

Catholic and Living It through the Sisterhood of the League

Despite facts presented over the past-two years about the cruel and horrific treatment of Indigenous children at residential schools run by Catholic agencies, many have remained silent or refused to admit the harm caused.

Through embracing the theme, Catholic and Living It, the St. Catharines Diocesan Council decided to be a tool to help members and parishioners learn and help heal the hurts of the past. As Truth and Reconciliation Day approached, I asked Linda Dirks, the spiritual development chair at my own parish (Master of Theology), to design a prayer program to begin the process of healing and forgiveness.

Based on the 94 actions listed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report, we have chosen Education as the direction for the members of the Catholic Women's League of Canada in the St Catharines Diocese. As the honorable Murray Sinclair chair of the TRC said, "Education is what got us into this mess, and education is what will get us out of it." As we began to consider ways to educate our members, what evolved was a historical, educational, and faith-filled journey.

The first initiative took place at A Landscape of Nations at Queenston Heights Park, Niagara Falls, where the First Nation Monument is located. Here we embarked on a journey that started with history and incorporated the Bible, prayer and the rosary. Every step along this site was educational reminding us of what the Indigenous sacrificed for Canada and what little we have given back.

Continuing our education our Diocesan Spiritual Advisor, Deedee Alexandre started a book club, where members via zoom discussed the book *The Inconvenient Indian*. Deep discussions and provoking questions forced us again to face facts and have a deeper perspective on Indigenous history.

At the end of March, St Julia's parish held The Circle of Fire while Indigenous representatives met with Pope Francis at the Vatican. It was open in the Diocese to come to the parish, light a candle and pray. It was very moving especially when the students from Denis Morris High School attended. It was truly moving to watch—as they came on their own time, lit candles and prayed.

In May we had a virtual presentation by a local member of Parliament, Vance Badawey, representing, Niagara Centre (Port Colborne)—Mr Badawey is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services . His

presentation was "The Indigenous Peoples: Vision and Progress Nationally and Locally." He spoke of so many initiatives of where and how the government is working to continue the process of healing and develop a better relationship with the Indigenous people.

On June 21, Indigenous Day we asked our parish councils in the Diocese, to have a Mass with the intention for all Indigenous Communities to heal from the past and for Catholics to acknowledge our mistakes. This day celebrates the history and diversity of Indigenous Communities and helps bring visibility to issues that need support and change.

To continue our education we will be participating in a blanket exercise. A blanket is an interactive educational tool that helps those participating understand our shared history as Indigenous and non Indigenous peoples in Canada. The blankets represent land and each person involved steps into a different role of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples. Educate about history as it progresses through a historical time line. It invokes compassion for the histories of these peoples.

This is just the beginning, being Catholic and Living It most certainly incorporates prayer for forgiveness, understanding and hope. Being Catholic and Living It also means we have a responsibility to learn as much as we can, so we may understand the past and make the future a better place with for all who.

Madame President, this is my report.

Lisa Fillingham

St. Catharines Diocese