

# The Apology of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Its Complicity in Colonization and the Residential School System

## Introduction

We, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, humbly offer this apology to the generations of Indigenous people and communities harmed by the residential schools and day schools we operated.

We originally made a Confession in 1994 for our role in operating residential schools and colonization but we have realized the inadequacy of that Confession. We apologize for our slowness and the apathy of our response. We are deeply sorry.

We acknowledge the families whose children were taken to schools without telling their families where the children were being taken and who never returned, who remain lost today. We acknowledge with grief the many unmarked graves that have been found and will be found, including at schools that we ran. We remember the children who never made it home.

We apologize for the impact of the genocide of colonization, forced assimilation and racism to which we actively contributed.

Many Survivors and intergenerational Survivors have shared very personal and traumatic experiences in the context of Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings and within the congregations, committees and governing bodies of the church. We acknowledge the strength and courage of Survivors for sharing your experiences in the schools and the heavy burdens you, your families and communities still bear. We acknowledge the pain and difficulty of sharing and reliving the truth of your lived experience.

We acknowledge that the church's apology itself, as well as the presence of church representatives making the apology, may be triggering, evoking trauma for some by surfacing memories of devastating experiences in residential schools.

## Apology

We acknowledge that Indigenous children suffered at residential schools. The Presbyterian Church in Canada ran Ahousaht Residential School in British Columbia, Alberni Residential School in British Columbia, Birtle Residential School in Manitoba, Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School in Shoal Lake, Ontario, Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School in Kenora, Ontario, Crowstand Residential School in Saskatchewan, File Hills Residential School in Saskatchewan, Muscowpetung (later known as "Lakesend") Residential School in Saskatchewan, Portage la Prairie Residential School in Manitoba, Regina Industrial School in Saskatchewan, Round Lake Residential School in Saskatchewan and Stoney Plain Residential School in Alberta.

We apologize for taking children from their homes, parents, grandparents and communities.

We apologize for traumatizing parents and communities and taking away their rights to protect their children.

We honour and respect the languages of the land and apologize for punishing Indigenous students for speaking their traditional languages.

We apologize for attempting to eliminate Indigenous identity and Cultural and Spiritual traditions.

We apologize for the abuse Indigenous children suffered, including physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and Spiritual abuses.

We apologize for the weaponization of food that happened in the schools and for non-consensual experiments with food, nutrition and medical procedures that were conducted on children.

We apologize for the lost lives, for children who died while at residential schools – from disease, neglect, suicide, attempts to run away and from violence by teachers, staff and volunteers.

We apologize that the schools created an isolated and unsafe environment where violence was condoned and students learned violence. We regret, and are deeply sorry, that we provided conditions where students could abuse other students.

We acknowledge and apologize for the resulting loss of bloodlines, of ancestors and of people who would not grow to become Elders, the huge loss of culture and future for nations this meant.

We apologize that when children died their parents were not always informed, they were not always returned to their communities and their burial sites were sometimes unmarked or the markers were not maintained and the record of names was not kept.

We apologize for the church's attitude of white superiority, for its assimilating policies and practices, for the racism of treating Indigenous people as less than human and for the ongoing intergenerational effects of our complicity with colonization and the schools that continue to negatively impact families and communities.

We acknowledge that this systemic racism continues to impact Indigenous people, including through: insecure housing; poverty; forced dependence on social assistance; experiencing lateral and domestic violence, in particular toward Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ people as named in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We acknowledge this has led to hopelessness, mental health crises and the tragedy of suicide, barriers to completing education and to accessing health care. We acknowledge this has led to the breakdown of family bonds that results in children taken into foster care, gang involvement, exploitation, addictions and incarceration.

We are sorry for how long it has taken for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to begin to understand the depth of harm we have caused, and we still have much to learn.

For our complicity in colonization and the residential school system, we are deeply, deeply sorry.

We therefore offer five fundamental commitments:

- We will continue to listen and learn from Indigenous people, leaders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, welcoming and engaging voices from both within and beyond The Presbyterian Church in Canada.
- We will continue the work of reconciliation, responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action and the work of reparation that we have begun.
- We will respect traditional Indigenous spiritual practices.
- We will listen to and tell the truth about the past.
- We will work to support Indigenous-led healing and wellness initiatives and be in solidarity with Indigenous people and communities.