



Minnesota Catholic Conference

Jason Adkins, Executive Director

(651) 227-8777

JAdkins@mncatholic.org

May 12, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Minnesota's Bishops Respond to Department of the Interior Native American Boarding Schools Report

Earlier this year, based on news reports coming from Canada and the announcement by the U.S. Department of the Interior that it would issue a report related to the legacy of Native American boarding schools in this country, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) expressed its desire to be of assistance in the process of reviewing that history.

“The report’s release is an important step toward understanding the full legacy of the federal government’s boarding school program, including the involvement of the nation’s Christian denominations,” said Bishop Andrew Cozzens of the Diocese of Crookston. “We are saddened by the tragedy of its contents and cannot even begin to imagine the deep sorrow that re-opening this painful chapter is causing in Native communities across North America and in our State.”

Pope Francis recently met with a group of indigenous leaders from Canada and expressed his sadness and apologies for the ways in which Catholics had participated in a boarding school system that, in many instances, involuntarily removed children from their homes and placed them in boarding schools that cut them off from their families and cultural and linguistic roots.

“[T]he ties that connect the elderly and the young are essential,” Pope Francis stated. “They must be cherished and protected, lest we lose our historical memory and our very identity. Whenever memory and identity are cherished and protected, we become more human.”

Here in Minnesota, the bishops of the Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC) proactively sought a meeting with tribal leaders last year to listen to their views about the boarding schools, assess their interest in exploring the history further, and express the bishops’ own commitment to making any archives and records related to the boarding schools available for review. Among other things, the bishops seek to work with the tribal governments to clarify whether there are any unaccounted missing persons or remains.

Since the December 9 meeting at Grand Casino Mille Lacs, MCC and tribal leaders have together developed a process for the exchange of information and records related to attendance at the boarding schools. The results of each diocese’s initial review will be made available to tribal

leaders soon. Due to privacy concerns, those records will be made public only upon the collective consent of the relevant tribal governments.

In his remarks to Canadian indigenous leaders, Pope Francis encouraged bishops to “continue taking steps towards the transparent search for truth and to foster healing and reconciliation. These steps are part of a journey that can favor the rediscovery and revitalization of [native] culture, while helping the Church to grow in love, respect, and specific attention to your authentic traditions.”

One path forward together is exploring ways to recover indigenous languages that were suppressed by the boarding schools. In the collaborative discussions, there is a strong sense among tribal leaders that efforts related to recovering tribal languages is an important part of healing the damage done in these schools.

The bishops of Minnesota are already considering ways to help in language recovery and looking forward to working with the tribal communities, recalling that Catholic leaders in the past often played an important role in putting indigenous languages into written form, as occurred with Bishop Frederic Baraga and the Ojibwe language.

In reflecting on the collective journey toward better understanding the legacy of the boarding schools, Bishop Daniel Felton of the Diocese of Duluth stated: “Although the history that is brought to light may cause deep sorrow in the Native and Indigenous communities, we hope it may also bring real and honest dialogue to lead towards healing, and a heightened awareness so that this history is never repeated.”

The Minnesota Catholic Conference is the public policy and legislative voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota and serves to uphold life, dignity, and the common good.

###

Diocesan Media Contacts:

Chris Clancy
Communications Specialist, Diocese of New Ulm
cclancy@dnu.org

Janelle Gergen
Communications Director, Diocese of Crookston
jgergen@crookston.org

Peter Martin
Director of Communications, Diocese of
Winona-Rochester, pmartin@dow.org

Deacon Kyle Eller
Communications Director, Diocese of Duluth
keller@dioceseduluth.org

Tom Halden
Director of Communications, Archdiocese of
St. Paul and Minneapolis, haldent@archspm.org

Joe Towalski
Communications Director, Diocese of St. Cloud
jtowalski@gw.stcdio.org