
Re Delegation

From Mark Dyrholm

Date Wed 1/7/2026 2:28 PM

To Abe Tinney <Abe@claresholm.ca>

Abe:

As per our discussion I am requesting to attend the next council meeting as a delegation regarding the issue of Land Acknowledgements.

The best material to make pre-available to the council members would be the article I wrote below.

Thanks

--

Mark Dyrholm DC B.Comm

Symbols, Property Rights, and the Moral Right to Govern

A Caution on Land Acknowledgments in Our Community

By Mark Dyrholm

This article is in response to last week's piece on page 13 of *The Local Press*.

Claresholm has recently adopted a formal land acknowledgment. The final five words of that acknowledgment are “... **on whose territory we reside.**” Many people see this as a gesture of respect. Others are uneasy, not because they oppose truth or reconciliation, but because they sense that something important is being overlooked.

That instinct deserves to be taken seriously.

Property rights and the moral right to govern

Property rights do not exist on paper alone. They exist because a community broadly agrees that ownership is settled and that the authority enforcing it has the moral right to do so.

Recent British Columbia Supreme Court decisions have highlighted how unresolved Indigenous land claims can create uncertainty around land ownership, showing that these issues are not purely symbolic.

When a governing body formally declares that the land it governs was unjustly taken, even symbolically, it introduces a serious contradiction. If the land is morally illegitimate, then the authority to tax it, regulate it, zone it, and enforce law upon it becomes morally unstable as well.

Over time, this kind of language can erode confidence in:

- The permanence of property ownership
- The security of land titles
- The moral legitimacy of law enforcement and governance

These are not abstract concerns. In a town like Claresholm, people build homes, invest savings, start businesses, and raise families on the assumption that the ground beneath them is not morally provisional.

Governments do not rule by power alone. They rule because citizens accept their moral authority. When that authority is publicly questioned by the government itself, even through ritual language, trust weakens.

History is tragic, but it is not unique

Human history is filled with dispossession. Every continent, every people, and every civilization has taken land from others through force, threat, or advantage. This does not excuse injustice, but it does place it in context.

What is historically unusual is not that land was taken. What is new is the practice of modern communities, generations later, ritualistically declaring their own presence morally suspect while continuing to govern, tax, and enforce law on the same land.

That contradiction matters, especially when it comes from elected officials.

Moral attention matters: past versus present

There is another concern that deserves equal attention.

At the same time that institutions across Canada increasingly ritualize apologies for historical wrongs, many **current, fixable injustices remain unexamined and unresolved.**

This raises a difficult question: why are we so willing to condemn the distant past, but so reluctant to confront recent harms where victims are still alive and decision-makers are still identifiable?

One of the clearest examples is the treatment of children during the Covid period.

The unresolved harm to children

During Covid, children bore enormous costs:

- Prolonged school closures
- Social isolation
- Increased anxiety, depression, and learning loss
- Disrupted development during critical years

These policies were not designed primarily to protect children. They were imposed on children to protect others.

Meaningful debate about these impacts was often suppressed. Parents, educators, and professionals who raised concerns were dismissed or silenced. Free speech, which is essential for identifying harm in real time, failed when it was most needed.

To date, there has been no reckoning proportional to the damage done.

Justice should prioritize living victims and ongoing harm. A society that focuses moral energy on the distant past while avoiding accountability for the recent past is not becoming more ethical. It is becoming less honest.

What we teach our children through ritual

Land acknowledgments are not only for adults. They are absorbed by children.

When children are repeatedly told, implicitly or explicitly, that:

- The land their home sits on is morally tainted

- Their community's presence is unjust
- They bear responsibility for historical wrongs they did not commit

we risk burdening them with inherited guilt rather than equipping them with responsibility, agency, and moral clarity.

Children need to learn how to act justly now, how to recognize harm as it happens, and how to speak freely when something is wrong. Rituals that undermine confidence in their community while discouraging present-day questioning do not help them do that.

Ritual without resolution displaces responsibility

Land acknowledgments offer no clear path to resolution. They do not define what justice would look like, when the moral account is settled, or how legitimacy is restored.

At the same time, they divert attention from the harder work of repairing real damage that occurred in living memory. Symbolic gestures become substitutes for accountability.

This teaches a dangerous lesson: that moral performance matters more than moral repair.

Respect without self-erasure

It is possible to respect Indigenous history, acknowledge suffering, and work cooperatively toward shared prosperity without undermining the moral foundations of our own community.

We can teach accurate history, support Indigenous success today, address living injustices honestly, and protect children by learning from recent mistakes.

What we should not do lightly is adopt rituals that weaken confidence in property rights, the moral right to govern, and the legitimacy of law, especially when so many present-day harms remain unresolved.

A call for local prudence

Claresholm is a practical town. We solve problems. We value responsibility and common sense.

Before embedding new moral rituals into public life, especially ones that will shape how children understand their place in the world, we should ask plainly:

- Does this strengthen or weaken confidence in property and law?

- Does it help us correct harm that is happening now?
- Does it build moral clarity, or quietly erode it?

History should inform us, not paralyze us. Symbols should serve responsibility, not replace it.