



June 23, 2023

Dear Mi'kmaw Chiefs of Nova Scotia:

Since my installation as the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth in November of 2020 I made it a priority to renew and strength the relationship between the local Church and the Mi'kmaq communities within the boundaries of the Archdiocese. Over the past three years my efforts to do this have been challenged by the limitations and restrictions placed on all of us regarding the global pandemic.

Yet encouraged by members of the Mi'kmaq community that I have met and spoken with over the past three years. We have continued the important conversation of how best we can walk together and I believe we have made some significant steps forward. This letter highlights our journey thus far.

In the spring of 2022, Bishop Kirkpatrick of the Diocese of Antigonish and myself had the opportunity to speak at an Assembly of Chiefs. At that time I had asked for assistance and guidance re: the National Indigenous Reconciliation Fund that was announced in February of 2022 by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB). This fund is now actively accepting applications from local Indigenous communities who are seeking financial support for programs and initiatives that will promote healing and reconciliation. Further information about this fund can be found here: <https://www.irfund.ca/>

Along with this national initiative we have made the following efforts locally as well.

1. Development of a Mi'kmaq Pastoral Council

When I was the Bishop of Antigonish I had a Mi'kmaq Pastoral Council that I relied on for consultation and advisement in matters of pastoral importance to the Mi'kmaq. When I became Archbishop in Halifax-Yarmouth I desired to create that same advisory body in this diocese.

I am delighted that this council was finalized and met officially as a Mi'kmaq Pastoral Council on May 25, 2023. This letter is one of the actionable results of our discussions and discernment.

In recruiting for this council, I made pastoral visits to four of the six First Nations communities in the Archdiocese: Annapolis Valley, Glooscap, Millbrook, and Sipekne'katik. Plans are in the works to visit the remaining two: Acadia and Bear River in late summer or into the fall.

I have been moved by the honest and open sharing and conversations that have happened during these pastoral visits and I look forward to continuing the conversations.

2. CCCB Pastoral Letters to the Indigenous Communities of this Land, February 2023

On February 8, 2023, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued four pastoral letters on reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. I support these letters and have shared them with the people of the Archdiocese. I encourage you to share specifically the letter addressed to the First Nations with your communities. They can be found on the CCCB website: www.cccb.ca

The series is titled: That We May Walk Together and the intention was to encourage local engagement. The letters are the fruit of many months of listening, encounter, and dialogue, through Listening Circles, the Indigenous Delegation to the Vatican in April 2022, and Pope Francis' Apostolic Voyage to Canada later that same year in July.

3. Pilgrimage of Healing and Reconciliation of Pope Francis in July 2023

The pilgrimage of Pope Francis last summer made an impact on Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities alike. I joined the pilgrimage while the Pope was in Quebec City. I felt it was important for me to be with my brother bishops to pray with Pope Francis and more significantly to pray together with the members of Indigenous communities that gathered for our shared journey of reconciliation and healing. It was also an opportunity to express my own commitment to the importance of this task. What impacted me most about the Pope's visit was the Holy Father's own obvious commitment to reconciliation.

4. Repudiation of Doctrine of Discovery

Most recently at the end of March the Vatican released a statement repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. This statement was released jointly by the Vatican Dicastries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development. The message reiterates the Catholic teaching that all human beings have an inherent dignity given to them by the Creator and strongly repudiates that Doctrine of Discovery:

The "doctrine of discovery" is not part of the teaching of the Catholic Church... the Church acknowledges that these papal bulls did not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples. The Church is also aware that the contents of these documents were manipulated for political purposes by competing colonial powers in order to justify immoral acts against Indigenous peoples that were carried out, at times, without opposition from ecclesiastical authorities. It is only just to recognize these errors, acknowledge the terrible effects of the assimilation policies and the pain experienced by Indigenous peoples, and ask for pardon. Furthermore, Pope Francis has urged: "Never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others."

The full document can be read on the Archdiocesan Mi'kmaq Community webpage: www.halifaxarmouth.org/mi-kmaq-community. There was little media coverage on this important document. I have shared it with the people of the Archdiocese and I encourage you share this widely in your communities.

5. Local Healing and Reconciliation Fund

As I mentioned earlier, a National Reconciliation Fund was begun by the CCCB. In addition, I implemented a local healing and reconciliation fund which is above and beyond the amount that Archdiocese has committed to the national efforts. Beginning last year, and for the following five years, the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth will run a diocesan wide special collection for this fund. Local Mi'kmaq communities will be invited to apply for funding to support programs, projects, and initiatives that will promote healing and reconciliation in Nova Scotia.

6. Education Sessions with Clergy and Staff

To help clergy and diocesan staff understand more clearly the horrible history of the treatment and relationship between Indigenous communities and the Church as well as the government of Canada, we have hosted education sessions with clergy and staff in Halifax and Antigonish. My aim is to build on these experiences.

If you have resource people that you feel would be able to share stories and experiences that would help others understand better, and ultimately do better in building relationships, I would welcome your recommendations.

7. Mass at Saint Mary's Cathedral Basilica for North American Indigenous Games

In response to a request from Indigenous members of the Mi'kmaq Pastoral Council, I will offer a Mass for all involved in the North American Indigenous Games. This Mass will take place at 12:15pm on Saturday, July 15, at Saint Mary's Cathedral in downtown Halifax. I invite all of you to come as you are able. All are welcome!

These are some of the small steps I have walked with a variety of people over the past several years in my efforts to renew the relationship between the Church and the Mi'kmaq. I know there is a long road and there is much work that needs to be done to bring about true healing and reconciliation between us. I am committed to this work and pray that together we can find new paths forward. I humbly ask for your collaboration and look forward to future conversation

Yours in Christ,



Archbishop Brian J Dunn
Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth