

Turning and Lamentation

June 7, 2015

This series of resources offers ways to engage with the closing of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to prepare your community to celebrate National Aboriginal Day on June 21. The following could be used in a study group or special program or incorporated into Sunday worship. Please feel free to adapt these tools to fit the needs of your community.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:4

Goals for the Session:

This session hopes to provide space to help participants process difficult truths of our past in order to move from grief into repentance and transformation.

Preparation:

Set chairs in a circle. For many First Nations communities, “sharing circles” are a common practice. Review the following guidelines on how to sit in a sharing circle taken from *The Unofficial United Church Handbook* (United Church Publishing House, 2007, pp. 125–26).

1. **Everyone is equal in the circle.** Sharing circles should be small enough to allow everyone time to share without feeling pressured. They work best when there is a “keeper of the circle” whose role is to remind everyone to listen with respect. Sometimes the keeper recommends a focus question.
2. **Pass the “talking piece.”** Some groups find it useful to signify who “has the floor” by passing an object around the circle. Often this object is a stick, a feather, a stone, or shell: a natural object. The person who holds it is the one to speak until they pass it to the next person.
3. **Listen (hard). Don’t interrupt.** Listening is difficult. Try to understand what the speaker is saying. Don’t ask questions. Don’t tune out to plan what you will say when your turn comes. Be patient and nonjudgmental. If you like, pray silently for the person who is speaking.
4. **Speak from the heart.** Express yourself in a way that is comfortable. Some people tell stories, some people use examples, some people struggle to find words to express their feelings. Supportive listening will help shy members speak out. The experience of being heard can be a profound and moving experience.
5. **Silence is acceptable in the circle.** No one should be pressured to contribute if they do not wish to do so. Once everyone in the circle has shared, the keeper of the circle may send the talking piece around once again in case anyone who “passed” earlier wishes to speak.

Getting Started:

“Abide with Me,” VU 436

Scripture and Reflection:

Lamentations give us an opportunity to be honest and bold about our raw emotions. We can express our deepest pain to God through our laments. They are a prayer of pain, grief, and sorrow. In sharing our laments, we join a rich Christian history of lamentations.

We join with the Psalmist who wept (Psalm 22:1),
with Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:15),
with Hannah (1 Samuel 1:7),
and with Jesus (John 11:35).

Ways to Engage:

Go through the following exercise, inspired by Joanna Macy’s suggestions for lamentation found in *Justice and Reconciliation: The Legacy of Indian Residential Schools and the Journey Toward Reconciliation* (The United Church of Canada, 2001, p. 40).

1. Acknowledge the Pain

- Read out loud the the 1986 and 1998 apologies (see handouts)

2. Share Feelings

- Ask people to briefly write down or silently reflect on how they are feeling. There may be feelings of betrayal, anger, and sadness for the experiences of loved ones, loss, trauma, guilt, shame, defensiveness, denial, resentment, and many more. Name that there are many feelings present and the purpose of this circle is to focus on the feelings of pain and grief caused by residential schools. (You may need to refer people to other spaces to address other emotions that have come forward through sharing and have pastoral care available to any who may need someone to talk to during or after the session.)

3. Listen to the Testimonies of Others

- People are invited to listen to testimonies about the residential school experience while doing a body prayer. Testimonies about the residential school experience can be found in Constance Deiter, *From Our Mothers’ Arms* (UCPH, 1999), *A Healing Journey for Us All* (The United Church of Canada, 2006), and by selecting video testimonies from the TRC website (www.trc.ca).

Body Prayer:

1. Explain that we are invited not only to listen but to receive the stories of others as precious sacred gifts that we are entrusted with. Invite participants to cradle their hands as if they are holding a small, fragile egg as they hear the various testimonies. After each story is read, have a moment of silence

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where people are invited to continue to hold the story with their hands cradled—stay with the pain and sadness that they hear in the story.

2. Invite participants to take their cradled hands (as able) and to slowly place them over their hearts while reflecting on what from the story shared is bringing out the most compassion in them (or is tugging at their heart the hardest).
3. When ready, invite participants to lift their hands in the air, palms up in thanks to God, for the gift of this testimony and for the courage of the person who shared it.
4. After giving thanks, ask participants to cross their hands in their lap as they hold the space for others to complete the process.
5. Once everyone has indicated that they are ready (by having their hands folded in their laps), you may repeat steps 1 through 4 with another testimony (depending on time).

4. Share in the Circle

- After the last story, invite people to share in the circle where they felt and heard the most pain and what drew out the most compassion in them. After everyone who wishes to has shared, invite people in the circle to hold hands (or touch in a way that is appropriate) and to offer a prayer asking God to hold the pain shared in the circle.
- Consider concluding the time with a prayer that is familiar to your group (such as The Lord's Prayer).

Closing Hymn:

"Stay with Us," VU 182

Closing Prayer:

Lament

We remember the children of the Indian Residential Schools.

We remember how they were plucked up from their homes by a system of arrogance that denied a good way of life.

Their tears, their hunger, their loneliness and their fear is not forgotten.

The shame that was taught, lingers yet.

The pain that was inflicted upon their bodies remains.

We remember the parents, the aunties; the uncles; the grandmas and grandpas left to grieve the empty places in their homes and their communities.

Mothers were left with tear stained aprons; fathers suffered in unyielding silence;

How was it they were expected to carry on, having lost their joy, their purpose?

And how was it that their community could continue to come together

to celebrate life and move together toward a bright future,

when their future is gone?

How long will it take to strengthen family, homes; and spirits?

How long will it take to heal the memories?

Who must we be, and what must we do to restore integrity and dignity

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to your world?

God of all great transformation,
in our lament we cry out to you.

God of all healing power,
in our pain we call your name.

God of all life,
in our hope we come before you in humble prayer.

We pray that all your children may once again sing and dance the songs
planted in their hearts since time immemorial.

We pray that in their play and in their learning
they be strengthened in wisdom and truth.

May they carry the knowledge of their ancestors—those ways of life
that brought abundance and joy to this pilgrimage on earth.

We pray for the children's health and wholeness; may they reconnect
with your unending love that they may once again know who they are;
their giftedness; and their value.

We remember those children who have found their home in you.

We acknowledge those who left this earth having heard no words of apology or lament.

We are grateful that you hold these ones close and have granted to them eternal peace.

As we move ahead into a time of truth telling and reconciliation:

- We pray for parents and extended family. Release them from their feeling of guilt and burden. Lift them from their grief. May their homes once again ring out with laughter and hope.
- May their communities reflect the joy of their presence. May they come together to work toward reclaiming and renewing minds, bodies, emotions and spirits.
- And finally, we pray that one day this world, your world, will be a place where children are no longer harmed and will never again be removed from a mother's embrace, or a father's helping hand.

We pray in the name of Jesus, your Son, who showed us a way to your Kingdom come on earth.
All my relations.

*—Rev. Maggie McLeod,
Executive Minister, Aboriginal Ministries Circle*

Handout: United Church Apologies

Apology to First Nations Peoples

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured.

We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality.

We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.

We imposed our civilization as a condition for accepting the gospel.

We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be.

We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

The Right Rev. Robert Smith, 1986
Moderator of The United Church of Canada

Apology to Former Students of United Church Indian Residential Schools, and to Their Families and Communities

From the deepest reaches of your memories, you have shared with us your stories of suffering from our church's involvement in the operation of Indian Residential Schools. You have shared the personal and historic pain that you still bear, and you have been vulnerable yet again. You have also shared with us your strength and wisdom born of the life-giving dignity of your communities and traditions and your stories of survival.

In response to our church's commitment to repentance, I spoke these words of apology on behalf of the General Council Executive on Tuesday, October 27, 1998:

"As Moderator of The United Church of Canada, I wish to speak the words that many people have wanted to hear for a very long time. On behalf of The United Church of Canada, I apologize for the pain and suffering that our church's involvement in the Indian Residential School system has caused. We are aware of some of the damage that this cruel and ill-conceived system of assimilation has perpetrated on Canada's First Nations peoples. For this we are truly and most humbly sorry.

"To those individuals who were physically, sexually, and mentally abused as students of the Indian Residential Schools in which The United Church of Canada was involved, I offer you our most sincere apology. You did nothing wrong. You were and are the victims of evil acts that cannot under any circumstances be justified or excused.

"We know that many within our church will still not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the blame for this horrendous period in Canadian history. But the truth is, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore, we must also bear their burdens."

Our burdens include dishonouring the depths of the struggles of First Nations peoples and the richness of your gifts. We seek God's forgiveness and healing grace as we take steps toward building respectful, compassionate, and loving relationships with First Nations peoples.

We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that we did not or would not hear, and how we have behaved as a church. As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority.

"We pray that you will hear the sincerity of our words today and that you will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future."

The Right Rev. Bill Phipps, 1998
Moderator of The United Church of Canada

Seeking the Spirit

June 14, 2015

This series of resources offers ways to engage with the closing of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to prepare your community to celebrate National Aboriginal Day on June 21. The following could be used in a study group or special program or incorporated into Sunday worship. Please feel free to adapt these tools to fit the needs of your community.

“But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”
Isaiah 40:31

Goals for the Session:

To create space to listen to the how the Spirit is calling us toward reconciliation.

Getting Started:

“Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness,” VU 375

Elder Gladys Taylor (in *Spirit of Gentleness*, The United Church of Canada, 1989) describes how this hymn helped in the formative days of the All Native Circle Conference: “Whenever we didn’t know our direction, or how we were going to be formed, we found that this hymn helped us... I believe the words have a message for everyone.”

Sing the hymn together and then invite people to share within the circle what the message was for them in the singing of the hymn.

Scripture and Reflection:

Read Ecclesiastes 3, and then this prayer:

*There is a time to plumb the depths of a painful truth.
There is a time to weep with those we have wounded.
There is a time to let go of the things that do not give life,
a time to lose our collective life as a church in the faith that out of ashes will spring new life.
There is a time to invoke the Spirit of God
because the reconciliation and healing we need is beyond our own making.
This is a time for the invocation of the Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit, Come.*

—from *Justice and Reconciliation:
The Legacy of Indian Residential Schools and the Journey Toward Reconciliation*
(The United Church of Canada, 2001, p. 47)

Seeking the Spirit

In our biblical tradition, we are told numerous times to wait and listen for the Spirit to orient and guide us:

- Habakkuk 2:3
- Luke 24:49
- Romans 8:19, 25
- 1 Corinthians 1:7

However, we know that listening is not passive. Listening demands energy. It requires being attentive. When listening attentively you must be attentive to the smallest things. In many Aboriginal teachings, we are taught to look for and find the Spirit in small things. Remember that we are not seeking solutions but small signs that point us in the direction of reconciliation and right relationship.

Ways to Engage:

Listen attentively to the following video clip.

Go to www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3

Click on “How should people feel?”

In a sharing circle, reflect on where you might be feeling a gentle nudging by the Spirit or where you might require the Spirit’s help/guidance in the journey toward reconciliation?

Hymn:

“Open My Eyes, That I May See,” VU 371

Closing:

The following are sacred teachings that emerged from the Elders that were a part of the amalgamation process of the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre of Carry the Kettle, Saskatchewan, and the Francis Sandy Theological Centre of Christian Island in Ontario in 2011 (adapted). Moving around the Circle, invite each participant to slowly read aloud these sacred teaching, pausing between teachings. Then, in a moment of silence, ask participants to consider what teaching stands out for them in the work of reconciliation. Share how God might be calling you to engage in the work of reconciliation.

Voice 1: **Respect:** Should we not agree, we will listen to each other.

Voice 2: **Kindness:** Despite our history of hardship and struggle, we move forward in a manner that expresses gentleness and affirmation to others as we live into our vision and purpose.

Voice 3: **Truth/Honesty:** We acknowledge that truth can be painful but it needs to be told for the sake of freedom from those things that bind us, i.e. de-colonizing, intergenerational effects of residential school. We seek to be true to the spirit of who we are and what God calls us to be—fully realized children of God.

Seeking the Spirit

- Voice 4: **Responsibility:** In our gratitude and in recognition of All My Relations, we will discern together a good direction for our future. We will take ownership for decision-making and actions. And we accept the consequences of our choices.
- Voice 5: **Sharing:** We offer our gifts to each other, to our communities, the church, and all Creation.
- Voice 6: **Caring:** We encourage care for our Elders, and our children, mindful of the need to serve them first. We encourage care for the youth and adults too because God cares for the whole. We encourage care for God's creation because God said it was good.
- Voice 7: **Humility:** We seek to be humble as Jesus was humble, letting go of self for the sake of ministry to the people.
- Voice 8: **Trust:** We trust in God's Word. We understand that we need to be the seed to growth and for the students.
- Voice 9: **Courage:** To face change with confidence and walk into the future as Christians grounded in the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Voice 9: **Wisdom:** To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom as it emerges from within our lives.
- Voice 10: **Love:** All of the above is love made real. Love as God loves us. Blessings will flow.

Closing Hymn:

"Creator God You Gave Us Life," MV 27

"I See A New Heaven," VU 713

Celebration and Thanksgiving Service

June 21, 2015

This series of resources offers ways to engage with the closing of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to prepare your community to celebrate National Aboriginal Day on June 21. The following could be used in a study group or special program or incorporated into Sunday worship. Please feel free to adapt these tools to fit the needs of your community.

“I tell you, if [the crowds] were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Luke 19:40

Goals for the Session:

In this service participants are invited to explore what reconciliation means and to dream about what reconciliation might look like in their community of faith.

Call to Worship:

We gather to share in God’s dream of abundant life for all.

We gather to give and receive gifts of deep emotion, deep wisdom, and deep love.

With gratitude we gather as a community to praise God, to seek transformation
and to celebrate the power of the Spirit who is always moving.

Opening Hymn:

“Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works,” VU 308

Opening Prayer:

Great Comforter,

we know that we are surrounded by a legacy of pain.

We acknowledge the pain, grief, and sorrow

caused by not living respectfully with all people,

and we are sorry for the ways that we have dishonoured the depths of this pain.

Open us, Creator, to the power of interconnectedness:

Help us to receive the painful stories and the inspiring dreams of our siblings;

Grant us the courage to own any feelings of vulnerability, shame, fear, and guilt that
may come from our interactions with each other;

And with your healing grace, lead us through our aching
toward your dream of wholeness.

Transform us and our community so that we may continually work toward reconciliation
and new life.

Amen.

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Hymn:

“Spirit, Open My Heart,” MV 79 “Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness,” VU 375

Sacred Stones (Learning Together/ Children’s Time...)

(Have a stone for each member of the community ready to distribute after the learning together)

Stones are sacred holders of wisdom and story.

(Share a story of significance attached to a stone with the congregation. The worship leader might share a personal or biblical story, or you might invite a couple of people from the congregation to share brief testimonies of significant stones that hold a story for them.)

These stories, like these stones, will change with time. We do not know what this stone will look like 100 years from now, but we know that it will still be here. By attaching a story to the stone, by sharing the story with others, we affirm that the story will live beyond us.

(Hand out stones to the congregation. Invite each person to take a stone and to grasp it tightly for the remainder of the service. They will be asked to attach a dream of reconciliation or of peace/right relations to the stone.)

Hymn:

“Like a Rock,” MV 92 “Come Now, O God of Peace,” VU 34

Scripture Readings:

- Genesis 32:22–31: Jacob Wrestles with God

Jacob, the heal-snatcher, always gets what he wants! He wanted his Brother Esau’s birthright, he wanted his Father Isaac’s blessing, and he wanted his Cousin Rachel’s hand in marriage, just to name a few. And he got them all, at a cost. The cost of tricking Esau out of his birthright and blessing was having to flee from his fratricidal brother whom we know Jacob loved. Now Jacob wants to return home and reconcile with his brother and we can expect that this will come at a cost as well. Part of the cost is represented in an all-night wrestle with an unknown man that Jacob later declares to be God. Many things are left unknown in this passage. What we do know is that Jacob at some point became convinced that he was wrestling with God and that Jacob wanted to receive a blessing from God, regardless of what it might physically cost him. Why did Jacob want a blessing so badly? Perhaps Jacob is seeking a blessing of healing and reconciliation. Perhaps he no longer wishes to be the heal-snatcher and is looking for a fresh start. Eventually, before the dawn, it is granted to him—represented by his physical transformation and his new name, Israel.

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- Luke 19:28-40: Jesus’s Triumphal Entry

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem marks a transition point in his ministry; Jesus is about to confront the powers and principalities, with the knowledge that it will result in his death. When the gathered crowd offered their praise to Jesus—“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”—some Pharisees ask Jesus to quiet the crowd (perhaps in fear that the crowd will be persecuted for such blasphemy). Jesus’s response: It is pointless; even if the crowd was silent the stones would cry out. Like the crowd, the stones are a witness to the story and will testify when needed. In Micah, we are told to “plead [our] case before the mountains and let the hills hear [our] voice” (6:1).

Stones are a living part of creation that hold our sacred stories.

Sermon:

*God forgives,
and calls all of us to confess our fears and failings
with honesty and humility.*

*God reconciles,
and calls us to repent the part we have played
in damaging our world, ourselves, and each other.*

*God transforms,
and calls us to protect the vulnerable,
to pray for deliverance from evil,
to work with God for the healing of the world,
that all might have abundant life.*

We sing of grace.

—A Song of Faith

Explore what reconciliation means from a Christian perspective. You may wish to use video clips, stories, and testimonies to expand on or add to the following starting points.

Reconciliation is

- a journey (not a goal or final destination)
- complex (you cannot authentically begin a reconciliation process without examining all the factors involved)
- personal (and often painful)
- a part of living faithfully

Reconciliation requires

- trust
- truth-telling
- relationships
- a life-long commitment
- time

Time of Reflection:

Invite people to dream a dream of reconciliation through a few moments of silence while holding their stones. Encourage people, listening for the movement of the Spirit, to imagine what reconciliation might look like in their community and attach that dream to their stone. Come out of the silence with a simple repeat-after-me prayer such as: “We dedicate these dreams of reconciliation to you, God; our living testimonies to your promise of renewed life and hope. Amen.”

We dedicate these dreams of reconciliation to you, God;

We dedicate these dreams of reconciliation to you, God;

our living testimonies to your promise of renewed life and hope.

our living testimonies to your promise of renewed life and hope.

Amen.

Amen.

Time of Sharing:

Invite people to share their dream with a neighbour while entrusting the neighbour with the stone that they have attached their dream to. Close the sharing time with a repeat-after-me prayer (so that people do not need to hold onto the order of service) such as: “Thank you, God, for entrusting me with this dream. May I hold it as sacred and let its presence inform my thoughts, actions, and prayers. Amen”

Thank you, God, for entrusting me with this dream.

Thank you, God, for entrusting me with this dream.

May I hold it as sacred,

May I hold it as sacred,

and let its presence inform my thoughts, actions, and prayers.

and let its presence inform my thoughts, actions, and prayers

Amen.

Amen.

Presentation of Offering

Offertory Hymn:

“Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” VU 602

Prayer of Dedication

A Prayer of Reconciliation:

Remembering the Children Prayer (see handout)

Closing Hymn:

“Hey Ney Yana,” MV 217

“O Day of Peace,” VU 682

Commissioning and Benediction

Handout

Remembering the Children Prayer

God of our Ancestors,
 who holds the spirits of our grandmothers and grandfathers
 and the spirits of our grandchildren:
Remembering the Children,
we now pledge ourselves to speak the Truth,
and with our hearts and our souls
to act upon the Truth we have heard
 of the injustices lived,
 of the sufferings inflicted,
 of the tears cried,
 of the misguided intentions imposed,
and of the power of prejudice and racism
which were allowed to smother the sounds and laughter of
the forgotten children.

Hear our cries of lament
 for what was allowed to happen, and for what will never be.
In speaking and hearing and acting upon the Truth
may we as individuals and as a nation meet the hope of a new beginning.

Great Creator God,
 who desires that all creation live in harmony and peace:
Remembering the Children
 we dare to dream of a Path of Reconciliation
 where apology from the heart leads to healing of the heart
 and the chance of restoring the circle,
 where justice walks with all,
 where respect leads to true partnership,
 where the power to change comes from each heart.

Hear our prayer of hope,
and guide this country of Canada
on a new and different path. Amen

*—from Remembering the Children,
a 2008 multi-city tour by Aboriginal and church leaders*