



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 PM02 Truth Telling and Reconciliation Action for Summer 2025

True Document Date: August 8, 2025

Origin: Ingrid Brown

1. What is the issue? Why is it important?

Between 1925 and 1969, The United Church of Canada operated a total of 15 institutions within the Indian Residential School system as part of the federal government's policy of assimilating Indigenous peoples. The 1986 Apology issued by The Rt. Rev. Bob Smith makes no mention of the violence perpetrated at Indian Residential Facilities ("School"). The 1998 Apology issued by The Rt. Rev. Bill Phipps affirms the pain and suffering experienced by students and their families, including the abuse inflicted on some students. It is time to update the 1986 & 1998 Apologies in light of the truths the church has learned since they were first offered.

The church is being asked by residential "school" survivors to explicitly name our denominational complicity in the deaths of babies and children who received improper burial and/or were incinerated - and who never came home. It is important that we continue to heed the words in the 1988 response to the Apology by the All Native Circle Conference that expressed hope and prayer that we live into action and that the words are not symbolic only. As The Rt. Rev. Phipps expressed in his 1998 words, "we pray...that you will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future" we are calling on The United Church of Canada to undertake two actions: offer an additional apology in light of new truths or update existing ones; and lay out a national denominational strategy for living out our commitment to reconciliation in action.

We recognize that the apologies were acknowledged but never accepted.

2. What is happening now?

On May 27, 2021 the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc announced that the remains of 215 children were found buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential "School". This affirmation of Elder's truths led to other investigations at former residential "schools" and the discovery of more unmarked graves and remains that were never returned to families and communities. On June 4, 2021, The United Church of Canada issued a response. In particular Calls to Action 73-76 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report from June 2015 were highlighted. The United Church that the denomination affirmed that all materials related to residential "schools" were submitted to the TRC and are available through the National Residential Schools Memorial Register.

The Manual reminds us that it is the responsibility of every generation to articulate our faith in our time, and the same is true with respect to our ongoing work of reconciliation and decolonization. A new statement that articulates a revised understanding of the ownership of our faults/sins along with the hopes for where we might be going in the future is an important next step, in conjunction with a plan of action.

This is especially important right now as the settler church and the Indigenous church discern how we will relate to one another; the settler church must own our history if we are to craft a new future together. The actions being recommended will help us to come to a common, national understanding of where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going that is not subject to personal perspectives or opinions.

3. What is the recommendation?

1. The General Council of The United Church of Canada undertake an appropriate process to update the 1986 and 1998 Apologies in light of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation discoveries and subsequent similar discoveries at other locations. The update is to include an acknowledgement of the babies and children who died and were denied proper funeral ceremonies, incinerated, and never returned home to their communities and families.
2. The General Council of The United Church of Canada in partnership with The Autonomous Indigenous Organization design, communicate, and implement a coordinated Truth and Reconciliation ministry plan for Communities of Faith and

4. Background information:

In recent social media engagement, the Rev. Rob Shearer (PMRC) shared the following:

"I was honoured to be asked to be a 'witness' today at ?Aps Ciik Cha Chim Hiy Ap (Road to Reconciliation), a monthly gathering of survivors of the The United Church of Canada's Alberni Indian Residential 'School' (1892-1973) who join each month with settlers (like myself) who are there to listen. As a witness - which is a listening and sharing tradition in some Island Indigenous cultures - I've been asked (without using names or images of survivors, in this case) to share what I heard: that is, that the stories of resilience, bravery and healing in the face of violence experienced at these state and church-run institutions (and ongoing violence and lateral violence due to colonialism) is powerful and ongoing. Whenever I attend this group, the stories are beyond heartbreaking and beyond powerful. I never leave unchanged. I've never written about it publicly, because I've never been asked to be a witness. But today, I was specifically asked by the survivors to do so - and to share on social media.

Today's main speaker - who is a survivor who is about the same age as me - shared deep spiritual strength, powerful teaching about profound grief, loss (of her children) and relationship with Creator/God - and even a story of her physical resurrection after an incident of extreme violence many years ago.

I am in awe of her. I am honoured, as a white settler, a male (on this International Women's Day) and Christian clergyperson, to be welcomed into this circle with such (unearned) grace, vulnerability and strength on the part of the survivors. The group has asked me to use my voice send a note to the senior leadership of The United Church of Canada on their behalf, asking us to update our apology to survivors to explicitly name our denominational complicity in the deaths of babies and children who received improperly burial and/or, were incinerated - and who never came home. I will do so in the coming days."

In a follow up comment, the Rev. Tony Snow (CWRC) wrote, "This final point about updating the apology/apologies is critical. For so long, real reconciliation has been ad hoc and temporary, with some Indigenous communities with United Church buildings not even knowing that an apology has been made. Can we finally have a coordinated strategy to deal with reconciliation nationally? Starting with building relationships in meaningful ways in all

areas where this national church has a presence. We have a 2022 Response document that emerged after the 215 were found and 7 years after the TRC Calls to Action were adopted. But this document gives no direction and no metrics to show how we are moving the needle in community. This information is critical if we want to sustain our commitments intergenerationally. The United Church has been very good at making (and tweaking) apologies. And lacking in follow through to enact real, meaningful, partner-building change.”

5. How does this proposal help us to live into our church’s commitments on equity?

This proposal comes at the request of survivors and families of students who attended a residential “school” that was run by The United Church of Canada, as well as the Rev. Tony Snow, Indigenous Minister for Chinook Winds Region. It has been prepared and is presented by the Rev. Ingrid Brown and the Rev. Dr. Bob Filler, with the understanding that Indigenous people should not bear the burden of continuing to hold the settler church accountable for reconciliation. We believe that the actions outlined in this proposal are the necessary next steps in a journey that is already underway but is in need of rearticulation and concrete action.

As such, they are an important part of the ecology of the church.

For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

Please select the appropriate option and provide the key discussion points for items being forwarded to the General Council:

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree without forwarding to the General Council
- ☐ Disagree and forwarding to the General Council

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: GCinfo@united-church.ca

Document Type: [Proposal](#)

General Council: [GC45](#)

Originating Body: [Pacific Mountain Regional Council](#)