



# The United Church of Canada General Council

## Report of the Dialogue on the Theme: Sin, Reconciliation, and Ecclesial Identity

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### **I. The theme:**

Following a fruitful discussion of Trinitarian language at baptism, the Canadian Roman Catholic/United Church of Canada Dialogue sought another topic of mutual interest and lively concern. Realizing that both churches were addressing issues around past failings, and involvement in sinful action, current demands for forgiveness, and the search for reconciliation, we agreed to study this reality further.

The concrete events we had in mind were a) the Demand of Pardon expressed by John Paul II in the year 2000 for past faults committed by members of the Roman Catholic Church, b) the United Church of Canada's response to past antisemitic

behaviour; and c) the reactions of both churches to the Indian Residential School issue in Canada, including official apologies.

These events inspired us to question the underlying theological comprehension of Sin and Reconciliation and to consider if it would be similar or different in each of our churches. As a further step, we wished to explore the ecclesial identity of the two churches as expressed in the approach of each church to corporate and historical responsibility. What concept of church is implied in the way we talk about the sins of the church and approaches to reconciliation? What does it mean to be “church” when that communion is tainted with collective sinful past activities? What can we learn from one another about what it means to repent of actions taken in the name of our churches?

In this way, “Sin, Reconciliation and Ecclesial Identity” became the focus for nine dialogue meetings between November 2000 and June 2004. A list of dialogue participants during this period is attached as Appendix A.

## **II. The process:**

During our first meeting on this topic,<sup>1</sup> we explored the theme of “Sin, Reconciliation and Ecclesial Identity” by considering: the Roman Catholic International Theological Commission text Memory and Reconciliation; the United Church of Canada’s Apology to First Nations People (1986) and Apology to Former Students of Residential Schools (1998) ; the Touchstone article Lessons from the Residential Schools; and the United Church of Canada statement Bearing Faithful Witness (concerning the United Church of Canada’s relationship with Jewish people); as well as a reflective reading of the first three chapters of Genesis.

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