

Report from the Diocesan Indigenous Reconciliation Fund Committee



Date:

January 14, 2025

Members

Lucy Savoie, Esgenoopetitj/Burnt Church
Roger Augustine, Natoaganeg/Eel Ground
Mary Jane Ward, Metepenagiag/Red Bank
Dymond Stevens, Welamukotuk/Oromocto
Theresa Atwin, Bilijk/Kingsclear
Imelda and David Perley, Sitansisk/St. Mary's
Chief Tim Paul, Wotstak/ Woodstock
Christianne Vachon, Saint John Region
Pam Breau, Fredericton Region
Gail McKibbon, Miramichi Region
Sr. Mary Beth McCurdy, scic
Fr. Bill Brennan

On December 12, 2021, the National Day of Solidarity with indigenous Peoples and the feast of Our Lady of Gaudalupe, the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops launched a financial appeal to contribute towards the CCCB's five year \$30 Million National Campaign to support Indigenous healing and reconciliation initiatives according to the following priorities: Healing and Reconciliation for Communities and Families, Culture and Language Revitalization, Education and Community Building and Dialogues involving Indigenous Elders, Spiritual Leaders and Youth with focus on Indigenous Spirituality and Culture.

The oversight of this project is through the establishment of a National Reconciliation Fund Committee, led by Indigenous Members. To fulfill the established requirements for implementing this National Indigenous Fund, Bishop Riesbeck, in consultation with Indigenous Elders, appointed a Diocesan Indigenous Reconciliation Fund Committee.

The first meeting of the Diocesan Indigenous Reconciliation Fund Committee happened in September 2022 and has been meeting regularly since then. The committee has worked tirelessly to meet with Indigenous Communities throughout the Diocese to bring awareness to the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund, to assist with the application process and to receive, review and approve (at the local level) the applications for projects. Once approved by our Diocesan Indigenous Reconciliation Fund Committee and subsequently by the Bishop, the applications were sent to the National Indigenous Reconciliation Fund Committee for final approval.

It is important to note that Funds raised within the Diocese through the annual Indigenous Reconciliation Fund Collection (the last Sunday of January each year) and from other contributions are all used to fund applications from the Indigenous Communities and projects applied for within the geographical area of the Diocese of Saint John.



The following is a list of Projects approved thus far with a total \$277,880 in total funding given to these projects collectively*. These projects have all been approved throughout 2024 and they are in order in which they were granted:



1. Welamukotuk/ Oromocto: Women's and men's resiliency program to assist members of the community through a healing and inward learning and unlearning to empower, guide support and encourage them.
2. Nignen's Woman's Shelter located in Natoaganeg (Eel Ground First Nations). This project offers healing workshops for women dealing with the dynamics of violence and assists with understanding the root causes of this and aids with self-care.
3. Gignoo Transition House: A Cultural Healing Program with families through local artisans, teachers, story tellers and elders.
4. Metepenagiag/Red Bank: Language and Culture classes (on the land and on line) with elders teaching youth language, spirituality and culture.
5. Printing of Cultural Artifacts of Peskotomuhkati(Passamaquody) Nation for preservation and use at Camp Chiputneticook on the shore of Skutik (St. Croix River) museums and other places for learning, awareness and culture.
6. A stone monument in honour of the residential school survivors of the community with a gathering place for remembrance, awareness and ceremony at Bilijk First Nations (Kingsclear)
7. Security, safety and Structural Upgrades to the Peskotomuhkati (Passamoquody) Camp ChipuneticookCenter of excellence at Skutik. This project is based on the urgent need for safe fire escapes to the lodge so it can be used for overnight gatherings by the Peskotomuhkati and Wabanaki peoples for healing, revitalization of language, culture and spirituality within their communities and in the building of Treaty and Ally partnership.
8. Sitansisk / St. Mary's: Restoring Kinship between elders and children. It is intended to acknowledge and assist and Indigenous Identity issues Elders may have as a result of the Indian Residential Schools while being active participants in creating healthy identities in the next generations.
9. First Nations Storytellers partnering with MetepenagiagHeritage Park in a 'proof of concept' project aiming at the feasibility of using AI technology to preserve and revitalize the Mi'kmaq language through the development of a Custom Language Model based on corpora collected directly from the Mi'kmaq communities. This is done by attending language classes and sitting with fluent language speakers to record languages as accurately and comprehensively as possible.

**Note: Some dioceses have large contributions given to this fund and less application requests. This enables them to offer support to other dioceses, such as the Diocese of Saint John, who are receiving a higher number of applications. We are very grateful that the Diocese of Hamilton has made available \$100,000. A portion of this has been added to the \$207,880 our diocese has raised bringing the total support for 2024 projects to \$277,880. The remaining amount will be applied to future applications.*

Our local IRF committee is very grateful to work with the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund. The approval of these nine projects as well as applications to be received through the coming year and beyond allows us to continue moving forward with concrete actions in learning about and acting on the Calls to Action of the National Truth and Reconciliation Report, especially the Calls to Action that are directed at Churches. We encourage and welcome your generosity with the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund Collection to be taken up throughout the diocese the last weekend of January 2025. With your ongoing help and support the diocese is expected to meet its funding target within the year and looks forward to supporting the important work of reconciliation and healing for years to come.

