

In Peace and Friendship

That's how Grassroots Grandmother Dorene Bernard signed off when she sent an email including words of welcome and a prayer for the service held last November when I was consecrated bishop.

Those words, and the words of her prayer, were filled with incredible hope and possibility about a new relationship with all of humanity and all of creation, one based in peace and friendship. They moved me to tears when I read them. They still do.

I was again moved to tears - more than once this past week - as I listened and read with horror that the remains of 215 children were found on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School. The youngest child discovered is believed to have been three years old!

The makeshift memorials that have appeared across the country of children's shoes of many different shapes and sizes and types, including one along Gottingen Street in Northend Halifax organized by the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, have been vivid and haunting.

There is no question: we are being called to mourn collectively as a nation. We also are being called anew to listen to our indigenous elders and leaders, to respect their wisdom and knowledge, and we're being called to ACT ON IT.

While the revelation of these deaths has been shocking to so many of us, if we had read the [Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued in 2015](#) and heeded its [Calls to Action](#) we would not have been so shocked. Residential School survivors and their families had already revealed the stark news that children had been buried at residential schools in unmarked graves all across the country. They've been telling us this for years. Now that the horrifying truth is now impossible to ignore, may we commit ourselves to do the hard work we are called to as those who follow Jesus Christ and his path of reconciliation, justice, mercy and peace.

The Anglican Church of Canada has acknowledged its role in the Residential Schools system and has apologized for spiritual, emotional and cultural harm and we continue to do so as part of our ongoing, lifelong commitment to the work of reconciliation. The establishment of the Anglican Healing Fund to support local, community-led healing projects is one example of that, and Anglicans across the country have contributed generously to make that possible.

In [An Apology for Spiritual Harm](#) offered during the meeting of General Synod in July, 2019, then-Primate Fred Hiltz reminded us of one particular Call to Action that we can lay claim to as Christian communities. He wrote:

"I remind our Church of our solemn responsibility to honour the Calls to Action from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, notably, Call #60:

"We call upon leaders of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement and all other faiths, in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders, Survivors, schools of theology, seminaries, and other religious training centres, to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy, and all clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities, on the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right, the history and legacy of residential schools and the roles of the church parties in that system, the history and legacy of religious conflict in Aboriginal families and communities, and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence."

May we do this work in our parishes and communities and families. Recognizing that our actions must be indigenous-led, I am reaching out to indigenous leaders in our Diocese to express our deep remorse and to seek new ways of living with them "in peace and friendship."

Many of us may feel overwhelmed by the events of the past week and may wonder how we can even begin this difficult and painful work. It can seem enormous and we may not even know where to begin. Let us not forget that we do not do this work alone, but find strength and guidance, courage and hope from the Creator of all life, who enables and encourages us along the path of truth and reconciliation.

In the words of Dorene Bernard, from that prayer on St. Andrew's Day:

"We pray for strength and courage that encourages growth and positive change.

We give thanks for the resilience you give to us, in our times of need.

We give thanks for the courage of our hearts, our female energy

And of our minds, our male energy, that empowers our potential for healing."

- Dorene Bernard, Grassroots Grandmother, Sipekne'katik, Mi'kma'ki

In this time of national mourning, may we listen and learn, repent and pray. May we work for the good of "all our relations," recognizing that we are all one body serving the One whose own body was wounded for the redemption of the world. As we walk in his footsteps may we share his dream for a new and reconciled creation: one with God our Creator, one with each other as sisters and brothers, siblings and relatives, and one with the whole earth.

May the Creator guide you and sustain you along the way.

In peace and friendship,

+Sandra Diocesan Bishop Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

June 4, 2021