

# Prayers for Canada and the United States

## Canada

**Context:** Between the 1870s and 1996, some 150,000 Indigenous children and youth in Canada were taken from their families and communities and placed in residential schools run by churches on behalf of the federal government. Far from home and loved ones, children in the schools could not speak their language, practice their ceremonies, express their culture and live their way of life. Many were physically and sexually abused by the teachers. Many died. In the early 2000s, a lawsuit by survivors of the residential schools led to, among other things, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which gathered stories and testimonies of survivors. The TRC completed its work in 2015 with [94 Calls to Action](#) to address the harms committed by the residential schools, as well as other institutions and practices. The TRC insisted that the journey of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples was Canada's greatest task.

### *Prayer #1*

**Author:** Dianne Climenhage and her husband Marty are MCC workers in Happy Valley/Goose Bay, Labrador. She writes this prayer especially for settler people.

Creator God,

We look at your world and praise you for the diversity all around us.

Thank you for the gift of relationships; our connection with people, animals and the land.

Help us, Lord, to see differences and diversity as strengths.

Help us to listen and understand; to meet one another with wonder and anticipation.

Help us to love as you love, without expectation.

Reveal to us your way of reconciliation and guide us into right relationships with all living things.

Lead us to understand how Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be profoundly harmed by settler people and institutions.

Lead us to repent when we as settlers deny Indigenous peoples respect, dignity and fullness of life.

Help us to listen compassionately, to speak humbly and to act justly.

Help us to seek the peace, justice and reconciliation you desire among all your children.

Thank you for your mercy and grace.

Amen.

### *Prayer #2*

**Author:** Jennifer Henry is Executive Director of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, a coalition of Christian churches and church organizations, working ecumenically to address Indigenous rights and ecological justice. MCC Canada is a member of KAIROS.

**Prayer:**

Gracious and loving God,  
Forgive us for what we have done and what we have left undone in our country's journey with Indigenous peoples. Our failure to live up to the treaties, to live up to the dignity of all peoples, to live up to your dreams of justice have created a rupture in our nation and a deep wound in our hearts. Bring us a change of heart, a restored will, and a deepened resolve for a renewed and hopeful future. With your enabling and empowering love, help us to begin to live in honour and mutual respect. Write this covenant of right relations on each of our hearts, and through the power of your Spirit, make it an enduring bond of love and justice. In the name of the One who loved every person, every creature, into being, we pray.  
Amen.

## United States

### *Prayer #1*

**Context:** The Trail of Death traces the route of the 1838 forced removal of 859 Potawatomi people by the U.S. military from their ancestral homeland in northern Indiana to present-day Kansas. This violent displacement of people was rooted in a legal document, called the Doctrine of Discovery, which presented a theological basis for the forced removal and non-recognition of any non-Christian people groups. Many churches in the U.S. are now working to decolonize this theology that has shaped the church for centuries.

**Author:** Katerina Friesen is a Mennonite pastor and educator whose work focuses on inviting the church to reparative justice for the ongoing harms of colonialism and racism.

**Prayer:** Trail of Death Litany of Remembrance

Standing where you walked,

**we remember you.**

Exile under gunpoint,  
loss of sacred land,

**We remember you.**

Bruised feet and weary bodies,  
choked by dust and heat,  
sickness stalking young and old,

**We remember you.**

**We lament this Trail of Death.**

Trail of Broken Promises,  
theft of homelands for white man's profit.

**We lament this Trail of Death.**

We lament that our ancestors  
did not dwell in peace.

**Creator of all, we long for new vision today.**

Open our eyes and give us sight  
**to seek the things that make for peace,**  
**to see the Image of God in all peoples,**  
especially those persecuted and oppressed.

Make a new way for us together.

**Guide our feet, O Lord, on a Trail of Life.**

Amen.

## **Prayer #2**

**Context:** This prayer was written in the context of the Iraq War, globally, and the plight of undocumented immigrants, domestically. It was a precursor to what exists today – political polarization along with the mistrust that fuels attitudes of “my way or the highway.” The author and at-the-time pastor of Salem Mennonite Church was receiving regular calls from immigrants seeking help contacting friends or relatives who were in transit. Many of the missing people ended up dead in the deserts of southern Arizona and Texas.

**Author:** Jack Knox, from Douglas, Arizona, where he and his wife support MCC Mexico workers in Agua Prieta, Sonora, was pastor of Salem Mennonite Church (Salem, OR) for numerous years.

**Prayer:** A Peacemaker’s Prayer

Gracious Lord, we dream of a world free of poverty and oppression, and we yearn for a world free of vengeance and violence. And we pray for your peace.

When our hearts ache for the victims of war and oppression, help us remember that you healed people simply by touching them. Give us faith in our ability to comfort and heal bodies and minds and spirits that have been broken by violence.

When the injustice of this world seems too much for us to handle, help us remember that you fed five thousand people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Give us hope that what we have to offer will turn out to be enough, too.

When fear of the power and opinions of others tempts us not to speak up for the least among us, help us remember that you dared to turn over the tables of money changers. Give us the courage to risk following you without counting the cost.

When we feel ourselves fill with anger at those who are violent and oppressive, help us remember that you prayed for those who killed you. Give us compassion for our enemies, too.

When we tell ourselves that we have given all we can to bring peace to this world, help us remember your sacrifice. Give us the miracle of losing a little more of ourselves in serving you and our neighbours.

Walk with us, Lord, as we answer your call to be peacemakers. Increase our compassion, our generosity and our hospitality for the least of your children. Give us the courage, the patience, the serenity, the self-honesty and the gentleness of spirit that are needed in a world filled with turmoil and terror.  
Amen.