

Worship and Educational Suggestions – National Indigenous Peoples Day

Ideas for Congregational Celebration

Background

In the spirit of “truth and reconciliation” we encourage congregations to mark the celebration of National Indigenous Peoples Day. Growing awareness and knowledge of the full truth of the place of Indigenous peoples in the past, present and future of our land is one of the steps we can take on the path of reconciliation.

What is National Indigenous Peoples Day?

June 21 is National Indigenous Peoples Day. This is a day for all Canadians to recognize and celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures and outstanding contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Also see

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013718/1534874583157>.

Why Celebrate Indigenous People?

The sixteenth century Doctrine of Discovery validated a perspective of Indigenous peoples as uncivilized and worthy of conquest and enslavement. The history long taught in Canadian Schools glossed over or ignored the strength and history of Indigenous peoples prior to European contact. When mentioned in the history of Canada, Indigenous peoples were shown as a minor side note. We have been given the impression that Indigenous peoples were an inferior people who were dying out.

But our understanding is changing. Canadians are recognizing the falseness and blindness of the history we have been taught. We are recognizing the need to learn what we did not know. We are recognizing the need to honour those who have been dishonoured.

As an act of justice and reconciliation we non-indigenous settler and new-comer peoples are “re-storying” our knowledge about the place and life of Indigenous peoples on this land. The willingness to restory their framework of knowledge is modelled for us by Jesus, Peter and the earliest followers of Jesus in the New Testament. In Mark 7:24-30 we read of Jesus’ initial refusal to heal a gentile woman’s daughter with a comment that includes comparing her to a dog. But he changes his perspective and his actions in light of the woman’s response.

In Acts 11:1-18 we read of how a vision of animals formerly considered unclean changed the story believed by Peter and the Jewish followers of Jesus in Jerusalem regarding the inclusion of Gentiles in the new community.

We are revising our framework and perspective as we learn what we had formerly been unaware of. On National Indigenous Peoples Day we celebrate and honour the rich cultures and histories, the wisdom and gifts, the strength and resilience of Indigenous peoples.

Congregational Ideas

Local Activities

Contact local Indigenous groups to see if there is a way to participate in or support activities they are planning for National Indigenous Peoples Day.

Educational Display

Investigate and set up an educational display in your church – perhaps about the culture of the people whose traditional territory you worship on, about the treaty history of the land you worship on, or the about the distribution of Indigenous national territories in North America. The <https://native-land.ca/> website may be a helpful resource.

Educational Session

Have a youth and/or adult education session or series learning about rich indigenous history and culture from Indigenous voices via videos available online. Here are some examples.

We are the Haudenosaunee – Oren Lyons and Sydney Hill – 7 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DofTnRhm5o>

We Are Part of the Earth – Oren Lyons – 8 minutes [https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSwmqZ272As)

[v=bSwmqZ272As](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSwmqZ272As)

Our Seven Ojibway Teachings – Dave Courchene – 12 minutes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sASjfNI_ID0

Voices From Here – Richard Hill – 13 minutes [https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ckxi7rjGac)

[v=8Ckxi7rjGac](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ckxi7rjGac)

Wahkohtowin: Cree Natural Law – George Breriton, Fred Campiou, Isaac Chamakese and

William Dreaver – 24 minutes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTXMrn2BZB0>

“Curse of the Axe” – Ron Williamson and Luc Lainestory – 88 minutes

<https://asiheritage.ca/asi-media/curse-of-the-axe>

Children’s Time:

Tell about the history of maize or potatoes, both bred by Indigenous people from naturally occurring plants. Consider using this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=439cZOjls0I>) about potatoes written and narrated by Hielke De Jong and created by James Sawatsky, both of Bethany Mennonite Church in Niagara. De Jong was born on a farm in Friesland in the Netherlands. He spent most of his working career as a research scientist in potato breeding at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Research Centre in Fredericton, NB. Consider providing purple potato chips after the video. Here is a suggested conversation to have with the children after watching the video.

My favourite way to eat potato is [...] what is your favourite way to eat potato?

The video is made by a man called Hielke who is part of our larger church family. He knows so much about potatoes, that he is actually a doctor! And he writes about them, and helps people around the world grow them. Why do you think he wants people to know the history of the potato?

Wild potatoes were domesticated in the Andean High Plateau around Lake Titicaca by Aymara-speaking people. This is in South America, between Bolivia and Peru. How were their potatoes grown? I imagine it’s hard work to grow potatoes on the side of a mountain!

Are the potatoes they grew the same colour and shape as the ones you eat?

It took hundreds of years - careful planning and careful planting - to develop the type of potato that people eat around the world today. Does your family have a garden? Do you grow potatoes?

These people are plant-breeders and excellent farmers. They took the wild potato and developed hundreds of varieties, including the purple potatoes in the video. Isn't that impressive? It makes me want to learn more about technology that Indigenous nations created. We all have things to share with each other and God wants us all to love each other and take care of one another.

So next time you eat your favourite potato, as well as saying thank you to God, and the farmer, and the truck driver, you can say thank you to the people of the Andes.

Let's say a prayer of blessing...

Sermon Suggestions:

Thematic focus: "changing our story or the framework we live by," where "conversion" is a re-storying/reframing of one's understanding.

Mark 7:24-30

Jesus changes his perspective/learns a new story.

Acts 10:10-16; 11:1-18

Peter changes his perspective/learns a new story about who is acceptable to God.

Mark 4:9, Luke 8:8

Many parables of Jesus end with the exhortation "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" Do we have the ears to listen and understand the "other" story we are hearing about the history and nature of Canada?

Responsive Reading in Celebration of Indigenous Peoples

(use the attached reading or write your own to use as a declaration or litany during worship)

When God had completed the work of Creation,
on the sixth day of the universe,
God saw that all Creation was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

It was all very good.

When Jesus began his public ministry he declared

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...
to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free" (excerpt Luke 4:18)

As followers of Jesus we are called to continue in the way of the Spirit of the Lord,
"in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23) as well as in concrete action (Matthew 5:9, Luke 10:36-37).

Today we declare our intention to do justice (Micah 6:8)
by taking a small step on the path of truth and reconciliation

by celebrating the wisdom, contributions and strengths of Indigenous peoples that have long been ignored, forgotten and even denied.

To *acknowledge* a people is to recognize their true presence, to declare intent to undo the injustice of misrepresentation and denial.

To *honour* a people is to hold them in esteem and ascribe them value, to relate to them with respect.

To *acknowledge* and *honour* is to celebrate a people.

Indigenous people have lived here sharing and caring for this land for thousands of years.

We acknowledge and honour the Indigenous people of this land.

Today we celebrate the wisdom, strengths and contributions of Indigenous peoples in the past, the present and the future.

We respect the great diversity of their cultures.

Indigenous peoples of this continent developed corn by controlled breeding of wild grass.

Indigenous peoples of our sister southern continent Developed tomatoes and hundreds of varieties of potatoes.

We thank and honour the Indigenous people of this land.

The Haudensosaunee practiced a system of government based on treaty and representative democracy that brought peace to five warring nations long before democracy became the norm in west European culture.

We pay them honour and respect.

According to a federal Canadian website, Canada, and her French and British forbears, made 70 historic treaties and 25 modern treaties with 461 Indigenous nations and communities.

We acknowledge a treaty is a covenant to live together in peace according to the agreement that has been reached.

We honour Indigenous peoples and ourselves
when we live up to the words that have been spoken and written.
We owe Indigenous peoples the honouring of the treaties that exist.

The website referenced is <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1380223988016/1544125243779>.

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