



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

June 18, 2021

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

The sad legacy of Residential Schools and the reality that Catholic entities participated in the Government policy which removed Indigenous children from their families and from their culture has once again been brought to the attention of Canadians. The discovery of 215 bodies of children in graves beside a former Residential School in Kamloops has brought us face-to-face with the stark and tragic history that many Indigenous children in Residential Schools died. When they died, often their bodies were not returned to their families and communities for burial.

This tragic and painful part of our history as a nation and as a Church causes us to grieve with the families of these children and feel sorrow and deep shame for our participation in the policies which created the Residential Schools. The recent discovery in Kamloops moves us to renew our efforts, which began many years ago, to bring about healing and reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of our land.

Thirty years ago, on July 24, 1991, as President of the Oblate Conference of Canada, in the presence of about 10-15,000 Indigenous peoples at Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta, I delivered an apology for the involvement of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in government sponsored Residential Schools across the country. It was among the first of such apologies offered to the Indigenous people. In 2015, Father Ken Forster, then Provincial Superior of OMI Lacombe Canada Province, repeated the apology and outlined commitments that the Oblate community had made to the Indigenous peoples they served, including making available to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) all of their archives relative to the Residential Schools, and to offer to university archives those materials that the TRC did not require.

The Catholic Indigenous Council was established to assure that Catholic Indigenous voices might be heard at the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle was formed so that Catholic Indigenous peoples, and other Catholic groups and organizations might come together to respond to the Calls to Action of the TRC. One of their first recommendations encouraged the Catholic Bishops to support the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which the Bishops did on April 27, 2018. The Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, including the Diocese of Hamilton, have provided financial support for the creation of a “Spirit Garden” at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto to honour Residential School survivors.

While the Diocese of Hamilton ran no residential schools, we remain keen participants in the process of healing and reconciliation. We made a significant contribution to the *Moving Forward Together* campaign of the CCCB; funds were directed to support Indigenous education opportunities at institutions of higher education within our Diocese. We also have an on-going partnership with the Diocese of Churchill-Hudson Bay to provide financial and administrative support as well as on-site ministry formation and mental health assistance for Indigenous youth.

The work of healing and reconciliation is, and must be, ongoing. Plans for a delegation to visit the Vatican and meet with Pope Francis were derailed by travel restrictions related to the pandemic. With the easing of those restrictions, it is expected that this visit will take place later this year.

I invite Catholics in the Diocese of Hamilton, to pray this weekend and especially on Monday, June 21st, National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada, for our Indigenous brothers and sisters – for the healing of past wounds, for wisdom to accompany one another on the path to reconciliation, and for a future full of hope.

All are invited to visit the Hamilton Diocesan website for information and resources to inform, to encourage and to heal.

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

+ Douglas Crosby, OMI

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton

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