

Truly and Humbly, a 60-minute documentary directed by Dr. Hoi Cheu of Laurentian University, tells the story of the first Apology made to Indigenous people by The United Church of Canada in 1986. Through powerful images and the evocative words of those present at this historic event—including Alberta Billy, who requested the Apology, and Very Rev. Bob Smith, who was Moderator at the time—the movie orchestrates a meditation on the meaning and implications of the Apology and challenges the church to walk a new path towards reconciliation and healing.

The movie can be downloaded for viewing from <http://www.manitoulearningcommunity.com/>. The full interviews on which this documentary is based can also be accessed via this website.

Preparation

It would be helpful to have copies available of The United Church of Canada’s 1986 Apology to First Nations people and the All Native Circle Conference’s response to the Apology. These are available at <http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/apologies>.

Opening Acknowledgement

Begin your study session by acknowledging the traditional territory:

For thousands of years, First Nations people have walked on this land; their relationship with the land is at the center of their lives and spirituality. We are gathered on the traditional territory of (name the First Nations, Inuit, or Metis group). We acknowledge their stewardship of this land and seek a new relationship with Indigenous people based on honour and respect.

Opening Prayer

Creator God, as we prepare to hear stories of our church’s Apology to First Nations people, open our minds and our hearts so that we may listen deeply, with humility and respect. Inspire us to find ways to walk a new path, a path of healing and reconciliation.

Discussion Questions

- 1) As members of General Council debated the Apology, some questioned how they could apologize for someone else. Why was it decided that the Apology was necessary?
- 2) Edith Memnook, speaking for the All Native Circle Conference, welcomed the Apology, but did not accept it, stating that they hoped the apology was “not symbolic but that these were words of action and sincerity.” Discuss the meaning of offering an apology and the challenge to live it out as the All Native Circle Conference asked.
- 3) One of the participants reflects on the “racist lenses” she was handed, which influenced her view of Indigenous people. Identify some of the lenses through which you look at the world and reflect on how they impact your relationships and your journey towards reconciliation.

- 4) After hearing the words of the Apology, we are told that Elder Art Solomon demanded, “What in the hell are they going to do about it?” Thirty years on, how can we, as individuals, congregations, and as a national church, answer this challenge?
- 5) Alberta Billy recounts attending a General Council meeting as one of only three Indigenous representatives from across Canada. She describes the response of non-Indigenous United Church members who questioned her attendance: “How did you get here, and who let you in the door?” How can we ensure that Indigenous voices are heard in the church and in all areas of Canadian life?
- 6) Several non-Indigenous participants state that their hearts and minds were changed by “hearing the truth spoken with respect by people we have come to love.” What do we have to do to build the kind of relationships that will promote healing and reconciliation?
- 7) The movie ends with a powerful reflection on the implications of the Apology. Stan McKay suggests that the need for healing is a “global reality,” that our relationships with creation and with each other are broken, that the Apology is really a challenge to a Western philosophy of life, and that non-Indigenous people have much to learn from the Cree understanding of “Fullness of Life.” Reflect on these issues.

Closing Activity

Share “This Path We Walk,” a hymn written by S. Curtis Tufts in April 2016 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the first Apology. The hymn is available from <http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/apology-30th-anniversary-hymn.pdf>.

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