



## *Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador*

July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021

The Feast of St. Ann (Co-Patroness of our Indigenous Peoples)

### **Re: Residential Schools**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Peace and Joy in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A few weeks have passed since the grim discovery of 215 unmarked graves in Kamloops and several reports of similar discoveries in other parts of Canada. For many, they have been difficult weeks. For our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters, they have been heart wrenching.

As stated in my June 11<sup>th</sup> letter to the Diocese, I am deeply sorry for the Catholic Church's involvement in this painful chapter of Canada's relationship with our Indigenous Peoples. The Church cannot apologize enough for what was done, and the harm that continues to weigh heavily upon our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters, but it also needs to take responsibility for what can be done today and the recommendations laid out in the Truth and Reconciliation Report (2015).

To this end, I would like to draw your attention to recommendations #59 and #61, that pertain to issues that are within the scope of the Diocesan Church.

#59 "We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church's role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities were necessary."

#61 "We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement, in collaboration with Survivors and representatives of Aboriginal organizations, to establish a permanent fund to Aboriginal people for:

- i. Community-controlled healing and reconciliation projects.
- ii. Community-controlled culture and language-revitalization projects.
- iii. Community-controlled education and relationship-building projects.
- iv. Regional dialogues for Indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss Indigenous spirituality, self-determination and reconciliation.

To this end I would like to suggest four things:

- 1) That each one of us take the time to read the Summary Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that is accessible on-line. By doing so, we will engage in the painful experience of walking in the shoes of our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters. Some of you may also be inspired to read one or more literary works penned by Indigenous Writers, detailing their struggles as Indigenous Persons in Canada today.
- 2) That we prepare ourselves for a Diocesan Financial Campaign in the Fall that establish funds that support Indigenous-controlled healing and reconciliation projects, dealing with inter-generational healing, culture, language, education and relationship building.
- 3) That we continue to remember to pray for healing and reconciliation, for all those affected by the Residential School Legacy, during the Prayers of the Faithful, in our personal prayers and during special prayer services organized in response to significant moments of trauma along the way.
- 4) That we challenge our communities and ourselves to respond with greater compassion to those who are suffering in our communities, building on God's gift of "Compassion" ("to suffer with").

As we await the delegation of Indigenous Representatives, who will enter into face-to-face dialogue with Pope Francis from December 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> (recommendation #58) and as we support those dioceses that are dealing with unmarked graves (recommendations #73-76), it is important that we express our solidarity with our Indigenous Peoples through continued prayer and concrete actions. I count on your support in all of these actions, and together with you, express my sincerest apologies to all Indigenous Peoples that have been impacted by Canada's Residential School Legacy.

**A Prayer for Healing and Reconciliation:**

O God, Creator and Father of us all, Healer of all our sorrows and afflictions,  
we come to you today to express our sorrow at the wrongs that have been afflicted  
on the First Peoples of this land.  
Send us your Spirit of Truth and Love, so that we may grow in wisdom and knowledge  
of the past and understand the wrongs that were done.  
Grant us the courage and strength to work together, as your children,  
in faith, hope and love, towards reconciliation and healing in our Church and in our Land.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Fraternally in Christ,



Bishop Bart van Roijen

Bishop of Corner Brook and Labrador

