



DIOCESE OF LONDON

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Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

To: The Faithful of the Diocese of London

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In September, Bishop Dabrowski and I participated in the annual plenary meeting of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops at which the Bishops of Canada decided to release a formal apology to the Indigenous Peoples of this land, dated 24 September 2021. We acknowledged the suffering experienced in Canada's Indian Residential Schools and expressed our sorrow for the historical and ongoing trauma and the legacy of suffering and challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples that continue to this day. We recognized that, along with policies and actions of various levels of government in Canada, members of our Church participated in the Residential School system and had been guilty of various forms of emotional, psychological, physical and sexual abuse. We, the Bishops of Canada, expressed our profound remorse and apologized unequivocally.

A few days later, on 27 September, I issued my own apology to the Indigenous Peoples as did many bishops across the country. We share responsibility to repair the harm that has been done to individuals and communities, including the systemic prejudice at the root of the abuse and inter-generational trauma that resulted from the abuse.

I noted, at the same time, the need for all of us in the Diocese to take part in concrete action to work diligently towards truth and reconciliation. We need to recognize the truth that Catholic communities were involved in past abuse and move to reconciliation to offset the effects of the abuse, seeking ways of working with local Indigenous communities to bring about healing. As I said in my apology, "I commit the Diocese of London to accompany you, the Indigenous Peoples of this land, on the journey of healing and reconciliation. I realize that there is much more work to do in our Diocese, but I know that 'we look forward to listening and learning from you as we walk in solidarity'" (27 September 2021).

To do this work, I set out a plan in five parts. The plan calls for dialogue with local Indigenous Peoples, educating ourselves on these issues in order to learn how we can move forward, exploring the possibility of a "service of reparation", participating in the fundraising campaign announced by the Bishops of Canada, and, finally, setting up a committee to oversee the plan. Today, I am very pleased to announce the formation of that committee.

Taking its name from the original Truth and Reconciliation Commission, our "Truth and Reconciliation Committee" includes people from across the Diocese, some of whom identify as Indigenous and others who have been allies working in various settings with Indigenous Peoples. The Committee will be co-chaired by Mrs. Kathy Furlong and Father Michael Béchar. They will share the work with Ms Sarah Donohue, J.D., Mr. Paul Gilpin, Ms Christine Maracle, Ms Melissa Philips, Father Dan Vere, Dr. Valerie Waboose and Mrs. Gwen Waeijen. This team is being entrusted with guiding all of us on the path to truth and reconciliation.

In expressing my gratitude to those who have agreed to guide this work, I ask all members of the Diocese of London to give our cooperation to this new venture so we can work together on the path of truth that will lead us to reconciliation.

Sunday, 12 December, is the National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in which we join with Indigenous Peoples in a special way through prayer and acts of solidarity. I invoke the Blessed Mother under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patron of the Americas, for her intercession that we in our Diocese may have the humility and generosity to carry through on this resolve to walk together on the path of truth and reconciliation. May God guide our words and our work.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, CSB
Bishop of London