

The Presbyterian Church in Canada Statement on Aboriginal Spiritual Practices

First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, before any encounter with Christianity, found meaning, spiritual benefit and the presence of the creator through life-giving indigenous spiritual practices that have deeply rooted traditions.ⁱ

Through the churches' participation in the residential school system, The Presbyterian Church in Canada contributed to the banning of those traditions. The Presbyterian Church in Canada presumed to know better and in our cultural arrogance tried to suppress practices whose value we were then incapable of perceiving.ⁱⁱ We acknowledge in a spirit of repentance our role in failing to recognize and respect these spiritual traditions and practices. The church believes that faith and devotion, reverence for life, truth and goodness coexist both in and outside of our own Christian experience.ⁱⁱⁱ

As part of the churches' commitment to a journey of truth and reconciliation, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has learned that many facets of Aboriginal traditional spiritualities bring life and oneness with creation. Accepting this has sometimes been a challenge for The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We are now aware that there is a wide variety of aboriginal spiritual practices and we acknowledge that it is for our church to continue in humility to learn the deep significance of these practices and to respect them and the Aboriginal elders who are the keepers of their traditional sacred truths.

Some of our congregations have been blessed with experiencing various traditional Aboriginal practices when Aboriginal elders, Aboriginal members of our church and indigenous people visited our congregations as guests, and graciously shared some of these practices and the traditions that give rise to them.

These practices are received as gifts and serve to enrich our congregations. Ceremonies and traditions such as smudging, the circle/medicine wheel, drum songs and drumming, and indigenous wisdom teachings^{iv} have been some of the practices our church has experienced as gifts from Aboriginal brothers and sisters. We acknowledge and respect both Aboriginal members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who wish to bring traditional practices into their congregations and those Aboriginal members who are not comfortable or willing to do so. The church must be a community where all are valued and respected.

It is not for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to validate or invalidate Aboriginal spiritualities and practices. Our church, however, is deeply respectful of these traditions. We acknowledge them as important spiritual practices through which Aboriginal peoples experience the presence of the creator God^v. In this spirit The Presbyterian Church in Canada is committed to walking with Aboriginal people in seeking shared truth that will lead to restoring right relations.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada
January 2015

ⁱ The Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, June 9, 1994, paragraph 2

ⁱⁱ The Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, June 9, 1994, paragraph 4

ⁱⁱⁱ *Living Faith* section 9.2 The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984

^{iv} Conversation Circle re Theological Framework for Aboriginal Spirituality Acts and Proceedings of The General Assembly, 2013 pp. 510-512

^v The Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, June 9, 1994, paragraph 2