

Script of the video Apology to Action: A Pilgrimage for Reconciliation



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Introduction

“Apology to Action: Reflections on the thirty-fifth anniversary” is a fifteen-minute video prepared by the **Manitou Intentional Learning Community** in collaboration with the Canadian Shield Regional Council Right Relations Resource Team, that revisits the First Apology made to Indigenous People by the United Church of Canada in August, 1986, during the 31st General Council, held in Sudbury, Ontario. The video recounts a brief history of that event, reminds us of the words spoken by those who offered and received the Apology, challenges us to consider our commitment to reconciliation and calls us to act so that the words spoken that day can truly become “words of action and sincerity.” (Edith Memnook)

The video features reflections from Lisa Blais and Maxine McVey, Right Relations Resource Team, Canadian Shield Regional Council, and the Very Reverend Jordan Cantwell, former Moderator of the United Church of Canada.

The video is suitable for inclusion in worship services, especially on June 20, 2021, to mark National Indigenous People’s Day, and to spark discussion of how we, as people of faith, can live out this Apology.

This script is made available for those who cannot use technology in their churches. You may find words that you would like to incorporate into worship services marking the Indigenous Day of Prayer. Please attribute the words to the speaker and mention this resource.

An additional resource, **“Apology to Action: A Pilgrimage for Reconciliation”** **available from** invites you to affirm your commitment to reconciliation by making a pilgrimage to the site of the Apology Cairn in Sudbury, Ontario, or to some place that is special to you. You are invited to reflect on the words of the Apology and the Response and to commit to the hard and humbling work of building right relations.

Both the video and the accompanying Pilgrimage Package are dedicated to the Very Reverend Stan MacKay, whose presentation to the **Manitou Intentional Learning Community** in April 2021 ignited this project.

Thirty - five years ago, August 1986, during the 31st General Council of the United Church of Canada, at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, a teepee was erected at this place by First Nations delegates.

Alberta Billy, Elder and member of the All-Native Circle Conference had, at another meeting, some time before, courageously called the Church to account for its complicity in the suffering of the people it claimed to love. On that night after typical United Church discussion and voting, Moderator, Rt Rev Robert Smith sat with elders and offered words of apology on our behalf, for the ways the church had contributed to the dismantling of a sacred spiritual path, and the destruction of Indigenous culture, and community.

It was the first apology of its kind, followed 12 years later by another, specifically for complicity in the suffering inflicted by the Residential School System.

As we all know, apology is hollow without a conscious repairing of relationship, so to that end, the Apology was received but not accepted as complete. This Cairn was built to remember the historic act, and, more importantly, the commitment to reconciliation. 35 years in, we ask: "How is our relationship mending going? How is our walk from Apology to Action progressing?"

Let's recall those historic words that light our way:

The Apology: read by Dr. Natasha Gerolami, member of the Manitou Intentional Learning Community

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured.

We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality.

We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.

We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel.

We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be.

We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

The apology was acknowledged and received with grace, to be considered by the Indigenous church before making a response.

The Response: read by Carol Germa, an Indigenous member of the Canadian Shield Regional Council Right Relations Resource Team.

The Apology made to the Native People of Canada by The United Church of Canada in Sudbury in August 1986 has been a very important step forward. It is heartening to see that The United Church of Canada is a forerunner in making this Apology to Native People. The All-Native Circle Conference has now acknowledged your Apology. Our people have continued to affirm the teachings of the Native way of life. Our spiritual teachings and values have taught us to uphold the Sacred Fire; to be guardians of Mother Earth and strive to maintain harmony and peaceful coexistence with all peoples.

We only ask of you to respect our Sacred Fire, the Creation, and to live in peaceful coexistence with us. We recognize the hurts and feelings will continue amongst our people, but through partnership and walking hand in hand, the Indian spirit will eventually heal. Through our love, understanding and sincerity the brotherhood and sisterhood of unity, strength and respect can be achieved.

The Native People of The All-Native Circle Conference hope and pray that the Apology is not symbolic but that these are the words of action and sincerity. We appreciate the freedom for culture and religious expression. In the new spirit this Apology has created, let us unite our hearts and minds in the wholeness of life that the Great Spirit has given us.

This exchange has been at the center of our work to make right this broken relationship, to bring about healing and new life so that both parties can walk together and with God in a good way. Maxine McVey has been a leader for us in that endeavour in Sudbury and beyond. She was here that night and shares the impact it has had on her life.

A Reflection by Maxine McVey, retired Diaconal minister and member of Canadian Shield Regional Council Right Relations Resource Team. Maxine was present at the Apology and co-ordinated the building of the cairn.

I had the privilege of being at that 1986 General Council meeting, and I will never forget when Alberta Billy stood up, shared her story, and called on the United Church to apologize including for our role in the residential schools. I was deeply moved by her story of the pain and anguish she experienced being taken from her family, her language and her culture. I was horrified. Y church, that I loved, had been part of an institution that had taken small children from their homes denying them their language and their culture leaving many parents, grandparents and whole communities sad and in mourning.

The experience of the church's Apology has flamed my passion to work for right relations, reconciliation, twenty-five years, first with Manitou Conference and now as part of the Right Relations Resource Team in the Canadian Shield Regional Council. One of our goals over the years has been to provide education for our faith communities. Many of our faith communities are now acknowledging what First Nations community they are worshipping on. Another resource is the "Minute for Right Relations" to promote understanding of First Nations cultures.

I have always been grateful to Art Solomon and his helper, Peter, for the many hours of labour and laughter and the time spent building this memorial cairn. That experience flames my love for my Indigenous brothers and sisters and continues to call me to continue the journey to find ways to walk together, to respect one another, and to listen and learn with and from one another.

Over the years our denomination has taken steps on our journey with our First Nations brothers and sisters, but we still have a long path ahead of us. Lisa Blais will share some concrete actions that YOU may want to take, both as individuals and communities of faith to help put the words of the apology into action

A Reflection by Lisa Blais, Indigenous member of the Right Relations Resource Team CSRC, and Outreach minister at Trinity United, North Bay.

My name is Lisa Blais and I am a member of the Right Relations Resource Team and the Faith Formation and Outreach Minister at Trinity United Church in North Bay. I am a Haudensaunee woman with Scottish and French ancestors. I live and work in North Bay, a city that is nestled between Lake Nipissing and Trout Lake – on lands and near waters that have sustained many Indigenous peoples – Anishinaabe, Cree, Algonquin, Metis and more – land that has also been shared with settler peoples who come from many different nations.

I have been asked to reflect on how we, as people of faith, and people of the apology - can put those historic words into action. Here are my top five!

1. Seek out and celebrate the historic and current contributions of Indigenous people in your region - artists, storytellers, knowledge keepers, athletes, leaders and other notable people
2. Listen and respond to the challenges that Indigenous people – both on and off reserve – are experiencing in your region
3. De-colonize your relationship with Indigenous peoples – that means recognizing and valuing the knowledge and experience that Indigenous people have
4. Become an ally and an advocate – use your voice to uplift some of the challenges that Indigenous people are facing – Language, culture, land, health, needs to be restored - both independent of and with the support of non-Indigenous people.
5. We have been given the framework for justice and reconciliation already – the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - Urge our Government to uphold and implement UNDRIP into Law

Nya:wen, Miigwech, Thank-you!

Now to inspire our journey, we welcome the Very Reverend Jordan Cantwell.

A Call to Action by the Very Reverend Jordan Cantwell.

“As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be.” This is why the work of reparations and right relationship building is essential. It is part of our healing journey, healing for settler peoples as well as Indigenous peoples. If I do not understand my own need for healing from my bondage to colonial and white supremacist attitudes, then even my best efforts at reconciliation will likely perpetuate and entrench colonial ways, not dismantle them.

I must come to terms with the ways in which the image of the Creator has become twisted and blurred in me; how my participation in racist and colonial structures distorts my own humanity as well as that of my Indigenous relatives. Once I see this truth clearly and feel its impact on my relationship with God, myself and my neighbours, then I will be fully invested in the transformation that needs to happen in me, in my church, and in society. Then, I won’t run from the hard and humbling work of building right relations, because I will know that this is the medicine I need to heal, to become whole. This is about my liberation and your liberation, the liberation of each and everyone of us which is all bound together. May we have the courage and the humility to embrace our healing journey that together we may be liberated to become what “we are meant by God to be.”