

FALL 2023

# LIGHT

Newsjournal of the Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association



The Alberta Teachers' Association



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# LIGHT

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## From the President

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Teaching in 2023 is not easy: teachers are under immense pressure from longer teaching assignments, more students with special needs, an increasingly diverse student population, demanding extra-curriculars, as well as countless meetings with administration,

colleagues and parents. At the same time, teachers are pulled toward noble causes such as racial justice, helping missions in Africa, supporting gender and sexual minorities, providing for the poor in our schools, assisting our local homeless populations, working against violence, supporting Ukraine, providing earthquake relief for Turkey and Syria, etc. Teachers are often expected to be everything to everyone, and that is unfair to them.

Sometimes we need to narrow our focus to be effective. Therefore, the Religious and Moral Education Council (RMEC) and I have decided to focus on working towards truth and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. When Pope Francis apologized for the role of the Catholic Church in residential schools, he said that the apology could not be a last step but needs to be followed by concrete actions. RMEC has taken those words to heart. In our professional journal, we have written columns that have brought attention to the calls to action. Last year's conference, Braiding Together, brought together

Indigenous and ecclesiastical leaders who spoke to us to about truth and reconciliation and impacted participants and leaders in a powerful way. In my classroom, I have added prayer cards and a candle honouring St Kateri Tekakwitha and a crucifix imprinted with the Lord's Prayer in the Kanien'keha:ka language. I have implemented Indigenous themes into my curriculum. As a family, we attend mass at Our Lady of Peace Roman Catholic Church on Tsuut'ina Nation to support the local Indigenous community. These are just some of the ways we have tried to make a difference.

There is no question we have more to do. Educators from around the province have asked us to continue exploring the themes of truth and reconciliation at our annual conference and we are listening! Our conference, Braiding Together 2023, will take place on October 13–14, 2023. We are bringing together Indigenous leaders, ecclesiastical leaders and Alberta's top experts in Indigenous education to help inform our work as teachers and to give us ideas on how we can better take those concrete steps and continue the work of truth and reconciliation. Please consider taking part in this amazing opportunity. I look forward to seeing you there.

For more information on the conference, including registration information, please check our conference website at [www.braidingtogether.ca](http://www.braidingtogether.ca).

*Dan McLaughlin*

## A Note from the Editor

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Welcome to this issue of our newsjournal renamed *Light* and featuring a fresh cover design. Our specialist council continues its work on truth and reconciliation, which began in the newsjournal two years ago and in its conferences a year ago.

The focus in this issue is on how we, as individuals and as communities, can dive beneath the surface of truth and reconciliation and engage in the long-term work to improve our relationships. You will find this reflected in our annual October conference as well. Braiding Together 2023 will revive previous stellar presenters and marry their wisdom with new insights and perspectives.

Alongside this focus, you will read about looking in on a culture and how we can assist our immigrant students, the offerings on hand in our library and the

revival of summer camps for kids. I hope there is thrill in your heart and mind beginning a new school year with your students and with your colleagues. May your professional reading here provide you an opportunity for inspiration and reflection as you open the doors on this school year.

On the theme of doors, this is the last issue of Religious and Moral Education Council's journal in which I serve as publication editor. While I am closing the door on this role within the council, I remain, at the behest of the membership as secretary. I have found challenge, growth, a closer connection to humanity and God, new friends and a sense of wonder while I have toiled over the construction of these issues. I hope the new editor finds their journal journey fruitful as I have found mine. I look forward to relaxing with the next issue under the tutelage of a new editor!

*Elaine Willette-Larsen*

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### The Religious and Moral Education Council

#### Mission

The Religious and Moral Education Council exists to improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of our members in the field of religious and moral education.

#### Vision

The Religious and Moral Education Council will, in search of peace and the common good, be a principal resource for Alberta teachers.

#### Values

We are committed to serving teachers through the values of faith, dignity, respect and collaboration.

# The Papal Apology and Seeds of an Action Plan

Archbishop Donald Bolen

*This article is reprinted with permission from Journal of Moral Theology 12, no 1 (2023): 33–47. Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.*

In the lead-up to both the visit of Indigenous delegations to Rome in March 2022 and the visit of Pope Francis to Canada in July of that year, there was much conversation about the shape and content of the apology that Pope Francis should offer to the Indigenous Peoples in Canada. As one of those involved in the preparation of those encounters, and in dialogues on local and national levels with Survivors of residential schools, I was able to hear many hopes and expectations connected with a response to call to action 58.<sup>1</sup>

There was a wide range of perspectives in Indigenous communities about what would be most helpful for the Pope to say, but some of the central elements requested from an apology were the following:

1. That it would acknowledge all that Indigenous Peoples suffered at residential schools, including: how Indigenous children were taken from their homes and separated from their parents and grandparents; how Indigenous languages were suppressed and cultural and spiritual traditions were denigrated; how many children suffered physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and spiritual abuse; and how many children died while at residential schools;
2. That it would take responsibility on behalf of the Catholic Church for the suffering experienced at Catholic-operated residential schools and that remains a legacy of those schools;
3. That it would acknowledge the trauma of Survivors

- and the intergenerational trauma experienced by many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities;
4. That it would express real lament and sorrow and a commitment to make changes in light of what has been learned through the truth and reconciliation process;
5. That it would be offered at the site of a former residential school, preferably one where ground penetrating radar had identified possible unmarked graves; many specific requests for the Pope to visit particular places (particularly Saskatchewan, Kamloops, Winnipeg) were extended, each with hopes and expectations;
6. That the apology would be connected to reparation, financial support, and other means of responding to the waves of suffering that are the legacy of residential schools;
7. That it would be accompanied by a commissioning of Canadian bishops to follow up with an action plan, preferably an action plan embedded in the papal visit itself, that would move the church towards real conciliation through practical steps of solidarity; this invited a focus, even in the planning of the visit, on the importance of “the day after the apology”;<sup>2</sup>
8. That it would address how the schools were an extension of colonization which led to the taking of Indigenous lands and marginalizing of Indigenous Peoples, and that the Pope would repudiate the papal bulls which provided support to the colonizers and the understanding that they were “discovering” lands which could then be claimed

and occupied, with no regard for the fact that the lands had been inhabited by Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years.

There was also a recognition that each Survivor would need to make their own decision about how to respond to whatever apology was given.

As the papal visit unfolded over the course of six days,<sup>3</sup> each event and address was carefully scrutinized and a wide range of feedback presented by media outlets. While this was to be expected, the visit was planned as an overarching whole. It is therefore both helpful and appropriate to work with the corpus of texts that Pope Francis presented as a single unit, accompanied by his actions and gestures over the course of the visit, to analyze the content of the apology given and the way forward to some degree charted out.

This paper does not offer an extensive evaluation of the papal apology but rather aims to extract and synthesize the substance of what was said. The first part will identify elements of the apology extended by Pope Francis, while the second will look at traces of an action plan identified and expanded upon as a follow up to the apology.

## Components of the Papal Apology

In this section, I would like to lay out six key components of the papal apology: the way in which Pope Francis addressed the reality that many children died in residential schools; how the apology acknowledged the suffering of Indigenous Peoples attending the schools; that the apology was extended on behalf of the church; how the residential school system was part of a colonizing effort to assimilate Indigenous Peoples, a system devastating for them; acknowledgment of the trauma and intergenerational trauma that Indigenous Survivors, their families, and communities continue to carry; and how the Pope, in the context of his apology, interpreted the history of the school system from a theological perspective, as Christ crucified in those who suffered in residential schools.

### Acknowledging the Children Who Never Came Home

In the days leading up to the papal visit, Pope Francis referred to his trip to Canada as a penitential pilgrimage, adding that it was different from other papal trips he had taken. While it was not an “apology

tour,” significant words of apology were extended at each location of the visit, and they were very much at the heart of the visit.

The first public event of the papal visit was held at Maskwacis First Nation, south of Edmonton, and site of the former Ermineskin Indian Residential School. Upon arrival at the site, Pope Francis prayed at the cemetery where it is understood that there are remains of children who died while attending the school. He then entered the church on the site, where the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation had unfurled the banner of the names on the Student Memorial Register, remembering the children who never returned home from residential schools. There, the Pope prayed before the list of names, blessed and kissed the banner.

At the very start of his address, the Pope made reference to the two pairs of children’s moccasins presented to him by retired Chief Mary Ann Daywalker-Pelletier of Okanese First Nation during the meeting of the First Nation delegation in Rome on March 31. The moccasins were presented as a living reminder of the children who died while at residential school, with the request that the Pope return the moccasins when he came to Canada, with an apology.<sup>4</sup>

### Acknowledgment of All That Was Suffered in Residential Schools

In his address at Maskwacis, Pope Francis acknowledged what he had heard from the Indigenous delegations months earlier:

Again, I think back on the stories you told: how the policies of assimilation ended up systematically marginalizing the Indigenous Peoples; how also through the system of residential schools your languages and cultures were denigrated and suppressed; how children suffered physical, verbal, psychological and spiritual abuse; how they were taken away from their homes at a young age, and how that indelibly affected relationships between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren.

The apology that followed built on that acknowledgment of the suffering Indigenous Peoples experienced in residential schools, and how policies of assimilation, including the residential school system, “were devastating for the people of these lands”:

I am here because the first step of my penitential pilgrimage among you is that of again asking forgiveness, of telling you once more that I am deeply sorry. Sorry for the ways in which, regrettably, many Christians supported the colonizing mentality of the powers that oppressed the Indigenous Peoples. I am sorry. I ask forgiveness, in particular, for the ways in which many members of the Church and of religious communities cooperated, not least through their indifference, in projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation promoted by the governments of that time, which culminated in the system of residential schools.

At the Basilica in Quebec City three days later, he also addressed the legacy of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people, in a context which included but was not limited to sexual abuse within residential schools. Pope Francis noted that this scandal required “firm action and an irreversible commitment. Together with you, I would like once more to ask forgiveness of all the victims. The pain and the shame we feel must become an occasion for conversion: never again!”<sup>5</sup>

### **An Apology on Behalf of the Church**

One question raised in Indigenous communities and highlighted in the media, both after the Pope’s apology in Rome on April 1st and during his visit to Canada, asked whether his apology was only pointing to the sinful behaviour of a few individuals or was taking responsibility and apologizing on behalf of the church as an institution. At Maskwacis, he had introduced a distinction that is relevant here, by noting—in the same sentence—that although “there were many outstanding instances of devotion and care for children, the overall effects of the policies linked to the residential schools were catastrophic.” He then proceeded to offer a strong critique of the church’s engagement with the system itself: “What our Christian faith tells us is that this was a disastrous error, incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is painful to think of how the firm soil of values, language and culture that made up the authentic identity of your peoples was eroded, and that you have continued to pay the price of this.” When he proceeded to speak of “many Christians” who were responsible for the evil committed against Indigenous Peoples (a phrase he echoed at Sacred Heart in Edmonton and at the

Citadelle de Québec), he made clear that he was speaking not only of those who abused Indigenous children but also of those who supported or were indifferent to the church’s engagement in the system itself. At Sacred Heart Church in Edmonton, he noted:

It pains me to think that Catholics contributed to policies of assimilation and enfranchisement that inculcated a sense of inferiority, robbing communities and individuals of their cultural and spiritual identity, severing their roots and fostering prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes; and that this was also done in the name of an educational system that was supposedly Christian.<sup>6</sup>

One further point in this regard emerged in a question and answer session in Quebec City with members of the Jesuit community in Canada, where the Pope was queried about how they should respond when asked why the Pope was apologizing on behalf of Christians but not on behalf of the church as an institution. He responded by noting that by virtue of his role as Pope, he always speaks “in the name of the Church, not in my own name. I speak in the name of the Church even when I do not make it explicit”; the exception being when he explicitly notes that he is sharing a personal thought and not speaking in the name of the church.<sup>7</sup>

### **Cooperation with Colonizing Attitudes and a System of Assimilation**

In the apology offered at the Citadelle de Québec, the focus was increasingly placed on the acceptance and cooperation within the Christian community of governmental policies of assimilation and a colonizing mentality: “in that deplorable system, promoted by the governmental authorities of the time, which separated many children from their families, different local Catholic institutions had a part.” He acknowledged that the history of great suffering within Indigenous communities, “the fruit of the colonizing mentality, ‘does not heal easily.’”<sup>8</sup>

In Iqaluit, too, the apology was contextualized in terms of engagement with a residential school system grounded in “policies of cultural assimilation and enfranchisement.” There, the Pope noted “how evil it is to break the bonds uniting parents and children, to damage our closest relationships,” and he relayed the testimony of an Elder who contrasted the spirit within Indigenous families before and after the coming of



the residential school system: “He compared those days, when grandparents, parents and children were harmoniously together, to springtime, when young birds chirp happily around their mother. But suddenly—he said—the singing stopped: families were broken up, and the little ones were taken away far from home. Winter fell over everything.”<sup>9</sup> While Pope Francis did not directly address the papal bulls of the fifteenth century often associated with the “Doctrine of Discovery,” his addresses communicated a strong critique of colonization and cooperation within the Christian community with policies of assimilation. At the Basilica of Quebec City, he stated strongly, “Never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others.” It was communicated during the course of the papal visit that the Holy See would in due course be issuing a further statement on the Doctrine of Discovery. During the press conference on the flight back to Rome, Pope Francis spoke of the genocidal character of the taking of children from their families and the suppression of culture, traditions, and worldview.

### **Acknowledgment of Trauma and Intergenerational Trauma**

Meeting with the Indigenous delegations in Rome, Pope Francis detailed what he had heard from those he had met, and spoke to the “unresolved traumas that have become intergenerational traumas.”<sup>10</sup> At the outset of his visit to Canada in Maskwacis, he acknowledged that even his presence on Canadian soil would evoke trauma for some by surfacing memories of devastating experiences in residential schools: “These are traumas that are in some way reawakened whenever the subject comes up; I realize too that our meeting today can bring back old memories and hurts, and that many of you may feel uncomfortable even as I speak.”<sup>11</sup> He thanked Survivors for telling him “about the heavy burdens that you still bear, for sharing with me these bitter memories,” noting that even though costly, “it is right to remember, because forgetfulness leads to indifference.”

Pope Francis proceeded to recognize that while he was not able to visit many of the places where he had been invited, he was “aware of the sufferings and traumas, the difficulties and challenges, experienced by the Indigenous Peoples in every region of this

country.” In the journey forward, he stressed that it would be important “to assist the Survivors of the residential schools to experience healing from the traumas they suffered.” At Lac Ste Anne, he made reference to “traumatic experiences that no human consolation can ever heal.”<sup>12</sup>

While he did not use the language of intergenerational trauma during the course of his visit to Canada, he pointed to its reality, to “the scars of still open wounds” and ongoing suffering within Indigenous communities.

### **A Christian Interpretation of Indigenous Suffering**

While it was clear that Pope Francis was mindful of speaking to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, to Catholics and people adopting a wide spectrum of worldviews and faith traditions, his apology grew out of a very particular faith lens. That was most clearly expressed at Sacred Heart Church in Edmonton, speaking to a church gathering, where he contrasted two approaches to evangelization, with very different ways of exercising power and authority. He pointed to the lasting pain created when Christians and ecclesial institutions “imposed their own cultural models” and “forced God” on students, noting that this was not God’s way. By contrast, God loves, liberates and sets us free:

One cannot proclaim God in a way contrary to God himself. And yet, how many times has this happened in history! While God presents himself simply and quietly, we always have the temptation to impose him, and to impose ourselves in his name. It is the worldly temptation to make him come down from the cross and show himself with power. ... Brothers and sisters, in the name of Jesus, may this never happen again in the Church. May Jesus be preached as he desires, in freedom and charity. In every crucified person whom we meet, may we see not a problem to be solved, but a brother or sister to be loved, the flesh of Christ to be loved.<sup>13</sup>

In that context, the Pope spoke of “Christ, crucified in the many students of the residential schools.” That provides a very different lens from which to view the presence of God in the context of residential schools: God is in and with the little ones and their suffering. While there was no request to Survivors that they view or receive his apology from that same faith

perspective, that was the theological framework from which it was offered.

## Elements of an Action Plan Emerging from the Apology

In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report commentary on call to action 58, it is noted that "apologies mark only a beginning point on pathways of reconciliation; the proof of their authenticity lies in putting words into action."<sup>14</sup>

Meeting with the Indigenous delegations in Rome, Pope Francis had noted that "any truly effective process of healing requires concrete actions" (April 1, 2022). At the very start of his visit to Canada, Pope Francis expressed his agreement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's request for engagement following an apology:

Dear brothers and sisters, many of you and your representatives have stated that begging pardon is not the end of the matter. I fully agree: that is only the first step, the starting point. I also recognize that, "looking to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient" and that, "looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening."<sup>15</sup>

While Pope Francis did not explicitly lay out an action plan for the church in Canada, he did empower it to engage with Indigenous communities on a path toward healing, reconciliation, and solidarity. In various ways, he pointed to the importance of building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, relationships shaped by attentiveness to the needs of the other, and by a desire to walk together. At Sacred Heart Church in Edmonton, he stressed that this engagement needed to happen at the local level:

Dear brothers and sisters: gestures and visits can be important, but most words and deeds of reconciliation take place at the local level, in communities like this, where individuals and families travel side by side, day by day. To pray together, to help one another, to share life stories, common joys and common struggles: this is what opens the door to the reconciling work of God.<sup>16</sup>

He also gave indicators of what the path forward would require, at both local and national levels. In

this second section of the paper, I would like to highlight four areas where Pope Francis summoned the church to engagement: telling the truth about the past, upholding and standing in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in their rightful pursuit of justice, offering support for the recovery and strengthening of Indigenous language and culture, and emphasizing the beauty and importance of Indigenous understanding of Creation and relationship with the land and environment.

### Commitment to the Transparent Search for Truth

Meeting with Indigenous delegations in Rome (on April 1, 2022), Pope Francis noted:

Without historical memory and without a commitment to learning from past mistakes, problems remain unresolved and keep coming back. ... The memory of the past must never be sacrificed at the altar of alleged progress. ... In a fraternal spirit, I encourage the Bishops and the Catholic community to continue taking steps towards the transparent search for truth and to foster healing and reconciliation.<sup>17</sup>

It was telling that Pope Francis began his trip to Canada in Maskwacis by focusing on honest attentiveness to the past, calling for deeper investigation "into the facts of what took place," and "mak[ing] space for memory. Here, today, I am with you to recall the past, to grieve with you, to bow our heads together in silence and to pray before the graves."

Meeting with an Indigenous delegation in Quebec City, he framed the purpose of his visit in relation to the critical role of truth-telling in order to move towards a future of right relationships: "I have come ... so that progress may be made in the search for truth, so that the processes of healing and reconciliation may continue, and so that seeds of hope can keep being sown for future generations—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—who desire to live together, in harmony, as brothers and sisters."<sup>18</sup> For the church in Canada, following this path will entail, among other things, ongoing historical research on the historical experience of Indigenous Peoples at the time of colonization and residential schools; assistance to First Nations and Inuit communities where there was a Catholic-operated residential school, as they engage in archival work to understand better what happened there; and working with Catholic school and ongoing

adult education systems in the preparation of curriculum and programs providing an accurate account of the residential school legacy, treaties, and an understanding of intergenerational trauma.

### **Commitment to Walking with Indigenous Peoples in Pursuit of Justice**

Survivors of residential schools have repeatedly asked churches and society as a whole to support the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples, rights given them by the Creator and rights articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).<sup>19</sup>

It was at the Citadelle de Québec that Pope Francis spoke most directly to the injustice and inequality experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and the importance of making economic and social decisions addressing their needs. The challenge he extended was to both church and society as a whole:

Even in a country as developed and prosperous as Canada, which pays great attention to social assistance, there are many homeless persons who turn to churches and food banks to receive essential help in meeting their needs, which, lest we forget, are not only material. These brothers and sisters of ours spur us to reflect on the urgent need for efforts to remedy the radical injustice that taints our world, in which the abundance of the gifts of creation is unequally distributed. It is scandalous that the well-being generated by economic development does not benefit all the sectors of society. And it is indeed sad that precisely among the native peoples we often find many indices of poverty, along with other negative indicators, such as the low percentage of schooling and less than easy access to owning a home and to health care.<sup>20</sup>

The Pope proceeded to point towards the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as guideposts for moving towards a more just society.<sup>21</sup>

At Commonwealth Stadium in Edmonton, he offered a vision of what a future where justice flourished might look like:

A future in which the elderly are not cast aside because, from a “practical” standpoint, they are “no longer useful.” A future that does not judge the value of people simply by what they can produce. A future

that is not indifferent to the need of the aged to be cared for and listened to. A future in which the history of violence and marginalization suffered by our Indigenous brothers and sisters is never repeated. ... Let us move forward together, and together, let us dream.<sup>22</sup>

For the Catholic Church in Canada, being an ally in the rightful pursuit of justice will require building relationships with Indigenous communities, listening to the needs of Survivors, and being ready to engage at all levels in solidarity with Indigenous communities as they strive to address inequalities, racism and systemic injustices, and respond to those suffering the effects of intergenerational trauma.

### **Support of Indigenous Languages, Cultures and Worldview**

As noted above, during the course of his visit to Canada, Pope Francis expressed how wrong it was that Indigenous languages and cultures were suppressed and acknowledged the devastating impact of that loss. He also highlighted his great respect for Indigenous languages and cultures at each location he visited.

At Maskwacis, of traditions passed on for thousands of years, he noted, “You learned to foster a sense of family and community, and to build solid bonds between generations, honouring your Elders and caring for your little ones. A treasury of sound customs and teachings, centred on concern for others, truthfulness, courage and respect, humility, honesty, and practical wisdom!”<sup>23</sup> At Lac Ste Anne, on the feast of Saints Anne and Joachim, grandparents of Jesus, he celebrated the presence and blessings of Indigenous grandmothers, and noted, “I am struck by the vital role of women in Indigenous communities: they occupy a prominent place as blessed sources not only of physical but also of spiritual life.”<sup>24</sup>

At the Citadelle de Québec, he spoke of how Indigenous culture “is of great help in recalling the importance of social values” and commented, “The Indigenous Peoples have much to teach us about care and protection for the family; among them, from an early age, children learn to recognize right from wrong, to be truthful, to share, to correct mistakes, to begin anew, to comfort one another and to be reconciled.”<sup>25</sup> In Iqaluit, he reflected on how Inuit Peoples have passed on from generation to generation “such

basic values as respect for the elderly, genuine fraternity, and care for the environment.” He specifically encouraged the young people to listen to the wisdom of their Elders, and to celebrate their culture and their “beautiful Inuktitut language.”<sup>26</sup>

When Pope Francis returned to Rome, at his weekly public audience (on August 3, 2022), he spoke of his visit to Canada and noted how he had “reaffirmed the active will of the Holy See and the local Catholic communities to promote the Indigenous cultures, with appropriate spiritual paths and with attention to the customs and languages of the peoples,” and spoke of the possibility of “recover[ing] harmony between modernity and ancestral cultures.”<sup>27</sup> His visit to Canada encouraged a deep engagement with Indigenous Peoples on the level of culture and worldviews. In Maskwacis, Pope Francis commented, “When the European colonists first arrived here, there was a great opportunity to bring about a fruitful encounter between cultures, traditions, and forms of spirituality. Yet for the most part that did not happen.”<sup>28</sup> While the suppression of Indigenous ways in the past is to be acknowledged and mourned, the possibility still exists today for Christian communities to support the recovery and strengthening of Indigenous languages, traditions, and cultures, and to be receptive to the possibility of encountering the riches of those ways.

### **The Blessing of Indigenous Understanding of Creation and the Land**

Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has paid significant attention to the environment and care for the earth, and in the most important documents in that regard, he has highlighted the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples with respect to Creation. In *Laudato Si'*, his encyclical on the environment, Pope Francis noted that in caring for Creation,

It is essential to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best.<sup>29</sup>

In the apostolic exhortation which followed the Synod on the Amazon, Pope Francis spoke of how the Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon “care for ecosystems and they recognize that the earth, while serving as a generous source of support for their life, also has a maternal dimension that evokes respect and tender love.”<sup>30</sup>

It was not surprising then that Pope Francis would speak of Indigenous respect for the land and Creation when visiting the Indigenous Peoples in Canada. At Maskwacis, he noted:

Brothers and sisters, you have lived on these lands for thousands of years, following ways of life that respect the earth which you received as a legacy from past generations and are keeping for those yet to come. You have treated it as a gift of the Creator to be shared with others and to be cherished in harmony with all that exists, in profound fellowship with all living beings.<sup>31</sup>

At the Citadelle de Québec, he spoke of the constant concern of Indigenous Peoples for the environment, “in fidelity to a harmonious vision of creation as an open book that teaches human beings to love the Creator and to live in symbiosis with other living creatures.”<sup>32</sup> He stressed the ways in which Indigenous traditions invite a long look into the future and the implications of actions we take today: “We need to be able to look, as the Indigenous wisdom tradition teaches, seven generations ahead, and not to our immediate convenience, to the next elections, or the support of this or that lobby.” In the midst of a frenzied pace of life, “we can learn much from this ability to listen attentively to God, to persons and to nature. . . . In this regard, the values and teachings of the Indigenous Peoples are precious.”<sup>33</sup> In Iqaluit, Pope Francis spoke of the “beautiful and harmonious relationship between you and this land you inhabit,” and encouraged the young Inuit to continue that tradition: “Care for the earth, care for your people, care for your history.”<sup>34</sup>

In this regard, Pope Francis’s encouragement to church and society in Canada is to listen deeply to and learn from the wisdom of Indigenous ways of relating to and caring for the land, for the sake of the future for all of us.

## Conclusion

When Pope Francis returned to Rome and spoke of the visit (on August 3, 2022), he commented on the pain he felt in hearing from elderly in Iqaluit “who had lost their children and did not know what had become of them, due to this policy of assimilation.” He added, “It was a very painful moment, but one we had to face: we must own up to our mistakes, to our sins.”<sup>35</sup> The papal apology was an attempt to do that.

Ted Quewezance of Keeseekoose First Nation in Saskatchewan, a Survivor I have the privilege of working with, has frequently said in recent months that each Survivor will need to make their own decision whether to accept or not to accept the papal apology, and that every Survivor is on their own healing journey.

Pope Francis’s words of apology did not meet every request or expectation from Survivors and Indigenous communities. For some, it did not say enough. For others, it brought healing. For still others, it was a step along the way, but one needing to be made real by being followed up with concrete actions, solidarity expressed in a way that builds relationships and restores trust.

The motto of the papal visit was “Walking Together.” In leaving the Basilica in Quebec City, Pope Francis was asked if he wanted to write something in the visitors’ book. He agreed to do so, and wrote, “Marcher ensemble, ce n’est pas facile, mais c’est possible.” (It is not easy to walk together, but it is possible). That is the great invitation before both church and society in Canada, now that we live into the day after the apology.

## Notes

1. “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” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report*, Call to Action no 58, 2015, available at <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>).

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3. See “Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Canada, July 24–30, 2022,” available at [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2022/outside/documents/canada-2022.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2022/outside/documents/canada-2022.html) (accessed August 30, 2023). All papal addresses, homilies and other public remarks are included in this collection.

4. Pope Francis. “Meeting with Indigenous Peoples: First Nations, Métis and Inuit,” Maskwacis, Alta, July 25, 2022, [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2022/7/25/popolazioniindigene-canada.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2022/7/25/popolazioniindigene-canada.html) (accessed August 30, 2023).

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8. Pope Francis. “Meeting with Civil Authorities, Representatives of Indigenous Peoples and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,” Citadelle de Québec, Que, July 27, 2022, [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2022/7/27/autorita-canada.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2022/7/27/autorita-canada.html) (accessed August 30, 2023).

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13. See note 6 above.

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23. See note 4 above.

24. See note 12 above.

25. See note 8 above.

26. See note 9 above.

27. Pope Francis. “General Audience.” Paul VI Audience Hall, Vatican. August 3, 2022, [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2022/documents/20220803-udienza-generale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2022/documents/20220803-udienza-generale.html) (accessed August 30, 2023).

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31. See note 4 above.

32. See note 8 above.

33. See note 8 above.

34. See note 9 above.

35. See note 27 above.



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# Setting Our Hearts Upon the Deep

Michelle Langlois, fcj

*So, I leave my boats behind / Leave them on  
familiar shores /  
Set my heart upon the deep / Follow you again,  
my Lord.*

—Father Frank Andersen, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, “The Galilee Song”

A teacher friend recently posted a picture of herself on Instagram; she was out for a winter walk in Edmonton, Canada. I felt an unexpected tug at my heart upon seeing her and the familiar, deep snowbanks. Living in the Philippines this year has meant that I’ve experienced only green scenery and hot temperatures. The wintery scene reminded me that I am very far from home indeed, even as I continue to delight in the many opportunities that I enjoy in this vibrant country.

Mark Twain wrote that a man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way. What I’m experiencing now is that a Canadian teacher temporarily residing in Metro Manila learns something about herself and many of her former students that she could not learn in any other way.

I have listened to stories about the Philippines for most of my teaching career. Long before I arrived in this warm and welcoming country, former students had educated me about jeepneys and tricycles (common modes of transportation here) and Christmas celebrations that begin in September. I had heard about favourite local foods, including roasted pig and babinka and balut. On countless occasions, Filipino students have shared about the place of their birth with a wistfulness that made me even more curious about this faraway nation.

Now that I have had the opportunity to live in Manila for a few months as part of my International Year (a part of the formation of FCJ Sisters in temporary profession), I have discovered that I am deeply inspired by all those who have dared to leave this tropical, archipelagic nation to live in North America. In the process of settling here, I have come to experience more deeply that living in a new country is about much more than adjusting to a different climate and an unfamiliar language. While the opportunity to live in a foreign place can seem like an adventure, once the *honeymoon period* wears off, the day-to-day lived experience can test one’s understanding of how one fits into the world.

To the homeless people who ring the bell at our convent in Quezon City, I am referred to using the adjective *matangkad*; that is, I am the *tall* sister. By Canadian standards, I am of average height, but when I walk on the sidewalks here, tree branches are trimmed in such a way that I must duck my head. When I travel in standard jeepneys (small public buses), I sit too high to be able to see out the windows. The tricycles (a kind of motorcycle with an attached passenger cab) are perhaps only a little larger than my coffin might be someday. This is a city that, on the whole, was not built for people of my *great* height.

My size is just one way that I can feel like a fish out of water. My first week here, I was reprimanded by security for talking to another sister on the light rail train as COVID-19 protocols here require silence from passengers. On another occasion, during a meal together, a student asked me if I always used a fork when eating rice. My affirmative response was clearly

surprising (and even a little bizarre) to him as many people here routinely eat with their hands. Even asking for help finding an item at the grocery store can turn into a frustrating interaction when it becomes apparent that the foodstuff I'm requesting goes by a different name in the Philippines. The occasional cockroach wandering into the house can, on my worst days, feel like the stuff of nightmares.

There is something about living in a different place that can, at times, strip us of our sense of belonging. It can seem like a lifetime of learning has not prepared us for current circumstances and we are children again, learning everything for the first time. Sometimes, it is utterly exhausting and even deeply emotional. When I cannot understand or be understood, or when it's a struggle to perform simple tasks, I ask myself if coming here was the right decision.

In the Scriptures, little is said about the reactions of the fishermen that Jesus called on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In the Gospel of Matthew, their response is encapsulated in eight words: "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." And yet, these men were leaving nearly everything they knew: their livelihoods, their homes, and surely many family members and friends. Some of them, the New Testament later tells us, even went on to travel all over modern-day Europe. This cannot have been an easy thing, so what sustained them in those moments when they were feeling far from home?

In reflecting on their experiences in his hymn "The Galilee Song," Australian priest Frank Andersen, MSc, writes, "I feel my spirit called like a stirring deep

within / restless 'til I live again beyond the fears that close me in." In these lyrics, I recognize something of the process that has helped to sustain me during my transition to life in a new country. First, to start trying to "live beyond the fears," it has been necessary to name the anxieties that ignite within me when my height or my limited Tagalog (the predominant language in the Philippines) or my *strange* Canadian customs result in embarrassment or difficulty in the routine of my day. Naming them has meant being honest with myself, sharing about them with the members of my community, and taking them to God in prayer.

It is in the silence of prayer that I can become more deeply aware of the "stirring deep within," the voice of the Spirit, inviting me to a place beyond my insecurities. It is in this place before God that, gradually, I start to see that the worries that plague me have no foundation, that they are formless and without substance. It is here, too, that I experience gratitude for the companionship of God who intimately knows my anxieties and gently challenges me to release them. This process of letting go takes time, deep-rooted honesty and humility. It is the work of a lifetime. Thankfully, God has the patience and persistence to be with me every step of the journey.

As I recall my former students and think of all the people who have relocated to Canada, I am inspired by the courage so many have shown in leaving their "boats behind" on "familiar shores." As millions of immigrants have learned to find their way around unfamiliar cities, taste new foods, adjust to language differences, purchase heavier clothes for cooler



Photo courtesy of Elaine Willette-Larsen



weather and make sense of a different political landscape, they have also been invited to acknowledge their insecurities and move beyond them in a challenging, exhausting process.

However, God's challenge is for everyone: we all carry anxieties with us in the ebb and flow of our everyday lives, whether we are living in new places or not. Perhaps you, too, are aware of the "spirit deep

within" inviting you to reflect on uncomfortable insecurities today. What "familiar shores" is God calling you to leave behind, even if only for a few hours? How are you being encouraged to "live again beyond the fears that close [you] in?" In the quiet of prayer, listen for God's invitation to greater freedom as you, too, set your heart upon the deep.

Some suggestions for teachers who are welcoming immigrants and/or refugees into their classrooms:

- Adjusting to a new language can be exhausting. It is okay to encourage students to take a break when they go home in the evenings and speak their first language at home.
- Pictures make a big difference. Word walls are useful for immigrants learning new vocabulary and can help other students who struggle with vocabulary. Invite your students to help you create a word wall in your classroom.
- Consider finding the flags of your students' countries of birth online, printing and putting them up in the classroom. A country's flag is like having a piece of their homeland in the room.
- Consider having a word of the day posted in your classroom, using the first languages of

your students as a starting point: for example, *Salamat* (means "thank you" in Tagalog). Many Filipinos learn some English in the Philippines, but there will still be a lot of English terms or idioms they may not understand, so the word of the day can help them learn these.

- Encourage students to talk about their difficulties living in Canada: what is different for them? What things do they find hard? Using gentle humour when sharing about our fears can sometimes be a big help.
- Ask your students to share about their countries. What do they miss? What was their favourite place? Knowing that someone is interested in hearing about their country of birth can be a great support.
- Consider bringing in a food from another country to share: grocery stores can have good options. Or if you see students eating different kinds of food, ask them about it.



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# Accompaniment in Religious Education

Matt Hoven

What are the two biggest sociological factors for religious commitment today? They are a personal experience of God and social influence (Thiesen 2015, 161). This answer rings true in my life. On the one hand, moments when I experienced the grandeur and intimacy of God—despite my smallness and brokenness—changed me. On the other, friendships with people of faith supported and deepened my journey. In moments of doubt, I recall those teachers and mentors who showed me the path of faith: priests who had personality and joy, a basketball educator coach who modeled living like Christ, and summer camp counsellors who witnessed to God’s love. These moments of accompaniment cut against the grain of what Pope Francis frequently calls an individualized, throw-away culture.

As religious educators, we need to ensure that our roles do not become a series of boxes to check: teaching, grading, meetings, supervision, etc. Neglecting relationships within the classroom is highly problematic—as specified in Alberta Education’s *Leadership Quality Standard* (2023, 3)—while faith compels deeper reflection on relationships within a school. Educational philosopher Jacques Maritain claimed many decades ago that the intellectual aims of schooling must uphold the communal nature of education (D’Souza 2016, 189). Academic learning and friendship are not opposed to one another.

English educator John Lydon (2022, 7) argues that learning in faith-based schools must reject the idea that “the human person [is] the only active creator of meaning.” Instead of narrowly embracing a student as the sole *meaning-maker*, educators should also

understand the learner as open to the transcendent. Social meanings are only lasting when we share them with others and connect them to something beyond us all. Thus, it is important to name this part of reality: an individual cannot make meaning on their own, as one is called to reach out to others and God. This open-ended, holistic approach to learning wisely (and seriously) considers mentorship, accompaniment and imitation as social forms of learning. These are legitimate ways of opening our minds and hearts to a reality beyond the individual.

Examples of accompaniment in Christian religious education abound. It is foundationally a biblical form of learning: for example, Jesus calls his disciples by name; he accompanies them in his ministry; and he walks with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus (Matt 4:18-22 and Luke 24:13-35). The early church’s catechumenate, which today’s RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) is modelled upon, led neophytes on a communal faith journey towards baptism and mystagogy. Medieval folks enjoyed their pilgrimages and moral plays together.

The patron saint of youth and educators, St John Bosco, emphasized the educational value of accompaniment. Working with impoverished boys in nineteenth century northern Italy, Bosco encouraged his Salesian brothers to spend time with students outside the classroom (Lydon 2022, 5). He told his confreres that less formal encounters built trust with youth, where rapport and kindness grow warmth and security in others (pp 4–5). Bosco told the brothers that they should break down barriers between the teacher and student: “The teacher who is seen only behind his

lectern is a teacher and no more. But when he spends recreation time with the boys, he will become like a brother” (p 5). In the same letter, he adds, “By being loved in the things they like, through their teachers taking part in their youthful interests, they are led to those things too which they find less attractive, such as discipline, study and self-denial. In this way they will learn to do these things also with love” (p 5). Thus, accompaniment not only builds trust but also fosters virtues and makes openness to new activities possible. Bosco’s educational approach brings together interior spirit and human solidarity to open teachers and students to one another and forge an openness to the transcendent (p 7).

Religious educators today have many opportunities for accompaniment: planning liturgies, leading retreats, assisting with student council, coaching sports, etc. These activities are not duties to be completed, but opportunities to forge friendships with youth. A twentieth century example of this form of education is Canadian Basilian priest-educator Father David Bauer. He completed his educational ministry in schools and ice hockey arenas. There, he promoted mentorship practices at the highest levels of youth and adult sport. He remained involved in the sport over several decades, even leading the National Team at Olympic Winter Games and becoming a long-standing member of the Hockey Canada board.

Bauer wrote and spoke about the power of mentorship (Hoven, forthcoming). Here are seven practices of mentorship inspired by his life and work (p 16). Mirroring the form of the beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12), these statements encourage religious educators to live in communion and foster goodness in their schools:

1. Be human: treat students like people. In institutionalized education, teachers run the risk of becoming simply a cog in the schooling wheel. Treasuring the dignity and sacredness of each human person is a necessary first step in education.
2. Be spirited and passionate: harmonize academics and personal growth. Religion teachers can wrongly choose either focusing on the academic demands in the classroom or on the personal development of students. Instead, through their enthusiasm for students and learning, teachers can seek balance between the academic and affective aims of religion class.
3. Be heartfelt: build friendships and community with your students. Living in communion with others feels rare in a postpandemic world. Religion teachers must open their hearts to young people. Finding friendship enables a sense of communion as modeled by St John Bosco.
4. Be reflective and visionary: gain perspective by discussing serious matters with youth. Religious educators should demand more than pat answers in class. Many good religious educators have said that they appreciate having atheists in the RE classroom because these students challenge clichés and platitudes. Engaging students’ concerns—and facing the real problems of our world—opens all involved to broader visions that transcend navel-gazing.
5. Be discerning and creative: discern challenges that youth face today—and find a small way to help. Having teachers that listen to the concerns of youth can open up pathways to outside assistance. The teacher need not be heroic, but forge a collaborative, family spirit within the school community that energizes and enables (Lydon 2022, 11).
6. Be vigilant and speak up: advocate for the full development of students. It is not difficult to think of mental health, family, and economic issues that trouble our youth. The challenges can feel overwhelming. Attentive religious teachers can raise their voices in schools and support a broader vision of education with the school’s leadership.
7. Be open to bear witness to human values and possibilities: offer life-changing opportunities and experiences. An undergraduate student told me about a religion teacher who led volunteer trips for her students. Another teacher shared meals with students, while another set up religion retreats. Bearing witness to religious values should not be underestimated; these have the possibility of enabling students to engage in a transcendent value beyond everyday life.

For faith-based religion teachers, accompaniment with students is vital. Giving witness to Christ can guide young people and lead to their full development.

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# BRAIDING TOGETHER

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# Braiding Together: Modern Lessons in the Application of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action

Shannon Cornelsen

Late in the spring of 2022, I heard of a conference in Banff that was going to be addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC 2015) 94 calls to action. This was particularly interesting to me because as the daughter of a residential school Survivor, I have been morally driven to speak openly about the healing process that I feel is required by all Canadians in the aftermath of residential schools. By now, the world is familiar with the legislated assimilation of Indigenous children into "normal" Canadian society, resulting in genocide. The news of unmarked graves of young Indigenous children who were buried outside of a residential school in Kamloops, BC, had repercussions for everyone in Canada. The non-Indigenous population was shocked to their core, disturbed and horrified by the history of the residential school system in Canada. The Indigenous community was saddened by the news but not surprised. Perhaps validated and vindicated would be added to the terminology that describes the mood of the Indigenous community. You see, it was our children, our brothers and sisters, our uncles and aunties, that never returned home. We have always known that they were buried without the comfort of a proper burial, and that they were more or less missing in action. It may seem wrong to use that term without a reference to soldiers because we are discussing the most vulnerable in our society: children who were sent to school not a war zone.

The conference was held at the Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta, during a glorious and sunny weekend in the fall. It was hard to believe a subject matter so harsh in the paradise that is the Rocky Mountains. Hosted by the Religious and Moral Education Council (RMEC) of the Alberta Teachers' Association, the conference invited teachers and the public from across Alberta to listen to our Elders and leaders in the Roman Catholic Church from Alberta and Saskatchewan. The main purpose was to reflect on, analyze and further the work of Pope Francis' visit to various locations in Canada in July of 2022. Believe me when I say that I am not a practicing Catholic, but I was raised that way and have a lot of questions about the church's role in residential schools in Canada. I signed up for the conference and drafted my questions weeks in advance, prepared to be disappointed by the rhetoric I was sure I would hear.

I take accountability for any mistakes that I make, and it turns out that I needed to be more open minded. As a *nehiyaw iskew*, or Cree woman, I am often reminded of the colonial world that I live in and all its shortcomings. I have been told "You people need to get over this residential school thing!" directly to my face by a guest where I work as an Indigenous interpreter. I encounter racism directly, openly and, sadly, with a sense of inevitability. I have lived my entire life witnessing the traumas being relived by my mother, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

because of her time at residential schools. My own story is the same as many Indigenous Peoples who have been touched by the residential schools: vivid descriptions of the abuses being passed down in our families while we still try to heal from the past.

However, the Braiding Together Conference was different. Not only because of the amazing panelists assembled to speak to the delegates but also because of the delegates themselves. Predominantly a gathering of Catholic educators and administrators, I was able to witness the generosity of their spirit. They are the modern generation of educators who are trying to come to terms with the harms of their church and that of the residential school system. Their morality led them to Banff to listen to the shared knowledge of our Elders and their own Pope, and that left me observing the event as the unprecedented gathering that it was.

## Intersectionality of Panelists

To assemble two Archbishops, two renowned Indigenous Chiefs, various clergy, educators and an activist as the panel for this discussion must have been a daunting task. However, Archbishop Smith and Archbishop Bolen were an integral part of debriefing the papal visit, and this conference could not have happened without their input. Likewise, the honorable Chief Wilton Littlechild held a place of unchallenged authority regarding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. His extensive, personal knowledge and calm demeanor were appreciated by the delegates. Chief Cadmus Delorme of the Cowessess First Nation and Phyllis Webstad were the other two main presenters, and to maintain some brevity in this paper, I will only reference Chief Willie's part in the discussions. Bishop William McGrattan, Jonathan Kaiswatum and Angela Houle facilitated other learning portions of the conference.

## Ten Themes of the Papal Visit

The overwhelming message from the team who organized Pope Francis' visit was one of hope and support for the Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Although the call to action that was referenced in the TRC report was not completed within the one-year time frame, portions of the 58th call to action were completed on this trip. Pope Francis' health was the main consideration while planning this trip from the

Vatican's point of view. The Pope was insistent on the schedule of visiting the Survivors and listening to their stories, where he could apologize in person. The initial stop of Edmonton, Lac St Anne and Ermineskin Residential School was met with resistance from many in the community due to the cost of hosting the papal visit. When 25 million dollars to spend on the recovery of residential school Survivors was declined by the federal government, it was noted that the 33 million dollars for the papal visit was spent with no hesitation. Suddenly roads were paved, infrastructure was upgraded, and no cost was spared for security. Survivors have been walking those same unpaved roads for years; it was ironic that they were paved by the government in an attempt to impress the Catholic community and international viewers.

## Archbishops' Message of Unity and Support

Both Archbishop Smith of Edmonton and Archbishop Bolen of Regina were profuse in their support of the Indigenous communities and Survivors by voicing their approval of the Pope's messages. With a full PowerPoint presentation to present the Pope's overview of the Catholic Church's continued commitment to healing and reconciliation, Archbishop Bolen and Bishop McGrattan did a good job of producing evidence. That being said, the ten points of reference that were to be published at a later date seemed like a common sense approach to the 94 calls to action.

The list of the themes is below:

1. The apology of Pope Francis;
2. Recognition of trauma which continues, including intergenerational trauma;
3. Colonization and policies of assimilation;
4. Truth-telling, telling history in a new way;
5. Supporting the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples;
6. Supporting Indigenous languages and cultures;
7. The blessing of Indigenous worldviews and understanding of Creation;
8. Local engagement;
9. Christian hope and perseverance; and
10. Walking together.

Each of these themes was filled with quotes from Pope Francis, extracted from his many speaking engagements across Canada. To expand on these points and read the full version, please view the PowerPoint presentation that is available for download on the website listed in the reference section.

Chief Wilton Littlechild spoke of his extensive career and motivations for becoming a lawyer. UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, took 27 years to be realized. The message from Chief Willie was simple: if you are walking on a train track, it is very difficult to stay balanced on one rail; however, if you are walking on one rail and you are holding hands with the person on the other rail beside you, you can both balance together and move forward. This was his metaphor for the Catholic Church and the Indigenous community. We need to work together in order to move forward.

I feel that I would be doing a disservice to Chief Cadmus Delorme to paraphrase his speech. The same can be said for Phyllis Webstad. Theirs were the most thought-provoking and emotional content of the entire conference. In keeping with how Indigenous knowledge is passed onto future generations, you must be present to experience the strength and conviction of their words. When you receive teachings from an Elder, you must learn it with your heart and not from a piece of paper.

The full magnitude of this conference will sit with me for a long time. As a first-generation Survivor, my only goal is to educate others about Indigenous

history and why it has left a lasting legacy of trauma. I fully understand that we are only in the truth portion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report. However, this is a start, and having the Pope declare his unmitigated support is a step forward in the right direction. The leaders within our community have also recognized this and will hopefully continue the narrative of love and forgiveness.

## References

Bolen, D, and W McGrattan. 2022. "Braiding Together." Presentation at the RMEC Conference Braiding Together, Banff, Alta, October 14–15, 2022. Also available at [www.rmecata.com/2022-conference.html](http://www.rmecata.com/2022-conference.html) (accessed June 19, 2023).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). 2015. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg, Man: TRC. Also available at <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/> (accessed June 19, 2023).



*Shannon Cornelsen is an urban member of the Saddle Lake Cree Nation living in Edmonton, Canada. Shannon's adventurous spirit has taken her to live abroad in the UK, Germany, and most recently Northern Iraq with her children and cat in tow. Life has continuously presented Shannon with both opportunities for change and lessons in human kindness, including starting her BA in Native Studies at the age of 50. As an Indigenous Peoples interpreter at Fort Edmonton Park, Shannon strives to communicate the effects of intergenerational trauma and PTSD on the children of residential school Survivors to the general public.*



*Phyllis Webstad (left) and Shannon Cornelsen at the RMEC Conference Braiding Together.*

# Camp St Louis Taught Me about Prayer, Community and Joy

Mike Landry

*This article is reprinted with permission from the Archdiocesan News of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton on 9 May 2022. Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.*

It was almost exactly 25 years ago that I made one of the most significant decisions in my life: I signed up to be a counsellor at Camp St Louis (then known as the Youth for Christ Camp).

While I'd like to say this decision came from a desire to grow in my faith or to serve others, the truth is far less noble. I signed up because I wanted to spend time with a girl. God, however, had something completely different in mind for me.

Over the course of that first summer in 1997, I spent two and a half weeks at camp. While my romantic ambitions crashed and burned, my experiences at Camp St Louis changed me. It changed the way I related to Jesus, whom I encountered in a new way that camp season. It also planted seeds for what I've done ever since.

Read more about camps in the  
Edmonton Archdiocese at  
<https://caedm.ca/camps>

At the end of that summer, I was invited to come back to serve as a member of the camp team the following year. This is a role I treasured over the following seven years when I would spend all or part the summer serving at camp. Being on this team was my

first experience of youth ministry. There, I gave my first talks, led my first small groups and gained confidence on the guitar. But beyond the impact camp had on my future professional life, I think there are three other ways in which my experience of camp ministry continues to influence me.

## 1. A Habit of Daily Prayer

While I had been getting into prayer within my youth group activities, it was being a leader at camp that inspired me to *really* pray daily. Our days at camp had many opportunities to pray, but at the same time there was also an expectation that those of us who led would take our own life of faith more seriously. And so, my life of prayer grew. I began to include in my daily prayer a few minutes of silencing my heart and mind to listen to God in the chapel. To this day, my favourite place to pray is still early in the morning in the chapel at Camp St Louis, sitting on the floor near the tabernacle under an open window.

## 2. The Gift of Community

When I was on the team at camp, I lived in a small house that summer with several guys who were very serious about their faith (three are now priests, and one is a Benedictine monk). They showed me what it was like to live among a group of people who were committed to pushing, pulling and dragging one another to follow Christ more faithfully. After our campers went to bed, we prayed the Rosary together. We discussed prayer, St John of the Cross, and how God works in our lives. I soaked it all up and have tried ever since to continue to surround myself with people who put God first in their lives in hopes that



we might push, pull and drag one another onward towards Him.

### 3. The Joy of Serving Jesus

Being entrusted to care for people's children is a huge responsibility. Each week involved a lot of work to make sure that kids were safe, had fun, and that we were doing justice to the beauty of the faith we were sharing with them. But amid all of that there was a great deal of laughter and joy. Whether it was an early-morning team meeting, a particularly intense round of capture the flag, or the need to unplug a toilet (again), we played practical jokes and made a point of not taking ourselves too seriously. Sometimes the laughter was so intense I was brought to tears. The lesson I learned then is one I've never forgotten: it is a great joy to work with and for Jesus. I've tried to keep this front and center in the parish and school ministry I've served in ever since.

In many ways, learning these lessons about prayer, community and joy in my early adult years have shaped not only the way in which I serve youth, but the man I try to be in every part of my life. These experiences left such a lasting impression on me that every year in June and early July, my heart feels drawn back to the shores of Moose Lake and the memories we made at Camp St Louis and a part of me wants to

go back there. But that chapter in my life has now passed, so instead I take a moment to pray for those charged with camp ministry as well as the young people they'll serve who need to learn these lessons just as much as I did 25 years ago.

It's for all these reasons that I dove in headfirst to help relaunch OLVC (Our Lady of Victory Camp). OLVC was first closed in the fall of 2018 as part of a review and revisioning process for camps in the Archdiocese of Edmonton. This closure was extended throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are thrilled to be welcoming young people entering Grades 4–12 back to camp this July and August. If you'd like to get involved with OLVC, support our relaunch or register kids to attend camp, please visit [www.olvcamp.com](http://www.olvcamp.com).



*Mike Landry is chaplain to Evergreen Catholic Schools and is the Camp Coordinator for Our Lady of Victory Camp. He is a speaker, writer, musician, and die-hard Edmonton Oilers fan. As division chaplain for Evergreen Catholic Schools, Mike works full-time serving students in five communities west of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. You can find him online at [www.mikeisthird.com](http://www.mikeisthird.com).*

# Eating Grandma

Gerry Turcotte

*Do not heap up empty phrases ...*  
—Matthew 6:7

Punctuation matters. “Don’t eat grandma,” is decidedly different to “Don’t eat, grandma.” A more famous example of this is the phrase, “A woman without her man is nothing,” written on a blackboard by a teacher, who then asked his students to punctuate the sentence. The story goes that the male students amended it to say, “A woman, without her man, is nothing,” while the female students responded with “A woman: without her, man is nothing.” One Shakespearean scholar couldn’t help himself and added a further version: “A woman without: her man is nothing,” to which a character responds, “Bid her enter then, and show her man to the livery.”

As I’ve written elsewhere, Google *the craziest grammatically correct sentences* and you’ll find these gems: “I dedicate this novel to my parents, Ann Rand and God,” or “Time flies like an arrow, but fruit flies like a banana.” Groucho Marx’s charmingly quirky dig at the English language looks like this: “One morning I shot an elephant in my pyjamas; how he got into my pyjamas I’ll never know.” All this is often referred to as *syntactic ambiguity*, but that’s a *different kettle of fish*—which is an idiom. But that’s *another story* too.

As a language nerd, the variability of meaning delights me: what appears obvious can be radically transformed by an accent or a humble mark upon the page. I came to this through the more pointed reality of lived experience, and I experienced part of that journey in the classroom. As a French kid, with a father who couldn’t speak English and a mother who couldn’t speak French, I was trapped somewhere in

the middle, confused by the grammatical travesties that each imposed on the other’s language. I translated frantically in between, and I learned to hide my accent in both tongues at a time when language was more political.

When my father forced me to go to English school though, my grasp on the language became less certain, especially when I was under stress. Most notable was my struggle with the *th* sound, so easy for English speakers but impossible for the French. If I was nervous my *th* disappeared: *De car is in de driveway*. My oral book report on Shakespeare exposed me for who I really was. “Today,” I announced sheepishly, “My presentation is on Richard the Turd.” After the humour faded, the high school bullies were quick to pounce: “Wait! You’re a Frenchie?”

It was the teachers who rescued me, though they used different tools. One was the formidable Sister Thibault, the only nun who survived the high school becoming comprehensive and the advent of boys. At four feet nine in heels, she could stare down the tallest male students and leave them quivering in their shoes. When she told me that choir was compulsory, even though the sign-up sheet said it wasn’t, I didn’t argue. And when she forced me to do the enunciation practice, I could only be grateful. It became second nature.

My English teachers, though, were the true champions. They fired in me a love of language by teaching me the beauty of words. Their unbridled excitement at reading even the most pedestrian text taught me to look beyond the cover, to understand context, impact and the skill behind the narrative. I had always loved

books, but teachers showed me how they were special both in and of themselves, and how books had a life in the community and in culture. Words matter.

Today it feels as though governments understand learning only in the context of functionality. *Learn a trade because it is all that matters. Leave the arts behind because they are frivolous.* But what I've learned from teachers, and what I've seen throughout my own life as a teacher, administrator and writer, is that the arts give shape to our understanding of the world. The arts give us the tools to enter conflict spaces and deliver texture and light, perspective and meaning.

As a teacher, I had the pleasure of using language to draw shy students out of their shell, to empower marginalized learners to use their voice to full effect, and to encourage graduates to go out into the workforce and fight for what was right. This powerful mission, when supported by faith, is even more effective.

I have had the honour of working in Catholic post-secondary institutions for over two decades, twelve of these as president. And I have seen first-hand the way students have brought the values of Catholic education from high school into the academy, building on a foundation of respecting the dignity of every human person, and then being committed to social justice, leadership anchored in care, and a passion for the common good.

When a student learning English asked me once "Why do the three c's sound different in Pacific Ocean?", I took it as an opportunity for dialogue and encounter. Isn't that what teaching is all about? Indeed, according to Pope Francis, encounter is what defines our very humanity: "Encounter must become our greatest desire, our goal to be pursued tenaciously, because a human being is made in such a way that it is not fulfilled, does not develop and cannot find its fullness except through a sincere gift of self" (Vatican News 2022). Teaching is the ultimate gift of self. It's important that we recognize and celebrate that fact.

## Reference

Vatican News. 2022. "Pope Francis: 'Encounter Must Become Our Greatest Desire'." November 25. [www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-11/pope-francis-festival-of-social-doctrine-encounter-trust.html](http://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-11/pope-francis-festival-of-social-doctrine-encounter-trust.html) (accessed June 26, 2023).

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*Gerry Turcotte is the president of St Mark's and Corpus Christi Colleges at UBC in Vancouver. Previously, he held the position of president of St Mary's University in Calgary for 11 years. Gerry is the author of 19 books and is a regular national columnist for The Catholic Register.*

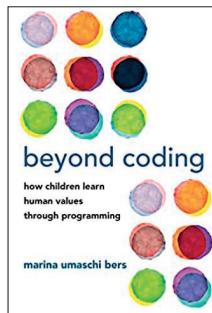
## Resources

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# What's New in Your ATA Library?

Sandra Anderson

Your ATA Library is a great resource for teachers' professional development. New books arrive throughout the year and are ready to be mailed out to teachers wherever you are in the province. Save money by test-driving a book before adding it to your collection!



*Beyond Coding: How Children Learn Human Values through Programming*

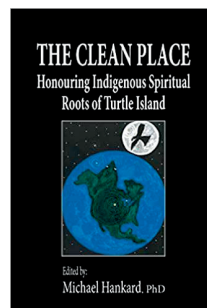
By Marina Umaschi Bers  
MIT Press, 2022

*The Body in Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*  
By Yudit Kornberg Greenberg  
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020

*Buddhisms: An Introduction*  
By John S Strong  
One World, 2020

*Character Toolkit for Teachers: 100+ Classroom and Whole School Character Education Activities for 5- to 11-Year-Olds*  
By Frederika Roberts and Elizabeth Wright  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018

*Children, Religion and the Ethics of Influence*  
By John Tillson  
Bloomsbury Academic, 2021



*The Clean Place: Honouring Indigenous Spiritual Roots of Turtle Island*

By Michael Hankard  
J Charlton Publishing, 2019

*For Flourishing's Sake: Using Positive Education to Support Character Development and Wellbeing*  
By Frederika Roberts  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2020

*Identities under Construction: Religion, Gender, and Sexuality among Youth in Canada*  
By Pamela Dickey Young and Heather Shipley  
Queen's University Press, 2020

*Islam Explained: A Short Introduction to History, Teachings, and Culture*  
By Ahmad Rashid Salim  
Rockridge Press, 2020



*It Starts in the Classroom: Character Education for a Better Tomorrow*

By Edward F DeRoche and  
Serena Pariser  
Rowman and Littlefield, 2023

*Making the Case: 2SLGBTQ+ Rights and Religion in Schools*

By Donn Short, Bruce MacDougall and Paul T Clarke  
Purich Books, 2021

*Practice What You Preach: Teacher Accountability and Personal Values*

By Nicole Philp  
Rowman and Littlefield, 2022

*Religious Diversity in Canadian Public Schools: Rethinking the Role of Law*

By Dia Dabby  
UBC Press, 2022

*Returning to Ceremony: Spirituality in Manitoba Métis Communities*

By Chantal Fiola  
University of Manitoba Press, 2021

*Ridiculously Amazing Schools: Creating a Culture Where Everyone Thrives*

By Tracy Smith and Jeff Waller  
Publish Your Purpose Press, 2020



*Take a Stand! Classroom Activities That Explore Philosophical Arguments That Matter to Teens*

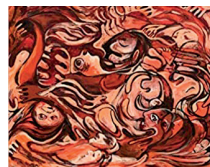
By Sharon M Kaye  
Prufrock Press, 2020

*We the Gamers: How Games Teach Ethics and Civics*

By Karen Schrier  
Oxford University Press, 2021

*What Do You Stand For? Character Building Card Game Cards*

By Barbara A Lewis  
Free Spirit Publishing, 2006



*What Has No Place, Remains: The Challenges for Indigenous Religious Freedom in Canada Today*

By Nicholas Shrubsole  
University of Toronto Press, 2019

*Whole School Character and Virtue Education: A Pioneering Approach Helping All Children to Flourish*

Edited by Paula Nadine Zwozdiak-Myers  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2020

Is there a book you've heard about recently that we don't have in our library catalogue? Let us know! We will do our best to buy it, and you will be the first person on the list to borrow it!

# Open Access Journals: What Are They?

Sandra Anderson

If you are surfing on the Religions web guide at your ATA Library, you'll notice a tab that says *Open Access Journals*. You may be wondering what these are, so I'll explain.

Open access journals are scholarly journals. They are peer-reviewed, which means that experts in the academic field of the journal review each article for validity, quality and originality. These are just like the journals you can access through a university library—with one important exception: they are free!

## Why Are They Free?

Many publishers make a lot of money selling journals to university professors and to college and university libraries. In the last twenty years, universities and governments have started to question why they pay so much to access the research published in scholarly journals. Professors are paid by their universities to do research, to write it up and even to work as peer reviewers for publishers. So, there is very little cost for publishers to put the journal together, but because demand is high in the academic realm, publishers can charge whatever they wish for access.

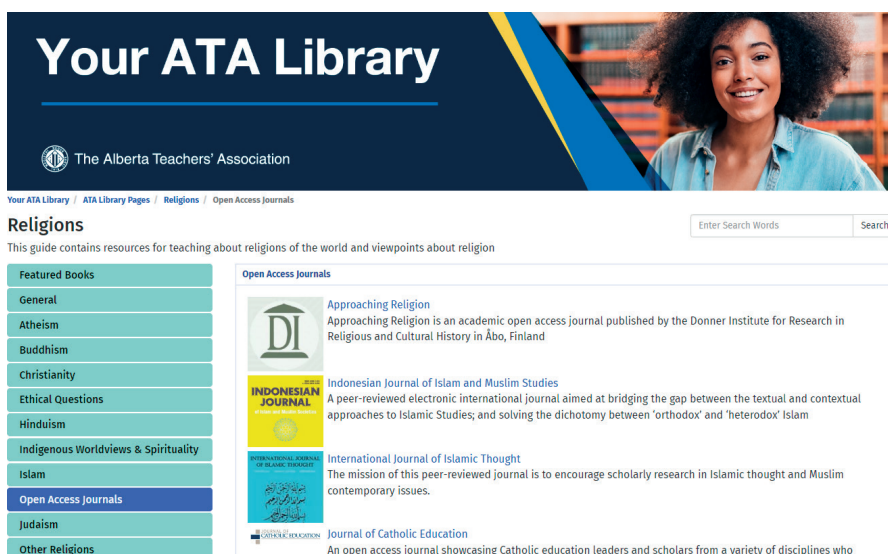
As a result, many universities and professional associations have begun publishing their own journals with some professors taking on the role of editor-in-chief.

## How We Help

The difficult thing about accessing these journals is that they don't all exist in an easy-to-find database. The average web user won't accidentally find them while searching for something else. You must know they exist and look for them specifically.

That is why your ATA Library has added subject specific open access journals to most of our professional development guides for teachers. We know teachers need access to high-quality information resources to keep up with the news related to their subjects and to teaching, but that your time is filled up with teaching demands.

So please read these journals and keep up with the newest research. We hope you'll find them useful.



The screenshot shows the 'Your ATA Library' website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the title 'Your ATA Library' and the logo for 'The Alberta Teachers' Association'. Below the navigation bar, there is a search bar and a list of 'Open Access Journals'. The list includes:

- Approaching Religion**: An academic open access journal published by the Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History in Åbo, Finland.
- Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Studies**: A peer-reviewed electronic international journal aimed at bridging the gap between the textual and contextual approaches to Islamic Studies; and solving the dichotomy between 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' Islam.
- International Journal of Islamic Thought**: The mission of this peer-reviewed journal is to encourage scholarly research in Islamic thought and Muslim contemporary issues.
- Journal of Catholic Education**: An open access journal showcasing Catholic education leaders and scholars from a variety of disciplines who

# Five Things You Probably Didn't Know About Your ATA Library

Sandra Anderson

1. This is *your* library! The ATA library has been designed to support your professional development. We exist to support you.
2. You can ask us to find resources to answer your teaching questions. Wondering how to use number lines in your math lessons? Looking for free lesson plans? Need help finding Indigenous oral stories for your students? Send an email to [library@ata.ab.ca](mailto:library@ata.ab.ca). We love finding great resources for you!
3. The library is free to use wherever you are in the province! We mail resources to you (at your home or school) and prepay the return postage! Everyone has the same access to materials regardless of where they are. You get the same access to our collection if you work in Edmonton, Fort Chipewyan or Okotoks.
4. We have collections of free web resources arranged by subject on our website (at <http://library.teachers.ab.ca>). For instance, for our guide to resources about world religions, visit <https://teachers-ab.libguides.com/religion>. You'll find links to other guides by clicking on the blue boxes on our site:

#### Web Guides

Main channels of our web guides for teachers



5. We have more than just books! Don't get me wrong, we love books! But you'll find many more other resources in our library, such as videos, articles, ebooks, technology kits and educational games.



ATA LIBRARY

## 5 REASONS TO USE YOUR ATA LIBRARY

Connect with us at <http://library.teachers.ab.ca>



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Your RMEC executive members give their time out of a genuine desire to serve you, our members, and to further develop religious and moral education in Alberta. We hope you'll get involved too!

[www.rmecata.com](http://www.rmecata.com) Twitter: @rmecata

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Complete contact information for the RMEC executive is available on the council's website at [www.rmecata.com](http://www.rmecata.com).



# Guidelines

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The RMEC newsjournal *Fully Alive* is published to

- promote professional development of educators in the areas of religious and moral education and
- provide a forum for contributors to share ideas related to religious and moral education.

Submissions are requested that will provide material for personal reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Where appropriate, graphics and photographs are welcome.

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:

- Classroom and school projects
- Upcoming events
- Book reviews
- Reflections
- Feature articles and interviews
- Humour in religion
- Liturgies

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, in Microsoft Word format. The manuscript should include a title page that states the author's name, professional position, address and phone number(s). Submissions should be typed and double-spaced and may be any length to a maximum of 5,000 words. References must appear in full in a list at the end of the article.

E-mail contributions or enquiries to the editor, Elaine Willette-Larsen, at [amberzeroone@gmail.com](mailto:amberzeroone@gmail.com).

The editorial board, which reserves the right to edit for clarity and space, reviews all submissions.

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Maggie Shane, the ATA's privacy officer, is your resource for privacy compliance support.

780-447-9429 (direct)

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I am giving consent for my child/children or ward(s), identified below:

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By signing below, I am consenting to The Alberta Teachers' Association collecting, using and disclosing personal information identifying me or my child/children or ward(s) in print and/or online publications and on websites available to the public, including social media. By way of example, personal information may include, but is not limited to, name, photographs, audio/video recordings, artwork, writings or quotations.

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Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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