



Truth, Healing & Reconciliation

REFLECTION GUIDE

Introductory Booklet

Canadian Unitarian Council
Conseil unitarien du Canada



CANADIAN	CONSEIL
UNITARIAN	UNITARIEN
COUNCIL	DU CANADA

This Booklet was prepared by the Truth,
Healing & Reconciliation Resource Team of
the Canadian Unitarian Council

www.cuc.ca | reconciliation@cuc.ca

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Welcome!

Welcome to the Introductory Booklet for the Canadian Unitarian Council's *Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Reflection Guide (THRRG)*. Thank you for your willingness to engage with us as we step into the work of healing the deep wounds in our relationships, created by centuries of colonialism. We recognize that Indigenous communities across Canada have been doing their own healing for generations and that collectively and as individuals, non-Indigenous people are only just beginning to reckon with this country's colonial past and present. We have a lot to learn and a long way to go and are humbled by every offering of teaching and support from our Indigenous neighbours.

Here is a brief introduction to who we are:

Unitarian Universalism (UUism) is a liberal religious faith grounded in the principle of covenant. UU communities come together in covenant of our shared principles. Our beliefs are diverse, and we walk our paths to spiritual discovery and truth together.

Unitarians are united by values rather than belief in one set of creed or dogma. Our values include acceptance of one another, compassion, and a commitment to justice and equity. We believe in exploring the mysteries of life, we believe in ethical living, we believe in living out our spirituality in this world by working for peace, justice, equality, democracy, and respect—for one another, as well as for the interdependent web of life, of which we are all a part.

We believe that it is not who or what you believe in that is important, but rather, how you live your life.¹

Each Unitarian may draw on different sources to inspire their lives and actions. The sources may include direct experience of the forces that create and uphold life, the world religions, the findings of science, inspiring human beings, and earth-centred traditions.

Background

In 2014, representatives from the Canadian Unitarian Council and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada made an Expression of Truth and Reconciliation to survivors of the Indian Residential School System at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Edmonton, Alberta. You can read that statement on pages 12 -14. In it, a commitment was made to provide Unitarian congregations across Canada with educational materials about the history and impact of the Indian Residential School System. A Task Force was struck, and our journey truly began. Meeting every two weeks gave us the opportunity to go deep and support each other in beginning to decolonize our own minds as we did the work of figuring out how best to support our fellow Unitarian Universalists on this path. Our primary task was the development of learning materials for a range of age groups: lower elementary, upper elementary, youth, young adult, and adult. Over the years we've also hosted and supported a range of other related experiences, such as KAIROS Blanket Exercises and other workshops at local and national gatherings, and online film screenings and discussion groups. The Board of the Canadian

¹ <http://cuc.ca/newcomers/>

Unitarian Council has identified Truth, Healing and Reconciliation as a national priority, and is committed to ensuring that this work remains an ongoing part of what it means to be Unitarian Universalist in Canada.

THRRG Goals

The overall goal of the *THRRG* is to offer Canadian Unitarians and Universalists age-appropriate materials and means to learn the history and present realities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada so that we may develop relationships based on dignity, respect and justice. The CUC's *THRRG* provides learning opportunities about the Indian Residential School System and the broader context of colonization in which it occurred, including historical as well as present-day examples of injustices faced by Indigenous families and communities. The learning and relationship-building will continue over our lifetimes and those of generations yet to come.

In addition to learning the history and hard facts, a foundational underpinning of this work is the encouragement for our congregations to reach out and form relationships with the Indigenous communities on whose land they live and find out how they might best serve the needs of their neighbours. Therefore, the details of how the Reflection Guides are used will be different depending on the local context. Our hope is that this booklet will provide background on Canadian Unitarians coming to this work, and the kind of experience and learnings we hope participants will come away with. For more specific information about the Reflection Guide that you will be participating in, please be in touch with the facilitators.

In this booklet, you will find:

- An explanation of our **Approach** to creating the Reflection Guides (*page 5*)
- A list of our **Reflection Guide offerings** (*page 11*)
- Participant Resources, for your reference:
 - **An Expression of Truth & Reconciliation**, the catalyst for the creation of the Reflection Guides (*page 12*)
 - **Enduring Understandings** we hope to impart on participants (*page 15*)
 - **Community Covenant** of how to be together while we learn (*page 18*)
 - **Terminology** with definitions, as used in the Reflection Guides (*page 20*)

With loving hearts, humble minds, and willing hands, we step into this learning journey. We are so grateful to be able to walk a piece of it with you.

Our Approach

We have collected educational multimedia materials for Lifespan Learning about the process of colonization and its impacts on our history and present-day life. This material was developed to provide Unitarian Universalist context through activities, reading lists, reflection questions and spiritual exercises for different ages.

We highly recommend that *THRRG* facilitators work with Indigenous elders and Indigenous educators. We recognize that having an Indigenous elder and/or educator helps make this shared history and its impacts real. We recommend that the facilitators connect with local Indigenous elders and educators *before* they decide how to do this learning.

Because there are so many resources available now about this topic, we are approaching the *THRRG* as a living document. It will continue to develop and grow as we develop our skills in intercultural communication, learn about new resources, and improve ways of offering them. We are pleased to offer the *THRRG* through this online platform so we can be responsive to these changes.

Our goal is to engage in authentic dialogue. The materials used in the *THRRG* are complex and the activities and group facilitation requires skill. This topic is sensitive and facilitators need to be able to respond to sensitive group dynamics and responses to the material being provided. It is for these reasons that we are not providing public access to the *THRRG*. Instead, teams of congregationally-sponsored facilitators will be oriented by an experienced facilitator who will support them in getting to know the materials. For groups outside the

Canadian Unitarian Council, we will develop a Memorandum of Agreement of how *THRRG* will be shared in their context. Our intention is to build relationships within a supportive, safe community, so that this work can be done in a good way together.

We are aware of the privilege and responsibility of taking on this task on behalf of our Canadian Unitarian Universalist movement. We are not experts in this area: we are fellow travellers. We offer what we have learned and found useful as resources, as well as what others have recommended to us.

We offer the *THRRG* in humility, offering the best we have. While we have attempted to keep it updated with relevant, new material, there are always new materials being developed and written. We offer it with best intentions and will continue to update the content. We also recognize that despite best intentions, sometimes we will miss the mark and there may be impact. We appreciate constructive feedback, so if you want to let us know when we have missed the mark or if you have suggestions, please let us know. Together we will continue to develop this *THRRG* and offer it to those around us, as we walk the path of truth, healing and reconciliation together.

In developing the *THRRG*, our approach:

- Invites you to walk into an organized experience - some of which will be planned, some unplanned - and provides opportunities to reflect on your learnings and experiences. This is why we have decided to call these materials *Reflection Guides*. For us, the word *curriculum* implies the goal of having a group of people reach the same level of knowledge about a certain subject. While we hope

you will take away new knowledge about this area of Canadian history and present reality, our intention is to provide processes by which participants can engage what they are experiencing intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. That way, it can be integrated into their lives and relationships.

- Supports Canadian Unitarians and Universalists to explore the following areas:

- 1. Engagement and Locating Ourselves**

Where we ask: What social identities do each of us have, what culture(s) do we come from? How do we relate inter-culturally? How do we relate to the land we call home?

- 2. Understanding**

Where we learn about colonization, in particular the Indian Residential School (IRS) System, and its impacts on the lives of Indigenous peoples in the past and present.

- 3. Connection**

Where we seek to update our understandings of Indigenous societies and learn about current issues. Where we learn how to be in solidarity, and, when ready, reach out to local Indigenous leaders.

- 4. Healing and Reconciliation**

Where we ask: What does healing and reconciliation mean to Indigenous peoples? What does it mean to us as Unitarian

*Universalists? What are the next steps for
building connections and making commitments?*

These areas guided the development of the sequential learning. The multi-session *THRRG* follow this sequence. We provide single session formats that focus on one step more than the others so that a congregation can decide where they are in the journey and use the session(s) that are most appropriate to their context.

- Encourages further interaction and cross-cultural awareness in a supportive way. In the past, some North American UU approaches to anti-oppression and pro-multiculturalism work has inadvertently created a shame/blame mentality; we have been learning how to shift and instead create empathetic human connections as well as empower people to change systemic oppression.
- Is consistent with the CUC's work in Social Justice.
- Locates participants culturally and in terms of social identity so they are able to recognize their place in the web of human connections and in this shared history. We take into account current Unitarian Universalist approaches to diversity work, including Milton J. Bennett's Intercultural Sensitivity Model (the approach used by Beth Zimsky with the UU Ministers Association), and the CUC Diversity Monitoring Group's "social identity" approach in their [Celebrating Diversity Program](#).
- Addresses pluralistic learning styles. Includes various methods to convey and process information (e.g., expert speakers, slide presentations, video, text, etc.). As well as providing basic information about historical and current events (through video,

text, etc.), we also include embodied learning approaches (e.g., role-playing exercises, storytelling, poetry, etc.). We help participants explore their experiences emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and physically.

- Offers well-researched and responsibly-vetted material, allowing a congregation to engage in meaningful explorations they might not otherwise be able to research and resource on their own.
- Places existing material into a Canadian UU context so participants may process it in a constructive way, while encouraging people to further their own local actions. While the THRRG is planned with Canadian UU communities in mind, these materials are accessible for various progressive communities (multi-faith or other) to adapt them to their own context.
- Recognizes that in the Canadian UU movement, there are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (and those of blended backgrounds). We have tried to design activities to be inclusive of Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities, and yet we must be transparent in that we have *primarily* written the *THRRG* for non-Indigenous participants. This is because it is the non-Indigenous people in Canada who are often less aware of the history of the colonization process, and that we assume will be the majority who will participate in *THRRG* activities.

We intend the *THRRG* as "bridging" work: for non-Indigenous people to educate themselves and engage in decolonizing their own minds before reaching out in significant ways to build relationships with Indigenous

people in their area so as not to repeat any past mistakes. *THRRG* activities are intended as the first stages of building deeper relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (which is the ultimate goal). If there are Indigenous people and those of blended background who are participants in *THRRG* activities, we encourage the facilitators to be sure that they adapt activities as needed so all are included in appropriate ways. We offer the *THRRG* as a way to prepare non-Indigenous people to more fully engage in the journey of truth, healing and reconciliation, and be better informed of some of the realities facing Indigenous peoples in Canada today.

The Reflection Guides

These are the Reflection Guides that are being developed by the Canadian Unitarian Council:

- Lower Elementary (ages 6 to 8)* An 8 session program
- Upper Elementary (ages 9 to 13) “Woven Together”: An 8 session program
- Youth (ages 14 to 18)* A 10 session program
- Young Adults (ages 19-35) “Project Awake:” A 10-week online program\
- Adult (19 and up)
 - An 8 session version
 - An 8 session “lite” version
 - A single session full-day workshop

** The Lower Elementary and Youth Guides are still in the development process.*

An Expression of Truth and Reconciliation

From the Canadian Unitarian Council and Unitarian
Universalist Ministers of Canada

Delivered to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

March 29, 2014 in Edmonton, Alberta

Gary Groot, then President of the Canadian Unitarian
Council Board of Trustees, and

Rev. Meg Roberts, as representative of the Unitarian
Universalist Ministers of Canada, presented an
Expression of Reconciliation at the last of seven national
events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on
the Indian Residential School System. The Expression
was signed by Gary, as well as Rev. Debra Faulk
(president of UUMOC), and Vyda Ng (Executive
Director of the CUC).

“We, the Canadian Unitarian Council and the Unitarian
Universalist Ministers of Canada, commit to the journey
of healing and reconciliation between Canadian
Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people. Today, as we
acknowledge and accept our responsibility for truth-
telling, healing and reconciliation, we commit to these
specific steps to advance that journey:

1. To assemble and promote educational materials for
our congregations regarding the history and impact
of the Indian Residential School system.
2. To create and promote a new program for
congregations about racial equity and intercultural
competency.
3. To continue to encourage our congregations and
their members to learn more about the richness of

Aboriginal spirituality and cultures; working together to advance the struggle for justice for Aboriginal people.

To further express our understanding and commitment to change we offer the following acknowledgement that the principles we affirm were transgressed in the Canadian Indian Residential School system and by government legislation.

- *The inherent worth and dignity of every person.* This was denied when you were forced to relinquish your cultural identities and denied the nurturance of your families and communities.
- *We affirm justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.* These were violated when parents were forced to give up their children to a school system where so many children were emotionally, physically and sexually abused.
- *We seek to accept one another and encourage each other's spiritual growth.* This was disallowed when your spiritual practices were outlawed and another religious tradition imposed upon you.
- *We support a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.* This search was completely disregarded while many children were used for manual labour, living in unsanitary conditions, leading to thousands of deaths from tuberculosis and other contagious diseases.
- *We promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.* The mere imposition of this school system was a clear violation of the use of any democratic process.

- *We affirm the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.* How could this be achieved when government legislation revoked the basic rights of Aboriginal people to govern themselves?
- *We respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.* This principle is integral to Aboriginal cultures. Not only did non-Aboriginals lose an opportunity to learn from your cultures, this understanding was all but eradicated from your children's way of life.

We must learn from these travesties, as well as from the strength, courage, honesty, resilience and success of those who survived the Indian Residential School system.

We have asked our congregations across Canada to read this statement. We want you to know we walk with you.

Finally, we offer this chalice, symbol of Unitarianism, as a gift.

May it light our way to truth, offer its warmth in our healing, and may its fire strengthen our commitment to the process of reconciliation.”

Enduring Understandings

These Enduring Understandings are intended to guide facilitators of the THRRG. These are the understandings from which we have developed the sessions and we invite participants to consider them as they engage in the work. If you wish to adapt content, then let these Understandings ground you in your choices.

- As Unitarian Universalists, the work of Truth, Healing and Reconciliation is grounded in our seven Principles which we live out through our actions.
- Reconciliation is a complex process involving acknowledging the truth about our history, addressing current injustices and restoring balance in the power relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.
- Truth-telling about our shared history and present realities is a first step and is at the heart of reconciliation. By opening our eyes, hearts and minds to the experiences of others, we open ourselves to authentic reconciliation felt in our spirits and bodies.
- Colonization has been an intentional, systemic undertaking to assimilate Indigenous peoples into a European way of life in order to gain control of their traditional lands and resources. This process is ongoing and complex.
- Reconciliation requires affirming each person's worth and dignity and better understanding ourselves and others.
- Uncovering implicit bias and privilege is essential when developing meaningful relationships and

partnerships.

- Our strength lies in appreciating and learning from the similarities and differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews which contribute to fair, inclusive and healthy communities for all people.
- Despite centuries of attempted cultural genocide, Indigenous peoples and many of their cultures are resilient, adaptive, and contemporary.
- Non-Indigenous peoples are called to stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples in the ongoing struggle for justice and healing.
- As Unitarian Universalists, we commit to this journey with open hearts, minds, spirits and hands.

Below is the child-friendly version of the Enduring Understandings that we hope will be shared by all children by the end of the program:

- We do the work of Truth, Healing and Reconciliation because of our seven Unitarian Universalist Principles.
- It's important to acknowledge the different kinds of power we all have in order to treat each other fairly.
- In order to heal from the past, we have to listen to the stories of the people who lived it and their families.
- Settler colonization is the process of one group of people arriving in another group's territory, claiming it for their own, and trying to make everyone who lives there look, think, act, and live like them. This is what is happening in Canada.

- Understanding ourselves and others is the key to creating a better world.
- To move forward with a good relationship, we have to learn from the past, respond to the hurt in the present, and treat each other with respect and dignity.
- We all become better when we share with and learn from people who live differently than us.
- Indigenous peoples have done more than survive; today, they are sharing their cultures as they grow and change.
- Non-Indigenous people should follow the lead of Indigenous people while we work for justice together.
- As Unitarian Universalists, we promise to do this with open hearts, minds, spirits, and hands.

Community Covenant

In this circle, I agree to . . .

1. Listen with intent and curiosity.
2. Speak personally about my own life. *I will do my best to avoid advice giving or problem solving.*
3. Keep other's lives and stories in confidence. *It is understood that I will want to bring whatever learning I have into my life, and I will share it in a way that doesn't identify another person or their story.*
4. Assume best intentions. *I recognize that clumsy words can be a sign of learning.*
5. Take responsibility when I have said or done something that has hurt another, and act to remedy that situation.
6. Discern when to speak and when to listen. *If I tend to speak more often than others, I will step back to share the time. If I tend to speak less than others, I will step us to share my thoughts.*
7. Make a commitment to do my own work. *I know that will be different for each person in the circle.*
8. Commit to the group for all the sessions. *I will do my best to be at each of the meetings. If I can't be there I will let one of the facilitators know in advance.*
9. Support each other. *I understand that we are forming community. What this looks like will depend on our own gifts and availability.*

"Covenant is the silk that joins Unitarian Universalist congregations, communities, and individuals together in a web

of interconnection. The practice of promising to walk together is the precious core of our creedless faith.” April Hope, former Social Responsibility Coordinator, Canadian Unitarian Council

Terminology

The meanings of words change over time. They can also be used to wield power. The *THRRG* writers acknowledge that *Indigenous* and *Aboriginal* are generalizing terms and do not replace the names that First Peoples historically called themselves. Rather, they are terms created by colonizers to describe legal categories of peoples that governments have sought to define and control. The *THRRG* uses these broad terms because they are now being used by many original occupants and their organizations, as well as by settlers and their organizations. Facilitators and participants are encouraged to incorporate relevant information and terminology of the specific Nations and Indigenous communities near them wherever possible, and particularly to learn how people in their community refer to themselves in their own language(s).

Indigenous - Throughout the *THRRG* we use *Indigenous* to refer to the original occupants of lands that have been colonized and whose cultures now have a minority status within a dominant colonial society. In the territory now known as Canada, that includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. *Indigenous* is often used in international contexts to draw attention to similarities in the experiences of colonized peoples and to inspire solidarity between them. It is also becoming a term used by more groups in Canada.

Aboriginal - The term *Aboriginal* is used to refer to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canadian legislation and documents we have included. We have not changed it when it appears in quotes and other source materials.

Indian is a term referring to North American First Peoples based on an inaccurate conclusion reached by Christopher Columbus: he thought he had landed in the area of South and East Asia (then known as Indie), which in 1492 he describes in Italian as “*las Indias*” and so he referred to the inhabitants as “*los Indios*.”² **Indian** is an important legal term in Canada, and it still is found in the “Indian Act” which is still in effect. Most Indigenous people associate the term “Indian” with colonization so it is not acceptable for non-Indigenous people to call Indigenous people by this term. It is only used in the *THRRG* when referencing historical documents or institutions, such as Indian Residential Schools, or when quoting an Indigenous person who chooses to use it.

First Nations people have lived all across Canada for thousands of years. They have many different languages, cultures, and spiritual beliefs. First Nations people are Aboriginal people who do not identify as Inuit or Métis. For many thousands of years, First Nations managed their lands and resources with their own government, laws and traditions. Their societies were very complex and included systems for trade and commerce, building relationships, managing resources, and spirituality.*

Inuit have lived in the Arctic lands and waters of northern Canada for thousands of years. Traditionally, they lived off the resources of the land by hunting whales, seals, caribou, fish and birds. Many Inuit continue to harvest these resources today. Their way of life and culture changed when they made contact with

² *Word Myths: Debunking Linguistic Urban Legends* by David Wilton, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp.163-164.

European settlers and began participating in the fur trade. It changed again when the Government of Canada moved many Inuit communities away from their traditional “hunting and gathering” or transient way of life on the land and into permanent, centralized settlements... The majority of Inuit live in small northern communities. Hunting and fishing continue to be important parts of the Inuit economy, culture and lifestyle.... There are four Inuit regions, known together as “Inuit Nunangat.” Inuit Nunangat includes land, water, and ice. Each region has a unique form of self-government. The best known is the Nunavut Territory, created in 1999. Non-Inuit used to call Inuit people “Eskimo”, but, like “Indian,” it may be considered insulting and should not be used.*

Métis comes from the word “to mix.” In the 1600s and 1700s, many French and Scottish men migrated to Canada for the fur trade. Some of these men had children with First Nations women and formed new communities. Their children became the first people called Métis. They created their own language, Michif, that has many regional variations and is often a mixture of Cree and French. The distinct Métis culture is known for its fine beadwork, fiddling, and jigging. The infinity symbol on the Métis flag symbolizes the joining of two cultures and that the culture will live forever... Not everyone agrees on the definition of who is “Métis.” Some people use the word “Métis” to describe any person of mixed Aboriginal and European heritage. Others say that it only refers to descendants of specific historic communities. Some Métis people prefer the Cree word otipêyimisowak over “Métis.” It means “independent.”*

Settlers is a term used in this Guide to describe those

people (and their descendants) who came from other countries with the intention of establishing their residence here and settling on the land. People's experiences were and are influenced by whether they come from those nations who were colonizers or from those who were colonized in various parts of the world because their experiences are affected by power imbalances, racism, economic, and other inequalities.

Newcomers is a term used to describe those people who came from other countries more recently to settle on this land. This would include recent immigrants and refugees. Some come from countries that had been colonized while others come from countries that were colonizers.

For more on this, visit the website of Indigenous Foundations, which was developed by First Nations and Indigenous Studies at the University of British Columbia, located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people:

<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/?id=7400>

*Indicates definitions that come from *First Peoples: A Guide for Newcomers* by the City of Vancouver, 2014.

