

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Most Rev. R. Anthony Daniels
PO Box 771
Grand Falls-Windsor, NL
A2A 2M4



Tel: 709-489-2778
Fax: 709-489-8431
tdaniels@rcdiocesegrandfalls.ca

DIOCESE OF GRAND FALLS

To Priests, Pastoral Leaders, Parishes and Faithful of the Diocese

October 7, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On September 24th, 2021, the Catholic Bishops of Canada issued a Statement of Apology to the Indigenous People of This Land for the Church's role in the residential school system and the suffering of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. It reads in part:

Many Catholic religious communities and dioceses participated in this system, which led to the suppression of Indigenous languages, culture and spirituality, failing to respect the rich history, traditions and wisdom of Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge the grave abuses that were committed by some members of our Catholic community; physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and sexual...we, the Catholic Bishops of Canada express our profound remorse and apologize unequivocally.

At our national Plenary Assembly, the bishops of Canada were presented with statements from Indigenous leaders and much of our work was informed by ongoing contributions from the Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle, a coalition of Catholic organizations and individuals working together to renew and foster relationships with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council, an advisory body of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

I am grateful to those Indigenous Leaders and bishops throughout Canada who have been dedicated to strengthening the relationships between the Catholic Church and our Indigenous peoples to bring about meaningful dialogue, healing, and reconciliation. The apology of the Bishops of Canada is a necessary step on the journey to healing and I am proud to add my voice to the voices of all bishops of Canada in apologizing unequivocally.

Within the territory of the Diocese of Grand Falls, we are blessed to have the Miawpukek Mi'kamawey Mawi'omi First Nations Reserve at the mouth of Conne River. During the time that I have been Bishop of Grand Falls, I have made many visits to this community of the Mi'kmaw people for Confirmation at St. Anne's parish, for Pow Wow and to celebrate St. Anne's Feast Day. During my visits I have become familiar with the history of this community.

In the early 1900's, the priest from St. Alban's – who was also responsible for the Conne River community – made the decision that all the Mi'kmaw children would need to attend school in St. Alban's, in English, without any respect for Mi'kmaw spirituality or traditions. Travelling daily to and from St. Alban's was impossible. As a result, the Mi'kmaw children needed to be boarded in the homes of residents of St. Alban's. While many families that took in Mi'kmaw children were kind and responsible, sadly often this practice resulted in the Mi'kmaw children being taken from their homes and given to boarding homes for weeks at a time. Siblings often could not be accommodated in a single boarding home, so siblings were sometimes separated. The money given to boarding homes for the care of the Mi'kmaw children was sometimes spent on their own needs/wants and left the children underfed and under-clothed. The children lost their language, their spirituality, their traditions, and their families. In short, it was the Indian Residential School system without the physical Residential School.

This memory of abuse has never been lost by the Mi'kmaw people and the scars remain real and deep.

I have told Chief Mi'sel Joe on several occasions how deeply sorry I am for the role that the Catholic Church played in the suffering and trauma of those days, and I committed to him that I would do what I can to bring understanding and healing to this terrible past.

Shortly after reading about the discovery of the graves of 215 children in Kamloops, I wrote to Chief Mi'sel Joe to say: "I want to say to you and to the members of your community that I condemn in the strongest terms this assault on the dignity of Indigenous persons; especially the young who are the hope of every peoples. I am well aware that in our own past, individuals representing the Roman Catholic Church in Central Newfoundland cooperated with others in authority to debase the honour of Indigenous persons and the Church, and we failed in our mission to protect and defend those who most needed our support and our respect." At the same time, I asked all parishes in the Diocese of Grand Falls to include a prayer for the healing of our relationship with Indigenous communities and encouraged every parish to mark our sorrow with some tangible sign.

The local work of healing is continuing. Later this month, the Priests and Pastoral Leaders of this diocese will engage with Chief Mi'sel Joe in dialogue and ritual. I am very grateful to Chief Mi'sel Joe who has agreed to meet with our Priests and Pastoral Leaders – first in Conne River and then in Grand Falls-Windsor. During our time together, we, the leaders of our Catholic Parishes, will listen to the history of the Mi'kmaw people in Conne River, we will learn about their rich spirituality and traditions, and we will be faced with our historic and current failures to understand and honour them. And we will pray together.

Hopefully, this will be the beginning of a process of healing and will spread throughout the diocese to all our parishioners. I invite you to pray for the success of this process.

Salvation history is an ongoing story of broken relationships that are healed by the work of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray that this will be a time when we can recover some of what has been lost and protect and appreciate the richness of what remains in our First Nations communities. May St. Anne, the mother of Mary and grandmother of Jesus intercede for us.

In Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Anthony Daniels". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a cross at the beginning.

R. Anthony Daniels
Bishop of Grand Falls