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**Mobilizing for
Mission**

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The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada.
The House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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January 12, 2012

Re. Crown – First Nations Gathering, January 24, 2012

Respected leaders on the Northern part of Turtle Island:

Warmest greetings, and blessings for 2012 to you on behalf of our church communities.

We write to inform you of our deep interest in, and hope for, the Crown – First Nations Gathering later this month. These days immediately following the Prime Minister's apology to Survivors of Indian Residential Schools; Canada's assent to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the convening of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are ripe with potential for justice and reconciliation between Indigenous People and Settlers. On January 22, churches in our communions will be joining together in prayer that this Gathering will provide positive and tangible momentum for reconciliation.

Our churches do not have a direct history of running residential schools. Nevertheless, we recognize that the troubled history of assimilation, paternalism and structural racism is ours as the Church, and ours as residents of Canada. We lament the brokenness of our relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada. We share in your words of apology, Mr. Prime Minister. As followers of Christ the reconciler we affirm and celebrate what Indigenous theologian Terry LeBlanc has said: "that Aboriginal people have a contribution to make to this place and nation – we need to do things to ensure that this contribution can be re-acquired. If there was a wrong, there is a right. This needs to move from personal change to collective responsibility at multiple levels." January 24 is a day for making things right.

Gentlemen as you prepare for this important Gathering we encourage you to adopt a posture of flexibility and respectful listening – particularly in the interest of re-acquiring the full contribution of Indigenous people to this place and nation. In our interactions with Indigenous people in the contexts of ministry, community and justice work we have come to understand that we are all treaty people and that a nation to nation framework is a key part of reconciliation. In this era of truth and reconciliation a First Nations – Crown gathering is a profound opportunity to shed past approaches of paternalism or suspicion and build a new relationship of trust and collaboration.

National Chief Atleo, we appreciate your continuing recognition of the need for a new relationship between First Nations and the Crown and the need for Indigenous leadership in addressing key issues in Indigenous communities. In particular we affirm the principle of *First Nation control of First Nation education*. Given the deep association of education with assimilation and paternalism via residential schools we believe that education is a central realm for reconciliation. In a submission to the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education called [Living the Story of Reconciliation](#), our Centre for Public Dialogue has presented detailed recommendations in favour of Indigenous leadership in education, including:

- consistent support for Indigenous led boards and administrative structures;
- robust provisions for culture, values, and community participation in education; and
- urgent measures to address funding inequity.

We most certainly look forward to the report of the National Panel and we hope that your discussions on the 24th will set the context for tangible reform and reconciliation in education.

As Christian believers in the Reformed tradition we passionately believe that Christ came to make *all* things new. In our recent interactions with Indigenous communities, leaders and organizations we have hope that this promise of *all things new* includes the relationship between Indigenous and Settler communities in this blessed place called Canada. It is with this hope that we wish you and your colleagues God our Creator's sacred blessings of wisdom and discernment as you work for a new and reconciled relationship on January 24 and beyond.

Sincerely,



Rev. Bruce Adema
Director of Canadian Ministries
Christian Reformed Church



Rev. John Kapteyn
Executive Secretary,
Regional Synod of Canada
Reformed Church in America

cc.: AFN Regional Chiefs
The Honourable John Duncan PC., MP
Linda Duncan, MP
Carolyn Bennet, PC, MP
Greg Rickford, MP