



GUIDELINES

Reserve 107: Reconciliation on the Prairies (Rebel Sky Media) is a 30 minute documentary fit for group or individual study.

For groups in churches

This film is an excellent resource for an evening study session for youth groups, adult study groups, book clubs, and other small groups. Plan on spending 1.5 to 2 hours watching and discussing the film. See page 2 for suggestions on how to lead the discussion. Page 3 can be copied and distributed to guide the conversation.

For individual study

Use the timeline below, the discussion questions on page 3, and the resources on the back to prime your thinking as you view the film. Consider watching with a friend.

Next steps

See the list of resources and suggestions for action on the back page.

Summary of the film

In 2006, 130 years after the signing of Treaty 6, Mennonites, Lutherans and the Young Chippewayan First Nation gathered on the sacred hill of Stoney Knoll/Opwashemoe Chakatinaw located in Laird, Saskatchewan.

With goodwill and shared goals, they signed a memorandum of understanding. With this document, the three groups recommitted to honouring a violated and long-neglected treaty relationship.

Shortly after the original treaty was signed in 1876, the Young Chippewayans faced tremendous hardship: dwindling buffalo populations, devastating epidemics, and encroaching settlement. They had no choice but to temporarily leave their reserve land in order to survive.

Seeing the reserve land unoccupied, Crown officials deemed the land “surrendered” and redistributed it to Mennonite and Lutheran settlers. When descendants of Chief Chippewayan returned, they found the land fully settled, its new occupants largely unaware of its prior history.

This is a story of pain and determination, but it is also a story of trust and hope. It’s what can happen when dispossessed people and innocent beneficiaries build a relationship and endeavour to make past wrongs right.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples were self-reliant, self-governing nations on “Turtle Island.”

Europeans arrived. This afforded cooperation, but also competition for land and resources.

Treaty 6 was signed between Canada and the Young Chippewayan First Nation. Reservation number 107, prime agricultural land, was designated for the band. This was also the year Canada passed its Indian Act.

The government took back the land without indigenous consent as required under the Indian Act.

Mennonite farmers sought more land in Saskatchewan. Canada gave them land considered abandoned at Laird, Saskatchewan. German Lutheran settlers joined them at the turn of the century.

pre-1492

1492

1876

1897

1898

Cont'd » » »

NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Step 1: Welcome, set context

(10 -15 minutes)

Welcome the gathered group and thank the participants for coming. If there are new faces in the group, take some time for introductions (e.g., say your name and share one question you bring to this evening's film and discussion).

If it feels right to do so, offer the following words of introduction:

This film is a good example of two communities coming together. The settler community of European origin acknowledged historic wrongs. They built relationships with their Indigenous neighbours and overcame fear and shame. The First Nations community came forward with a spirit of grace and common purpose to make things right.

Stan McKay was the first Aboriginal moderator of the United Church of Canada (1992-1994) and is a member of the Fisher River Cree Nation in Manitoba. When dealing with the legacy of colonization, he had the following to say:

"There may be progressive Christians who have a deep calling to engage with First Peoples to explore the potential for interdependence with 'all my relations.'

"Might this be a time when humility and respect will lead us to new covenants?"

"In the midst of remembering what the Church is called to be, there could be opportunities for mutual healing.

"This may be a season of blessed unrest."

[From an article in Geez magazine, Fall 2015.]

Step 2: Watch film

(35 minutes)

Before viewing, you may wish to invite members of the group to prepare for the discussion by paying attention to the following themes:

- » how individuals can change,
- » the roles and responsibilities of churches,
- » the nature and relevance of treaties,
- » obvious and subtle expressions of racism,
- » how communities can cooperate, and
- » the government's role in historic grievances

Step 3: Discussion

(35 minutes, approximately)

Invite participants to gather in groups of 3 to 5 people.

Option A. Hand out the discussion sheets and invite participants to take turns reading the topics. Share thoughts and answers after each discussion topic.

Option B. Distribute only one of the discussion topics to each small group (*note: use scissors to cut the discussion topics into slips of paper*). Invite them to assign a reporter to make notes of the conversation. Re-assemble as a larger group and invite brief comments on each of the six questions.

Step 4: Moving forward

(25 minutes, approximately)

Have a flip chart, chalk board, or white board handy to record comments and ideas from the group.

Brainstorm together to come up with some ways you might work towards reconciliation in your community. You may wish to consult the list of resources and ideas on page 4 of this guide. If appropriate, ask for volunteers to plan subsequent meetings.

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Mennonite Church Canada

HISTORICAL TIMELINE (Cont'd)

St. John's Evangelical [Lutheran] Church was established in Laird, Saskatchewan.

Crisis at Oka, Quebec, when the town sought to expand a golf course on traditional Mohawk territory. Violent confrontation involved the Canadian military.

The Indian Claims Commission concluded that Canada had illegally taken land from the Young Chippewyan First Nation. But it also said genealogical evidence was necessary to prove existence of a remaining "identifiable community."

Mennonites, Lutherans, and descendants of the Young Chippewyan First Nation gathered and signed a memorandum that signaled a common intention to seek redress for the land claim.

More than 200 land claims remain unsettled in Canada. Federal government court costs exceed \$2 billion fighting the claims. The grievance for Stoney Knoll Reserve 107, the former reserve of the Young Chippewyan First Nation, remains unsettled, yet receives moral and financial assistance from Mennonites, Lutherans and others.

1910

1990

1995

2006

2016

» » Cont'd

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In groups of 3 to 5, spend a few minutes answering each of the questions below.

Option: Divide the group into 6, one for each question. Appoint one person as a reporter, then spend 5-10 minutes discussing the question, noting comments and feelings that emerge. Report back to the larger group.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1. Personal change

Context: Barb Froese lives and farms with her husband Wilmer on land that was once Reserve 107 for the Young Chippewyan First Nation. Initially, Barb wanted to avoid facing the facts of dispossession. By the end of the film she seemed relieved to engage in a process of reconciliation and advocacy.

Questions:

- What factors affected her change in perspective?
- In what way can you relate to her situation?



Barb Froese, farmer

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2. Responsibility

Context: Jason Johnson is a minister at St. John's Lutheran church in Laird, Saskatchewan. His parish is located on land formerly reserved for the Young Chippewyan First Nation. To not do anything about the historic dispossession, he said, is "shameful."

Questions:

- Do you agree with him?
- Do Christians bear extra responsibility to engage in this dispute? Why or why not?



Jason Johnson, minister

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3. Treaties

Context: Treaties will always be important, said elected Chief Ben Weenie. "This is our land. We are the first aboriginal inhabitants here, and we gave up certain parts of it to be an established guarantee of safety [sic], to sustain ourselves, [and] to have our home."

Questions:

- How do you understand treaties?
- What treaties were made in the area where you live?
- What insights from the film apply to your situation?



Ben Weenie, elected chief

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4. Mixed-descent

Context: Lori Higgins is a Young Chippewyan descendant living in B.C. She went back to Stoney Knoll, curious about her family. Her father had both European and Indigenous ancestry. When he discovered he had Indigenous relatives "it was always kept sort of hush, hush," she said.

Questions:

- How do heritage and identity affect the way we think about ourselves? Interact with others?
- What are some examples of white (or Settler) superiority? How can you address these?



Lori Higgins, descendant

DISCUSSION TOPIC 5. Role of government

Context: Hereditary chief George Kingfisher and farmer Ray Funk talk about compensation. Ray's father was a Mennonite who signed the memorandum in 2006. He said, "Do you really need the government for them [Young Chippewyan] to have some land?" Chief Kingfisher said the government "didn't do things right, and they are the ones who should correct it."

Questions:

- Is it enough for Settlers to give money or land to dispossessed First Nations, or should the government produce the compensation?
- What factors are involved?



Kingfisher (left) and Funk

DISCUSSION TOPIC 6. Cooperative action

Context: The genealogist Rarihokwats said this is a coming together of dispossessed people and innocent beneficiaries, and they decided to do something about it. "Absolutely remarkable!" It's "something that should be done right across Canada," he added.

Questions:

- Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- What would it take to make this happen in your community?



Rarihokwats, genealogist

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

If you're new to conversations about colonization and the church, *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together* (Herald Press, 2013), edited by Steve Heinrichs, is a good place to start. It brings together Christian Settlers and Indigenous writers; they reconsider our shared stories in an accessible but challenging way.

In *Shalom and the Community of Creation* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), Randy Woodley invites Christians to view creation and read scripture through an Indigenous lens. As he puts it, "Native Americans have been the recipients of American church mission longer than any other people in the world. We have scrutinized the message and the messengers and we have something to say."

Two Rivers is a one-hour video that describes how a group of White Settlers in the town of Twisp, Washington, learned the Indigenous history of the place they were living in and proceed to build real relationships with the local Native American community. They held public gatherings to acknowledge the fracture between

the communities and the need for restorative justice.

Geez magazine, a quarterly publication about faith, social justice, and contemplation, released a special issue on the topic of decolonization in Fall, 2015. It features faith leaders, activists, and academics.

Intotemak is a periodical published by the Indigenous-Settler relations office of Mennonite Church Canada. See the story, "An Historic Meeting on Stoney Knoll," by Eric Olfert, (Fall 2006), and the special edition, *Wrongs to Rights* (2016), about how churches can engage the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

After hearing stories of pain and struggle for several years, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its 94 Calls to Action in 2015. Some of the Calls addressed churches in particular. You can read them alongside other TRC reports at nctr.ca/reports.php.

Finally, Kairos Canada offers practical resources for congregations to continue learning about Indigenous rights and reconciliation. Their Blanket Exercise, for example, can help groups better understand Canada's history and how it affects communities today (see www.kairoscanada.org).

For all these resources and more, please see www.commonword.ca

CommonWord
Bookstore and Resource Centre

IDEAS FOR ACTION

Now that you've heard the story of renewed relationships at Stoney Knoll, here are some ways to keep the conversation going and work towards reconciliation in your community.

1. Learn from the work of thinkers, poets, and storytellers who are already grappling with the Church's colonial legacy. Consider the resources listed above as well as books from writers such as Leanne Simpson, Richard Wagamese, John Ralston Saul, Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, Paulette Regan, Rudy Wiebe, and others. Read with a group to increase learning and prepare for action.

2. Re-read the Bible in a way that "unsettles" the status quo. Scripture has long been used to justify conquest and oppression, but it also contains stories of reconciliation and messages of hope. Try to discern the liberating threads within its pages.

3. Recognize the stereotypes at

work in yourself and your community. Review Mennonite Central Committee Canada's mythperceptions.ca to explore prevalent myths about Indigenous peoples.

4. Enter spaces where you might learn from Indigenous leaders. Ask to visit elders on a reservation or attend events at a Native Friendship Centre in your city.

5. Consider ways in which you could be a good neighbour to Indigenous people in your community – not necessarily to serve them, but simply to build positive relationships.

6. Identify yourself as a settler and name the treaty territory or unceded host lands you are from when speaking at church or elsewhere. Put up a sign at your church and adjust your mailing address to include this information as well.

7. Explore the history of struggle over land in your area and learn the Indigenous names for local landmarks.

Discover stories of hope that can animate discussion and action.

8. Attend Indigenous-led rallies. Spread the word and offer help, but don't try to take over leadership.

9. Resist resource extraction. Many Indigenous communities are more concerned about climate change and environmental exploitation than their settler neighbours. Find out what environmental issues are affecting your province and seek out pockets of non-violent resistance.

10. Create space in your church – physically, audibly, visually, financially, spiritually – for Indigenous voices and concerns.

For more practical steps forward, see *Paths for Peacemaking with Host Peoples* by Steve Heinrichs, available at commonword.ca/go/95.