

A reflection for The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Reflecting on the upcoming National Day for Truth and Reconciliation as a non-Indigenous Christian, I acknowledge the history of colonialism and continually commit to learning a more faithful history of Canada. I lament cultural and religious colonialism that violated core principles of the Gospel: human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity and the common good.

The practical things I strive to decolonize in healthcare, education and ministry contexts include trying to understand my privilege, incorporating circle and narrative pedagogies, avoiding taking space and resources of Indigenous peoples, and trying to listen more than I speak. I read Indigenous literature, participate in webinars and courses and consider what Indigenous peoples are saying to settler audiences. I also think it's important to attend Indigenous ceremonies for experiential learning and enjoyed the recent Stalew Pow Wow in Langley. The ceremony and elders' teachings were moving, motivating and relationship-building. This learning involves critical self-reflection and helps in my own personal transformation so that any outward action comes from a good place.

Beyond personal learning, I try to address racism in conversations with friends, family, and community members. I collaborate with Indigenous peoples to breakdown prejudices, and increase awareness through education and Indigenous-Church reconciliation initiatives. I have had to learn how to accept correction and guidance by Indigenous friends, colleagues and elders, and have also learned to listen differently since the communication and guidance may be indirect. I support the Legacy of Hope, an Indigenous charitable organization with the mandate to educate and create awareness and understanding about the Residential School System as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Fund, a registered charity established by the Canadian Catholic church to advance local healing and reconciliation initiatives.

For me, reconciliation is a heartfelt process that is full of hope and humility. I believe reconciliation is possible and am committed to doing my part to effectively collaborate with others toward this vision. I agree with Cecil Chabot of Indigenous Catholic Research Fellowship who states: "I believe honouring and respecting 'all our relations,' as so many Indigenous traditions emphasize, means freely giving myself to the original and ultimate Common Good. It also means not reducing the Church to the failure of some of its lay and clerical members - a complex journey since the suffering, coercion and colonialism faced by Indigenous peoples has often been at the hand of self-professed Christian peoples."

I am pleased that over the past year, the Mission Engagement department of Providence Healthcare has collaborated with the Indigenous Wellness Reconciliation department for two, well-attended in-person learning sessions. In addition, individuals have taken San'yas, Indigenous Canada Coursera, Introduction to Indigenous Health, Indigenous Pastoral Lay Leader Ministry Education and Moving Beyond the Land Acknowledgement. We have incorporated Indigenous drumming into some of our events, are developing relationships with Indigenous people in the DTES and continually seeking ways to decolonize practices.

May the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation provide each one of us an opportunity to learn, reflect and act in our ongoing journey of healing, reconciliation and hope.

The following prayer reflection is an amalgamation of prayers from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlottetown:

Creator God, we praise and thank You for the blessings of life, from your natural bounty and from the work of human hands. We ask you to open our ears to the truths about our collective history shared with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by survivors of Residential Schools.

We ask you to open our minds to the complex and subtle yet profound ways that past mistakes, arrogance, misuse of authority and sinfulness have damaged our social fabric in ways we have barely begun to redress. We express our sorrow for all those Indigenous children and young people who have suffered during their time at Residential Schools over these past many decades; a suffering that continues for many. We ask for comfort, healing and consolation for all Indigenous peoples who are experiencing pain and sorrow over the Residential School legacy.

God of mercy we ask You to open our hearts that we may continue to listen even when the truth challenges us; that we may understand that we are heirs and have benefitted from the spoils of a system that has shown itself capable of domination and cruelty, whether or not we personally contributed.

May we commit ourselves in all humility to do what we can and support the efforts of others to restore our ruptured social fabric. Give us courage, humility and wisdom so that we can walk the path of truth and reconciliation in justice, peace and love.

The use of the word subtle in the prayer can be misunderstood and that's why I adapted it to include 'subtle yet profound'. We are invited to consider the nuanced impact of systemic issues and are invited into a deeper and more thoughtful engagement with the complexities. My read of the use of the word subtle in this context highlights how some of the ways past mistakes, arrogance, and misuse of authority have damaged our social fabric and are not always immediately obvious. Many of these harms are woven into the very systems and institutions we operate within, often operating beneath the surface in complex and nuanced ways. By describing them as subtle, we acknowledge that their influence can be insidious, pervasive, and difficult to detect, requiring careful reflection and deep understanding to fully recognize and address. This choice of wording encourages us to remain open to uncovering the less visible but significant ways in which historical wrongs continue to shape our present reality.

By saying 'subtle yet profound' we capture the deep and often blatant ways in which these harms have affected Indigenous people. We highlight the severity and obviousness of the issues being referenced—mistakes, arrogance, misuse of authority, and sinfulness. These are not minor or barely perceptible offenses; rather, they have had profound and visible impacts on our social fabric, particularly when we consider historical and ongoing injustices like colonialism, racism, and systemic abuse.