



AMBROSE
UNIVERSITY

Report of the President's Commission Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Respectfully submitted

Ken Draper (Chair), Monetta Bailey, Mark Buchanan, Christina Conroy, Derek Cook, Sherry Martens, Lisa Moran, Alanna Schwartz

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Report of the President's Commission

Preface

The presence of Ambrose University in southern Alberta entails obligations and relationships entered into on our behalf by representatives of the Canadian government, who negotiated the terms of Treaty 7 with Indigenous nations in 1877. While for many years settlers have assumed that “treaty” defined the status of Indigenous people, in fact the nation to nation nature of treaty binds both parties. Hence, we are all treaty people.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to come to terms with the difficult legacy of Residential Schools, has placed the destructive nature of settler attitudes and approaches to Canada's Indigenous people on the nation's agenda in a powerful way. The Commission's *94 Calls to Action* outlines a path forward to deal with this legacy and to lead toward reconciliation. Many of the Calls to Action address governments at various levels but there are also calls to universities and religious communities. Whether directly involved in the Residential School program or not, universities and churches participated in and even helped produce a colonial narrative that assigned Indigenous people to a cultural inferiority which then authorized a variety of interventions which have ultimately been detrimental.

As a university and as a Christian community, we recognize these harms and we recognize in ourselves the attitudes and ideas that have justified them. From this recognition, we commit to repent, to listen and to be ready to enter into a new and respectful relationship with the Indigenous peoples of Treaty 7.

On this path toward reconciliation we need to begin with an awareness of the ways that colonial patterns of thought and action continue. Thus, we must intentionally surface these attitudes and revise them in an effort to decolonize the campus.

The reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission illustrate the ways in which Indigenous people have been missing from or appropriated by our school curricula and our national narratives. Thus, along with other educational institutions, we will look carefully at our curricula for ways to reflect a new story and integrate Indigenous knowledge.

Treaty 7 holds out the possibility of new relations with the Indigenous peoples of this territory. We will find ways to enter into a respectful relationship that will build toward reconciliation as individuals and as an institution.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada ... was created by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement... [T]he Commission spent six years travelling to all parts of Canada to hear from the Aboriginal people who had been taken from their families as children.

From the Preface of the Summary of the Final [Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

The Ambrose mission calls us to “redemptive engagement in the church, society and the created order.” The responses to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended here provide an opportunity for redemptive engagement in a relationship which has been neglected for too long. We have much to learn and commit ourselves to in what is sure to be a difficult and rewarding journey.

1. Decolonizing the Campus (48, 49)

The colonial narrative that justified residential schools is still with us because it lives *in* us. We need to locate and resist this narrative in order to decolonize the campus. This will involve recognizing the rights of Indigenous people and rethinking our relationship to the land. This will also involve engaging with new ideas that will unsettle the settler.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) was adopted on September 13, 2007, after 20 years of dialogue and negotiation with Indigenous people from hundreds of Indigenous nations around the world. Developed in response to persistent injustices and human rights violations, this document is designed to guide governments, courts and institutions toward respectful participation in the protection of Indigenous human rights. The adoption of UNDRIP was celebrated globally and is recognized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a necessary component in establishing right relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. We recommend that Ambrose University move toward adopting UNDRIP by exploring the implications of the declaration for the policies and practices of our institution.

The Commission heard from more than 6,000 witnesses, most of whom survived the experience of living in the schools as students. The stories of that experience are sometimes difficult to accept as something that could have happened in a country such as Canada, which has long prided itself on being a bastion of democracy, peace, and kindness throughout the world. Children were abused, physically and sexually, and they died in the schools in numbers that would not have been tolerated in any school system.

From the Preface of the Summary of the Final [Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

Doctrine of Discovery

The Doctrine of Discovery finds its roots in a series of Papal Bulls beginning in the 15th century. These Papal statements declared that lands belonged to any Christian power that “discovered” them and not to “savages” who occupied them. Though the Doctrine of Discovery seems archaic, it went on to provide a legal framework for imperial conquest around the world, and is cited in decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada as recently as the 1990s. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada describes how the Doctrine of Discovery shapes how Indigenous people have been viewed by non-Indigenous people. Several of the TRC’s Calls to Action ask Christians to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. We recommend the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery by Ambrose University.

Recognition of Territory

One way we can signal a new relationship with the Indigenous peoples of Treaty 7 is to recognize the traditional territories of the people who are part of the Treaty. We recommend the use of the following recognition of territory statements in appropriate places and on appropriate occasions.

Short statement – for use in email signature, and in the welcome to formal events, including Convocation Chapels, Commencement, public lectureships and conferences.

- Ambrose University is located in the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikuni, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina and the Iyârhe Nakoda.

Full statement – for the website when referring to our location.

- Ambrose University is located in the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikuni, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina and the Iyârhe Nakoda. We are situated on land where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, and the traditional Blackfoot name of this place is "Mohkinstsis" which we now call the City of Calgary. The City of Calgary is also home to Metis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

Land Development

Ambrose University resides on Treaty 7 land. Much of the university land remains undeveloped in a semi-natural state. This affords an opportunity for the university to realize its objectives for reconciliation in a tangible way through the use and development of the campus.

Understanding and Honouring Territory

One of the key thrusts of the TRC is the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery. In Calgary's context, this doctrine is manifested in the belief that the history of Calgary began with settlement. Repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery, therefore, involves re-inscribing the history of place prior to settlement.

In order to honour the land on which Ambrose resides, it is important to work with Indigenous knowledge-keepers to understand the history of the campus and surrounding lands. This would involve understanding the story of the territory, the traditional uses of the land, historical sites and events of significance as well as understanding Indigenous names. Honouring territory could also include an understanding of the natural flora and fauna and traditional uses of the same.

The story, and names if appropriate, of the land should be acknowledged by the university through:

- Interpretive elements on the campus
- Naming of buildings and rooms, if appropriate
- Description of the history and names of the land in appropriate university communications

Through this process, the university could also be a source of education about the Indigenous history of the area to the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Respectful Development

For Indigenous people, land holds sacred meaning. Future development of the campus should thus respect the meaning and story of the land. As the university proceeds with the creation and

development of a campus master plan, it should work in consultation with Indigenous elders to ensure that such development is respectful and honours the Indigenous history of the land. Accordingly, the university should:

- Engage with Indigenous representatives as the campus master plan is developed, either by including them on a planning committee or providing an opportunity for input and review of the plans.
- Conduct an Historical Resources Impact Assessment (HRIA) as part of the development process.
- Work in partnership with The City of Calgary to realize aligned interests in both reconciliation and land development as part of the larger Area Structure Plan (ASP) planning process for the neighbourhood.
- Consider providing an opportunity for Indigenous elders to perform appropriate ceremony for the land as / when development occurs.

Locating and Resisting the Colonial

It is now time to engage in dialogue that leads us to deeper understanding. We will create openings where members of the Ambrose and Indigenous communities can come together to engage in meaningful interaction that allows for the surfacing of perspectives and the building of foundational knowledge through relationships. Put simply, we can provide space and time to informally gather together and begin a dialogue that is based upon a willingness to unsettle the settler within. This will include a number of campus-wide activities:

- A Chapel series (which began in 2016-17) that explores the ways in which our true worship requires our commitment to truth and justice
- Cultural sensitivity activities for faculty, staff, students and board that confront unexamined beliefs and assumptions
- A film series that opens discussion of residual colonialism among Ambrose faculty, students and members of Indigenous communities
- A speaker series inviting Indigenous speakers to assist in understanding how to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing

2. Curriculum that Builds Reconciliation (60, 62, 63, 64)

The TRC Calls to Action have identified curriculum as an area requiring action. While a curricular response is important for all students, it is particularly so for pre-service teachers and those whose professional work will bring them in contact with Indigenous communities. Ambrose is committed to developing a curriculum that addresses difficult truths related to the history of Canada and its relationship with Indigenous peoples. Beyond identifying these difficult truths, the curriculum will provide models for redemptive engagement with Indigenous communities. This curriculum, in collaboration with Aboriginal advisors, will seek to integrate Indigenous knowledge.

Over the next two years, Ambrose will engage in a process of careful listening and curriculum design to address these Calls to Action across all faculties and programs to ensure that all Ambrose graduates understand the need for reconciliation and ways to move toward a new, respectful relationship with Canada's Indigenous peoples. This process will:

- identify key learning outcomes in collaboration with Aboriginal advisors;
- integrate these outcomes into curricula for each program with attention to appropriate scope and sequence and integrative work across disciplines; and
- revise existing courses and develop new courses to ensure these outcomes are part of an Ambrose education.

Reconciliation requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed. It also requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one.

From the Preface of the Summary of the Final [Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

3. Mutually Beneficial Relationships (with Treaty 7 Peoples)

Treaty defines a nation to nation relationship but this relationship need not be limited to governments. If we are to embrace the reality that we are all treaty people, we need to recognize that treaty also defines a relationship between peoples. If this relationship has been distorted by attitudes that have been destructive, there is work for us to do institutionally and personally to mend this relationship.

Creating Opportunities for Relationship Building

Relationship building is not something that can be forced and specific outcomes cannot be manufactured. With this in mind, we will provide opportunities for and support of initiatives to create environments conducive to the development of respectful relationship. We anticipate some of the following activities:

- Talking circles including members of Indigenous communities and Ambrose faculty to engage in conversation guided by questions such as: What is it you want your students to know about your people? What would you want for your students here on campus?
- Identify individuals, groups and institutions with whom members of the Ambrose community are currently connected to develop new and broader relationships.
- Develop an Indigenous Advisory Group that understands the Ambrose mission to consult on our decolonizing, curriculum development and relationship building efforts.
- Enter into a formal relationship with an Indigenous college.

Creating a Supportive Environment for Indigenous Students

Over the next two years Student Development will engage in a consultation process to create resources and culturally sensitive space within a co-curricular context for Indigenous students. Possible outcomes may include some of the following:

- an Indigenous Student Centre (physical space);

- full- or part-time Student Development staff dedicated to supporting Indigenous students;
- an Elder-in-residence who may serve in conjunction with another area of campus; and
- creating an enrolment strategy to specifically address recruiting Indigenous Students.

Respecting Indigenous Spirituality

TRC Call to Action 60

We call upon leaders of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement and all other faiths, in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders, Survivors, schools of theology, seminaries and other religious training centres, to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy and all clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities, on **the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right**, the history and legacy of residential schools and the roles of the church parties in that system, the history and legacy of religious conflict in Aboriginal families and communities and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence.

We recommend that Ambrose University and Ambrose Seminary implement this Call as part of how we design and teach, whenever and wherever applicable, our curriculum.

We are also aware that this Call to Action may need some unpacking, especially this part: “We call upon ... schools of theology, seminaries, and other religious training centres, to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy... on the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right.”

In one sense, respecting people and their cultures is what Christians, in our finest moments, have always done. At our best, we have treated all people, and their cultures, with dignity. But at our worst, we have treated people who are different from us, and cultures that are other than our own, with contempt. Such contempt has caused deep and lasting damage, both to the people to whom we have shown it and to the church’s witness. None of us want to repeat this.

Respect is what we owe others. Period.

It is also the key to our witness, the basis for sharing our faith and hope with anyone: “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord,” The Apostle Peter says. “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

In this way, we can and should heartily embrace this Call to Action.

But perhaps its wording makes us nervous: “respect indigenous spirituality *in its own right*.” What, exactly, are we being asked to do? To affirm all forms of Indigenous spirituality, no matter what, as valid ways of knowing and worshipping God? To incorporate Indigenous spiritual practices, no matter what, into our own worship? To abandon evangelism altogether?

Simply, we are being asked to go on a journey, and to walk the journey with humility. Too many of our attempts with Indigenous people to “give the reason for the hope [we] have” lacked gentleness and respect. Too much of our history is marked with harshness and arrogance. Too often, we have acted toward Indigenous people as though they know nothing of God and have nothing to teach us about God – or anything, for that matter. Too often we have acted as though Indigenous people need to be

rescued, not just, like all of us, from sin and death, but from their own culture. This approach has been disastrous. It has betrayed the gospel under the guise of sharing it.

First Nations people are asking the church to walk now in humility, in curiosity and in wisdom. They are asking us to do what we do, but this time with gentleness and respect.

It just so happens, it's what God is asking us, too.

Indigenous Research

The university has a role to play in advancing understanding of Indigenous issues through research. However, research in the past has often reinforced colonial relationships wherein Indigenous peoples have been disempowered. Accordingly, research involving Indigenous peoples must adhere to ethical protocols that govern both the content of the research as well as the research process.

Content

The subjects of inquiry for university-based research must be developed in partnership with Indigenous persons, respectful of the approach of "nothing about us without us." Consequently, the university should seek to develop a research agenda in partnership with the Indigenous community to realize the principle of mutual benefit, ensuring that research undertaken reflects the concerns and interests of Indigenous people. This research agenda should be developed and included in the Ambrose Institutional Research Plan.

Process

Research involving Indigenous people must adhere to strict ethical protocols while honouring Indigenous methods and worldviews. Consequently, it is recommended that Ambrose University adopt the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research Involving Humans, specifically as it pertains to research involving First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples of Canada (Chapter 9). This policy represents the ethical standards that all institutional researchers are expected to follow when conducting research involving Aboriginal people.

To that end, a committee should review the policy statement to assess Ambrose's compliance and to identify areas where additional process and protocols are required. Further, Ambrose should seek to learn about, promote and adopt Indigenous research methods as appropriate.

Appendix A: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s “Principles of Truth and Reconciliation”

Principles of Truth and Reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada believes that in order for Canada to flourish in the twenty-first century, reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canada must be based on the following principles.

1. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.
2. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.
3. Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.
4. Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples’ education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity.
5. Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
6. All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.
7. The perspectives and understandings of Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.
8. Supporting Aboriginal peoples’ cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.
9. Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.
10. Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society.

From What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation (TRC)

Appendix B Calls to Action We Are Addressing

48. We call upon the church parties to the Settlement Agreement, and all other **faith groups and interfaith social justice groups** in Canada who have not already done so, to formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a framework for reconciliation. This would include, but not be limited to, the following commitments:

- i. Ensuring that **their institutions, policies, programs, and practices comply** with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- ii. Respecting Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination in spiritual matters, including the right to practise, develop, and teach their own spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies, consistent with Article 12:1 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- iii. Engaging in ongoing public dialogue and actions to support the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- iv. Issuing a statement no later than March 31, 2016, from all religious denominations and faith groups, as to how they will implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

49. We call upon all **religious denominations and faith groups** who have not already done so to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*.

60. We call upon leaders of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement and all other faiths, in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders, Survivors, **schools of theology, seminaries, and other religious training centres**, to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy, and all clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities, on the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right, the history and legacy of residential schools and the roles of the church parties in that system, the history and legacy of religious conflict in Aboriginal families and communities, and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence.

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
- ii. Provide the necessary **funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms**.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying **teacher-training needs relating to the above.**

64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to **denominational schools** to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.