

# A Christian Theological Statement in Support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #6

Call to Action #6 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools calls for the repeal of Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada.

Section 43 provides a legal defence for the use of physical punishment by parents (and people standing in the place of parents) to correct a child's behaviour.

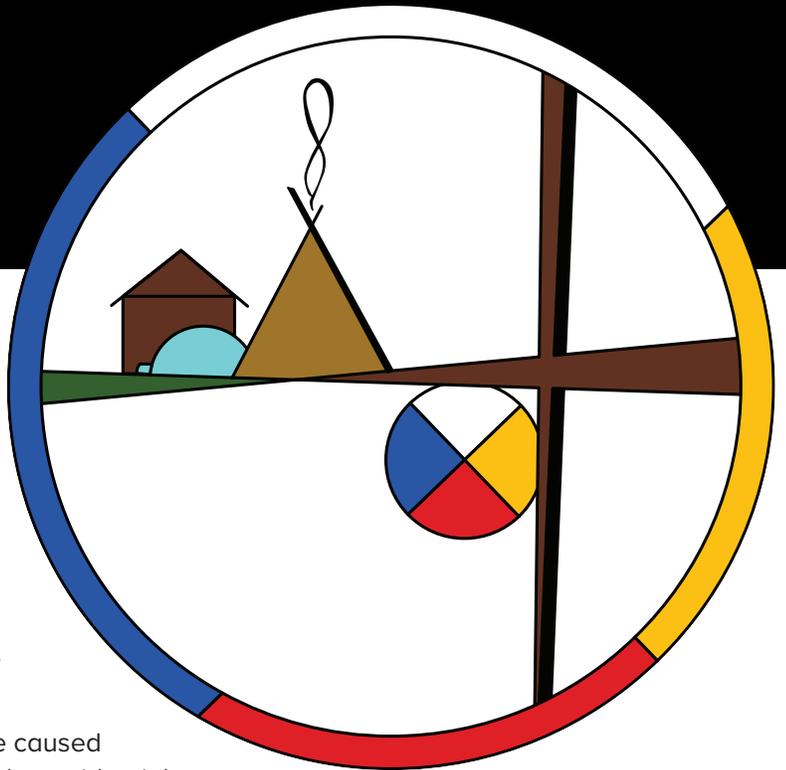
We acknowledge the legacy of damage caused to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children by residential schools. The resilience and courage of the Indian Residential School survivors has awakened us to our moral failure. This compels us to imagine a new and hopeful future, supporting the healthy development of children and their families for all peoples in Canada.

Research and lived experience have revealed the destructive effects of physical punishment on the mental, physical and spiritual health of children. Physical punishment also weakens the parent-child and other family relationships. It is time for Canada to provide children with protection from violence equal to that enshrined in the law for adults.

A full reading of scripture in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ, who embraced and welcomed children, is incompatible with physical punishment. Scripture constantly invites the people of God to imagine a better future. We affirm the following biblical principles: children are sacred gifts from God; fully human and deserving of dignity and respect; blessed with gifts, wisdom and strengths that enrich the common good; vulnerable persons deserving nurture, protection and justice; and individuals with growing moral and spiritual capacities.

While parenting can be challenging, children deserve respectful discipline and mentoring, so they know their identity as beloved children of God.

In response to Call to Action #6, churches and faith-based groups have a duty to call for the repeal of Section 43 as a vital step towards reconciliation, and a more just and peaceful society.



## Recommendations

Based on these principles and the final report of the TRC:

1. We call upon Christian churches to petition our government to ensure the full protection of children, including the repeal of section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada.
2. We call upon Christian churches to recognize the deep societal wounds that remain as a result of colonialism, and to actively address the on-going, disproportionate physical, spiritual and emotional harm experienced by Indigenous children and youth.
3. We call upon Christian churches to increase awareness in our communities of the impact of violence, including physical punishment, in homes, families, institutions and communities.
4. We call upon Christian churches to endorse the Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth.  
<http://www.cheo.on.ca/en/physicalpunishment>
5. We call upon all leaders and educators in Christian communities to be active in the protection of children.
6. We call upon all Christians to work together in continuing to develop healthy, effective and non-violent approaches to discipline in raising children and youth.

The Right Reverend Mark MacDonald, National Indigenous Anglican Bishop, Anglican Church of Canada  
The Venerable Dr. Michael Thompson, General Secretary, Anglican Church of Canada  
The Right Reverend Riscylla Walsh Shaw, Suffragan Bishop & Ambassador of Reconciliation, Diocese of Toronto, Anglican Church of Canada  
The Reverend Dr. John H. Young, Executive Minister – Theological Leadership, The United Church of Canada  
The Reverend Dr. William Morrow, Professor of Hebrew and Hebrew Scriptures, School of Religion, Queen's University, Kingston, ON  
Dr. Marcia Bunge, Professor of Religion and Bernhardson Distinguished Chair of Lutheran Studies, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN  
The Reverend Dr. Valerie Michaelson, Post Doctoral Fellow, School of Religion and Department of Public Health Sciences, Queen's University, Kingston, ON  
Dr. William Pickett, Professor and Head, Department of Public Health Sciences, Queen's University, Kingston, ON  
The Reverend Dr. Peter Robinson, Professor, Wycliffe College, Toronto, ON  
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## Artist Statement

The logo evokes the homes of First Nations and Inuit families, which are connected to represent our overlapping experiences and the universal need for safe, strong homes for our families. Smoke rises in the form of the infinity symbol of the Métis Nation. In Indigenous teachings, burning sage carries prayers to the Creator; in Biblical teachings, the burning of incense is a vital part of ceremonial activities and prayer. The smoke is leaving the teepee where prayers are made, healing takes place, understanding develops, and cultural relationships can be restored. The smoke is going up toward God, the creator of people and the world. The homes are encircled by the Medicine Wheel, composed of four colours symbolizing the four stages of life – infancy, childhood, adulthood and old age. The cross, which spans from east to west and north to south, is connected to the circle and placed within the circle to represent the vision of reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and the church. Beside the cross, the small Medicine Wheel represents the wholeness of the child.

Ken Letander, the logo's designer, is an Indigenous artist from Manitoba's Treaty One territory who worked with Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, hearing and documenting the stories of Indian Residential School survivors.