



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC44 Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Report for October 19, 2024

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Sara Stratton

I was on leave for 5 months in 2024. My work in the period of this report (September 2023-September 2024) reflects an increasing emphasis on anti-racism in reconciliation, and a continuing focus on education, public witness and restorative justice.

I worked with the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead to develop educational materials on remit 1 focused on reconciliation, rights, and anti-racism. This was followed up with a post-remit consultation with regional staff. We anticipate further working with them to address anti-racism as a key component of reconciliation.

I coordinated with the rest of the Indigenous Ministries and Justice (IMJ) Team to prepare materials for a staff curriculum addressing the non-Indigenous church, reconciliation, and equity. We are awaiting its finalization from Learning and Development. I have also been using this material in presentations to communities of faith, theological schools, and other bodies of the church.

The first "Placing Ourselves in Colonialism" webinar series (also a collaboration with the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead) concluded in September 2023. The positive evaluation of the program has led us to develop a second, more theologically-oriented program for early 2025. The program revealed a strong interest on the part of settler Canadians in understanding their connections to colonialism, both as it played out in the past and continues to impact Indigenous people today. Please see the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead's report for more on the evaluation of the first series.

I collaborated across the Unit and with the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead on a number of issues related to Reconciliation, Indigenous Justice, and Anti-Racism, including the impact of false claims to Indigenous identity on Indigenous peoples and their rights, and the movement supporting the families of missing and murdered women, girls, and Two Spirit people (MMIWG2S), particularly related to the Winnipeg landfills. We held United in Learning sessions on these two topics, which were well attended by people from across the country. We also engaged communities of faith in public witness on “Have A Heart Day” on the underfunding of services for Indigenous children; the Moose Hide Campaign on missing and murdered Indigenous people; and Orange Shirt Day/National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, all of which relate to the TRC Calls to Action.

In terms of restorative or reparative justice (particularly with respect to TRC Calls to Action 73-76), I work with the Executive Minister, General Secretary, and Archives Manager on the *Bringing the Children Home* initiative, which provides funds to financial and archival support to communities affected by UCC-operated residential institutions. We have funded projects in two communities, one of which is nearing completion; and we are in conversation with another two. At the end of this month, I will be attending the next National Gathering of the Special Interlocutor on Missing Children and Unmarked Burial Sites, which will release an Indigenous framework for reparations, and we hope to bring some public work forward from this in 2025.

One area of frustration is that the Covenant of Reconciliation (Call to Action 46) has stalled out. The United Church has provided significant coordination on this at the meetings of the Parties to the Settlement Agreement, but there have been significant changes in the grouping, both in terms of leadership and immediate priorities. This will be followed up.

Lori Ransom

Throughout this reporting period, I continued to serve half-time as the Indigenous Peoples Consultant for the World Council of Churches (WCC). From April 30, 2024, in my other half-time role as a Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animator for the United Church of Canada, I was asked to assume responsibilities as one of two A/Executive Ministers, Indigenous Ministries and Justice. These continuing acting responsibilities created challenges for me in carrying out commitments made before April 30, 2024 to carry out activities through the reporting period in both of my other roles.

As previously reported, my major project, the document, *Addressing Spiritual Violence committed by Christians among Indigenous Peoples in Canada*, was completed in March 2023. This work responds to TRC Call to Action 60. In June 2024, the writing team gave a presentation to the Canadian Theological Society on the decolonized approach used to produce the document. I gave presentations on spiritual violence to a class at Martin Luther University College and as part of a 5-part series of educational presentations on Indigenous issues at Berwick Camp. Plans to launch the document in Fall 2024 have been postponed till 2025.

My role as Member-at-Large on the Executive of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) was renewed for three years. In this capacity, I have been providing leadership to the Christian Interfaith Reference Group (CIRG) of the CCC on spiritual violence and the development of relationships with Indigenous spiritual leaders. These topics were confirmed at the Fall 2023 CCC Governing Board meeting as CIRG's priorities for the next triennium. In the reporting period, I helped plan and organize CIRG meetings and helped develop plans for and do some writing on a report. Owing to CCC budgetary pressure, CIRG has not had any funding to support its work in 2024 and this is impeding progress on its work plan.

The UCC continues to implement TRC Call to Action 61 (iii) through the Justice & Reconciliation (J&R) Fund grant programme. The J&R committee met twice in the reporting period and awarded its full \$100,000 budget for 2024 to 14 projects. A survey was sent to 50 previous grant recipients in February 2024 as part of the first ever evaluation of the J&R Fund. The survey had roughly a 40 percent response rate. Compilation and analysis of responses began but work slowed after the departure of one of IMJ's two programme support personnel in March and was suspended indefinitely in late May 2024 given the need to attend to priorities in my new acting responsibilities. J&R project stories are shared regularly through the Living into Right Relations newsletter.

In collaboration with Archives staff, work to review and edit over 100 UCC day school narratives produced by consultant Michael Kitching is nearing completion. A plan will be developed to share these narratives publicly on a website. In the meantime, these narratives are being shared with Indigenous communities on request.

I worked collaboratively to recruit Indigenous and settler writers to prepare worship materials for the 2024 Indigenous Day of Prayer. I carried out speaking and preaching engagements related to Orange Shirt Day in September 2023. As able, I've contributed to other IMJ team initiatives and the UCC's reparations team.

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