



8 September 2016

Dear Friends and Relations in Jesus Christ:

On 31 March 2016, I stood with representatives of the Aboriginal Ministries Council to publicly state [The United Church of Canada's commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

The church did this not simply to meet the challenge issued in the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), but to meet the challenge we issued ourselves 30 years ago in the Apology to First Nations People: "to walk together...in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed."

And we did it to meet the challenge issued by our faith, as encapsulated in this passage from Corinthians:

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Corinthians 5:18–19)*

Yet, as Paul reminds us in his earlier letter to the Corinthians, our words have no meaning unless they are accompanied by love and intent. And so now I write to ask you, as communities of faith and members of The United Church of Canada, to think, pray, and act in support of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

You may be asking why the church has placed such a priority on this document. You may be wondering what it has to do with you. You may question how a document developed at the United Nations can do anything to improve relations among the peoples of Canada.

The answer to all these questions is that the UN Declaration offers us a new way of understanding how we are in relationship with each other. Not a relationship of domination, but a relationship of mutuality, equity, and respect. And we must all, as individuals, as a church, and as a nation, do our part to build that new relationship.

This fall, the church begins a prayerful exploration of how our policies, practices, and programs align with the "principles, norms, and standards" of the Declaration. We understand those to be the rights to self-determination; to participate in decision-making; to cultural and spiritual identity; to lands and resources; to free, prior, and informed consent; and to be free from discrimination.

Our government recently committed to fully implementing the Declaration. The corporate sector has also been challenged by the TRC to do so. And at this moment, as we are engaged in decision-making on projects like the Energy East and Trans Mountain pipelines and the Site C Dam, they are faced with the question of how to recognize the rights to participation in decision-making; to lands and resources; to free, prior, and informed consent; and to the protection of places of cultural and spiritual significance. In the broader North American context, we see similar concerns raised in response to the Dakota Access Pipeline, and an aggressive response when Indigenous communities and their allies advocate for Indigenous rights.



The United Church has called for [assessment processes on the pipelines that honour free, prior, and informed consent](#). Our ecumenical partner [KAIROS has called for the same regarding Site C](#). The National Anglican Indigenous Bishop and the Anglican Primate have recently issued a [joint pastoral statement on the Dakota Access Pipeline](#), invoking the UN Declaration.

I now ask you to help The United Church of Canada do its part in living out the Declaration, in bringing new life to the Apology that we made 30 years ago, in continuing to move forward together in reconciliation.

Join me in thinking critically about the nature of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the church and in Canada.

Learn more about the history of the relationship between our peoples. The [KAIROS Blanket Exercise](#), available as a workshop or a worship experience, is a terrific way to begin.

Pray that we might build relationships of mutual understanding, equity, and respect.

Take action to build that new relationship. What can do you do?

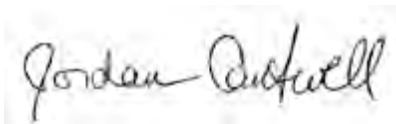
- Learn more about the importance of land to Indigenous culture, spirituality, and identity. [Acknowledge the traditional or treaty territory](#) that your church is on.
- Support the right of Indigenous Peoples to participate in decision-making on issues that affect the land they live on, and to exercise their right to free, prior, and informed consent.
- Tell your MP that you support the Declaration and ask them to support its full implementation. One way this can be achieved is by supporting [Bill C-262](#), a private member's bill to make Canada's laws compliant with the UN Declaration.

In late August, I spent the day with more than 200 members of our church who had chosen to gather in Sudbury to acknowledge 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Apology to First Nations Peoples. One of those people was Alberta Billy, the woman who told the church in 1985 that it owed Indigenous Peoples such an apology. In an interview that will soon be available on [united-church.ca](#) and the November issue of *Mandate*, Alberta was asked what the church could do, 30 years on, to truly live out the Apology.

Her answer was clear and direct: "I really believe that the church has to accept us; we are Indigenous to the land from the Creator, we had a way of life that was very spiritual, we had thanksgiving for everything. The food from the ocean, the food from the forest. We lived with the land and we need to pursue those values again."

I ask you to join me, and the whole church, in once more heeding the call of our wise Elder.

All My Relations,



The Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell  
Moderator, The United Church of Canada