

The Apology Cairn: A Minute for Right Relations

Located on the grounds of **Laurentian University** in Sudbury, the Apology Cairn is a peaceful site surrounded by sacred medicines and native plants. It commemorates a pivotal moment in the United Church of Canada's history.

The Call for an Apology

In November 1985, **Alberta Billy** called on the United Church to apologize for its role in colonization and the resulting loss of Indigenous languages, culture, and spirituality. In response, during the August 1986 General Council meeting, Moderator **Robert Smith** delivered an official apology to the Elders in a tepee. Speaking for the **All Native Circle**, the Elders received the apology but did not yet accept it, stating that true reconciliation required meaningful action.

From Stones to a Monument

When the meeting concluded, a pile of stones—brought by Commissioners from across Canada—remained in the worship space. **Rev. Stewart Bell**, inspired by the memorial cairns of Scotland, proposed using these rocks to build a permanent monument on the site of the apology.

Construction and Collaboration

With permission from Laurentian University, a group of volunteers (Maxine McVey, Erik and Tina Hansen, Rev. Ross and Jean Leckie, Jim Van Exan, and Charlie Martindale) began construction at what is now **Parking Lot #15**. Renowned Anishinaabe Elder and stonemason **Art Solomon** guided the design and construction.

The Symbolism of the Site

- **The Foundation:** A 25-foot round cement pad representing the **Circle of Life**.
- **The Entrances:** Four openings in the walls represent the **four directions**.
- **The Materials:** Field stones from **M'Chigeeng First Nation** and red flagstone from **Whitefish River First Nation**.
- **The Cairn:** Situated in the center, built from stones gathered from across the country.

Commemorative Plaques

The site features two plaques:

1. **The First Plaque:** Gifted by the people of **Whitefish River First Nation**, it explains the significance of the red rock floor.
2. **The Second Plaque:** Provides the history and meaning of the structure in **English, French, and Anishinaabemowin**.

For more information, please visit the **Right Relations** section on the **CSRC webpage**.

Submitted on behalf of the Canadian Shield Regional Council's Right Relations Resource Team, March 2026.