for the career she eventually pursued. She was awarded a BSc in Biochemistry from the University of Ottawa and then took a BA in English. She then held a number of positions in the federal department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. She was appointed as the first Healing and Reconciliation Program Animator for The Presbyterian Church in Canada and later as Senior Advisor, Church and Interfaith Relations, for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. After returning briefly to government, Lori left the public service and was appointed as a Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animator, Indigenous Ministries and Justice, The United Church of Canada in June 2017. She has also served as Interim Executive Director, KAIROS Canada. In 2023, Lori began working in a half-time capacity as Indigenous Peoples Consultant, World Council of Churches, while also serving The United Church of Canada on a half-time basis. Lori lives in downtown Toronto, where she enjoys the city's lively arts scene and from where she likes to travel and explore the world. She delights most in her role as mother to a young cockapoo named Finnegan.

Appendix C: Discussion and Reflection Questions Summary

1. What are the ways that spiritual violence has been described in your own tradition?
2. What are some of the notorious moments in history where spiritual people have committed spiritual violence?
3. What do we hear from the recipients of spiritual violence?
4. What are some examples of genuine dialogue on Indigenous spirituality that your community has participated in or witnessed?
5. How does dialogue differ from other forms of engagement?
6. What are some of the ways that your church or tradition has amplified the voices of others?
7. What kind of “others” has your community shone a light on?
8. What is an example of freedom and self-determination from your ministry context?
9. Are there stories or skills that your community has that would be useful as others learn to do this (i.e., amplify the voices of others) more respectfully and intentionally?
10. Think about a worship space that you have recently visited. It might be your own, or something from a different denomination. Can you recall the way the physical space was arranged? What was the visual focal point? Did the layout indicate what was of great value to the community? What kind of symbols were visible? What kind of values were communicated by those who spoke?
11. Now think of a worship space you have visited in a culture not your own. How are things differently arranged or symbolized or communicated? How does your culture value money, property, relationships, mistakes, virtues? Does this affect the symbols and message of your church?
12. It is just as true for us as it was for the early Christian missionaries that we have a hard time seeing our own culture in the expression of the Christian message. How would you describe the differences between your own culture and the Christian message?
13. What are some of the ways Western values have enmeshed with the Christian message as it is encountered in popular culture today?
14. What are Indigenous members of your church and/or members of your local Indigenous community(ies) saying about the significance of UNDRIP to them? If you don't know the answer to this, is there someone you can ask?

15. How is UNDRIP being implemented across your church denomination, in your province/territory, and at the national level?
16. What is the history of the land that your church building or gathering place is located on?
17. What are your congregation's stories of how you came to be where you are and what led you to your current location?
18. Do you know the Indigenous stories related to the land that you are now on? What kind of plants and animals made their home there? How were these used as medicines? What was necessary for harmony?
19. How could you begin to weave the original story of the land into your story?
20. How is the Spirit wild?
21. How does the Spirit work in your life?
22. How do you experience the gifts of the Spirit?
23. How have other ways of knowing and being influenced your spiritual trajectory?
24. There is a difference between Indigenizing and decolonizing. What is your understanding of the difference between the two?
25. How do the ideas of freedom and self-determination help us understand what matters—and to whom—when we aspire to see both the Indigenization and decolonization of theologies and practices?
26. The legacy of Christian division has left a violent scar on the fabric of Indigenous communities. Elders speak of how this competition exacerbated the divisions created by the colonial project.
27. What kind of co-operation and collaboration can your church or community model that will help bring diverse people of Christian faith together?
28. Where can we work together and find common ground?
29. What kind of spiritual practices or consolations does your church or tradition provide when you encounter something that makes you uncomfortable?
30. Are there insights from the discipline of intercultural competence that can help you navigate your own uncertainties and fears?
31. What are some scripture passages that address fear?

32. What resources does your community have from trauma-informed practitioners that can expand your understanding of how the legacy of spiritual violence seeps into the present?
33. What strategies can be used to ensure Indigenous peoples, and those who lead Indigenous ministries, have an appropriate voice in decision-making about resource allocation within denominations to address the inevitable imbalances in terms of their numbers?
34. What is your theology of reparations for historical wrongs? How is that being applied with respect to Indigenous ministries within your denomination?
35. Are there practical ways to participate in the healing of Indigenous communities who have been forgotten by the denominations that converted them?
36. How does your community and/or culture think of the role of children and youth? How do they contribute to the life and thought of the community?
37. What's at stake if we leave children and youth out of discussions about reconciliation, reparations, and church life?