



**The United Church  
of Canada  
General Council**

# **GC45 GS07 Updated Apology for United Church Participation in Residential Institutions for Summer 2025**

True Document Date: August 8, 2025

**Origin: General Secretary**

## **1. What is the issue?**

The United Church of Canada, as an operator of residential institutions, is being asked to issue an updated apology for its role and the actions of its employees in that system. Calls for an updated apology have come from a survivor/United Church settler group in Port Alberni; Pacific Mountain Regional Council (PM02); and in the Final Report of the Special Interlocutor for Missing and Disappeared Children and Unmarked Burials.

## **2. What is happening now?**

Sara Stratton, Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animator, reported on the findings of the Special Interlocutor for Missing and Disappeared Children and Unmarked Burials to the Executive at its November 21-23, 2024 meeting.

In January 2025, after consultation with the General Secretary, Moderator, and IMJ Executive Minister, the PMR Executive Minister and Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice staff met with the Port Alberni ministerial/church plant team. The purpose was to determine if a pastoral visit with the survivor group would be an appropriate next step as the church looked towards a process for a revised national apology. This was agreed, and in March 2025, the GCE agreed that the Moderator, General Secretary, and PMR Executive Minister will undertake the visit.

In its meeting of March 7-9, 2025 the Executive of the General Council agreed to form a Task Group to review the ongoing commitments and work of reconciliation that have emerged since the 1986 Apology and the 1998 Apology from The United Church of Canada to survivors of Residential Schools; explore the necessary ongoing actions including but not limited to an updated apology for the legacies of residential schools by consulting with Indigenous communities in ways that are trauma informed, collaborative, respectful of nation-to-nation relationships, with caretaker communities and rooted in a theology of care and reparative justice.

### **3. What is the recommendation?**

The General Secretary recommends that:

In light of the action of the Executive of General Council in March, 2025, to create a task group to review ongoing commitments and the work of reconciliation and to explore the necessary ongoing actions including but not limited to an updated apology for the legacies of residential schools by consulting with Indigenous communities in ways that are trauma informed, collaborative, respectful of nation-to-nation relationships, with caretaker communities and rooted in a theology of care and reparative justice, that:

the General Council therefore take no further action on PM02 at this time.

### **4. Background information**

In the summer of 2021, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation was the first among a number of Indigenous communities to share information that it had located unmarked and undocumented burial sites on the property of former residential institutions. This was not "news" to these communities; it had been known and spoken of for years, and it factored significantly into the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Findings continue to be shared, including from United Church run institutions in Port Alberni BC and Coqualeetza BC.

In the summer of 2024, ?Aps Ciik Cha Chim Hiy Ap (Road to Reconciliation), a group of survivors and United Church members affiliated with Courageous Community at Alberni Valley United Church provided suggested text for an updated United Church of Canada apology, including a full and specific explanation of the harms perpetrated against the

children. Pacific Mountain Regional Council has also submitted a General Council 45 proposal for a revised, more specific apology (PM02)

In September 2024, the Special Interlocutor reached the end of her mandate and released a final report identifying “the legal, moral, and ethical obligations that Canada must fulfill to address the legislative and structural gaps that exist in identifying, protecting, and commemorating missing and disappeared children and their burials.” One of the 42 obligations calls for renewed apologies:

*Federal, provincial, and territorial governments, churches, the RCMP, universities, and any other organizations that supported and/or operated Indian Residential Schools and associated institutions must apologize for the multiple harms they committed against the missing and disappeared Indigenous children, their families, and communities. For these apologies to meet the criteria of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, they must:*

- *Establish a full and accurate public record of the historical injustices and ongoing harms of genocide, colonization, and mass human rights violations; and*
- *Commit to further substantive material and symbolic reparations and actions in accordance with international human rights law.*

Through the 1986 Apology, the 1998 Apology, and the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), the United Church has taken a measure of responsibility for its role in colonization and in operating residential institutions. Both the 1986 and 1998 Apologies promised a future “living out,” and while they have been acknowledged, they have not been accepted. The Settlement Agreement obligations acknowledged harms, but within a traumatic framework. None of the responses reflect the deeper knowledge that has been unflinchingly placed before us by communities and the Special Interlocutor.

In 2021, former Moderator Richard Bott referenced the church’s responsibility to help bring missing children “the honour we denied them in life.” Both the ?Aps Ciik Cha Chim Hiy Ap (Road to Reconciliation) group and the Special Interlocutor have made clear that time is passing.

Survivors of residential institutions are aging and dying. There is not a lot of time left to give them the full apology that they and all the children deserve.

The United Church has never apologized for its role in day and other colonizing institutions, such as hospitals. Nor has it spoken in depth about spiritual violence against Indigenous people not only in these institutions but more generally in the process of evangelism and ministry on reserve. Any new apology should also speak into these other institutions and the issue of spiritual violence.

An updated apology is an act of restorative justice for those whom we as an institution have harmed. It is also rooted in the United Church's "duty of care" theology, our commitment to reconciliation, and our growing focus on reparative justice as outlined in the strategic plan.

## 5. How does this proposal help us live into the church's commitments on equity?

The action of the Executive of the General Council set in place a process that addresses the request of PM02 in a way that consults with Indigenous nations and people as the church seeks to honour its commitment to reconciliation.

### **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
- ☐ Take no action at this time

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

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