



*Photo by Beth Melena-Carlson*

## **Praying the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**



**Welcome to Praying the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.** We invite you to enter into the themes of this document through prayer in the hopes that our commitment to this Declaration as a framework for reconciliation would re-shape us as people of faith. Allow these prayers and exercises to come into dialogue with news you are hearing on these topics.

Every article in this declaration comes from a time when a right has been violated or outright denied to Indigenous peoples. As you reflect on these articles, let that sink in: for each article there is a contemporary example of violation of that right. What is our call as Christians as we bear witness to such profound brokenness of relationships and denial of justice?

Please take the time this season to pray. Pray for understanding, lament what is broken, and ask for wisdom and courage to change the systems that deny Indigenous rights—rights that are still out of reach.

In the words of Cheryl Bear, a Nadleh Whut'en woman and Christian leader:

***“Ultimately we long for a better day for our children and grandchildren.***

***We are not asking for any more than what is rightfully and respectfully ours. Justice is an attribute of Creator who walked in human form to reconcile God and man, and who will one day make all things right. Our careful steps towards reconciliation together are joining with the heart of our beloved Creator.”***

*How to use this guide:*

We've connected each of the 6 sessions to one or two themes in the Declaration, such as self-determination, and offered exercises and prayers for each session. Alone or (even better!) with a group, take the week to read the articles and reflect on the theme through the suggested prayers and exercises. For weeks with two themes, consider beginning your reflections on the first theme on Sunday and on the second theme on Wednesday.

We intentionally haven't packed this reflection guide tight with material to give you time to sit with the uncomfortable truths of the violations of Indigenous rights and to hold prayers of lament and hope before Creator God thoughtfully. The road of dehumanization of Indigenous peoples and colonization has been a long one, and the road of full recognition of Indigenous rights and learning to walk together in the Two Row Wampum way is likewise a journey of more than a day, and more than a season.

Let us join our hearts and prayers. Let us walk together.



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## **Week 1: Self-determination (articles 1-6)**

It is very hard for many Canadians to comprehend the need to protect a right like self-determination, especially when many immigrants came here seeking freedom to exercise their rights. It is hard to fathom that Indigenous peoples in Canada do not enjoy those same rights.

**Exercise:** Be mindful of the ways you have or don't have power to make decisions for yourself today. If you have Aboriginal status in Canada you do not have that right to self-determination in regard to seeking medical care, as one example. As a ward of the State under the Indian Act you must first seek the approval of the State for many medical procedures.

Go for a walk with your children or visit a park where children are playing. Imagine what it would be like to have someone tell you that they are now the legal guardians of these children and they will determine what is best for the child, where he/she will live, which activities he/she will participate in, and who he/she can and cannot visit. This affront to self-determination and the rights of parents is a common one among Indigenous people in Canada.

**Prayer exercise:** If you have a hand drum use it to pray. If you do not, go out into creation and find a stick and a tree, or simply use your hands on the tree. Listen to the beating of your heart. Find the rhythm of your heart and echo it on the drum or on the tree. As you do this, simply hold in the presence of the Creator those individuals whose basic human rights are not observed or respected. Echo their heartbeats on the tree or the drum.

*For Indigenous people exercising their rights to be peacemakers and builders of healthy communities, even and especially, in those times when those calls disrupt our complacency, we give thanks.*





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## **Week 2: Life, Liberty, Culture and Security (articles 7-10)**

Indigenous peoples have the right to choose and preserve their identities, enjoy family unity, and make their own decisions about where to live, free of discrimination and enjoying a sense of safety and well-being.

The disproportionate numbers of Indigenous children in Child Protective Services is seriously impacting not only family unity, but also loss of culture and individual and community identity.

The Canadian government has declared a state of emergency around the foster care system and its treatment of Indigenous families.

Foster care is one example of the multitude of ways Indigenous communities are disproportionately impacted by violence in this country.

**Pray:** *Loving God, for children in the foster care system we pray your protection. We pray also for a stirring of imaginations as to how this system can be changed to protect children and strengthen families. We pray for the healing and thriving of Indigenous families as they seek to overcome the onslaught of colonial systems aimed at destroying indigenous families. We give you thanks that you have not allowed Indigenous families in Canada to be eliminated and for all those families who are thriving and showing a way forward for those around them.*

*You know the pain of losing a child. We pray for members of northern communities, as they struggle through the pain of suicide deaths. Bring comfort and peace to these families and communities. Disrupt, unsettle, and heal the forces and broken systems in which children end their lives. Bring healing, strength, and renewal to Indigenous children, youth, and their families.*



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## Week 3 – part 1

### Culture, Religion and Language (articles 11-13)

“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 16:26-27)

Why are there so many obstacles keeping Indigenous peoples from determining their own theology, as other groups do? Indigenous peoples are in a fight to reclaim their cultures and to defend them from people who don't recognize the gifts from God in them.

**Exercise:** Begin by thinking of a cultural treasure, artifact, or sacred object of your own that has meaning for you, your family, culture, or spiritual tradition. If possible, hold it in your hand throughout this prayer time. If you don't have it with you, visualize the object. Notice what it feels like to hold or visualize this symbolic object. Consider what it means to you and what it represents for you. Notice any emotions that come up. Keep holding the object as you engage in the prayer.

**Prayer:** *Jesus, it is remarkable that many cultures have valued cultural artifacts created by the peoples of this land but have failed to value those people themselves. We long for the day when people from every tongue, tribe, and nation will enter into your throne room in all the splendour of those cultures. In the meantime, help us to restore what has been broken, stolen, and dishonoured.*

*God of diversity, in tongues of fire you blessed your disciples with the gift of different languages, that all people might know you, and speak to you in words of praise. Teach us to love diversity as you do. Stoke fires that rekindle indigenous languages.*





Photo by Beth Malena-Carlson

## Week 3 – part 2

### Education, Media, and Employment (articles 14-17)

Since contact, Indigenous people have not been allowed to choose how and what their children would learn. They were educated in a foreign language, removed far from family with no regard to safety or quality of education. It is right for Indigenous people to enjoy learning and engaging in media and employment that is culturally relevant and available in all parts of society.

**Exercise:** Language revitalization programs are being launched all over the country for Indigenous languages before they are lost entirely.

If English is not your first language reflect on aspects of worldview are “lost in translation” between your mother tongue and English. If English is your first language find someone for whom it is not and talk with them about if/how they see the world differently when they speak their mother tongue. Are there concepts that are difficult to translate into English?

**Prayer:** *God of wisdom, you have given us minds to know you; we receive all knowledge and understanding from you. Your son was found as a boy sitting among the leaders in the temple listening, learning, and asking questions. We pray that all your people will be treated equally and fairly, so that they have the same access to education.*



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## **Week 4 – part 1**

### **Participation and Development (articles 18-24)**

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine, through full engagement, decisions regarding matters that affect all parts of their life individually and in community, in matters of economics, in matters of health and safety.

Many communities in this country lack safe ways for women with limited resources to travel safely. The Highway of Tears in Northern British Columbia is a famous example, but there are other places as well. Sometimes the discontinuation of bus services happens purely on limited economic analysis and disregards the perspectives and voices of those most affected.

*Prayer: Loving and caring God, you know what it is to lose a child to violence and murder. We pray for missing women; for violated women; for abused women; for murdered and missing women whose families need the truth. Give strength to the Commissioners of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.*





Photo by Janice Young

## **Week 4 – part 2**

### **Land and Resources (articles 25-32)**

Land is at the heart of Indigenous rights. From land, identity is formed. The health of the land is paramount for future generations, economic growth, and continued access to collective areas.

From the Royal Proclamation of 1763 to the Delgamuukw Decision of 1997 there has been official acknowledgement of Aboriginal Rights and title to land and yet it has proved very difficult to defend that sovereignty in the face of development of varying kinds.

*Prayer: Creator God, We pray for members of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation as they peacefully resist the construction of a pipeline through their territory. We pray for those peoples across Canada who are defending their rights. Open our ears God, and the ears of those who govern decision-making for pipelines and projects like the Site C Dam, to the voice of your Spirit, when voices are raised to protect lands and waters that might otherwise be degraded.*





Photo by Murray Bush

## **Week 5**

### **Self-Government and Indigenous Laws (articles 33-37)**

Indigenous laws and governments need to work together in the best interest of Indigenous peoples, giving priority to Indigenous nations to determine their best interests concerning citizenship, roles, and responsibilities.

*Prayer: Creator God, we pray for understanding as to how to authentically honour these rights when our own systems still repress and deny them. Creator, help us to accept these rights to make our society stronger than what it is now.*



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## **Week 6 – part 1 Implementation (articles 38-42)**

Government support is needed to implement the Declaration. Governments should support laws, policies, and funds to ensure these rights are protected. Indigenous peoples have the right to access support from the international community and any work that is being done to uphold these rights should be done in consultation with Indigenous peoples.

We know that Jesus shook the culture of His day and went to the cross for it. Pay attention to the systems and structures that tried to eliminate Jesus. Who was threatened by his message? Who embraced it? What did it cost them?

*Prayer: Creator God, our country has been slow to implement the Declaration. Give us the urgency to fully respect Indigenous rights. Jesus, speak to our hearts so that we may be instrumental to carrying on the work done by the people that created the Declaration, so that Indigenous peoples' rights may be understood, valued, and upheld by all parts of society.*





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## **Week 6 – part 2**

### **Understanding the Declaration (articles 43-46)**

The articles set out in the Declaration are the minimum standards for Indigenous peoples to survive and thrive. These articles are not to be interpreted in any way to take away human rights or fundamental rights. These articles are to be interpreted “in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance, and good faith.”

The idea of human rights are rooted in the idea that we are all created in the image of God and that image ought to be respected and valued no matter a person’s citizenship, ethnicity, gender, or class.

*Prayer: Creator God, we give thanks that you are a God of justice and love.*





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## May our prayers rise to you, Creator God!

Lim 'limpt (thank you) for praying along with us. If you would like to continue your learning, here are some resources that we recommend:

- Your local Indigenous friendship or healing centre
- The KAIROS Blanket Exercise
- Healing at the Wounding Place website: [redclover.ca](http://redclover.ca)
- Month of Prayer Surrounding the Stories of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada: [bit.ly/MMIWpray](http://bit.ly/MMIWpray)
- Living the 8th Fire small group learning series: [bit.ly/8thfire](http://bit.ly/8thfire)
- *Wrongs to Rights: How Churches can Engage the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*: [commonword.ca](http://commonword.ca)
- *Lifting Hearts off the Ground: Declaring Indigenous Rights in Poetry*: [commonword.ca](http://commonword.ca)