## Lenten Lament—Seeking Right Relations

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Lent is a time of lament within the Christian tradition. In this 150th year since the formation of the confederation of Canada, we invite you to take time to acknowledge the truth about the damage that European immigration as well as Christian assumptions and actions did to the First Peoples of this land, to lament the deep harm done through the devaluing of customs, traditions, and spiritual practices. Then join in seeking right relations and the mending of the fabric of our nation through reconciliation. For each week, there is a ritual of lament for use within worship, as well as a suggestion for a “next step” that could be explored after worship or at a mid-week gathering. The ritual of lament is appropriate for all ages, while some of the “next steps” might be more suitable for older youth and adults. This lament was created for a congregation that is primarily non-Indigenous peoples. Please feel free to adapt and edit as appropriate to the cultural context of your congregation. For more information on reconciliation, see [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca) (search *affirming other spiritual paths*).

### Materials needed:

* five purple candles*

* red, white, yellow, and black candles (one of each)*

* nine candle holders*

### Background on the Colours

Embedded in our United Church crest are the four colours often associated with the Medicine Wheel, which teaches us to seek balance in the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the circle of life. The four colours—red, white, yellow, and black—incorporate teachings from the four directions, the four stages of life, and the four seasons. The placement of these colours varies according to the traditions of the nation. In our doing, thinking, feeling, and being, we give thanks for these teachings. We use these colours with humility and with permission, treasuring and honouring the tradition they represent. Purple is the traditional colour used for Lent. It also is a colour that represents the divine presence in our lives.

## Lament on the Path to Right Relations

*To be printed in the bulletin or projected each week.*

To lament is to express sorrow and grief.

To lament is to weep, to sob, to wail in the face of injustice.

To lament is to mourn what has been lost and to express regret for wrongs done.

The 40 days of Lent are a traditional time of lament, of repentance,

and of seeking reconciliation and the mending of relationships.

During these 40 days of Lent, we are invited to lament the deep harm inflicted upon the First Peoples of Canada through the imposition of Western ways and culture, through the residential schools, and through continuing stereotypes and racism.

In lamenting, we open the path for reconciliation and healing that will bring wholeness and well-being to all the peoples and the land of Canada.

## Lent 1

### The Lament

We live in a land rich in both natural and cultural beauty, a natural and cultural beauty that existed long before the first Europeans arrived.

The beautiful tapestry of this land was torn by injustice and racism.

We light these purple candles

to represent the journey of lament we will make this Lenten season,

a lament for the devastating patterns of human rights violations imposed on Canada’s First Peoples, the continuing injustice, and the need for reconciliation and mending of relationships.

*All five purple candles are lit.*

We lament that the first European explorers and immigrants to Canada could not see the wisdom and richness of the spirituality, traditions, and cultures of the First Peoples of this land.

We lament the assumption that this was an empty land, just waiting to be discovered and occupied by Europeans.

These may be hard things for many of us to name and acknowledge,

and yet these assumptions destroyed Indigenous Peoples: individuals, families, and communities.

And we are all the poorer.

What can we do but weep and wail at the injustice?

What can we do but lament the loss and destruction?

What can we do but ask for the courage and will to seek reconciliation?

*The first purple candle is extinguished, followed by a time of silent reflection.*

**All:** VU 239 “O Great Spirit” or VU 692 “O God, lead us from death to life”

### Seeking Right Relations

We light the red candle to honour the people of (*First Peoples’ territory*). We acknowledge, with respect, their history, spirituality, culture, and ways of knowing. We recognize our responsibility as signatories to Treaty (*number*) to live with respect on this land and in peace and friendship with its people.

We acknowledge the continuing injustice and commit ourselves to seeking right relations with all the First Peoples of Canada.

May the Creator’s wisdom work within us toward mending the torn tapestry of this land.

### Next Step

Look at treaty maps. To which treaty/territory does your congregation belong? If you have not already done so, write an “Acknowledging the Territory” passage to use at the beginning of worship, meetings, and other events in your congregation.

## Lent 2

### The Lament

We light these four purple candles to mark the journey of lament we make this Lent,

a lament for the past as well as the continuing injustice to the First Peoples of this land,

and the need for reconciliation and mending of relationships.

*Four purple candles are lit.*

We lament the pain, suffering, and damage that the Indian residential school system caused as it forced assimilation on the First Peoples of this land.

We lament the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental abuse experienced by too many of the students of the Indian residential schools, acts that cannot under any circumstances be justified or excused.

We lament the havoc and destruction caused to the First Peoples by the introduction of diseases to which they were not immune.

These may be hard things for many of us to name and acknowledge, and yet these actions destroyed Indigenous Peoples: individuals, families, and communities.

And we are all the poorer.

What can we do but weep and wail at the injustice?

What can we do but lament the loss and destruction?

What can we do but ask for the courage and will to seek reconciliation?

*The second purple candle is extinguished, followed by a time of silent reflection.*

**All:** VU 239 “O Great Spirit” or VU 692 “O God, lead us from death to life”

### Seeking Right Relations

We light the white candle, to honour the people of (*First Peoples’ territory*). We acknowledge, with respect, their history, spirituality, culture, and ways of knowing. We recognize our responsibility as signatories to Treaty (*number*) to live with respect on this land and in peace and friendship with its people.

We acknowledge the continuing injustice and commit ourselves to seeking right relations with all the First Peoples of Canada.

May the Creator’s wisdom work within us toward mending the torn tapestry of this land.

### Next Step

Learn about any residential schools in your area (or in your province/territory), when they were opened and when they were closed, the number of Indigenous children who attended, deaths of those children, and other stories associated with the facility. You might watch the Heritage Minute ([www.historicacanada.ca](http://www.historicacanada.ca)) on Chanie “Charlie” Wenjack, which shares the story of one youth whose death led to the first inquest into what was happening in residential schools. See also, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website: [www.umanitoba.ca/centres/nctr](http://www.umanitoba/.ca/centres/nctr).

## Lent 3

### The Lament

We light these three purple candles to mark the journey of lament we make this Lent,

a lament for the past as well as the continuing injustice to the First Peoples of this land,

and the need for reconciliation and mending of relationships.

*Three purple candles are lit.*

We lament the policies created and implemented to eliminate Indigenous Peoples as distinct peoples and all attempts at assimilation.

We lament the destruction of cultural artifacts and practices that were a foundation for each Indigenous Peoples’ community.

We lament the traditions and wisdom lost because they could not be passed from generation to generation.

These may be hard things for many of us to name and acknowledge,

and yet the loss of tradition, language, culture, and spirituality destroyed Indigenous Peoples: individuals, families, and communities.

And we are all the poorer.

What can we do but weep and wail at the injustice?

What can we do but lament the loss and destruction?

What can we do but ask for the courage and will to seek reconciliation?

*The third purple candle is extinguished, followed by a time of silent reflection.*

**All:** VU 239 “O Great Spirit” or VU 692 “O God, lead us from death to life”

### Seeking Right Relations

We light the yellow candle to honour the people of (*First Peoples’ territory*). We acknowledge, with respect, their history, spirituality, culture, and ways of knowing. We recognize our responsibility as signatories to Treaty (*number*) to live with respect on this land and in peace and friendship with its people.

We acknowledge the continuing injustice and commit ourselves to seeking right relations with all the First Peoples of Canada.

May the Creator’s wisdom work within us toward mending the torn tapestry of this land.

### Next Step

Celebrate the gifts of Indigenous Peoples. Make yourself aware of Indigenous artists, actors, playwrights, academics, athletes, authors, musicians, politicians, and others in your area. Take time to explore the many achievements of Canada’s Indigenous Peoples.

## Lent 4

### The Lament

We light these two purple candles to mark the journey of lament we make this Lent,

a lament for the past as well as the continuing injustice to the First Peoples of this land,

and the need for reconciliation and mending of relationships.

*Two purple candles are lit.*

We lament the stereotypes by which we define and judge Indigenous Peoples,

stereotypes, some negative and some romantic, reinforced through movies, television, and other media, as well as through our societal practices.

We lament the ways that these stereotypes are used to limit and to devalue Indigenous Peoples.

These may be hard things for many of us to name and acknowledge, and yet these stereotypes destroyed Indigenous Peoples: individuals, families, and communities.

And we are all the poorer.

What can we do but weep and wail at the injustice?

What can we do but lament the loss and destruction?

What can we do but ask for the courage and will to seek reconciliation?

*The fourth purple candle is extinguished, followed by a time of silent reflection.*

**All:** VU 239 “O Great Spirit” or VU 692 “O God, lead us from death to life”

### Seeking Right Relations

We light the black candle to honour the people of (*First Peoples’ territory*). We acknowledge, with respect, their history, spirituality, culture, and ways of knowing. We recognize our responsibility as signatories to Treaty (*number*) to live with respect on this land and in peace and friendship with its people.

We acknowledge the continuing injustice and commit ourselves to seeking right relations with all the First Peoples of Canada.

May the Creator’s wisdom work within us toward mending the torn tapestry of this land.

### Next Step

Discuss the images of Indigenous Peoples in television shows and movies through the years. What was the typical image? What assumptions have you made about Indigenous Peoples based on those images? Be truthful with yourself: what are the stereotypical assumptions about the Indigenous Peoples that you catch yourself making? What do you wish to learn more about on the journey of seeking right relations? As appropriate and respectful, begin to connect with and build dialogue with Indigenous Peoples in your area, to learn, to listen, and to grow in understanding. If there is not an Indigenous community or organization near you, consider starting a book club or film club in which you raise awareness of right relations. Check out [www.saskatoonlibrary.ca/read-for-reconciliation](http://www.saskatoonlibrary.ca/read-for-reconciliation) or the National Film Board of Canada (www.nfb.ca).

## Lent 5

### The Lament

We light this purple candle to mark the journey of lament we make this Lent,

a lament for the past as well as the continuing injustice to the First Peoples of this land,

and the need for reconciliation and mending   
of relationships.

*One purple candle is lit.*

We lament that the tapestry of our land is still torn by injustice and racism toward Indigenous Peoples.

We lament that, in a country with great abundance, there exists within Indigenous communities a scarcity of clean drinking water, decent housing, quality health and family support services, and access to economic and educational opportunities.

We lament the slow progress of the journey toward right relations with the First Peoples of Canada.

These may be hard things for many of us to name and acknowledge,

and yet Indigenous Peoples—individuals, families, and communities—must still cry out for justice.

And we are all the poorer.

What can we do but weep and wail at the injustice?

What can we do but lament the loss and destruction?

What can we do but ask for the courage and will to seek reconciliation?

*The fifth purple candle is extinguished, followed by a time of silent reflection.*

**All:** VU 239 “O Great Spirit” or VU 692 “O God, lead us from death to life”

### Seeking Right Relations

We light the four candles in the colours of the Medicine Wheel to honour the people of (*First Peoples’ territory*). We acknowledge, with respect, their history, spirituality, culture, and ways of knowing. We recognize our responsibility as signatories to Treaty (*number*) to live with respect on this land and in peace and friendship with its people.

We acknowledge the continuing injustice and commit ourselves to seeking right relations with all the First Peoples of Canada.

May the Creator’s wisdom work within us toward mending the torn tapestry of this land.

### Next Step

Read together the 1986 Apology, the 1988 Response, and 1998 Apology made within the context of The United Church of Canada. Consider the recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. How is your congregation part of seeking right relations? What can you do in your context to be part of the healing and mending needed with the Indigenous Peoples of Canada? Consider a special collection toward the Alvin Dixon Memorial Bursary Fund for education. For information, see [www.united-church.ca/social-action](http://www.united-church.ca/social-action).

## Palm Sunday

*Begin with the “Acknowledging the Territory” passage you have written for your congregation.*

*Next, the four candles in the colours of the Medicine Wheel are lit one by one, with these words:*

*Red Candle:* May the Creator grant us strength and vision for the journey toward right relations and well-being.

*White Candle:* May the Creator grant us the courage to examine our own motivations and desires, learning from the mistakes of the past.

*Yellow Candle:* May the Creator grant us the wisdom to see the possibilities and promise of healing.

*Black Candle:* May the Creator guide us with truth to release what must end and to embrace what must begin.

On this Palm Sunday, we begin a journey of another kind, a journey with Jesus into the depths of suffering and loss. With the light of these candles, may we be reminded that Creator God is with us on all the journeys we make, the journey to the cross and the journey to right relations between the Indigenous Peoples and the non-Indigenous peoples of Canada.

## Easter Sunday

*The Christ candle is lit. If it is being carried into the sanctuary, stop at several points and say:*

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

*Once the Christ candle is placed in its holder:*

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

On this Resurrection Sunday,

we are powerfully reminded that, with God,

all things are possible

for Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

Out of the cross came new possibility.

Out of death came life.

Out of loss came hope.

Out of suffering came joy.

For Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

Through the Lenten season, we lamented that there is not yet right relationship

between the Indigenous Peoples and the generations of immigrant peoples of Canada

(or the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Canada).

As we bask in resurrection hope,

let us hear the prophetic voices urging us toward right relations   
with the First Peoples,

and reminding us that in the Spirit,

we are all related to each other   
and to all of creation.

We commit ourselves to continuing   
the journey,

for Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

*Offer the “Acknowledging the Territory” passage you have written for your context.*