**Principles for Reconciliation in Education**

DRAFT For discussion –November 5, 2014

***As Canadians who feel called by the Creator to walk a path of reconciliation and right relationship, we commit to work together, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, for justice and equity in Indigenous education.***

***We call on all people of this land, particularly the Canadian government, to support changes in Indigenous education policy and funding based on the following principles:***

* **A renewed relationship must be built on justice and equity**
The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this land is broken. For the relationship to become healed and renewed, it must be rebuilt on the values of respect, justice and equity, based on historic commitments to peace and friendship. Renewed relationships of mutual trust require “good faith” consultation and a commitment to free, prior and informed consent, as described in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
* **Indigenous control of education is critical to reconciliation**
Changes to Indigenous education policy and funding is a matter of great urgency but also offers an opportunity to renew the relationship. Indigenous peoples must be able to establish and control their own educational systems in order to properly include their own cultural and spiritual values, Indigenous languages and perspectives, and the full participation of communities and elders. Such control of education includes control of the financial resources provided for educational purposes.
* **Funding support for education must be immediate and equitable**
Indigenous children have the right to equitable financial support in education. The underfunding of Indigenous education as compared to other Canadian children is offensive to Canadian values of justice, equity and respect. This must be addressed independent of the resumption of policy negotiations. In this era of truth-telling and reconciliation, when Canada and the churches have apologized for the assault on Indigenous children, families and cultures through the residential school system, full and immediate funding for Indigenous education would be an act not only of justice but of reconciliation.

**Background to these principles**

The promise of the 2008 federal government’s apology was for a renewed relationship built on trust, respect and the mutual recognition of rights and responsibilities. Yet, the persistent disparities in educational opportunities between First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and the rest of the population of Canada, leave this promise of a new relationship unfulfilled.

The systemic and consistent marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada reflect discriminatory government policies that are based on attitudes of racial superiority. One area where, this marginalization is most glaring and morally indefensible is in the area of Indigenous education. In an era of truth and reconciliation it is unacceptable that Indigenous children and families have graduation rates of less than 40%, and that there are funding gaps of $3500-$4000 per student when compared with provincial education systems.

Discriminatory and inequitable education systems have deeply hindered the advancement of justice for Indigenous people in Canada. Education plays a unique and dynamic role in the restoration of cultures that is so urgently needed. Education is the sacred act of sharing knowledge, wisdom and values from one generation to the next. It is an holistic intellectual, cultural and spiritual enterprise that is essential for the growth and wellbeing of people, communities, and nations. Education is essential for reconciliation.

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures. This requires Indigenous authority and control over the educational process of Indigenous children. Additionally, there must be an equitable sharing of the benefits of this Land, particularly resources for education. An equitable sharing of land and resources will enable the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous values and ideals in every community, and equip Indigenous Peoples with the necessary tools to participate successfully communally, nationally and globally.

In the tears and testimony of survivors; in the resounding call for justice in Indigenous communities; in the voices of [Shannen](http://www.fncaringsociety.ca/shannens-dream) and [Jordan](http://www.fncaringsociety.ca/jordans-principle); and in the imperfect and heartfelt acts of solidarity of non-Indigenous people, we sense the movement of the Spirit and the call of the Creator in our mutual longing for justice and reconciliation.

While the journey of reconciliation is a long one, we live in a moment of profound hope and opportunity. This is certainly a moment for the churches and faith communities of Canada to seek a good that is common: to amplify the voices of our Indigenous sisters and brothers as they seek justice and reconciliation. We are this nation together and the political will to make things right is ours to create. The TRC and our apologies from pulpits and Parliament all demonstrate that the history of assimilation and paternalism is the heritage of all who live in this place called Canada. Ignorance and indifference are, therefore, not an option –when one part of the Body suffers we all ache. As Justice Murray Sinclair said: “Education got us into this mess and education can get us out.” Through education trust was destroyed, but through education, the trust between peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, can be reconstructed. With the leadership of Indigenous peoples, broken covenants can become whole and our broken relationships can be reknit.

With the wisdom of Elders; with prayer and celebration; with decades of rich research and best practices; with the stories of struggle and success in Indigenous schools; and with the voices of hundreds of thousands of citizens and people of faith standing with Indigenous people, we can joyfully demonstrate that reconciliation is tangible, and that Indigenous kids and cultures are important to all of us.