

Video Transcript:

Bishop Hagemoen addresses two issues of concern: residential schools and sexual abuse – July 22, 2021

I wish to address two issues today – the issue of residential schools and the issue of sexual abuse.

Both involve the Catholic Church and both involve sinfulness – in particular the sinfulness of Catholics when we have not lived up to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as individuals or as an institution. Both involve deep and lasting wounds that will only be healed through listening, repentance, conversion of hearts and concrete action demonstrating true conversion of heart.

Since the discovery of gravesites at various cemeteries of former residential schools was announced, I have listened and heard how the shock and dismay of this news is impacting and hurting so many in our community, affecting us all – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – across our own communities and our nation. In particular, I have heard and shared the sorrow and the anguish of knowing that Catholics were among those who ran the schools established by the federal government that operated in this country from the 1870s until the late 1990s.

I deeply regret and apologize that Catholics were part of this system which was designed to separate children from their families and communities and to assimilate them into a culture that featured a colonial attitude and approach. I deeply regret and apologize for the damage done to children at these schools, which for many included neglect and abuse, and I apologize for the deaths that happened at these schools, with children dying far away from mothers, fathers, grandparents and families, and I apologize to the families and the communities who have not been able to honour children's burial sites.

As the discoveries of other planned searches at other cemeteries progresses, we know that this will again expose the wounds and scars from the Indian Residential School legacy and raises awareness that our church communities and larger Canadian communities are very much at the beginning of the work to address the Calls to Action featured in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I commit to do all I can to work with our Catholic community to engage in such work, including extending my own support for Pope Francis to come to Canada and further the journey of reconciliation in our Church and in our country and joining the other Catholic bishops in Saskatchewan in initiating the already announced new fund-raising appeal among our parishioners to support healing and reconciliation programs for residential school survivors, their families and communities.

The second issue I wish to address is our diocese's ongoing work to implement our "Safeguarding Action Plan" which creates safe environments and responds to sexual abuse and serious misconduct by clergy or lay employees in the diocese. Developing and acting on this plan has revealed the range of needs and perspectives of victims and survivors as they recover from the trauma of sexual abuse or other forms of serious misconduct.

It also prompted us to undertake a Historical Case Review, which examined historical cases alleging serious misconduct, including sexual abuse. The review found nine cases involving serious misconduct by either clergy or lay employees working in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon. Case summaries have been posted to our diocesan website and shared with various Catholic communities throughout the diocese of Saskatoon. I am grateful to those who led this process – professionals who are Catholic and non-Catholic, and who did their work independent of myself and our diocesan offices.

To any person in our diocese or beyond who has experienced abuse by clergy or anyone else in the Church, I again express my profound sorrow and I apologize for what you have suffered, and for the betrayal, violation, and abandonment you have experienced. I also apologize to all members of our Church whose faith and trust has been damaged because of the sinful actions of those who have abused the innocent, and those who covered up such abuse. I recognize that both individual and institutional change must happen in our Church to move forward.

Words must be accompanied by substantial actions, and trust must be earned, not merely granted.

It is my earnest commitment that this stage of developing our Safeguarding Action Plan demonstrates that we are holding the bar high in assuring that all our churches are safe and respectful communities.

We are in the midst of a difficult and life-changing time. I hope and pray that these expressions of sorrow and support will provide some basis for the Catholic community's contribution to building a safer and more respectful civic community.

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