

To our Kitchissippi UC community:

Over the past week, our congregation, with the nation, has been reacting to the news of the discovery of 215 graves of children at the Kamloops Indian Residential school. We have individually been responding and also considering how we can collectively express grief and solidarity in an appropriate way.

Below you will find a statement from our leadership team on behalf of Kitchissippi United Church. In addition, Outreach, Right Relations, and other Circles are also working on actions and appropriate commemoration plans for our congregation to contribute to and participate in. We are renewing our commitments of educating ourselves and working for reconciliation and recognize the great need for our ongoing efforts and focus.

For those of us who are non-Indigenous, we may still be learning that, sometimes, our initial reactions or ideas may carry unintended messages or meaning. To ensure that our actions and symbols of caring properly reflect our good intentions, we can look to requests from Indigenous organizations, and representatives for suggestions and guidance as to what is welcome and culturally respectful in this time of trauma.



We encourage you to read this call to action and enclosed instructions for helping to create hearts, either physical or virtual, to contribute to an Ottawa Heart Garden memorial display. You can also do this on your own property. This request comes from the Indigenous community and allies and is something you and your family can do today to show respect.

Kitchissippi United Church is deeply saddened and angered at the discovery of the remains of 215 children at the Kamloops Indian Residential school. We may collectively be shaken by this recent discovery, but we cannot claim to be shocked: to do so would dishonour countless statements and disclosures by generations of Indigenous survivors of Indian Residential Schools.

We share in the mourning and call to ensure they are remembered for what they were--innocent victims of ruthless colonization that to this day, continues to take young, innocent, Indigenous lives. We also remember the thousands more child inmates who died, known and unknown, as well as the IRS Survivors, their families, and communities who continue to live with emotional, physical, and spiritual wounds.

The known, deliberate, church and state-sanctioned mistreatment of generations of Indigenous children, their families, and entire Nations happened for over 150 years. The Christian church, including the United Church of Canada, has been complicit in this evil, denying First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people's basic human rights. It is important to state that this is not history: it continues in systemic ways throughout Canadian society. Racism, sexism, and ongoing colonization continue to operate **as the norm** throughout Canadian society affecting every aspect of Indigenous peoples lives at every stage in their lives.

As a community of mostly relative newcomers to this land (Settlers), we take seriously our responsibility to learn how and why we've supported the ongoing devaluing of Indigenous lives and the appropriation and abuse of their lands. Then we need to learn how to support and stand with Indigenous peoples as they strive to regain their traditional ways of living – according to their own laws and customs. Our meaningful action is required today and every day.

In Ottawa, we cannot lawfully say we are Treaty people, as no Treaties have been negotiated here. By the rules of international law, the unceded, unsurrendered territory we are living on still belongs to the Original Peoples, the Algonquin Nation. This does not excuse us from treaty obligation, but rather the opposite. One of the principles of reconciliation as stated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is that we *all* share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships. To live into reconciliation, we must demonstrate our willingness to change our collective behaviour, be courageous, and do what is right. Reconciliation means not only equitable treatment, but restitution. We must earn Indigenous people's trust.

We have a long way to go and we are grateful to the Survivors and their families for continuing to walk with us. Let us also understand why there may be those who are not ready to walk with us. We can learn as much if not more from those whose wounds make it difficult to trust. Let us stand back to give space when asked, to stand up against injustice, and to stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities. When our intentions or actions are not correct, let us be ready to stand corrected.

Our leadership and congregation renew our commitment to continue listening, learning, and speaking the truth about the lasting impacts of the Indian Residential School system and the continuing injustices faced by Indigenous people. We re-commit to addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. At the same time, we urge all levels of government to do the same. We honour the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples being embedded within Canada's jurisdictional framework and urge our national church and all others to do likewise.

We will continue educating ourselves with honest and age-appropriate approaches for all members of our faith community, encouraging individuals to critique our understanding and actions on a continual basis. We will continue to both invite Indigenous people into our church families and allow ourselves to be invited into their spaces for it is through making personal connections that we build respectful relationships.

The Ministry Team and Right Relations leadership of Kitchissippi United Church

Rev. Jenni Leslie (on sabbatical)
Rev. Dianne Cardin (supply)
Diana Brushey, Faith Formation Leader
Sylvia Smith, Right Relations Circle

Here is a call to action you can do today to send hearts as part of a larger effort.



Dear fellow educators,

It is with sadness that we learn about the 215 children found at the site of the Kamloops Residential School. Our thoughts and hearts are with the families, community members, and survivors. We will never know the pain they feel, but we stand with them.

Yesterday, Charlene Bearhead, Director of Reconciliation at Canadian Geographic, and Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, called on educators across Canada to plant heart gardens at their schools to memorialise the 215 children and to publicly call Canada to action. See their letter attached.

We are writing to ask if you, your families, your students, the toddlers and preschoolers in your care, and your school communities would also consider creating hearts for a heart garden on the grounds of the Canadian Geographic building at 50 Sussex which is directly across from the grounds of Rideau Hall where we collectively planted a heart garden on June 3, 2015, at the closing ceremonies of the TRC, to memorialize the children who died in residential schools. Although we can not access the Rideau Hall grounds currently the connection to this place just across the street at Canadian Geographic gives us a connection so we can fill this adjoining space with the paper hearts that are so meaningful to Survivors, Elders, and family members and that create such a public display of honouring.

To support you in this work, you can find the information about the Heart Gardens and what they are on pages 3-5 of this [BCTF resource](#). Additionally, on pages 9 and 10 you will find **examples including patterns and templates for the hearts and messages**.

We are hoping to fill this space this week but will continue to grow the garden with additional hearts into the next. **Please take your hearts to the Royal Canadian Geographic Society at 50 Sussex Drive in Ottawa between 9am-5pm. You will see the receptionist through the glass and can buzz her to open the door. For Covid safety, please leave the hearts inside the door.** When the garden is taken down, the hearts will be gifted to Algoma University to catalogue and display in their new Centre for Reconciliation. Some will also be displayed at Canadian Geographic as a constant reminder of the work ahead of us.

For those learning online, an initiative has been created so that virtual students can participate. This virtual heart garden will be hosted by the Project of Heart National Website. Please click on this [link to access the virtual heart garden](#). A short video tutorial on using the

virtual garden can be accessed [here](#). Please note that families who are learning on line but are also wanting to contribute to the heart garden at 50 Sussex are asked to please also drop your hearts off at the front door as outlined above to be added to the heart garden there.

Thank you for your commitments. We respect and honour you and the work that each of you do, each day. Please share widely on your email, social media, and other networks.

Sincerely,

Sylvia Smith, Founder, Project of Heart (*Recipient of the 2011 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching for Project of Heart*)

Lisa Howell, Teacher, WQSB and Part-time Professor, UOttawa (*Recipient of the 2018 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching for Decolonizing Pedagogy*)