

Mamow Be-Mo-Tay-Tah

Let us walk together

Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network
The Canadian Council of Churches

Welcome!

Mamow Be-Mo-Tay-Tah. Let us Walk Together. Was that not the original intent of the Creator's covenant with the people? Treaties establish a relationship and responsibilities for all parties to the agreement. Since we are all then treaty people, is walking together not what all who live in Canada are called to practice?

This new resource from the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN) is designed to help Canadians engage with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools and better understand the legacies of colonization that Aboriginal peoples live with today.

Beside the essays, testimonies and reflections included in this written resource, we have included a DVD interview with Anglican Indigenous Bishop Mark MacDonald to help bring this resource to life.

The Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network is especially grateful to José Zárte and Norah McMurtry who have guided the production of this year's resource, including developing this all-indigenous roster of authors. They have persevered through many months of planning, soliciting contributions, editing, proofing, and organizing. We are grateful to the authors for their written contributions: Harley Eagle, Richard Hill, Joann Sebastian Morris, Stan McKay, Lori Ransom, Freda Lapine, Ruth Yellowhawk, Janet Sigurdson, Jose Zarate, Daniel Paul, Bishop Mark MacDonald, Tim Thompson, Harold Roscher, Marlene Brant Castellano.

Anne O'Brien was once again indispensable with her excellent editing skills. Louis Rémillard translated the entire document into French. We are grateful to Saskia Rowley Fielder and Jane Thornton of the Anglican Church of Canada for their creative design and layout skills and for their patience.

What can you do to support racial justice?

- Plan to give time throughout the year to engage in learning, discussion and outreach — both with communities that experience the debilitating effects of racism and communities that live with privilege.
- Find ways to journey together as you confront the reality of racism and explore how racial justice and reconciliation can be achieved.
- Send us your suggestions for how we might improve our support for your work.

The mandate of the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN) is to accompany Canadian churches and church organizations who are working

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toward racial justice, racial reconciliation, and peace to transform themselves and their communities. The CEARN Steering Committee is made up of representatives from members of the Canadian Council of Churches and sister ecumenical organizations.

The Commission on Justice and Peace of The Canadian Council of Churches serves as the institutional home for CEARN. The Canadian Council of Churches is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 22 churches of Anglican, Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions.

Peter Noteboom
Associate Secretary, Justice and Peace
The Canadian Council of Churches

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Becoming Comfortable With the Uncomfortable

By Harley Eagle

... be then as wise as snakes, and as gentle as doves

OVER THE LAST few decades there have been many efforts by Canadian Christian denominations to bridge the all-too-visible social gap between dominant Canadian society and folks of Native ancestry. Most of these efforts have been written from the perspective, style and format recognizable and comfortable to dominant, white Canadians. The following resource attempts to utilize more of an Indigenous People's perspective. What follows is two-fold: first, you will hear *Our Voices* as Native Peoples of this land about the effects of racism and oppression on us, and our communities, and thoughts on paths of healing and being anti-racist. Secondly, we felt it was important to present our voices within a process that is more in keeping with the Native worldview. We looked to the Medicine Wheel or Circle process.

The first task seems somewhat easier as more and more Native People are finding agency and venues to present our history and the outcomes of colonization. It is more of a challenge, especially when using English which is considered more of a noun-based language, to capture our sacred teachings that derive from conceptual languages based in oral traditions. We know that there is no all-encompassing, pan-Indigenous worldview that encapsulates the many understandings and expressions of the way of life of the Original Nations and Peoples

of this land. Therefore we recognize that even our presentation here of naming the Circle process as the Medicine Wheel is limiting and runs the risk of labelling a process for which there is no one label. But we do hope that by presenting in this fashion we are offering a helpful pattern or process that impart these stories in meaningful ways.

We ask those of Indigenous heritage who strive to walk in the ways of our Ancestors for your understanding in our attempt. Our intent is not to say that the descriptions, words and process that follow are the only way of describing the Circle process but we do hope to use what we know, stemming from our experiences and teachings. For those that read and utilize this resource whose heritage is from other parts of the world, we ask that you do not misunderstand our efforts as an attempt to codify or set in stone our understandings. It is our hope that you embrace the process as something that will help you in your journey of seeking a better understanding of racial justice and what it means to be anti-racist and allies to Native People.

For many, the process of colonization is a process that happened in some distant land many years ago. Yet for others it is a process that is ongoing, alive and well in our communities and indeed within ourselves. It seems most understand colonization as only the subjugation of a People and the taking of their land. What is important to remember is that it was also about changing the world view of the Original People. We have created this resource using a process more in keeping with a counteraction to the colonizing process. We feel this understanding is fundamental to decolonizing our minds and standing against forced assimilation and racism.

Further reinforcement for our choice of direction for this resource is the current condition of our environment. No longer can we deny that our earth is suffering from the effects of industrialization and a way of life based upon greed, without regard for the effects on the land. For most Indigenous Peoples from this part of the world there is a realization that, in order to walk in a way that provided for balance both within a human being and external to a human, a way of living was required that paid respectful attention and relationship to all things to insure a healthy existence. Therefore respectful relationship to all things was a

hallmark of the cultures of the People of this land and at its core a way of living with and for the environment rather than seeking to control the land for personal profit.

When Indigenous people speak of racism, they often make connections with the effects on the land and the need for freedom to live walking in balance within ourselves and all that surrounds us and to continue that cycle in and for our children. Therefore the flow of this resource seeks to capture a process less linear and more in keeping with a circular flow, leaning heavily on Indigenous wisdom. This wisdom leads us to the symbol of the Medicine Wheel and how it represents an understanding of balance within a human being.

In looking at the symbol of the Medicine Wheel we are reminded that it holds deep meaning for us as we progress on life's journey. It finds its logic in the patterns of nature, four cardinal directional points, four basic elements. It expresses cycles just as we find in the natural world, the seasons, the cycle of day and night and the natural rhythms of our bodies. We are told by Indigenous teachings that in order to walk as balanced human beings, we need to pay attention to the four areas within us expressed as the Spiritual, Emotional, Physical and Intellectual quadrants. Since the design of this resource looks to the circle process, our stories and articles will follow this flow and will be divided into these four quadrants.

Description of the four quadrants

Over the last several years, I have had the privilege of facilitating or being a part of the Circle process, by using it with communities and families in conflict, addressing difficult issues and for decision-making. The following descriptions are from my experience and follow my particular Dakota cultural teachings. There is a good chance that others would explain it differently.

The Spiritual quadrant is where we set the tone for the work and bring focus to what we are doing. Here we are reminded that we are all members of the human race, with different experiences and

understandings but we all have contributions to make to the process. For some we may need to remember that we do not have all the answers but are a piece of the puzzle, for others we may need to realize that we are valued in this process and that people will want to hear what we have to offer.

This quadrant is also where we are reminded of appropriate behaviours that will be helpful towards a good outcome of our time together. We are reminded of how to treat one another in respectful ways based on the values we all cherish — generosity, humility, courage, truthfulness, patience, respect and love. It is important to show appropriate respect for higher power, the land, Elders and children. If our goal is to provide a safe place to be open and honest with one another then careful attention must be paid to this quadrant.

The next quadrant is the Emotional, where we hear the stories. In this resource, often the stories will not be easy to hear and will illicit from us deep emotions. It is important to let them be and to stay engaged in the listening process, not to jump to solutions or to take a defensive stance. You may also find yourself within the stories and you may begin to identify with certain aspects of the stories and with certain players. This is a good thing and to be expected as this helps to build trust and ownership for this work. It will also have you asking the question of why and how this could have happened.

These questions lead us into the next quadrant that of the Physical. In Indigenous teachings, the physical quadrant is not only about our bodies and paying attention to its need to maintain good health but it also pays attention to the relational and how things are connected. In looking at racism, here is where we begin seek answers to the question of why and how could this have happened? It means intentionally digging deeper and hearing the opinions of how historically and presently racism plays out in the life of Native peoples and communities.

We also look at government and legislative mandates that put into law policies that led to the results we find in these stories. This is the quadrant where we go deep and explore profound issues that are foundational to the functioning of our society and figure out how they all fit together and have brought us to results found in these stories. But

it is also where we can begin to find hope because throughout these stories when you hear our Native voices you will hear of our resilience, strength, genius and brilliance to survive and still be here.

Finally we end with the Intellectual quadrant. It is by working through the three previous quadrants that we can come to a place where we can make good decisions together. Hopefully as you have embraced the stories you will have grown and come to new understandings. This is the section where we present ideas of how to move ahead in ways that will affect change and break harmful cycles. We also will look at what others are doing and will be able to see that we are not alone in trying to make much needed change. It is also a time to present our own ideas and test them with each other based on what we have learned from moving through the previous quadrants.

This brings us back to the Spiritual quadrant. If we have followed the guidelines established in the first quadrant we begin to see the value of its teachings and reminders. We begin to realize how it is vital to undoing racism to hold on to and express these values in all aspects of our life. It is vital for breaking cycles of oppression because it replaces them with something that is good. Again it is valuable to mention that it is difficult to explain a process that requires us practicing and experiencing its strengths.

One point brought up time and time again for many folks working on this issue is that this cannot not be strictly an academic exercise. It must be focused on the stories and the high level of emotion they bring out. Indeed it is often our experiences that motivate many of us in this work. At the center of the Circle process is “self”, finding where you fit into this picture and, by design, how it will lead you as a participant to a deeper understanding of who are and where you fit both in the making of the problem and the undoing it. For that we need courage and we need each other. We need courage to hear and embrace the stories. We need each other for support and for a fullness of ideas. You are about to undertake a journey that will challenge you in your innermost self. But if we truly want to be on a journey, *walking together* in authentic ways, we must embrace the challenge. We are convinced it could be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life.

Perhaps one of the most vital of needs to embark on this anti-racism endeavour is to be able to listen deeply. The stories you will read here and hear in other places go beyond simply gathering information. If we listen deeply, they will lead us to look deeply at the issues and circumstances that surround the difficult relations both historically and presently between dominant Canada and descendants of its Original Peoples. Deep listening will take us to a place of asking why it all happened and whet our appetite to dig for deeper understanding. With deeper understanding comes creative and holistic solutions toward a healing journey, toward where we can all feel we have a place and responsibility to each other and to the land.

Deep listening leads to connecting to one another in authentic ways. We cannot do this work alone nor can we jump too quickly to simply getting along. We need to enter into a process that helps us embrace the myriad difficult issues before us: the Indian Residential School experience and its legacy in our communities; treaty rights violations; the murder of Aboriginal women going unnoticed; Canadian apartheid through the Reserve system; poverty; land and resource exploitation — the list goes on. Common to all these issues is racism. In this resource, we attempt to expand the understanding of racism beyond crimes and brutality based on race enacted by a few hateful bad apples to a realization of systemic abuse of power and control to maintain the privilege of a few. The latter requires all of us in this society to act.

The Canadian experience is not unique. For many years now, Indigenous Peoples from all over the globe have been working both in their own lands and with each other to address the harms and crimes committed against them. In 2007, the United Nations passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It was a hard-fought battle encompassing decades of difficult work. That was merely the beginning. Now comes the hard work of pushing national governments and peoples to live by this Declaration. Changing political will is not the work of Indigenous Peoples alone. It is the work of all humanity.

As this resource is being assembled, it is just over a year since Prime Minister Harper issued an apology on behalf of the Canadian Government to First Nations Peoples who suffered by the Indian Residential School

policy, acknowledging that it was wrong. A five-year process of Truth and Reconciliation around the same issue, though stalled and delayed, has been embarked upon. But apologies and reconciliations will fail without wholesale changes being made that effect relationships in authentic ways.

We hope that this resource will be one tool that congregations and denominations can look to in the quest for the liberation of all. Racism not only binds those marginalized by race but it also enslaves those who receive benefit based on race. Recognizing and working towards this truth is a goal of this resource. The hope is to build strength in numbers as we embrace an anti-racist journey and liberate our minds. It is our sense that incorporating a process that values balance and equality well suits our journey of walking together. ▣

Mitakuye Oyasin, All my Relations, Harley Eagle

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