

# Resetting the Relationship: A Canadian Baptist Apology to our Indigenous Peoples of Canada

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Today, I come humbly to this place, on behalf of Canadian Baptist Ministries. Before we seek to Reset the Relationship, as this conference is named, and before I speak on behalf of our churches, allow me to apologize before God and to you, our Indigenous brothers and sisters, both personally and collectively. I am mindful that I cannot apologize for others' acts without admitting my own shortcomings. As a community of God's people, we admit that too often we have not been or done what we could or should have to live and act justly. To you, our neighbours, our sisters and brothers who have been hurt, directly or indirectly by our actions and inaction, we ask your forgiveness.

Canadian Baptists have heard the pain and hurt inflicted upon our country's Indigenous peoples. We acknowledge the deep wounds that persist as a consequence of our shared history. As a Church body, our early roots were in a white, Colonial past, from both Europe and America. Attitudes and acts of arrogance, entitlement and greed compelled many who settled here in Canada to assume ownership of lands that were not theirs to take, to occupy territories that were unceded and to formulate and sign treaties which were tilted in their own favour. The trust and goodwill of our Indigenous peoples were further abused when we failed to honour the treaties.

Many of our own church roots emerged from the Anabaptist tradition in Europe. Our forefathers suffered forms of persecution and exclusion in Europe, yet we acted in a similar manner here. We went from being excluded to being the excluders, from the oppressed to the oppressors. We failed to learn from our past and fully embrace the "other" when we arrived

here, despite the hospitality that was extended to us.

Although Canadian Baptists were not directly involved in the Residential School system, we failed our Indigenous brothers and sisters by not speaking out against it, when your language, culture, religion and values were being assaulted and harm was being inflicted on your children. We sinned when we were not the voice of the oppressed. We looked the other way when wrong was being done. And when some Baptists, like Silas Rand who lived and worked among the Mi'kmaq from 1843 – 1889, challenged the colonial status quo, our churches silenced them.

We put up walls when we should have opened doors. These practices have created a context wherein Indigenous peoples in this land today experience disproportionate poverty and oppression, the result of which are negative stereotypes, high rates of mental and emotional illness, suicide, violence against women, substance abuse and intergenerational pain. When we should have challenged our churches, institutions and governments to respond to systemic injustices, such as the lack of access to clean water and educational opportunities, we were silent.

We have heard the pain and sadness of the children and grandchildren of those who were affected by the actions and attitudes of the past. In a spirit of humility and weakness, we acknowledge the hurt we have done – when we acted greedily out of self-interest and when we failed to act vocally on behalf of our neighbours, our hosts – our brothers and sisters. For this we are truly sorry.

We are grateful to those who served and led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and affirm the excellent Calls to Action. We renounce the Doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullius by which European Christians took that which wasn't theirs, sadly in the name of God and the Church. It is untenable, unacceptable and wrong for them to have done so, and we acknowledge our ongoing complicity through our failure to call out and stand against these systemic acts of injustice. We acknowledge that we have benefited from them and ask your forgiveness.

But, today we commit ourselves to journeying on a new path. We want to venture alongside you so that we can learn from you. For many Canadian Baptists, this journey with Indigenous peoples is new. Some are just starting out. For those who are new and weak to the journey, please help

us. Others have been on the journey with you for a very long time. Thank you for allowing us to walk with you.

Along this pathway, we will call upon our churches to renounce all forms of injustice and discrimination. We shall embolden our churches, schools and institutions to embrace the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous peoples. We will encourage our churches to participate in opportunities for education and the resetting of our relationship.

Practically speaking, Canadian Baptist Ministries commits itself to working with local bands to identify and assist Indigenous women and girls at-risk and cooperating with local churches to participate in the healing of broken communities. We recognize that the path ahead will not be easy. Unjust systems are always difficult to dismantle, but we commit ourselves to doing all we can.

We are a people of the Good News – the Gospel – which promises us new life in Jesus' name. In the spirit of mutuality and partnership, we will encourage our churches to acts of repentance, learning and service. By God's grace, together we will seek to do what God desires from us: to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

Terry Smith, Executive Director  
Canadian Baptist Ministries