



Diocese of Whitehorse
BISHOP'S OFFICE

Pastoral letter for National Indigenous Day, June 21, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we celebrate National Indigenous Day in Canada and in our diocese. Let this be a day to bless the Lord for our Indigenous sisters and brothers; a day to highlight and celebrate their stories, language, culture, art, music, and their contribution to our diocese.

During these six years as Bishop of Whitehorse, living and ministering in Yukon and Northern BC, I have learned tremendously from Indigenous people in our communities. Through their open and generous sharing of personal stories, joys, grief and suffering, they have made me aware of the realities of their lived experience.

Their experience is part of our shared history, and National Indigenous Day offers us the opportunity to not only celebrate, but also to reflect upon this history. I am extremely grateful for all of you who, with me and with the Catholic Church, are walking the path of healing and reconciliation. I warmly thank the residential school survivors, the Elders, the Chiefs, and all people from the Yukon and Northern BC who have added to my understanding of the impacts of colonization and the residential school system. Whichever way we attempt to make reparation for the hurt that was done, I acknowledge that we, by ourselves, can never succeed to completely fix what has been broken. However, I know that nothing is impossible to God, our Creator, who has the power to heal us all.

Also, I wish to share with you that last year, our diocese formed a Committee for Reconciliation with twelve members. The members include residential school survivors and Indigenous representatives, parishioners, and pastoral ministry workers, who have a range of experience and knowledge in the fields of community leadership, history, language, education and anthropology. Most recently, the committee is committed to guiding our Diocese towards local healing and reconciliation initiatives to be funded by the five-year Indigenous Reconciliation Fund.

In addition, as you know, our Holy Father Pope Francis is coming for a Papal Visit to Canada from July 24 to July 29, 2022 as another opportunity to listen and to dialogue with First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples in Canada. He will be visiting Edmonton, Québec and Iqaluit. I sincerely hope that the Holy Father's visit to Canada will be a step forward towards healing and reconciliation for all of us.

Let us continue to pray for healing and reconciliation, and for the continuing flourishing and prospering of the Indigenous peoples in our diocese and in our country.

God bless you,

+ Héctor Vila