Your Guide to Preparing for

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation: Indigenous Perspectives on the Pope’s Apology

September 30, 2022
Thank You, Miigwetch!

Chi Miigwetch, thank you, for joining the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund (DWF) for our upcoming panel discussion, “National Day for Truth and Reconciliation: Indigenous Perspectives on the Pope’s Apology”.

We are grateful to have you walk the path of reconciliation with us. We all begin our reconciliation journey at different points and for different reasons, so we encourage everyone to learn as much as they can and take care of themselves.

DWF was created out of two families, one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, coming together to make a change, uphold Chanie and Gord’s legacies, and build cultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

For more information, visit downiewenjack.ca.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

If your school or organization offers social and mental health support, please be sure to have them available. Topics and materials describing the residential school system can include highly sensitive subject matter and may cause powerful emotional responses.

Health Canada provides a free 24-hour crisis line for Survivors and their families affected by the residential school system (also available in French). The 24-Hour Residential School Support Line: 1-866-925-4419.

Kids Help Phone: Call 1-800-668-6868 (toll-free) or text CONNECT to 686868.
Indigenous people can connect with an Indigenous volunteer crisis responder, when available, by messaging FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, or MÉTIS to 686868 for young people and 741741 for adults.
National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

In June 2021, the federal government announced the creation of a new statutory holiday known as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, to be recognized on September 30th each year.

This day fulfills the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call-to-Action #80 and will serve as a day of remembrance, reflection, action, and learning. Since 2013, September 30th has been known as Orange Shirt Day, a day to recognize the tragic history and long-standing effects of residential schools.

Call-to-Action #80

We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.

About the Papal Visit

From July 24-29, 2022, Pope Francis visited Canada. The trip was centred on an apology for the Catholic Church’s role in the residential school system in Canada. The visit started with the Pope flying into Edmonton, AB, then to Maskwacis, where he delivered the formal apology. Afterwards, the Pope visited Sacred Heart Church in Edmonton, a church that is significant for many urban Indigenous Peoples. After conducting a morning mass in Edmonton, his next stop was at Lac Ste. Anne, a place of significance that has hosted an annual pilgrimage since 1889. The Pope then went east to Quebec City, QC and finally to Iqaluit, NU before returning to Rome.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children attended the residential school system, mostly by force, from the late 1800s to 1996. Of the 139 schools in the system, more than half were run by the Catholic Church. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission estimates that approximately 4,100 to 6,000 children died from abuse and neglect while in the residential school system.

The Truth and Reconciliation Call-to-Action #58 calls upon the Pope to issue an apology on Canadian soil for the Catholic Church's role in the residential school system.

Call-to-Action #58

We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology to be similar to the 2010 apology issued to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of the issuing of this Report and to be delivered by the Pope in Canada.
INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE POPE’S APOLOGY

Since the papal visit in July 2022 resulted in mixed emotions for many Indigenous Peoples throughout the country, the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund has brought together representatives who were involved in and affected by the Pope’s visit to Treaty Six Territory. This conversation explores what the apology means to those impacted by residential schools, its effects on reconciliation, and how this will shape Indigenous communities and intergenerational relationships across Turtle Island.

MEET THE PANEL:

Matthew James Weigel, Naheyawin (Host)
Matthew James Weigel is a Dene and Métis poet and artist born and raised in Edmonton, AB. He is the designer for Moon Jelly House press and his words and art have been published by Arc Poetry Magazine, Book*Hug, The Polyglot, and The Mamawi Project. Matthew is a Writers’ Trust Dayne Ogilvie Prize finalist, National Magazine Award finalist, Nelson Ball Prize finalist, Cécile E. Mactaggart award winner, and winner of both the 2020 Vallum Chapbook Award and 2021 bpNichol Chapbook Award for his chapbook "It Was Treaty / It Was Me". His debut full-length collection Whitemud Walking recently won the Alcuin Society Award for book design and is available now from Coach House Books.

Joel Cardinal, Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund
Joel Cardinal joined the DWF team in 2022 as the Manager of ReconciliACTIONs, providing leadership and vision in the planning, development, and implementation of DWF’s national community-based presence in Legacy Schools and Legacy Spaces. Joel is Cree and was raised in his community of Saddle Lake Cree Nation in Treaty Six territory in Alberta. For over 3 years, Joel worked as a Client Management Paralegal primarily focused on interviewing residential school Survivors on their experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse at residential schools. Interviewing hundreds of Survivors has given Joel an immersive understanding of intergenerational trauma and its legacy within Indigenous communities.

Shani Gwin, pipikwan pêhtâkwan
Shani is the founder of pipikwan pêhtâkwan, an Indigenous-owned and operated company focused on elevating Indigenous voices and their stories. She’s a sixth-generation Métis, a member of the Cunningham and Ferguson Clans and a descendant of the Michel First Nation. Shani has over 13 years of professional communications experience working for government, private and not-for-profit organizations. She has led communications on high-profile initiatives, including the papal visit to Treaty Six Territory, Indigenous Ward Renaming in Edmonton, the Protect Our Elders campaign during COVID-19, the grand opening of Fort Edmonton Park’s Indigenous Peoples Experience, Secret Path Live for the Downie Wenjack Fund, and several infrastructure projects and initiatives for Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation.

Dr. Matthew Wildcat, University of Alberta
Matthew Wildcat grew up in the community of Maskwacis and is a member of Ermineskin Cree Nation. He has a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of British Columbia and is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and Native Studies at the University of Alberta. His current research, the Relational Governance Project, looks at how First Nations create forms of shared jurisdiction with each other. Wildcat is one of five directors of the Prairie Indigenous Relationality Network.
**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
Discussion questions for schools and groups:

1) Shani Gwin’s PR and Communications firm was hired to manage communications during the Pope’s visit. She states that they were unsure if the Pope was going to make an apology during his visit. Why do you think the Pope kept this a secret?
2) Shani mentions that they were worried the visit would be retraumatizing, especially if an apology didn’t happen. Why was an apology such an important part of this visit for so many?
3) Why was it important to let people know that they did not need to talk to the media, and during the press conference if someone wanted to leave, they could?
4) What does it mean to be trauma-informed? Why was it important to share a trauma-informed guide with media outlets ahead of the Pope’s visit?
5) Why would the Catholic Church share little information, leaving a lot of work to communities? How do you think the church controlled the media?
6) Dr. Matthew Wildcat states that the apology was a necessity on traditional territory, why do you think this is?
7) “The ability to listen isn’t just taking someone’s words at face value. Whenever someone speaks, there’s also all this buried knowledge, experience, histories which are being referenced, right? And so sometimes even the act of listening is difficult because of all that implicant information that is being drawn up when someone speaks. It may be difficult to even see it.” What does Dr. Matthew Wildcat mean by this? What do you think he means by this statement?
8) Why was it different for those in attendance to hear the apology as opposed to reading about it?
9) Chiefs and community leaders were walking beside the pope, side by side. Why is this significant?
10) Maskwacis Education Schools Commission put up money and catered all the food for the visit, the organization that was dealt all the harm is now covering all the costs. Why do you think they took on that responsibility?
11) Why is humour so important when dealing with stress and trauma?
12) In order to make meaningful change, you can’t do it without Indigenous peoples. Why is this so significant in reconciliation?

**DEFINITIONS**

**APOLOGY** – A regretful acknowledgment of an offence or failure.

**DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY** – The discovery doctrine, also called the doctrine of discovery, is a concept of public international law that was promulgated by Christian European monarchies in order to legitimize the colonization and evangelization of lands outside Europe.

**MASKWACIS** – Maskwacis (formerly known as Hobbema) is the townsite that serves five reserves of four Cree First Nation band governments, which are collectively known as the “four nations” and are each party to Treaty Six. The four nations include the Ermineskin Cree Nation, Samson Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, and the Montana First Nation.

**POPE** – The current pope is Francis, who was elected on 13 March 2013. Bishop of Rome. Pontifex maximus. Doctrinally, in Catholic churches, the pope is regarded as the successor of St. Peter, who was head of the Apostles. The pope, as bishop of Rome, is thus seen to have full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the universal church in matters of faith and morals, as well as in church discipline and government.
What do you envision when you hear these terms?

“Silence washed over”
“A collective sigh”
“Hopeful change will come”
“Leaning into the Catholic Church”
“Walking into the abyss”
“Can’t be left in the dark about something that’s for us”
“We all look for closure for the wrongs in our lives”
“Seek to understand”
“If you want to take action, make sure it’s guided by Indigenous peoples”
“Harms are still so present in such a deep way”
“Boot of oppression”
“To listen”
“Listen to residential school Survivors”
“Emotional labour”
“Pilgrimage of penitence”
“It's not just listening it’s the work of being able to listen well”
“Listening as an artistic practice”

Resources

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice
Road through Alberta reserve to be paved for Pope’s visit
The Popes Apology may be just the first step but perhaps it should be the last
Pope Francis arrives in Canada as Indigenous Groups seek a full apology

Social Media

@DownieWenjack | DownieWenjack.ca

Please tag us @downiewenjack so we can like and share your posts. Include the following hashtags on your social posts: #DoSomething | #reconciliACTION

Made possible with support from Canadian Heritage