

The Basics

What is the Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights?

A 600 km walk from Kitchener to Ottawa engaging churches in a series of conversations about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, exploring why it matters, the hope it offers, and how we can collectively live into it.

Who We Are and Why We Walk...

We are a diverse group of people; many are Christians from a variety of faith traditions. From the legacy of our Christian faith expressions, we have learned about our part in the oppression and suppression of Indigenous peoples during a dark period of colonial Canadian history, including the Indian Residential School (IRS) system. Many of us have attended Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) national events and have heard firsthand the stories of IRS survivors. The TRC issued some specific actions for Churches to engage in our mutual quest for healing. This Pilgrimage is one way, amongst many, that Churches are responding. We have done much work in studying and understanding the generational impacts on children and families of IRS survivors. We recognize that much more work needs to be done, particularly as it concerns the ways that Settler worldviews and practices have been impacted by colonialism, both past and present. We have studied our own faith traditions and come to the conclusion that our beliefs and values compel us to seek justice so that Settlers and Indigenous peoples may live in peaceful and right relationships. When we seek healing for others, we ourselves will be healed. During this journey, we will reflect on many scripture passages that call for justice for all peoples, such as Micah 6:8: "And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

How We are Doing This...

If we do not speak to injustice, we become part of it. The Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights will host conversation circles along our route for anyone with a sincere hope for a better future for all of us: Indigenous, Settler, and new immigrants. You can expect respectful responses to respectful questions. We honour anyone with a genuine and authentic desire to listen – the first step in a healing of the nations. You are invited to join a conversation circle or walk with us for an hour or a day while we talk.

What is our hope?

The Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights is both a spiritual and a political endeavour. For people of faith, these are not easily separated. In the great quest for justice and right relations, our faith, our values, and our laws – natural and legal - are inextricably bound together. As we walk we pray and sing and praise our Maker; we walk in and through God’s wonderful creation; we share what we have to share; we honour and accept what is offered to us. All these things represent our hope; all are fundamental parts of living in right relationship with our God and one another.

We will also seek from our Canadian government the full adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) when we end our pilgrimage in Ottawa. We are not naive about our hope for a future of harmonious relations among all people, nor does ‘optimistic’ adequately capture our spirit, for optimism claims everything will be all right despite reality. “Hope accepts reality, the poverty of spirit that underlies all fear, instigates all tragedies, bureaucracy and institutional inertia” (David Henderson).

Where to from here?

If you have stuck with this conversation so far – congratulations! You may be ready for some next steps. *Paths for Peacemaking with Host Peoples* is an excellent resource for further reading and learning: <http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/43/16613>. Study the TRCs *Calls to Action for Churches* and approach your fellow church members to learn more; a good place to start is with Action #60 (<http://trctalk.ca/call-to-action-60/>). You can also express your support for Bill C-262, “An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (find a complete mailing list for MPs at <https://tinyurl.com/m8w6kxn>). And of course, your ongoing prayers for the healing of the nations are always welcome.