

Canada's Bishops Announce Indigenous Reconciliation Fund to Support Projects Across Canada

January 28, 2022 – Canada's Catholic Bishops have agreed to establish a new registered charity to support and advance healing and reconciliation initiatives. The charity is expected to manage the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund, which will accept contributions from 73 dioceses across Canada in order to fulfill the \$30 million financial commitment made by Canada's Bishops in September.

"The Bishops of Canada are fully committed to addressing the historical and ongoing trauma caused by the residential school system," said Bishop Raymond Poisson, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB). "In moving forward with our collective financial commitment, we will continue to be guided by the experience and wisdom of Indigenous peoples across the country".

The Indigenous Reconciliation Fund will be managed with financial measures in place to ensure transparency and good governance. The Board of the fund will be comprised of both Indigenous directors and Catholic members who collectively bring a strong financial acumen and deep commitment to the healing and reconciliation journey. The directors of the Board include:

- **Chief Wilton Littlechild, Ph.D**, a Cree chief, residential school survivor, and lawyer who served as a Commissioner for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Chief Littlechild has been a Member of Parliament, Vice-President of the Indigenous Parliament of the Americas, North American Representative to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and a Chairperson for the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform.
- **Giselle Marion**, who holds a law degree from the University of British Columbia and was called to the Bar in the Northwest Territories in 2008. During her articles Ms. Marion worked for the Department of Justice. She is a Tłı̨ch̨o Citizen and was born and raised in Behchokò, NT. She is the Director of Client Services with the Tłı̨ch̨o Government out of the Behchokò office.
- **Rosella Kinoshameg**, an Odawa/Ojibway woman from the Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation Territory. She is a Registered Nurse with over 50 years of nursing experience, mostly working with First Nations communities doing community health, maternal child health, immunizations, home and community care. She was one of the original members of the CCCC's Indigenous Council and continues to serve as a member of Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle.

The members of the Board include:

- **Natale Gallo**, a former Supreme Director of the Knights of Columbus, where he represented Canada on the International Board of Directors.
- **Claude Bédard**, National President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Canada.
- **Barbara Dowding**, former National President of the Catholic Women's League of Canada.

The fund will publish annual reports and will be subject to an audit by an independent accounting firm each year. Any administrative costs will be on top of the \$30 million being raised and will not be deducted from this principal amount.

While specific disbursement guidelines will be informed by additional input from Indigenous partners, we intend the funds to contribute to the following priorities:

- Healing and reconciliation for communities and families;
- Culture and language revitalization;
- Education and community building; and
- Dialogues for promoting indigenous spirituality and culture.

Regional and/or Diocesan Granting Committees will be established to identify projects that further the fund's priorities, review applications and request funds to support such projects. These committees will include Indigenous and Catholic membership and it is our recommendation that they be chaired by local Indigenous partners

We recognize that there has been considerable disappointment with a previous Catholic fundraising campaign tied to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. While the CCCB was not party to the agreement, we have recognized the shortcomings of this campaign and learned critically important lessons to ensure that the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund is fully funded and well managed with appropriate oversight.