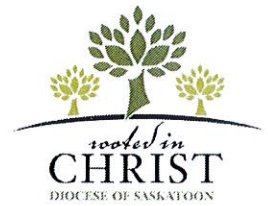




Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon
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Holy Week 2018

**Dear Clergy, Religious, Parish Life Directors, Lay Leaders,
Sisters and Brothers of the Diocese of Saskatoon,**

I am contacting you given the recent release of a letter to the Indigenous Peoples in Canada, written by Bishop Lionel Gendron, President of the Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops, with regard to Pope Francis not coming to Canada to apologize for the Catholic Church's role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

As you are no doubt aware, one of the Calls to Action in the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) called upon the Pope to come to Canada to issue an apology to residential school survivors, their families and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools.

Among those bringing that Call to Action #58 to the attention of the Holy Father have been a number of bishops – including the Catholic bishops of Saskatchewan, and myself, when I was serving as the bishop of the northern diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith.

In making the announcement that the Holy Father will not personally respond with a visit to Canada at this time, the President of the CCCB describes how Pope Francis is putting the emphasis on the bishops and the local churches to continue to provide and build concrete initiatives, and engage in an ever-deeper path of reconciliation and healing, in the spirit of the TRC.

Here in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon and the broader community of Saskatoon, the commitment to journeying together as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is not new, and continues to inspire ongoing initiatives at relationship building. This community was the site of one of the national Truth and Reconciliation gatherings, held at Prairieland Park in Saskatoon in June 2012. The accounts of what happened to children, families and schools in the flawed Residential Schools system was heard and witnessed by many – including many

from the Catholic community. The bishop of this diocese at the time, Donald Bolen, spoke in a circle of reconciliation at that gathering, and along with diocesan Justice and Peace Chair Carol Zubiak and Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish Elder Gayle Weenie, placed a diocesan pledge in the TRC Bentwood Box as a gesture of reconciliation. That pledge established the Diocesan Council for Truth and Reconciliation or DCTR, a dialogue and advisory circle of Indigenous and non-Indigenous representatives charged with raising awareness, addressing justice issues and furthering the work of reconciliation.

Since then, the DCTR has led a number of initiatives, including working with Bishop Bolen on a pastoral letter about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and initiating a community awareness event held at Mayfair United Church in the spring of 2015. In conjunction with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, the DCTR has also developed ways for parishes to take steps toward increasing awareness and healing – such as hosting Indigenous elders and OTC speakers to provide learning and insights about treaties and about First Nations spirituality to Catholic parishes, or placing Treaty Medal Plaques in parish buildings to acknowledge their location on Treaty 6 land. In addition, the DCTR has prepared a parish plan for reconciliation, outlining practical steps for faith communities to take in response to the TRC Calls to Action.

The DCTR has also reached out to communities struggling with recent events involving the shooting death of a young Indigenous man in a farmyard near North Battleford. The establishment of a West Central Reconciliation Committee has led to plans for an event to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from that area together for a day of awareness building, conversations and dialogue.

Other diocesan ministries are also playing an active role in bringing about reconciliation and healing. The coordinator of Restorative Ministry, Dianne Anderson, regularly holds Returning to Spirit sessions with Indigenous men at the Saskatoon Correctional Centre, an initiative that is changing lives. For many years, First Nations spirituality and the experiences of Indigenous Catholics has been part of our Lay Formation program, and in 2007, an Aboriginal Catholic stream of Lay Formation was added to the program. The bishops of the Prince Albert diocese, Keewatin-LePas archdiocese and the diocese of Saskatoon work together to provide the program for the Aboriginal people of their three dioceses.

In addition, our diocese is blessed to have Our Lady of Guadalupe parish actively ministering to First Nations, Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, and Métis Catholics, living out the truths of our Catholic faith in harmony with Indigenous spiritual traditions. Their invaluable outreach and leadership immeasurably enriches our diocese.

I am also extremely proud and impressed with efforts by our Catholic health facilities, our Catholic schools and St. Thomas More Catholic College to take steps toward reconciliation and healing, and make progress in reversing systemic injustice with programs, initiatives, awareness, and most of all - relationship-building.

In addition to addressing issues of justice, outreach and care, this journey of reconciliation has also involved times of sharing our lives, our prayers and our celebrations. One moment of shared joy was the diocesan celebration of the canonization of St. Kateri Tekakwitha in October 2012 – the “Lily of the Mohawks” is the first North American Indigenous woman to be declared a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike rejoiced at this recognition of her beautiful life of holiness and love for Jesus.

I also recall with joy my own installation as your bishop in November 2017, when I was honoured to be accompanied by drummers offering an honour song, led by Indigenous dancers as I entered the Cathedral of the Holy Family to bless the assembly. Another highlight was celebrating the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December with Our Lady of Guadalupe parishioners, elders and leaders, alongside Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon and visiting Archbishop Murray Chatlain of Keewatin-LePas. The incorporation of First Nations traditions into the liturgy, and the feast that followed were important moments of sharing and connection.

These are only a few examples of how we build relationships and grow in understanding. This is part of our gospel call to reconciliation and solidarity. We must walk in love and friendship as sisters and brothers.

As disappointing as it is to many that Pope Francis will not be coming to Canada any time soon, I was humbled and encouraged to hear from Indigenous people in this community. They told me that the desire to receive and welcome the Holy Father is always here.

I ask us all to renew our ongoing commitment to building relationships of honour and respect, and to continue to take concrete steps on this journey of healing that must involve all of us.

Sincerely,



✠ Most Reverend Mark A. Hagemoen
Bishop of Saskatoon