

## **Inter Faith Prayer Circles "LET US ALL PRAY TOGETHER" on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

In 2000, Grandmother-Elder and human rights activist Willi Nolan and United Church Minister Wade Reppert initiated a series of inter-faith prayer circles with their various spiritual leaders to guide constructive dialogue between Canadians and First Peoples in the Maritimes during the well-reported "Lobster Wars." in the Esgenoopeetitj (Burnt Church) region of New Brunswick.

Utilizing public spaces for prayer circles was found to be a practical and effective way to celebrate and bring together spiritual people of all faiths in support of the journey to peace and friendship with Canadians and First Peoples.

Building on the success of those prayer gatherings, members of the "Say Yes! To Indigenous Rights" project convinced various spiritual leaders to engage in public prayers. This time, the prayer circles will focus on ways to ensure that Canada wholeheartedly, without conditions or limitations, endorses the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP).

The collective prayers ask Creator-God to help Canadians and First Peoples to find the best ways to share natural resources.

Founders of the Say Yes To Indigenous Rights campaign know that the higher power called at prayer circles will bring just and peaceful resolutions to conflicts that have been tearing families, friends, communities and Canada apart.

"Canadians and First Peoples are to be celebrated and blessed; both hold the need to protect and honour their communities, faith and traditions. With prayer and dialogue considering their common interests, Canadians and First Peoples can decide the best ways to live together in peace and friendship."

The common theme identified for the prayers are to address current difficulties regarding unanimous adoption of the UNDRIP by the member countries of the United Nations. Dissenting parties should be named in prayer without judgement or condemnation, seeking only the guidance of Creator-God to help them to join the 145 other countries on good terms. Prayers should also be offered for the work of official mediators and for peacemakers and observers who place themselves in the way of oppression, aggressive or violent confrontation.

Spiritual leaders of all faith groups are asked to hold Prayer Circle events for their members at regular services. Elders, Bishops, Presidents and other denominational titular heads should have the pre-eminent voice.

Invitations to pray have been sent to Indigenous Elders and Spiritual Leaders from communities of First Peoples across Canada. The Wulustukieg Traditional Council of Tobic has already begun to hold prayer Circles in support of this work.

Faith groups are encouraged to pursue the theme from the "Say Yes! to Indigenous Rights" prayer circles during their regular ecumenical gatherings, and to participate in human rights education and actions available through experienced groups such as Kairos, the Christian

Peacemakers Teams, Society of Friends and Aboriginal Rights Coalition. Traditional indigenous leaders will continue to hold ceremonies within their territories and be available to join their neighbours in education and prayer circles.

All are encouraged to share their unique stories of bravery, kindness and success in delivering justice and human rights, such as:

A Story of Menno Cornelius Grunau 1920 (as told by his grandson)

*During time of Russian civil war in Southern Ukraine, bandits looted Cornelius's village while the Red and White Armies were commandeering supplies; the people of the village were starving. Cornelius Grunau, the only university-educated person in the community, took a rowboat and fished in dangerous waters, under fire from both sides, filled his boat and fed the people.*

The "Say Yes! to Indigenous Rights" prayer campaign seeks participation with all groups who welcome spiritual influences in their deliberations, especially workers, human and Aboriginal rights, peace and environmental organizations.

In Prayer, we will honour and celebrate the rights of Canadians and First Peoples to protect and defend each other and their children's future well-being. Without judgement or condemnation, with prayer we can set aside fear, anger and selfish interests and come together as one mind and one heart on good terms and begin to act as "we" as opposed to "I."

Already accepted by a number of congregations, the invitation continues to be extended, gathering strength and unity for the campaign among faith communities.

Tobic Saugem Dan Ennis states, "We anticipate that this work will grow to be international in scope to engage Spiritual leaders from all corners of the Earth in this simple and worthy undertaking. We know that all prayers are heard by the same God, so we will be successful."

***For more information, please contact:***

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Information sites:

**<http://TheWTCT.org/>**

**<http://cfsc.quaker.ca/pages/un.html>**

**<http://cfsc.quaker.ca/pages/un.html>**  
**<http://cfsc.quaker.ca/pages/un.html>**

**<http://canada.mcc.org/indigenouwork>**