

A Service of Lament: Remembering the Victims of the Residential Schools

Opening Collect

We remember today, O Creator of all, the innocents who died away from their families at residential (boarding) schools, and those who were abused. Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great power stir our hearts to acknowledge and repent of the pain and suffering our churches have caused, and guide us into your rule of justice, love, and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Scripture Readings

- [Jeremiah 31:15-17](#)
- [Psalm 124](#)
- [Revelation 21:1-7](#)
- [Matthew 2:13-18](#)

Reflections

Following in the way of Jesus of Nazareth, his way of love, and that is a new way of life. Our work of truth and reconciliation is about that. Like baptism, it is about facing truths of our past. Maybe even especially painful truths. But not to impose or wallow in guilt. Not for anybody to point fingers at anybody, but for us all together ... I want to say that again. For us all together, and I say that as a descendant of African slaves. I'm sitting right here in Raleigh, North Carolina, less than 100 miles from the plantations where my momma's ancestors worked for nothing. But this is an opportunity for all of us, no matter who we are, no matter who we descend from, to face the pain of the past, to confess it, and above all, to learn from it. To tell the truth in love, as the Bible says, so that we can learn love's more excellent way. And having learned to turn, to repent, to turn in a new direction, in a new way, and to do that by righting old wrongs as best we can. To do that by repairing any breaches, as we are able, to help and to heal and to join hands together to make God's beloved community real. – *Presiding Bishop Michael Curry*

I pray for not just lip service, not just fancy words, I really pray for action because that's what our community needs. And I'm hopeful right now because I feel like we are so close. ... Our own communities are beginning to heal. Our grandmas are finally sharing their stories. We're at that tipping point right now. – *Sarah Eagle Heart*

The wrenching legacy of residential schools is felt not only by those who survived. It lingers in the pain of families whose children died while at school. It lingers in the agony of not knowing why they died or where they are buried. It lingers in the inadequate record-keeping that does not tell the cause of death. It lingers in the neglect to even record the names of almost one-third of those who died. For a parent the death of a child is an unimaginable pain.

– *The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls and The Most Rev. Mark Macdonald*

A LAMENT FOR THE LOST CHILDREN OF CANADA

Canada now is our conscience, as more children's graves are revealed, and many more perhaps yet to come, the ghosts of those un-lived lives, those innocent and gentle lives, standing silent sentinel over us all, waiting to see what we do: witnesses to our past, prophets to our future. What will we learn? It is more than repentance that we need, more than more apologies, more even than the shock and awe of our own cruel history. Canada now is our conscience, where we all stand on unmarked graves, no one exempt from their silence, no nation better than another, but all complicit in what has been done, and all challenged to define what comes next. If communities of faith have a calling, surely it is to exile racism from every human heart, if not for the sake of our own children, then for the memory of those whose childhood was lost to an arrogance that spared none before it.

– Bishop Steven Charleston

Poems

This poem is from The Diné Reader (U of A Press). "If" is a poem written by unidentified Diné students at the Tohatchi boarding school, one of the 1st boarding schools on the reservation. 1933

If I were a pony,
A spotted pinto pony,
A good racing pony,
I would run away from school.
I'd gallop on the mesa
And I'd eat on the mesa,
And I'd sleep on the mesa,
And I'd never think of school.

A poem by Abigail Echo-Hawk (Pawnee) written in 2021 – "I wrote this for our people, I wrote it because I couldn't quit crying as I read newspaper reports of this genocide against Indigenous people, I wrote it because my heart was crying justice that my tongue couldn't shape words for, so my hand did."

When they buried the children
What they didn't know
They were lovingly embraced
By the land
Held and cradled in a mother's heart
The trees wept for them, with the wind
they sang mourning songs their mothers
didn't know to sing
bending branches to touch the earth around them.
The Creator cried for them the tears falling like rain.

Mother Earth held them until they could be found.
Now our voices sing the mourning songs.
With the trees. The wind.
Light sacred fire ensure they are never forgotten as we sing JUSTICE.

The Prayers

A Prayer for Healing and Hope

O Great Spirit, God of all people and every tribe,
through whom all people are related;
Call us to the kinship of all your people.
Grant us vision to see
through the lens of our Baptismal Covenant,
the brokenness of the past.

Help us to listen to you and to one-another,
in order to heal the wounds of the present
and give us courage, patience and wisdom to work
together for healing, and hope with all of your people,
now and in the future.

Mend the hoop of our hearts and let us live in justice and peace,
through Jesus Christ, the One who comes to all people that we might live in dignity. *Amen.*

Prayer for the Children Who Didn't Return Home

Almighty God, we remember before you all of the children – our dear relatives – who did not return home from the Residential Schools. May you remember their suffering and pain. May you grant them rest in the Land of Peace. May you surround them with beautiful and sacred love and joy. We pray to you also for ourselves and our children. At a time like this we remember we need your Spirit so very much. We pray to you, your Spirit prays through us, in the Name of Jesus, who suffered with us but raised us and will raise us with our departed loved ones. *Amen.*

(Archbishop Mark Macdonald)

Prayer for the Children

God who came into the world as a child, we bring before you in deep grief the children who died and were abused in Boarding and Residential Schools. Continue to hold them closely in the safety, comfort and everlasting Love which you desire for all creation. Hear our cries of sorrow and lament for our participation in a system that allowed these deaths to happen. Forgive us our ignorance and complicity.

Holy Spirit, in the unimaginable pain of this loss, when all words fail, hear and hold our “groans too deep for words” as we see and honor the anguish of families left without the life, love and laughter each child represents. Be present with us in the myriad of emotions we may bring – sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, fear. Guard also the hearts and minds of survivors and relatives as they are faced again with memories of their own trauma and suffering.

Jesus, who showed us how Love is meant to live in the world, call us again out of denial and into truth, out of despair and into hope. Spur us to action in the places where systems of injustice prevail. Provoke us to speak out against racism, discrimination, climate injustice, and all that stands between

us and the good, just, beautiful life you designed for us together. Be our strength when weak, our courage when afraid, our light in dark places. Hear our prayer, God of all, in the name of your son the Reconciler of all things. *Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Prayer

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that all nations and races may serve you in harmony; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Blessing *(suitable for lay or ordained)*

O Great Spirit, who has filled the world with beauty, open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your work. Keep our hearts thankful and our vision clear, as we seek to fulfill your blessings. Amen. *(Shinnecock)*

*Opening Collect and Scripture Readings based on the Holy Innocents Day of December 28.
Other prayers adapted from the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church.*



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