



**The Catholic Women's League of Canada
Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council**



**Community Life Chair
Communique # 8**

TO: Diocesan Chairpersons of Community Life
CC: Diocesan Presidents / Provincial President (Judy Look)
CC: Provincial Executive, National Chairperson of Community Life (Faith Anderson)
FROM: Theresa Hickey, ABMK Community Life Chair

Residential Schools & Reconciliation

It's estimated that about 150,000 indigenous children were removed from their homes and forced to attend residential schools, many have never returned to their families.

What happened to the children who never returned home from Residential Schools?

So far, the truth and reconciliation commission determined more than 4,000 school children died in the residential schools. Researchers say that thousands died of tuberculosis, some ran away in minus 30 below zero and were found frozen to death, some bodies of the children were not returned home, and parents rarely learned the circumstances of a child's death. The Spanish flu and influenza epidemic killed many due to neglect. So much neglect, emotional and psychological abuse was constant.

On May 29, 2021 there came the overwhelmingly news of the remains of 215 children found in unmarked graves at a former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. In June, more unmarked graves were found near the former Marieval residential school in Saskatchewan. Hundreds more unmarked graves found at former residences gives chilling evidence that many of the missing children may have died at these schools.

More remains were discovered near the grounds of the former St. Eugene's Mission School in the East Kootenay in the region of British Columbia.

Can you imagine the pain the families experienced who already had a shared history of pain, sorrow and loneliness, opening their wounds once again?

A call for change happened in 1993 when, then the National Chief Phil Fontaine appeared on the national news and made a statement recounting the physical and sexual abuse that occurred at his school as a child. His statement opened legal action with thousands of cases of abuse at the schools. The truth is out and finally the survivors can finally speak and be heard.

The Catholic Women's League was devastated by the terrible news of the findings of the unmarked graves. We are terribly sorry to hear about this sad discovery. Our hearts go to the families of those children who never returned home.

How do we reconcile and build relationships with our indigenous sisters and brothers after so much abuse and hurt in the residential school system?

First, we should acknowledge their pain, know their feelings of hurt and anger are real.

Educate ourselves on indigenous culture, read books that reflect on the residential school experience. Be trustworthy, respect the rights of indigenous peoples, be respectful and acknowledge we are on treaty land, donate and support an indigenous organization. Invite an indigenous leader to join our organization at a CWL meeting. We need to listen, truly listen to their stories being told by survivors, so we can begin to make small changes in our lives to become better allies and deepen our relationships with indigenous peoples.

Please remember: ORANGE SHIRT DAY SEPTEMBER 30th, known as National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a national day of remembrance for the victims of the Canadian Indian Residential School System. Official website: <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/>

There are many non - indigenous Canadians who are unaware of residential schools and how recent they are in our history. Visit Beyond94, <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-single/beyond-94> to hear stories from residential school survivors and what reconciliation means to them.

In closing, Catholic Women's League encourages all organizations to pray for the children buried in unmarked graves to be identified and rest peacefully in their final resting place. Let us not forget them.

Prayer for Missing Children

Lord, I ask for your help in the safe return of all missing children, especially those who never returned home from residential schools. Guard those children wherever they are. Lord Jesus gives comfort to their families in these moments of terror. Dear Lord, we place our trust in you to find all children in the unmarked graves. We pray those little children will be found and buried with dignity.

Amen

Theresa