

**Minute for Right Relations**  
**September 2022**  
**Alberta Billy**

Alberta Billy, We Wai Kai Elder and a fierce defender of Indigenous rights, died on June 13, 2022. Alberta played a pivotal role in influencing The United Church of Canada in its journey towards reconciliation.

At a meeting of the General Council Executive, on behalf of the Native Ministries Council, Alberta asked Moderator, Rev. Bob Smith, to issue an apology to Indigenous peoples for the Church's role in colonization and assimilation, particularly through the Residential Schools system. This led to The United Church of Canada offering the first apology on August 15, 1986 – the first church to do so. After receiving concerns from Alberta, Edith Memnook and other Indigenous peoples that the first apology was too vague, the Church issued a second apology in 1998 which directly referenced and apologized for the 15 residential schools run by The United Church of Canada. Both of these apologies have been heard and acknowledged, but not accepted.

Alberta was also instrumental in advocating for the Aboriginal Ministries Circle receiving equal governance within the United Church.

Prior to her death, Alberta traveled Canada leading workshops on Indigenous and European contact, with a specific focus on the history of Residential Schools. In 2021, after the discovery of the unmarked grave site at a former Residential School in Tk'emlúps, British Columbia, Alberta called on the churches and Government to act rather than just deliver pretty words and empty promises.

Alberta's work calls on us, as a church and community, to commit and make concrete steps toward reconciliation. In a conversation with the Very Rev. Bob Smith, Pam Hart, Sara Stratton and Lawrence Sankey at the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apology, Alberta stated that she believes the church has taken action, but there is still a lot to do. She believed that the church must show that Indigenous peoples and their ceremonies are accepted, welcomed, and respected.

Alberta's words remind us that the apology is an ongoing process – a commitment to reconciliation, reparation, and repatriation. The apology must be heard and carried into the future through continuous action.

For more insight on Alberta Billy's work and life, listen to her conversation with the Very Rev. Bob Smith, Pam Hart, and Lawrence Sankey on The United Church of Canada's YouTube Channel at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brQjxEg-p1A>

The first apology was commemorated with the building of a Cairn at the site. The Apology Cairn has become a gathering place to remember and reflect on reconciliation. If you'd like to visit the Apology Cairn, it can be found in Parking Lot #15 at Laurentian University in Sudbury.

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on behalf of the **CSRC Right Relations Resource Team***