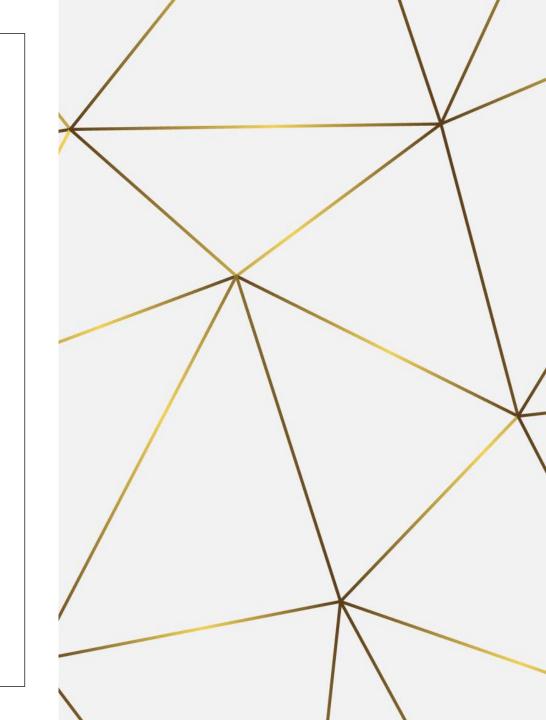
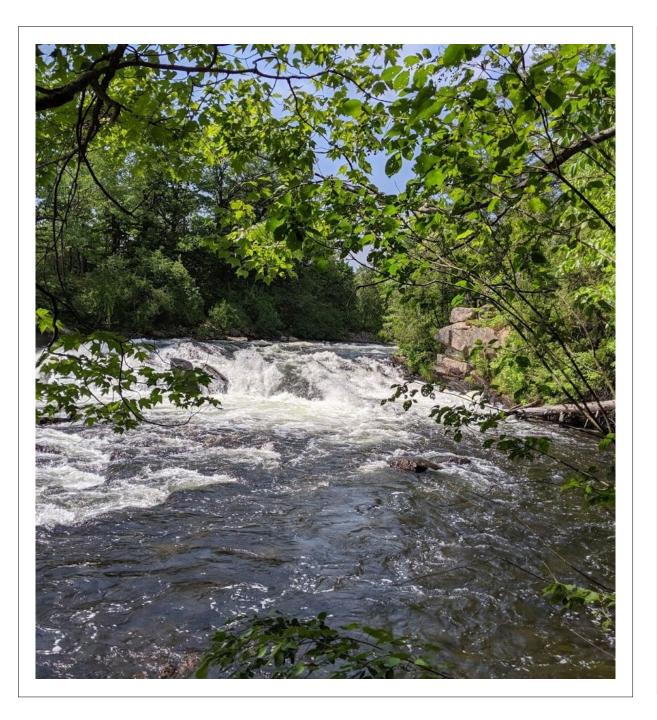
Five Things Every Presbyterian Should Know

about residential schools and colonization

June 2025
Prepared by Justice Ministries,
the Life and Mission Agency

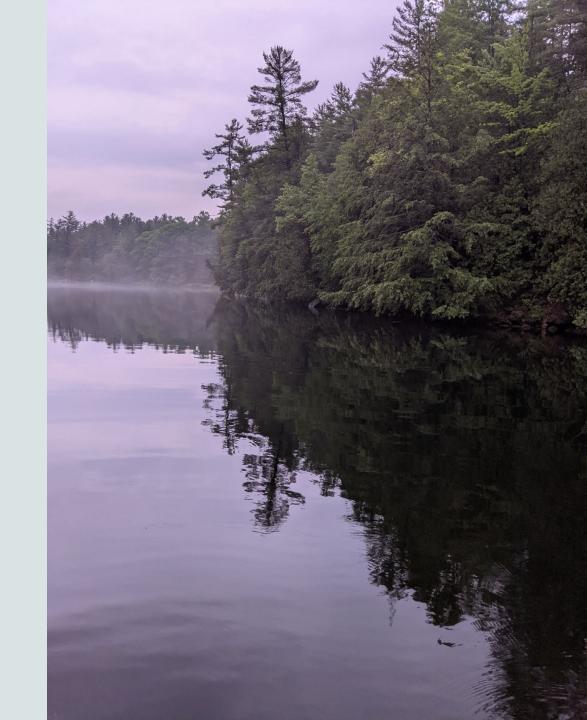




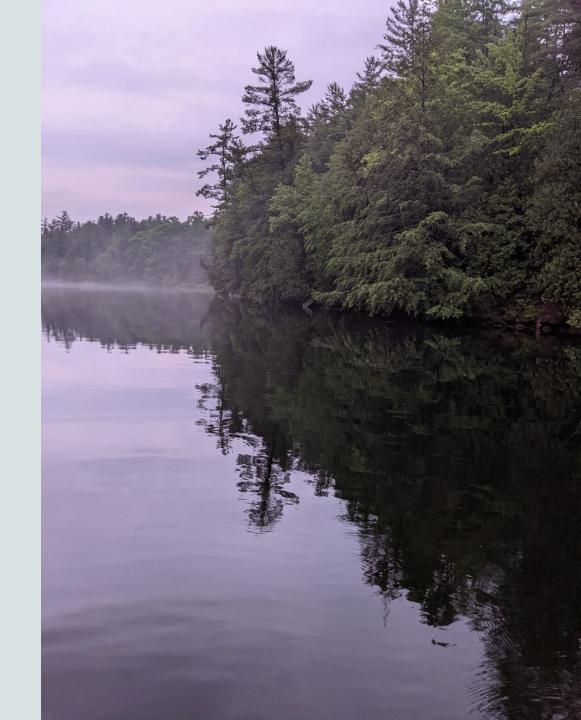


Land and territorial acknowledgement

The importance of language for clarity and respect



The importance of remembering



Some of the PCC's commitments framing this presentation

Responding to TRC Call to Actions

"We call upon church parties to the Settlement
Agreement to develop ongoing education
strategies to ensure that their respective
congregations learn about their church's role in
colonization, the history and legacy of residential
schools, and why apologies to former residential
school students, their families, and communities
were necessary."

- TRC Call to Action #59

Recommendation to GA (adopted, p. 22)

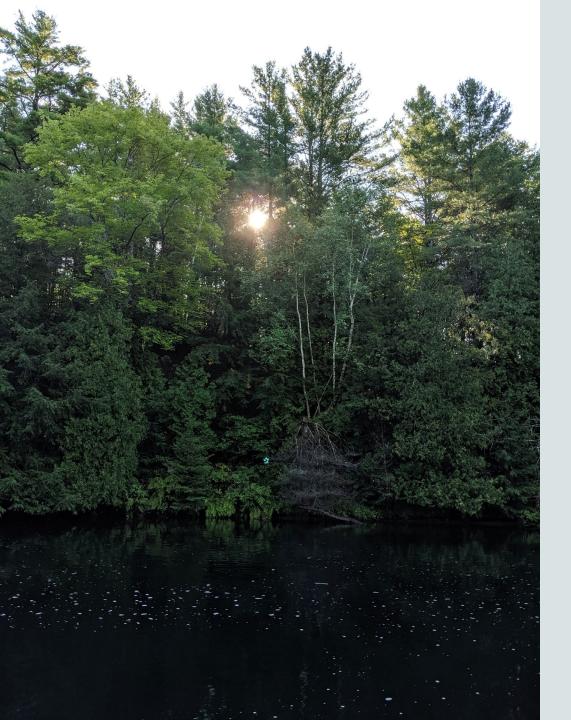
"That sessions, presbyteries and committees of the General Assembly be encouraged to learn more about colonialism and the impacts of intergenerational trauma."

- (A&P 2022, p. 185)

Reflecting on our reactions

This is difficult and uncomfortable material: but feeling uncomfortable isn't always bad.





Indigenous nations had vibrant societies and complex inter-nation relationships, agreements and trade prior to European contact

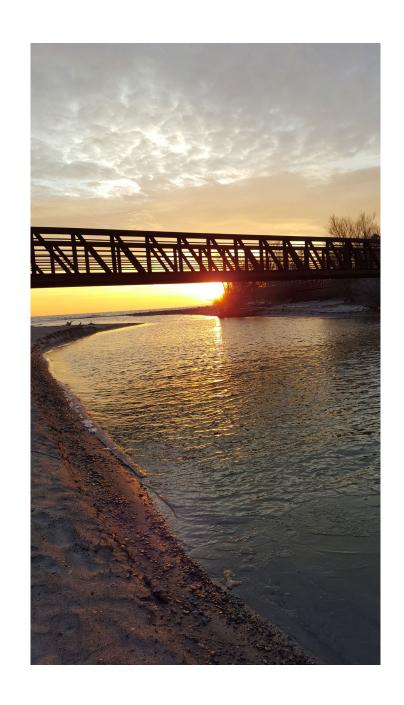
It is important to learn about the history of Indigenous peoples from Indigenous people – Elders, Knowledge Keepers, artisans, academics.

Five things we will discuss today

- The schools are not the only form of colonization the church participated in
- The Presbyterian Church in Canada ran 12 residential schools
- In addition to anything that happened at the schools, the schools themselves were tools of separation and forced assimilation
- The intergenerational effects of the schools continue today
- Because of the PCC's legacy, reconciliation is part of faithful discipleship



The schools are not the only form of colonization the church participated in



The breadth of colonialism

This presentation is focused on colonization as it unfolded in Canada, but it is important to remember that people all over the world have experienced colonization.

Often, to the detriment of its witness, the church's mission work was tied to colonization.



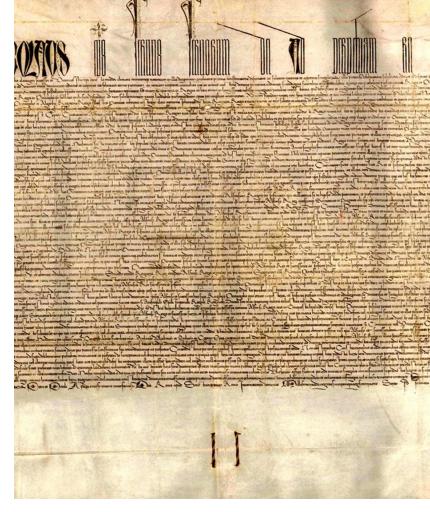
What is colonialism?

"... the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically"

- Oxford Dictionary







Roots of the church's colonialism: The Doctrine of Discovery

Papal Bull "Inter Caetera," Pope Alexander VI 1493

Excerpt, Pope Alexander's 1493 bull to the King of Spain:

"In the islands and countries already discovered [the previous year] are found gold, spices, and very many other precious things of divers kinds and qualities. Wherefore, as becomes Catholic kings and princes, after earnest consideration of all matters, especially of the rise and spread of the Catholic faith... you have purposed with the favor of divine clemency to bring under your sway the said mainlands and islands with their residents and inhabitants and to bring them to the Catholic faith... [we] give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, forever, together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances, all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered towards the west and south, by drawing and establishing a line from the Arctic pole, namely the north, to the Antarctic pole, namely the south, no matter whether the said mainlands and islands are found..."

-The Gilder Lehrman Collection GLC04093 www.gilderlehrman.org

The Doctrine of Discovery had no thought of "treaty" It was focused on taking, exploiting, and controlling.

Taking, Exploiting, Controlling.

While at times and in places a more covenantal approach characterized church relations with Indigenous people, those three words above are more frequently an accurate description of the attitudes and actions of The Presbyterian Church in Canada during much of its relationship with Indigenous peoples.



The church is working to repair and change that.



Mission and land

"The head man of the party – whom we knew to be unfriendly to our object - then spoke. He said we had come to their land that we wished to take possession of the land and live on it and work it; that if he should go to England or to Canada he would have to pay for whatever he took, and it was only reasonable that we should pay for their lands when we come to live on them. We told him that the land belonged to the Cree Nation, and that if we paid him, every other Cree had a right to come and ask payment, that we had no authority to buy land and had nothing to buy it with. He said it was not us alone, but he knew whenever a mission is established that other settlers soon come, and they not only take their lands, but their buffalo also."

-- Letter of Rev. James Nisbet dated 30th July 1866. The Home and Foreign Record of the Canada Presbyterian Church, No. 2, Vol. VI (Dec. 1866), pgs 47-48.]

Foreign Missions Committee, 1908:

"When the Dominion of Canada was extended westward so as to encompass it its widened sweep the great prairies between Winnipeg and the Rocky Mountains... No one could think for a moment of leaving half a continent in the possession of a race incapable of extracting from it more than the merest pittance of its wealth. Our race took from the Indian that which is enriching us. At our approach the buffalo and the elk, on which the Indian had lived, vanished, and he was left without food... We destroyed his living. Were we not bound to help him regain what he had lost? Does not that same bond hold us to our task still?"



Cultural Assimilation conflated with mission

"So long as education is not compulsory, the potlatch permitted, the Siwash doctors allowed to practice and the Indians not trained to make their living by some industrial activity, the work of the church must remain comparatively ineffectual."

[A&P 1914, HMB report, Synod of British Columbia, pg. 49]



Getting the children to school

"the most important change is the proposal to adopt a system of **compulsory** education. Hitherto **pressure** of many kinds has been brought to bear upon chiefs of bands and upon parents to send their children to school – moral suasion has been employed, **rations have been withheld** from those who refused, and they have been **deprived** of some of the favours which it is in the **power** of the officers of the Indian Department to give."

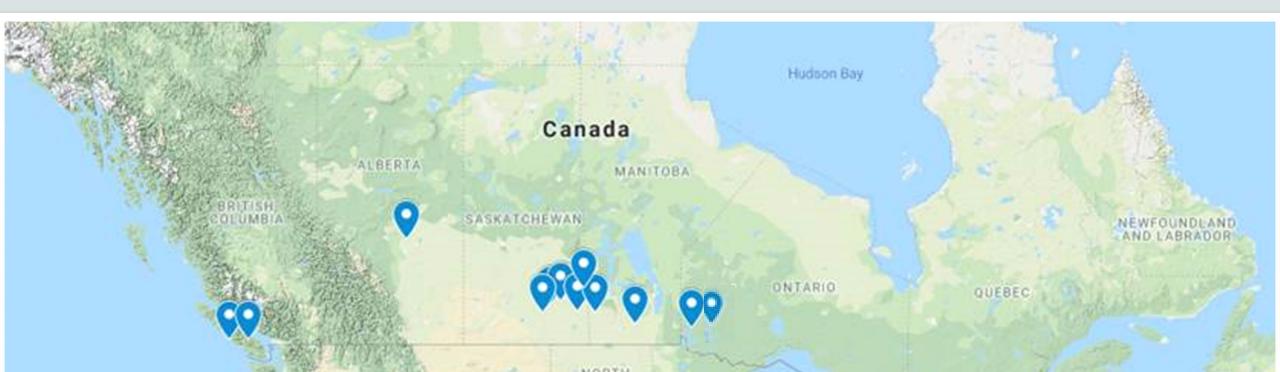
-- A&P 1893, FMC report, appendix xxxi



The Presbyterian Church in Canada ran 12 residential schools

The Presbyterian Church in Canada ran twelve Residential Schools:

Ahousaht Residential School in British Columbia, Alberni Residential School in British Columbia, Birtle Residential School in Manitoba, Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School at 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.



The majority of PCC-run schools were in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, (with two in Ontario and two in British Columbia) but there was a PCC-run school in Alberta, near Edmonton

Ston(e)y Plain Boarding/Industrial School

An inspection report names a Presbyterian Boarding School on Enoch Reserve, and references the teacher Mr. Wellbourne:

EDMONTON AGENCY.

The Presbyterian Boarding-school on Enoch's Reserve was closed at time of my inspection of the agency, and the teacher, Mr. Wellbourn, had accepted a position in the public school, Edmonton. It was expected the school would soon be re-opened, however.

There are similar records and references for 1891-1894. In the <u>1891</u> records, there is a clear reference to there being two schools on Enoch Reserve, one run by the PCC, described as a mission and boarding school, and Roman Catholic mission and day school. The same schools are also listed in one place in this record as "Stoney Plains", which may be where confusion of spelling (Stony vs Stoney) arouse. Reference below (page 214 of the PDF - https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item?id=1891-IAAR-RAAI&op=pdf&app=IndAffAnnRep&lang=eng):

After 1925, the PCC had two schools which it operated til 1969: Birtle Residential school and Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School, in Kenora



In addition to anything that happened at the schools, the schools themselves were tools of separation and forced assimilation The schools were intentionally set up to separate and assimilate



Assimilation and the destruction of Indigenous spiritual systems and practices was the goal

"No report of the committee would be complete without the grateful acknowledgement of the help received from the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. The large sums of money which it raises year by year for the evangelization of heathen women and children, has made possible the recent extension of our work in the way of boarding and industrial schools - a system of training which is already achieving an improvement in the morals, the manners and the intelligence of the children, such as never could have been expected by means of day schools, where the teaching during the day, however good, is too often neutralized by the **blighting influences** to which the pupil is subject morning and evening in a pagan home."

Separation was a core intent, not incidental:

"It is in the school, and especially in the industrial [boarding] school, that the great work of the Church for the elevation of the Indian must be done. In the industrial school the children are withdrawn for long periods – and the longer the better – from the degrading surroundings of their pagan homes, and placed under the direct influence of all that is noblest and best in our Christian civilization... we may confidently expect that the generation trained under these influences will be immeasurably superior to their parents, and that in a comparatively few years our work as missionaries to heathen Indians will be accomplished."

This focus on spiritual and cultural assimilation continued as the schools expanded

"The influence of the new school [at Birtle] is very great and opportunity is greatly increased of helping and leadings these original Canadians to our Lord Jesus Christ"

--WMS Annual Report 1932, pg. 69

"In all three schools the main object has been kept in view – to help these Indian children to become good Christians and followers of Jesus."

--A&P 1944, WMS report, pg. 60

The intent to separate continued as well

"Our school-age children are all at the Indian Residential School at Birtle, Manitoba. This year they were allowed home for Christmas Holidays. Everybody enjoyed these days very much indeed. It was the **first time** our Indian people had their families home at Christmas time."

A&P 1948, GBM report, Section on Indian Work, Waywayseecappo Reserve pg. 19

Some of the things we are now aware happened at Presbyterian-run institutions:

Physical abuse
Sexual abuse
Neglect
Lack of contact with family
Nutritional experiments on children
Medical experiments on children
Complete segregation of children based on gender assigned at birth
Providing inadequate food and then selling extra bread to students

Some samples from reports regarding health

WMS Annual Report 1917

"The health of the pupils and adults has been exceptionally good; the death rate is decreasing each year [Round Lake Boarding School]."

-- WMS Annual Report, 1917, pg. 70

WMS Annual Report 1941

"Miss Carruthers [nurse at Cecilia Jefffrey] has had a busy year. Flu, 37; mumps, 106; scabies, 40; pneumonia, 2; Preventorium (tuberculosis), average per month, 13; transferred to sanatorium, 7; deaths, 2. General diseases, 70; accidents, 3; operations, 3; deaths, 1. Miscellaneous: Doctor's visits, 5; complete X-ray in October."

-- WMS Annual Report 1941, pg. 57

Conditions at the schools were often poor, due to underfunding and other issues



Alberni Residential School

"Completed in 1896, the home opened with 16 girls in residence, ranging in age from 18 months to 16 years, as well as 11 boys ages 5 to 14. The church designed the home without bathrooms on the main floor and in the attic, where the girls slept, in order "not to indulge that class of children with too many of the modern conveniences." In response to Department of Indian Affairs concerns about the practice, matron Bella Johnston claimed that the children enjoyed the 'health activity of bathing in the river, even when snow was present.' The church later agreed to add bathrooms."

- from The Children Remembered

Crowstand Residential School

In 1914, following reports of sexual abuse,

"the Department's Medical Inspector, O. Grain, reported that the school was 'the worst residential school I have had to visit.' His report pointed out several issues with the school, including dilapidated buildings, unsanitary washrooms, a prevalence of flies, and children who were neglected in appearance. He concluded, 'I would like to suggest that the whole boarding school be entirely done away with.'"

https://gladue.usask.ca/node/2648

A fuller account is here:

https://www2.uregina.ca/education/saskindianresidentia

Ischools/wp-

content/uploads/2017/10/shatteringthesilenceCrowstan d-1-1.pdf

Cecilia Jeffrey: Shoal Point and Kenora

Policies that were seen as being unacceptable in the early twentieth century were still in place in the 1960s. Many students compared Residential Schools to jails: some spoke of being locked in in their dormitories, broom closets, basements, and even crawl spaces. In 1965, students who ran away from the Presbyterian school in Kenora were locked up with just a mattress on the floor and put on a bread-and-milk-diet (TRC Summary, 2015, p. 104).

Some children ran away. Some who ran away never made it home.

Chanie Wenjack (born 19 January 1954; died 23 October 1966) attended Cecilia Jeffrey in Kenora, a PCC-run school.

He was one of the children who ran away, but died in his attempt to get home.

In 1994, the church confessed its role in operating residential schools and in colonization

"We acknowledge that the stated policy of the Government of Canada was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to the dominant culture, and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada co-operated in this policy. We acknowledge that the roots of the harm we have done are found in the attitudes and values of western European colonialism, and the assumption that what was not yet moulded in our image was to be discovered and exploited. ... In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned... [we] and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ."

Excerpts from the 2024 Apology

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 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 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 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 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.

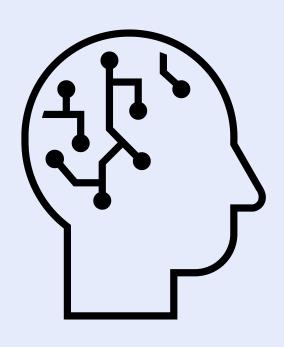
We are **sorry for how long it has taken** for The Presbyterian Church in Canada **to begin to understand the depth of harm we have caused**, and we still have much to learn.

"But all that was a long time ago..."

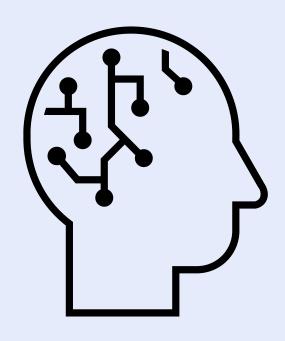
The intergenerational effects of the schools continue today.

We (humans) are shaped by and learn from our experiences.





At a minimum, children taken to residential schools experienced separation from their families and devaluing, even loss, of cultural and spiritual identity



We now understand those experiences are often a form of *trauma*

"[A Survivor] compared the experience to that of being captured and taken into captivity. 'at's when the trauma started for me, being separated from my sister, from my parents, and from our, our home. We were no longer free. It was like being, you know, taken to a strange land, even though it was our, our, our land, as I understood later on."

- TRC Final Report, Executive Summary p. 39



Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future (PDF)

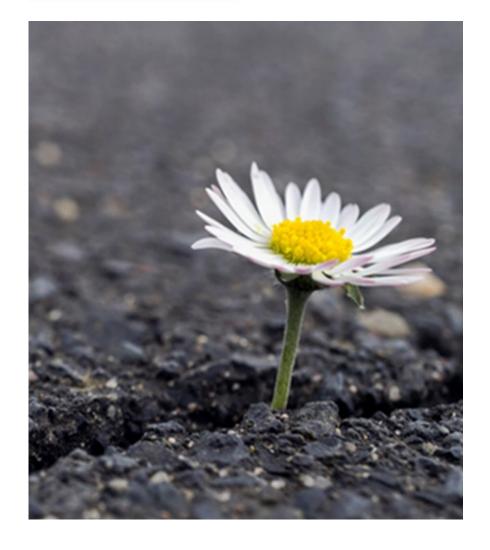
2015

DEFINING TRAUMA

Trauma is a pervasive problem. It results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or lifethreatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being.

Experiences that may be traumatic include:

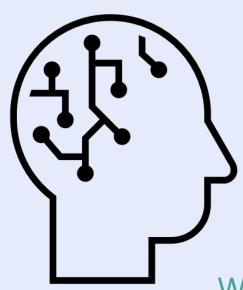
- Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
- Childhood neglect
- Living with a family member with mental health or substance use disorders
- Sudden, unexplained separation from a loved one
- Poverty
- Racism, discrimination, and oppression
- Violence in the community, war, or terrorism



Although trauma can occur at any age, it has particularly debilitating long-term effects on children's developing brains.

Often referred to as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), exposure to these experiences is **common across all sectors**of society:

Source: https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/wp-content/uploads/Fact-Sheet-What-is-Trauma.pdf



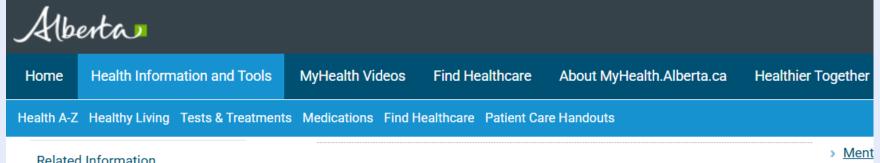
Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (The ACE study)

WHAT ARE ACES?

"Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are negative, stressful, traumatizing events that occur before the age of 18 and confer health risk across the lifespan. The 10 best studied ACEs are divided into the umbrellas of abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. These experiences create toxic stress. Children with ongoing, unmitigated toxic stress develop patterns of maladaptive behaviours and physiological disruptions that compromise health over the lifespan"

https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-know/aces/

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences



Related Information

Credits

Overview

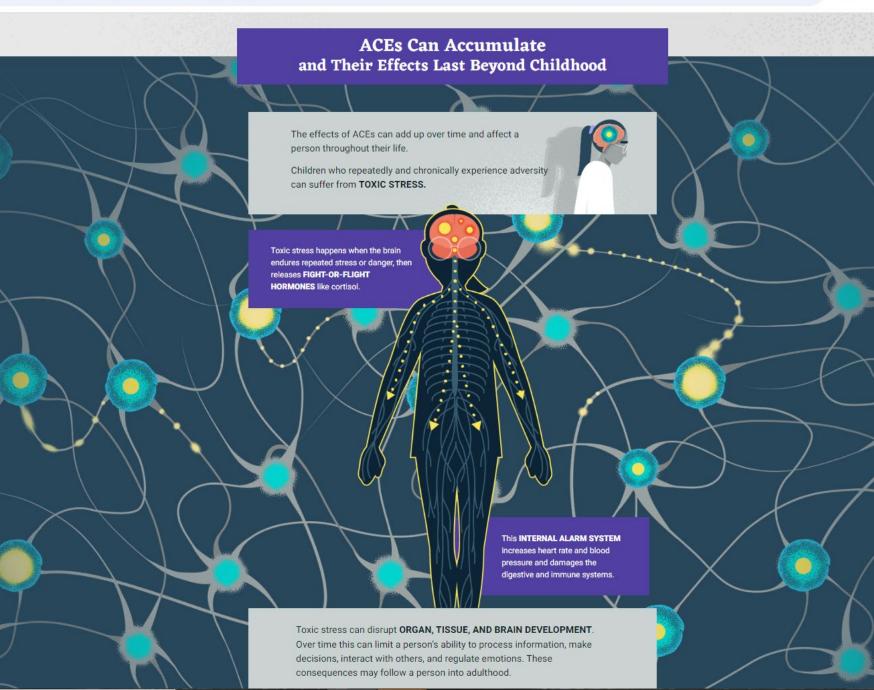


Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful experiences that happen before adulthood that can cause trauma. Some examples of ACEs include violence, neglect, abuse, and family mental health or substance use problems.









Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)











Research shows that experiencing a higher number of ACEs is associated with many of the leading causes of death like heart disease and cancer.

Chronic Health Health Risk Conditions

- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke
- Asthma
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Cancer
- Kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity

Behaviors

- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol use
- · Substance misuse
- Physical inactivity
- Sexual risk behaviors
- · Suicidal thoughts and behavior

- · Lack of health insurance
- Unemployment
- Less than high school diploma or equivalent education

Social Outcomes Mental Health Conditions and Substance Use Disorders

- Depression
- Substance use disorder including alcohol, opioids, and tobacco

ACEs Can Echo Across Generations

The consequences of ACEs can be passed down from one generation to the next if children don't have protective buffers like positive childhood experiences or a caring adult in their lives.

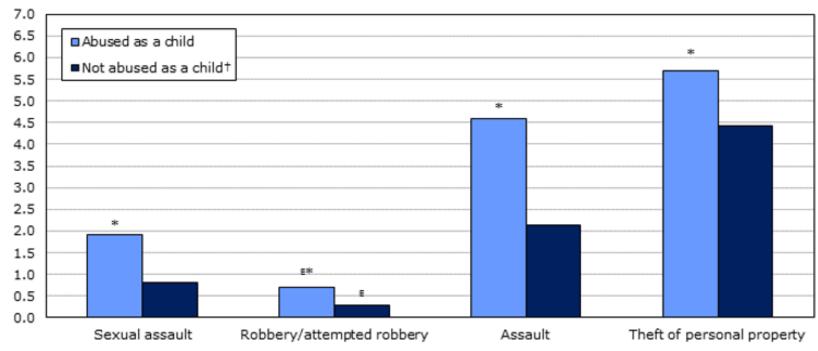
Also, when families experience historical and systemic racism or living in poverty for generations, the effects of ACEs can add up over time.



Childhood trauma increases likelihood of revictimization

Chart 1.10
Types of self-reported criminal victimization experienced during adulthood, by victims of childhood physical and/or sexual abuse, Canada, 2014

percent reporting victimization



Type of victimization during adulthood

Note: Data for respondents who answered 'don't know' or 'refuse' are not shown, but are included in percent calculations.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey.

E use with caution

^{*} significantly different from reference group (p < 0.05)

[†] reference group

"Multivariate analysis showed a clear association between childhood maltreatment and violent victimization. Even when all other risk factors were taken into account, people who had experienced physical and/or sexual abuse as children were at **double the risk** of violent victimization as adults compared to those who had not been abused."

Marta Burczycka, "Profile of Canadian adults who experienced childhood maltreatment" available online at https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14698/01-eng.htm#r24

ACEs also correlate with increased likelihood of incarceration

"What we found

The findings of this study suggest that the majority of offenders (80% men; 86% women) experience at least one ACE. The most common ACE among men and Indigenous women was the childhood experience of substance misuse in the household.

The most common ACE among Non-Indigenous women was abuse or neglect in childhood. Notably, Indigenous men and women had the highest rates of exposure to ACEs across all categories, and were more likely to have exposure to multiple ACEs than other ethnocultural groups.

Increased exposure to ACEs was associated with a number of negative institutional and community outcomes, such as substance use, institutional charges, institutional incidents (both as an instigator/associate or victim), self-injurious behaviour, correctional program dropout, and revocations with and without an offence. In some cases, the association between institutional and community outcomes varied across gender and ethnocultural group."

Trauma can be unintentionally handed down

Intergenerational trauma can occur when parents or caregivers are living with unhealed trauma, which impacts the context in which the next generation is raised



This was borne out in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

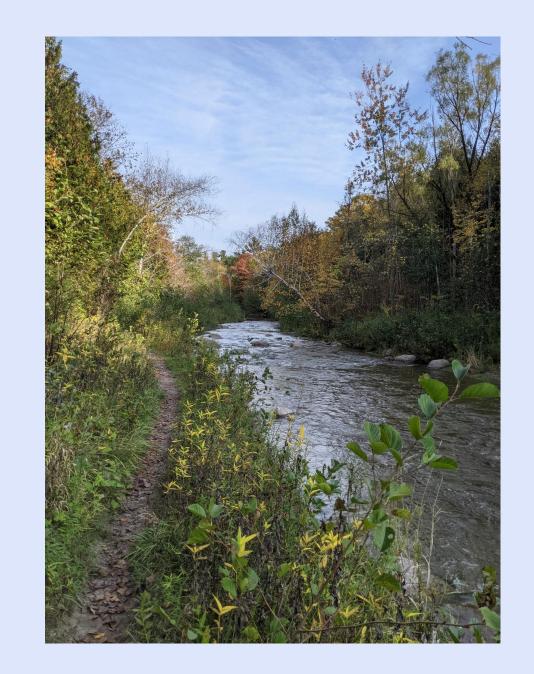
"Many of the witnesses who spoke about their own life or the lives of their missing or murdered loved ones remarked on the repeated acts of physical, sexual, and emotional violence that denied them any sense of safety from childhood onward. **This violence becomes normalized**... The normalization of violence within this context has serious repercussions in terms of Indigenous women's ability to protect themselves when it is necessary to do so.

In many of the truths shared by witnesses, the normalization of violence could be traced back through family lines to trauma experienced in residential and day schools, to the Sixties Scoop, and to other forms of colonial violence."

--Executive summary, Reclaiming Power and Place p. 33

What does this mean for the church's work today?

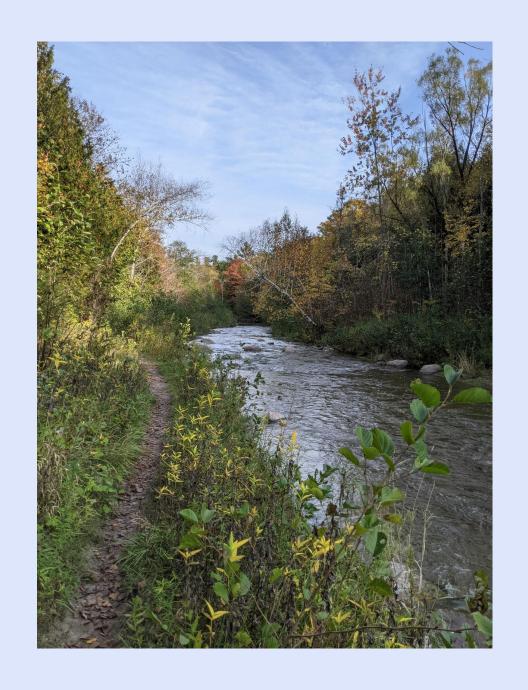
- Part of the church's witness is,
 sinfully, a history of trauma and harm
- That was, and is, a misrepresentation of Jesus
- The wounds we helped cause are still open
- Working for reconciliation is thus the work of anyone and everyone in the church



When we realize we have been wrong, we are called to turn to repentance and reformation

"The church is in constant need of reform because of the failure and sin which mark its life in every age. The church is present when the Word is truly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and as it orders its life according to the word of God."

--Living Faith, 7.1.6



Because of the PCC's legacy, reconciliation is an important part of faithful discipleship today



PCC commitments from *Living Faith*

"God's justice is seen when we deal fairly with each other and strive to change customs and practices that oppress and enslave others.

Justice involves protecting the rights of others.

It protests against everything that destroys human dignity.

Justice stands with our neighbours in their struggle for dignity and respect and demands the exercise of power for the common good.

The church's present path and work toward reconciliation

To work for reconciliation, we must each acknowledge our own history and the ways it intersects with the church's history of profound colonial harm.



Key events in the last 30 years of the PCC's work on reconciliation

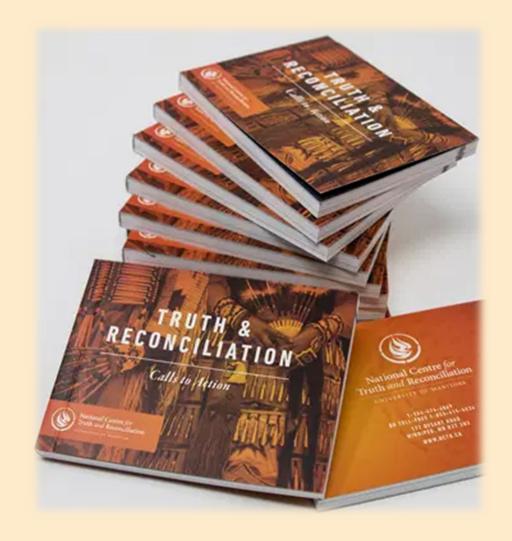
- 1994: Formal Confession for residential schools and complicity in colonization: PCC enters a period of learning and reflection
- 2000s: Various lawsuits are brought against the churches that ran residential schools
- 2006: PCC Healing and reconciliation program established
- 2007: IRS Settlement Agreement finalized
- 2008- 2015 PCC Participates in TRC events and processes
- 2016: General Assembly recommends that congregations and presbyteries study the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and respond to the TRC's Calls to Action; Reconciliation is prioritized in the church's national strategic plan

Key events in the last 30 years of the PCC's work on reconciliation

- **2019**: Formal repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius;* acknowledgement of UNDRIP as the basis of right relations/ framework for reconciliation
- 2021: General Assembly accepts the findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, including its finding of genocide; encouraged congregations and individuals to respond to the Calls for Justice
- 2021-22: Honouring the Children fund established
- 2023: PCC receives information request from the Independent Special Interlocutor appointed to look into unmarked graves; gathers needed materials
- 2024: General Assembly adopts apology for the harms of colonization and residentials schools. A Special Committee of Indigenous and settler Presbyterians prepared the Apology and continue the work of developing guidance for the church

United Nations DECLARATION on the **RIGHTS** of INDIGENOUS **PEOPLES United Nations**

Framework for Reconciliation



Five Fundamental Commitments in the Apology:

- We will **continue to listen and learn from Indigenous people**, leaders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, welcoming and engaging voices 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.

Read the Apology in Full

https://presbyterian.ca/justice/apology-colonization-schools/

Some **Important** Church Resources

Indigenous Justice Page on the Social Action Hub: https://presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/indigenous-justice/

Anti-racism Page on the Social Action Hub:

https://presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/anti-racism/

Work through "Racism and Hate in Canada" and "Why Work to Decolonize?" Both downloadable to at the two Social Action Hub pages listed above

Archives on Residential Schools the PCC ran:

https://presbyterianarchives.ca/2018/08/17/narrative-history/

Learn about the Doctrine of Discovery:

https://presbyterian.ca/justice/doctrine-of-discovery/

Consider supporting the Honouring the Children fund:

https://presbyterian.ca/donate/donate-honouring-children-fund/

Other Important Reconciliation Resources

The Truth and Reconciliation Commissions 94 Calls to Action:

http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls to Action English2.pdf

National Memorial Student Register:

https://nctr.ca/memorial/

Progress tracking on the 94 Calls:

https://yellowheadinstitute.org/trc/

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (*Reclaiming Power and Place*):

https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/

The 231 Calls for Justice that are named in the final report above:

https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls for Justice.pdf

Read the reports released by the Special Interlocutor

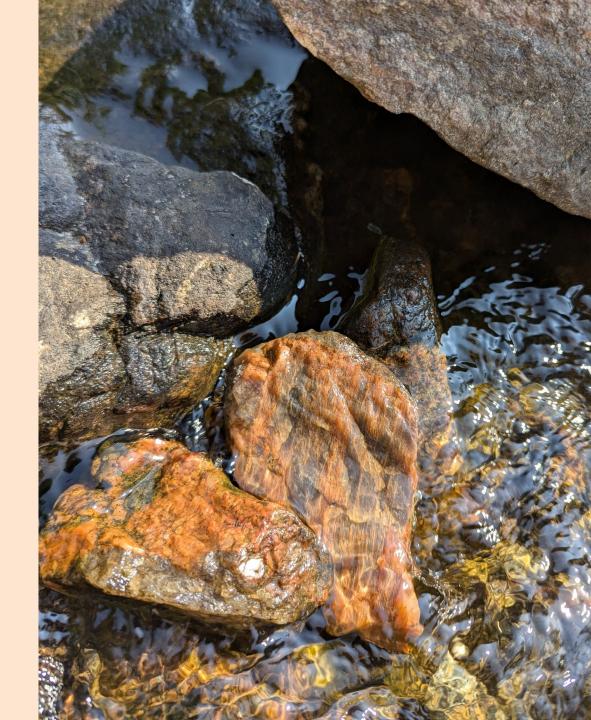
Reports – Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor

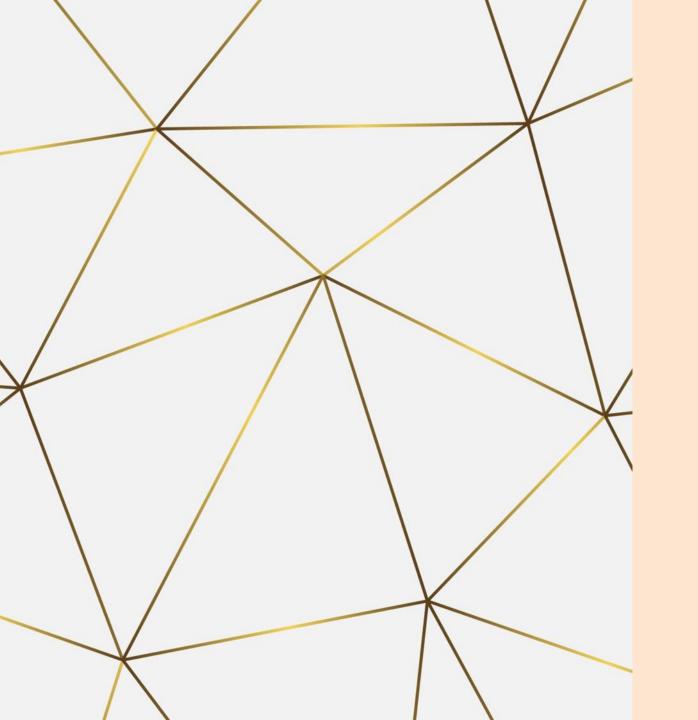
The Children Remembered (UCC site that also has histories of Presbyterian schools) https://thechildrenremembered.ca/school-histories/



Reconciliation is a journey

Memory, for right action





Questions?