

## Prayers of the People for Reconciliation

A reflection on the legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada

(in unison)

Gizhe-manidoowiwin, Divine Nature, today we reflect upon the deplorable legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. This blight was inflicted upon Indigenous people for 125 years; only at the turn of this century was the last federally operated school closed. And so we pray:

- for the roughly 150,000 children who over the course of the residential schools' existence were compelled to attend
- for the at least 4,000+ of them who died while attending a residential school
- for the unmarked, lost, and lonely graves in which they were interred
- for the many thousands of parents who grieved at their children being forcibly abducted and removed to school
- for the hundreds of thousands of grandparents who were denied their proper role of sharing their culture, language, and spirituality with their grandchildren
- for the communities that withered and died for the lack of a younger generation to reinvigorate and repopulate
- for the thousands of children who were exposed to and suffered from serious illnesses because of the deplorable conditions
- for the roughly 78,000 former students who survived the system, but still daily carry the physical, emotional, spiritual, and/or psychological scars upon them
- for the thousands of residential school survivors who found themselves condemned to a lonely and painful existence of dependency, addiction, and chronic illness
- for the countless generations who were the children and grandchildren of former residential school students, and who suffer from the syndrome of multi-generational abuse
- for those who daily labour to gather and reconstitute the disparate elements of culture, language, and spirituality scattered and destroyed by the residential school system
- for those who had the courage to come forward and publicly expose the abuses that were perpetrated upon them, and thus brought this system to an overdue end at last
- for those misguided European settlers who assumed their own civilization was the pinnacle of human achievement, and genuinely believed that they knew best
- for those teachers, clergy, support staff, police officers, bureaucrats, agents, and others compelled to function in a system they didn't support, and who were themselves victimized by the process

Finally, Creator, we ask a blessing upon all those who in their everyday lives quietly demonstrate an attitude of reconciliation and egalitarianism, that ensures that such travesties as the residential school system can never happen again.

*—Matthew Stevens is an ordained United Church minister of Kanien'kehá:ka Haudenosaunee (Mohawk) and Irish Métis heritage, who has been recognized as an Elder within the Anishinaabek, and has served both First Nations and dominant society congregations.*