# Reconciliation in the Watershed: Reflections for Creation Time

During Creation Time in the Season of Pentecost, communities of faith are invited to take time each week to reflect on ways that we (as earth-beings) may be collectively separating ourselves from the rest of creation, and how we might instead work toward reconciling those relationships. In so doing, we embody the United Church’s call to honour “All My Relations.”

Since 2012, the United Church crest has included the Mohawk phrase Akwe Nia’Tetewá:neren, translated into English as “all my relations.” This is an acknowledgement that Indigenous peoples were a part of the founding of the United Church, but it is also a statement of our connectedness to each other and to the whole created order. This understanding is key to both our work for ecological justice and for Indigenous rights and reconciliation. One way to explore these connections is through the framework of “watershed discipleship,” or as it is coming to be known in Canada, “reconciliation in the watershed.”

Watersheds are those areas of land that drain into a single body of water. They are occupied by interconnected streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes; by flora and fauna; and by human beings. How we interact in those watersheds has the potential to tell us much about reconciliation. These worship materials, focusing on the ecological and Indigenous rights issues in North America’s five continental watersheds, offer a beginning.

There are several ways to use this worship idea over the five weeks of Creation Time:

* As a learning together time.
* As a time of testimony, when a congregant is invited in advance to prepare that week’s motif.
* If there are artists in your community, you may invite someone to design an art installation that would build over the five weeks of creation.
* You could display each week’s item on a table cloth (orange for Creation Time), so that the table is gradually set over the weeks of the season.

You are also encouraged to prepare and use an Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory in this season (for details, download “Acknowledging the Territory” from [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca)).

Further resources, including workshop opportunities, are available here:

* [www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/ecological-justice/reconciliation-in-the-watershed](http://www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/ecological-justice/reconciliation-in-the-watershed)
* [https://watersheddiscipleship.org](https://watersheddiscipleship.org/)

## Week 1: Where are we?

**Materials:** A jar or pitcher of water

Tell the congregation the story of where the water in the jar comes from (its immediate source, and the name of its watershed; see the [Canadian Atlas Online](http://www.canadiangeographic.com/atlas/themes.aspx?id=watersheds&sub=watersheds_flow_canadaswatersheds&lang=En)). How did it get to you, or how did you receive it? Is this water readily accessible? Who has access to this water, and who does not? Was this water treated in any way? Why? Is this water safe to drink?

* *or –*

Share the following story about the Deh Cho (Mackenzie River):

**We Simply Call It Deho  
A Story from the Arctic Watershed**

Some Dene call it Deho. To others it’s Deh Cho. Both mean “big river.” The Inuvialuktun name, Kuukpak, means “Great River,” and the Gwich’in name, Nagwichoonjik, means “river flowing through a big country.” In their own way, each of these Indigenous Peoples captures the significance and importance of the river to the animals, land, trees, and everything on the Creator’s earth. It is the longest and largest river system in Canada.

Elders say that every creek or water flowing into the big river has a story behind it. They tell stories of how certain hills or landmarks along the river were formed. Every Dene learned early in life just how important the environment, the galaxy, and especially water is to people, land, and animals. Put simply: Without water, there is no life!

One story many Dene groups share is that of Yamoria, or one who walked around Earth: the greatest medicine man who came to the Dene long ago. He brought teachings and laws to the Dene that changed their lives. These teaching stress respect, caring for one another, and living in peace and harmony. Depending on where a person lived, the story may differ a bit, but the lessons are unquestionable!

When the world was new, it is believed there was a family of giant beavers who were terrorizing the land and killing the Dene people on Sahtu or Great Bear Lake. Yamoria was asked to help. He began chasing the beavers down Sahtu de or Bear River, and caught up with them at the mouth of the river at Tulita. Yamoria killed the three giant beavers with a bow and arrow, skinned them, and stretched their hides on the Great Bear Rock.

To this day, you can still see the outline of the beaver pelts on Bear Rock. The arrows that Yamoria shot are still seen each spring where the Great Bear River and the Mackenzie River meet—the poles are still sticking out of the river. Further up the Mackenzie River, Yamoria cooked beaver meat and the beaver’s grease dripped into the fire. It is said that the fire continues to burn near Tulita.

The story has been passed on for generations. It teaches respect, harmony, and living in peace with land and water.

Despite the attempts to take care of the land and water, Dene notice a number of changes in the mighty Mackenzie. Pollution is affecting fish and other living creatures. Climate change is melting permafrost, causing more and more landslides into the river. But the biggest concern is water level. It has dropped to the point where there is concern for barges being able to deliver essentials to communities. Many are saying it may be time to return to the teachings of our ancestors to preserve and protect the land, sky, and water.

*Written by Paul Andrew, who was born in the Mackenzie Mountain across from Tulita. He spent his early years learning the Dene traditions and language before going to school. Paul spent seven years at a residential school in the NWT. In 2012, Paul retired after many years with both CBC radio and TV. He lives in Yellowknife.*

**Let us pray:**

We are grateful, Creator, for sacred water that flows in our bodies and through the Earth.

Water is a powerful force that both creates and destroys, sustains and erodes,

deposits and washes away;

Forgive us for all the ways that we have wasted, polluted, and ignored precious water….

*[allow time for silence, or insert some of the injustices around water in your community]*

And help us restore good relations, remembering that Water is Life.

Amen

**Song:** “River Running In You and Me” (MV 163)

## Week 2: What lives here?

**Materials:** Symbols of things that live in your watershed: a planter or other container with plants (living, in water, or dried) that are indigenous to your watershed; figures or images of animals, birds, or fish that are indigenous to your watershed. This will require some research: most provincial/territorial departments of the Environment or Natural Resources provide guides to native species. Check online or in your local library.

Talk to the congregation about the story of what you have brought in. Remembering the words of scripture that “we do not live to ourselves and we do not die to ourselves” (Romans 14:7), share how we are connected to this organism. Why does it live in your community? What does it need to survive that your community provides? What do they do for your community? How are we connected to them? Where does it thrive? How are they doing currently? What problems are they facing? Is the population healthy? Are they at risk?

* *or –*

View the following video about the reintroduction of the buffalo to Banff:

**Thunderous Roar of the Buffalo  
A Story from the Hudson Bay Watershed**

As European settlers moved west across North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries, they cleared the land to make way for agriculture. This was not an innocuous practice—it included the removal of First Nations and Métis peoples from their traditional territories, and as a part of that, it included the mass slaughter of bison. Bison played a crucial role in the prairie ecosystem of western North America, were an important source of food, fur, and hides for Indigenous peoples, and held spiritual significance. In other words, bison were an integral part of the web of life in the Hudson Bay watershed. Today, bison are being reintroduced to the prairie, and Indigenous peoples are helping to ensure that they thrive. Recently, a group of bison from Samson Cree First Nation were reintroduced to Banff National Park, and the Stoney Nakoda First Nation took part in welcoming them back. See this story from Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN).

* <http://aptnnews.ca/2017/01/30/thunderous-roar-of-the-buffalo-to-return-to-banff-national-park/>

**Let us pray:**

We are grateful, Creator, to all living things,

knowing that we depend and rely on each other for survival.

Whatever we do to the water and to the life around us,   
we do to you and to ourselves,

Forgive us for all the ways that we have harmed the living…

*[allow time for silence, or insert some of the injustices around water in your community]*

And help us restore good relations.

Amen.

**Song:** “It’s a Song of Praise to the Maker” (MV 30)

“O Beautiful Gaia” (MV 41)

## Week 3: What is hurting?

**Materials:** In a jar, place a piece of litter or a harmful/neglected item that could represent our carbon footprint (e.g., an old shoe to represent a wasteful footprint, molasses in a jar to represent oil/fossil fuels, unrecyclable litter), or display pictures of endangered species in your area.

Share the struggles that your environment has with the substance you have presented. What happens to it? How does it affect the surrounding environment? How does that then in turn affect us? Remembering the words of scripture to “live in a manner worthy of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27), how might caring for creation help to draw us closer to the gospel?

* *or –*

Share the following reflection by Barbara Wilson:

**Privilege Brings Responsibility  
A Story from the Pacific Watershed**

My ancestors, the Haida, have lived on our lands and waters “since it was light and yet dark.” Our ancestors were here when the earth was covered with the ocean. “Raven flew away, and spit some of the water on the ground as he flew along. Thus originated all the rivers on Xaayda (Haida) Gwaay (Gwaii). He also made the Skeena and Stikine rivers…”

The stories of our creation, rivers, and lakes come from a time when our ancestors knew to give thanks for each gift of being. They were mindful of responsibilities and remembered to respect all things, because they knew disrespect meant the loss of privilege.

Rivers are old and very important to all people, regardless of where they live, whether along the coast, mountains, or on the plains. They are the source of fresh water to drink and food, and serve as the rearing areas for many ocean creatures where the ocean meets the rivers. Plants live and have adapted themselves to life on the flats of the estuaries and along the banks of rivers. All beings, whether rooted or free-moving, deserve to be respected, just as we feel we should be respected.

Should we allow oil tankers to deliver “condensate,” transport Liquid Natural Gas, or other oil and gas–based products along our coasts with the possibility of a spill contaminating our ocean, lakes, streams, creeks, or rivers and destroying neighbours, our food, and drinking water? We only have to look to the lasting impact of the *Exxon-Valdez* 1989 spill in Alaskan waters (the collapse of traditional seafood gathering) to see what might lie ahead.

Why would anyone want to risk the health of our waters? It is important to protect tidal waters, and all manner of beings, whether humans, sea creatures (whales, mollusks, fin-fish), sea and land mammals (deer, bears, mountain goats), plants for food, medicines, and fibers, and all which we appreciate when we are sitting looking out our windows, walking on beaches, or on a scenic drive. Imagine the damage and smell as oil oozes over all that we hold precious and value.

The Coastal First Nations have spent almost a decade researching to complete their report “A Review of Potential Impacts to Coastal First Nations from an Oil Tanker Spill Associated with the Northern Gateway Project.”

We watched small, unprotected communities in their attempt to save and protect the lands, foods, and creatures in the ocean when an American transport tugboat sank just north of Bella Bella in the BC central coast area in October 2016. The clam beds that the Heiltsuk Nation rely on for food were devastated. Chief Marilyn Slett said, “Our nation has been waiting for years for a robust safety plan that protects coastal waters” (Canadian Press, Nov. 7, 2016).

Privilege brings responsibility.

*Written by Barbara Wilson, who lives in Vancouver and is from Skidegat, Haida Gwaii. Through deep time, she is related to Eagle clans along the Northwest coast of British Columbia through her mother’s lineage from Cumshewa Eagles and Raven families through her father’s lineage—Skedans Ravens. She is a Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) Fellow and is a Candidate–Master of Arts at Simon Fraser University.*

**Let us pray:**

We long to travel gently on the earth, Creator,

to respect all life, and to recognize water as sacred.

Forgive us for the things that we have made and done that hurt your good creation…

*[allow time for silence and for examples to be named]*

For the sake of creation, help us to live better.

And help us to restore good relations. Amen.

**Song:** “Touch the Earth Lightly” (VU 307)

“All Praise to You” (VU 297)

“Called by Earth and Sky” (MV 135)

## Week 4: What are signs of hope and new life?

**Materials:** In a basket, or displayed on a table, bring fruits of the harvest native to your community/watershed. Since it is World Wide Communion Sunday, you may consider bringing in relevant symbols that grow in your area (e.g., bundles of grain or bunches of grapes or berries).

Share the harvest that you have brought in and explain why. What is bountiful in your community? Why? What helps it to yield a good crop? We are reminded today that God is at work in us. Do you experience God at work through this harvest? How? The most bountiful crops tend to happen when all of the elements are working together to help the plant to grow. Perhaps the same is true for creation, that there is great hope possible when we are in right relationship with all creation.

* *or –*

Share the following story about the creation of Nunatsiavut:

**Nunatsiavut  
A Story from the Atlantic Watershed**

Nunatsiavut (what most Canadians know as the northern part of Labrador) is one of four self-governing Inuit regions in Canada, known collectively as Inuit Nunangat (an Inuit word meaning “land, water, and ice”). Inuit Nunangat comprises 30 percent of Canada’s land mass and 50 percent of its coastline. Inuit peoples have occupied this land for time immemorial.

This was reflected in the 2005 Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement—the modern treaty that created Nunatsiavut, recognizing the deep Inuit relationship to what they call “our beautiful land.”

The establishment of self-government in Nunatsiavut was a positive move for its people, providing the opportunity for Inuit to make their own decisions about their and their land’s future. Many non-Indigenous people would see this as a significant moment in Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples, as a precursor of sorts to reconciliation. Yet profound issues remain unresolved in this furthest corner of the Atlantic Ocean watershed.

Two huge reconciliation issues currently face the people of Nunatsiavut.

Some are embroiled in a struggle over the hydro development at Muskrat Falls. To paraphrase a campaign around the project, how is it possible to “make Muskrat right”—to ensure economic development while also ensuring the protection of traditional hunting and fishing territories? How will the parties to the hydro development be in respectful relationship with those who are critical of it or oppose it?

Others in the region are awaiting the results of a settlement agreement recently concluded on their experience in residential schools. After years of delays, what will reconciliation look like in this context?

As we seek reconciliation, we look for signs of hope and new life. Where might we find them, and encourage their growth, in the story of Nunatsiavut?

**Let us pray:**

We are grateful, Creator, for good food, drink, clothing, and shelter

that sustain us in the present while nurturing future generations.

Forgive us for the gardens, fields, and forests that we have mistreated or wasted,

and all of the broken promises they represent…

*(allow time for silence of for broken promises to be named)*

May we care well for all our relations.

Amen

**Song:** “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ” (VU 468)

“Lord, Your Hands Have Formed” (MV 181)

“For the Fruit of All Creation” (VU 227)

“Spirit Dancing on the Waters” (VU 388)

## Week 5: What are we thankful for?

**Materials:** a large container or vase displaying things of beauty and awe from your community (a pretty weed, a beautiful leaf, a pine cone, a drawing). You may wish to ask people to bring in something beautiful that they noticed on the way to church or during the week (suggest they respect living beings, e.g., don’t kill a plant to display it).

Share a story describing a time when you experienced an unexpected moment of beauty and awe in your daily life. Unpack the experience to help people marvel at the mystery of it and why it was so awe-inspiring for you.

* *or –*

Share the following story about water protectors at Standing Rock:

**Standing Rock: A Model of Reconciliation  
A Story from the Gulf of Mexico Watershed**

People—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—from all the watersheds of North America came together in South Dakota (Gulf of Mexico watershed) in late 2016 to stand in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux.

The tribe had gone to court to prevent construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) on its territory, citing the need for proper environmental assessment of the impact on water and scared burial grounds. According to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Standing Rock had the right to free, prior, and informed consent on any development on its land—but in this case, that was not respected. Neither were the tribe’s treaty rights.

The Indigenous-led effort to protect the environment captured media attention for months, and drew together a broad solidarity movement, including hundreds of clergy and church representatives, many from our full-communion partner, the United Church of Christ. In December, the Department of the Army declared that the pipeline could not go ahead as planned because the treaty relationship had not been respected. But with the change in political leadership in the United States, that ruling was reversed and the pipeline was approved and constructed. Oil started to flow through it—and leak from it—in March 2017.

Yet there is something to be thankful for in this story. The persistence of Standing Rock in naming their treaty and Indigenous rights. The response of those who gathered from across the continent to support them in their struggle. The acknowledgement that Christian constructs like the Doctrine of Discovery are what have for the last 500 years justified the taking of Indigenous lands. The repudiation of such concepts as a first step in reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and the land.

The story of Standing Rock is not over. The legal case continues, and so does a corporate social responsibility campaign to ensure that financial institutions backing such developments respect the terms of treaties and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. And the example of Standing Rock, where people came together across nations and watersheds to protect the Earth, stands as a model of what the road to reconciliation can look like.

Suggested video (from the United Church of Christ):  
[*The UCC Stands With Standing Rock: #NoDAPL*](https://youtu.be/Y2_omSMNYPE) (https://youtu.be/Y2\_omSMNYPE)

**Let us pray:**

We want to be respectful tenants of your beautiful garden, God,

marvelling at the beauty and complexity of your creation.

Forgive us for all the ways that we have hurt your good creation,

and heal our relations with the stardust and water that forms us.

Amen.

**Song:** “For the Beauty of the Earth” (VU 226)

“Teach Me, God, to Wonder” (VU 299)

“Mother Earth, Our Mother Birthing” (MV 39)