

Canadian Yearly Meeting annual report on truth and reconciliation work

Periods covered: January 2023 to December 2023

Introduction

Since 2016, local Quaker Meetings and Worship Groups have reported back to Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) on the reconciliation work they do each year. This sixth report compiled by CFSC synthesizes and summarizes reports from 14 individuals, Worship Groups and Monthly Meetings about their activities in 2023, including contributions from:

- Argenta Monthly Meeting
- Huron Worship Group, under the care of Kitchener Monthly Meeting
- Calgary Monthly Meeting
- Hamilton Monthly Meeting
- Interior BC Monthly Meeting
- Kitchener Area Monthly Meeting
- Niagara Monthly Meeting
- PEI Quaker Worship Group, under the care of New Brunswick Monthly Meeting
- Truro Worship Group, under the care of Halifax Monthly Meeting
- Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting
- Vancouver Monthly Meeting
- Yonge Street Monthly Meeting

Overall Impressions and Themes

There is profound interest in reconciliation work in many Meetings, but capacity is frequently a limiting factor. Meetings also report that Friends are in a variety of different places when it comes to interest, capacity, and understanding. Consequently, while some Meetings work towards reconciliation as a body, in others the work is undertaken by individual Friends, or those working in conjunction with non-Quaker communities such as KAIROS or Mennonite working groups. Several Meetings and Worship Groups report that they found the [Reconciliation Queries](#) produced by CFSC to be beneficial in furthering their understanding of and engagement with settler-Indigenous reconciliation.

A sizeable portion of the efforts takes the form of education—within as well as outside of Meetings—while other forms of action include providing financial and material support, petitioning officials, or volunteering time to support Indigenous-

led initiatives. Correspondingly, the following summary is divided into two themes: first, education, and second, advocacy and action.

Theme 1: education

A clear focus on education emerges from the reports: many Meetings and Worship Groups indicate that they have hosted Indigenous guest speakers or documentary screenings centered on Indigenous rights and experiences. Friends collectively engaged in book clubs and discussions as well. One Meeting compiled and disseminated a list of resources on Residential Schools, and another created a compendium of Indigenous- and Black-owned local businesses, made available to the community through their website.

Through in-person gatherings, as well as through email, Friends keep one another apprised of ongoing events related to Indigenous rights in their respective territories. At times, they also join public events such as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, powwows, or exhibitions by Indigenous artists, either individually or as a Meeting.

Several Meetings state that their members are in a variety of different places on the path towards reconciliation. As individuals and as groups, many work to educate themselves and others on Indigenous life, history, culture, and spirituality. Many Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups indicate that they start their gatherings with land acknowledgements, the CFSC queries on Truth and Reconciliation, or both. Meetings using the Queries report that these have been helpful to them to place their commitment to reconciliation in a new light as an ongoing process affecting their practice in many ways. Another Meeting reports that they vary the wording of the acknowledgement to avoid slipping into “rote repetition.”

On an individual level, Friends whose professional lives involve research or teaching in museums or educational institutions, or who are enrolled in relevant university programs such as Indigenous Studies or Reconciliation Studies, intentionally share what they learn with their Quaker communities. The fruits of these research and learning efforts are also shared beyond Quaker Meetings—for instance, one friend has shown her documentary on an Indigenous artist at several Quaker meetings as well as in universities and museums, and another uses his board position at a museum to support its repatriation program and to ensure Indigenous materials are handled properly, in accordance with the relevant protocols.

Theme 2: advocacy and action

Friends support projects by Indigenous communities in a variety of ways. For instance, various Meetings have provided resources, meals, or the physical space of

their Meeting House to Land Back Camps and blockade sites. Other Meetings support Indigenous centres and communities financially, and one Monthly Meeting who found that laws regarding charitable giving limited their ability to do so as a collective body still encouraged their members to do so individually and encouraged Indigenous friends to apply for funding from [CFSC's Reconciliation Fund](#).

Several Meetings also report petitioning government officials (on federal, provincial, and local levels), as well as other individuals and organizations, about matters relating to Indigenous rights and land in their respective regions.

One initiative among these that merits special mention is reported by Vancouver Meeting. In November 2023, the Meeting sent a letter to 25 local Members of Parliament to urge them to support MP Peter Julian's Private Member's Bill C-273, calling for the repeal of Section 43 of the Criminal Code that permits physical punishment of children in Canada –a bill that directly responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Call to Action* #6. All other Monthly Meetings in Canada were invited to send similar letters, and individual Friends were encouraged to sign a petition in support of the Bill as well.

Another initiative that merits special mention comes from Kitchener Meeting. In January 2023, Meeting members found that the Indigenous service agency next door to their Meeting House, who at the time were holding ceremony to support communities affected by the identification of grave sites on school grounds across the country, experienced repeated racist vandalism and theft of their orange "Every Child Matters" flags. With the support of the agency's director, one of the Meeting's members purchased 16 flags from their Indigenous supplier, placed one of these flags at the Meeting House and distributed the rest to other nearby residents who likewise wanted to send a message of support. The Meeting reports that this has strengthened connections between themselves, the neighbouring agency, and surrounding neighbours.

Friends also support truth and reconciliation in conjunction with non-Quaker organizations, either as official representatives of their Meeting or on an individual basis. Some of this takes the form of board work; in other cases, individual members join more action-oriented working groups and coalitions.