



September 22, 2021

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation September 30, 2021

To all the faithful of the Diocese of Prince Albert,

May the pure love of Christ reign in our hearts!

This September 30th, Canada will celebrate its first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Such a day of remembrance was requested by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in its Call to Action #81: “to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.”

The Catholic Church has a long history with the indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan. In the current area of the Diocese of Prince Albert, there are more than thirty different Nations (e.g. Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota Sioux, Dene, and Métis.) Although the Catholic missionaries who came to serve indigenous peoples did so out of love and a desire to help, we know now that many efforts were clouded by colonialist attitudes which were common to Canadians of European descent and which became government policy. Canadians of various faiths, including Catholics, participated in a program of assimilation. We know now that Day Schools and Indian Residential Schools caused severe damage, the fragmentation of families, intergenerational trauma, the suppression of indigenous cultures, languages, and spirituality. As Catholics, we greatly repent the damage that members of the Church caused in this history of interaction. We abhor especially the abusive behaviour of some clergy and religious which was sexual, verbal, and physical in nature.

This National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an opportunity to examine this history together, particularly the legacy of residential schools, to understand their impact on indigenous peoples, and to search for ways to work together for healing and reconciliation. Although this day will not be kept as a statutory holiday in Saskatchewan, this means that its observance can flow into our daily life: schools, work, homes and places of worship. It is an opportunity for all Canadians to reflect and to commit ourselves to a new way of living together.

In the Diocese of Prince Albert, many positive efforts have been made to move forward with reconciliation, particularly through the continued presence of parishes on indigenous lands and the indigenous Catholic communities that worship there. In addition to parish activities, we have been supporting cultural camps on several reserves as well as psychological counselling for people needing support through Catholic Family Services. I also wish to thank many people in our cities and towns who live as peaceful neighbours and who make efforts to walk together respectfully. Nevertheless, we know that there is much more that we can do and should do to assist in a process of healing and reconciliation.

On Thursday, September 30th, I encourage parishes to offer Mass for the intention of healing and reconciliation. Various formularies in the *Roman Missal* would be appropriate (e.g. # 16 For Reconciliation). Look for a video and prayer from me on our diocesan website and social media that day. As Catholics, our efforts at reconciliation should involve prayer because it is God who is the source of life and who calls us to live as brothers and sisters. We need God's grace to face the evil done, to repent, and to ask for forgiveness. God can heal hearts that are broken and help us to walk together in renewed respect and peace.

There are many other ways that people may choose to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The pastoral centre staff and I will also be taking time on this day to learn more about this history together. May God bless your efforts to make a difference, and may each year bring us closer to healed relationships in a healed land.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Stephen A. Hero

✠ Most Rev. Stephen A. Hero
Bishop of Prince Albert