



The Archdiocese of Regina

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Statement from the Archdiocese of Regina regarding the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation Residential School Grave Site Near Kamloops, BC.

From Archbishop Donald Bolen:

We have all heard the devastating news that has come out of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation with the discovery of 215 children found buried at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in unmarked graves. There is an outflowing of emotion: outrage, dismay, profound grief. And we have questions, many unanswered questions that need to be asked in the coming days and weeks. This shared history of residential schools profoundly impacts residential school survivors, and indeed all Canadians.

Here in the Archdiocese of Regina, we have a responsibility to look anew to the four Catholic operated Indian Residential Schools within our diocese: the Marieval Indian Residential School on the Cowessess First Nation, the Lebret Indian Industrial Residential School on the White Calf First Nation, the Muscowequan Residential School near Lestock on the Muskowekwan First Nation, and the St. Philip's Residential School near Kamsack on the Keeseekoose First Nation. There are cemeteries at these schools as well.

Recent reports have stated that there are at least 35 unmarked graves on the site of the Muscowequan Residential School. Indigenous communities here in Saskatchewan are speaking about the importance of using the same ground-penetrating radar technology to search for unmarked graves on other sites of former residential schools. The Archdiocese has a moral obligation to assist in that process, to support the Indigenous communities carrying out that work, and to walk alongside Indigenous brothers and sisters as we face anew the waves of suffering that were part of residential schools. In the coming days, we will seek out ways to enter into conversation with these communities while also continuing the dialogue that has already begun with others so that we can offer support and assistance in this work.

As an Archdiocese, we are striving to show our support and stand in solidarity with the Indigenous community. In the last few days, we have been connecting with and supporting the kohkums (grandmothers) and friends who have been deeply affected by this. Over the past four years, we have taken a number of steps to build right relationships and to walk together in truth and reconciliation. We are mindful, however, that events such as we have heard and experienced are extremely re-traumatizing to the survivors of residential schools. We acknowledge and understand that the road ahead is long and that there is much work to be done. We are in the process of consulting with Indigenous Elders and community leaders on how best to respond as a church. We will have more to communicate in the coming days in terms of direction, ideas, and ways that we can take concrete steps as a church towards healing and reconciliation. It is ever important to walk together in a spirit of humility and repentance and to honestly acknowledge the ways that we have caused deep pain to Indigenous communities.

We know that we cannot hide the past, and we cannot ask people who carry heavy burdens from the past to set those aside. We need to deal honestly with the past, to know as much as possible of what happened, to repent and ask forgiveness where appropriate, to walk together as much as we are able in the present, and to work together where possible in building a better future.

We are profoundly sorry for the hurt that actions and decisions of our church in the past have caused to Indigenous Peoples and in ways that we presently re-traumatize by our actions and inactions. We have heard and acknowledge that apologies are not an end point but a starting point, and are learning how to

walk in solidarity. On this journey, we have embraced a simple saying that I learned from Indigenous friends years ago, "nothing about us without us." As an Archdiocese, we invited Indigenous Elders and leaders to join us in establishing an Archdiocesan Truth and Reconciliation body. Since 2017 that group has helped us to identify what work can be done in parishes and schools, in formation, and in the joint pursuit of justice, and we have engaged in that work. We will continue these conversations in the coming days. A key part of what lies ahead will be working together in the field of education, so that more and more people will come to know the history of Indigenous Peoples, the wisdom of their traditions and ways, the suffering they endured, the legacy of colonization in today's society, and ways of constructively walking together today.

May the Creator bring consolation to Indigenous Peoples, perseverance to us all in the pursuit of justice, a healing of relationships, and the grace of being able to walk together in our day.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "+ Don Bolen". The signature is stylized and cursive.

+ Don Bolen
Archbishop of Regina