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18 January 2019

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

Greetings and prayers of goodwill for you from The United Church of Canada.

Last week, as the events on Wet'suwet'en territory escalated from peaceful protest to armed police intervention, members of The United Church of Canada asked for guidance in how they should respond.

The United Church of Canada has a broad membership. It includes peoples Indigenous to this land, descendants of the first Europeans to pull ashore here, and those who have more recently arrived as immigrants or refugees. We are people who work in the oil and mining industries, and people who protest the activities of those industries. We are law enforcement officials and politicians.

What we all hold in common is that we are members of a church that is committed to reconciliation and to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We try to live this out not just within our church, but also as citizens and residents of Canada.

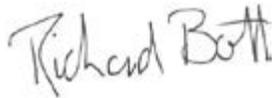
The church's response to its members, offered as a prayer and attached here, was to acknowledge that while we often speak of justice and reconciliation, our actions too often fail to meet the mark. We pray for the wisdom and patience required to change our ways.

We believe there are lessons for settler Canada to take from what is happening on Wet'suwet'en land: when corporations seek access to traditional territories, they must honour Aboriginal title to these lands and obtain the free, prior, and informed consent not just of elected leadership, but also of the community, including hereditary leaders who have particular responsibility for the land.

If, as settler Canadians, we intend to take reconciliation seriously, then we need to understand how decisions are made in Indigenous communities, and adapt our decision-making processes to honour and reflect that.

It is our prayer that we no longer rely on the imbalance of power that currently defines our relationship, but instead work together in mutuality, equity, and respect. It is our prayer that the response from government and from police will model calmness, compassion, and restraint. May we continue to work together toward genuine reconciliation, especially when the work challenges us.

Sincerely yours,



The Right Rev. Dr. Richard Bott
Moderator
Justice



The Rev. Maggie Dieter
Executive Minister, Indigenous Ministries and
Justice

CC: The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations
The Honourable John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia

Prayer for Wet'suwet'en First Nation

The Right Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, Moderator of The United Church of Canada

We speak, God of all Creation—
but are they just pretty words?

Words like “right relations” and “reconciliation,”
like “consultation” and “rights-based legislation.”
But, when push came to shove on the unceded lands of the Wet'suwet'en,
actions showed willingness to use
force over conversation—
legalism over discussion—
Settler rules over Indigenous lives.

Open our hearts with truth
to the fact that these actions give lie to our words.
Open our minds with wisdom,
that the leaders of the governments of Canada and British Columbia
would stop the relentless move forward;
that they would stop the destruction,
stop the imposition of will;
and listen to the voices
of the Hereditary Chiefs of the Unist'ot'en and Gidimt'en clans
of the Wet'suwet'en people,
on their unceded territories.

We pray that the officers and constables of the RCMP on those territories would be filled with the gifts of calmness, of compassion, and of restraint, that no harm would come to the people, standing in defence of life and the land.

We pray for peace and understanding in the complexity of conversation between the Band Chiefs and the Hereditary Chiefs; but, even more than that, we pray that our Settler ways would not use their disagreement as a way to impose our wants.

O God, we cry to you,
help your peoples.
O God, we cry to you,
help your peoples.
O God, we cry to you,
bless the world
with your love.

In Jesus' name, I ask these things...
amen.