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Dear Friends:

A year ago this week the leaders of the Reformed Church in America and Christian Reformed Church in Canada wrote to our churches with a request for prayers for God's presence and blessing at the Crown First Nations Gathering (Jan. 24, 2012). We echo that request for prayer today, a time when indigenous justice has received significant public attention because of the Idle No More movement and the high level meeting between First Nations leaders and the Prime Minister (Jan. 11, 2013). In this rare moment of broad public reflection on indigenous justice and reconciliation we hope that Christian communities will join in thoughtful discernment, prayers of hope and gratitude and active pursuit of restored relationships.

The reality of broken relationships between indigenous people and non-indigenous people is evident in the suspicion and fear common in news comment sections, and sometimes in our own hearts and minds. Fear stalls reconciliation and prolongs injustice and brokenness. We know full well that Idle No More is unpredictable and controversial. The messages of this movement and media campaigns, for and against, require our careful discernment and, we submit, the suspension of a posture of fear. We can do so in the confidence that God will encourage the momentum of reconciliation in his kairos time.

We have listened carefully to indigenous Christian leaders in this important time. We take [their perspectives](#) on the links between legal treaties and spiritual principles of covenant with deep respect. In this moment indigenous people are reminding us of the urgent need for a new relationship between First Nations and Canada based on mutual respect and a "nation to nation" relationship as expressed in treaties. A treaty is a sacred agreement between the people of Canada and First Nations that implies deep mutual responsibilities. The failures of mutual responsibility over generations, broken treaties and policies of assimilation are all elements of a fractured covenant that has had devastating effects on indigenous communities and on true shalom in Canada as a whole.

In 1987 and again in 2007, churches in Canada acknowledged our covenant relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada. Those words remain true for us again today:

As a country, we should not allow this historic moment to slip by without taking action.... While some of the details may be complex, requiring intense discussion and negotiation, a healthy dose of political vision, and will is essential if Canada is to move forward with a new covenant.

May God bless us and disturb us with a beautiful hope that refuses fear and suspicion and embraces new relationships with all of our neighbours in a spirit of courage, joy and possibility. As we live into a new covenant between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Canada we can join good words with prayer and action.

Please consider sharing some of the following suggestions in your community in the coming weeks:

- Offer this prayer or something similar in the context of a worship service:
Sovereign God and Sustaining Creator, we pray that your Spirit moves mightily in our hearts and our communities, breathing new life into the broken relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Canada We pray that you would use the public prominence of these issues today to transform the relationship between the Canadian government, citizens and indigenous peoples. Bless our leaders with wisdom and stir us as responsible and passionate citizens. May your Spirit work in us to be witnesses and active learners in this moment for truth, reconciliation and justice.
- Write to your local Member of Parliament and the Prime Minister to inform them that you are in prayer for, and eager to see, continued momentum for justice and reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours.
- Learn about the justice and reconciliation work of CRC and RCA at the [Centre for Public Dialogue](#). The Centre has ongoing programs to support learning and action on Indigenous Justice. We encourage members and congregations to join this work, and to learn to pray and act in your communities.

Friends of Jesus Christ, there is much to be done – to root out sins in our hearts, our structures and public spaces, and to nurture ways of being that bear the fruit of friendship, justice and reconciliation. Let us commit ourselves to this work, made possible through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Indeed may God bless us and disturb us as covenant people and as ambassadors of reconciliation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Ben Vandezande
Director of Canadian Ministries
Christian Reformed Church



Rev. John Kapteyn
Executive Secretary,
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