

**A Message from Archbishop Anne for the Dioceses of Algoma and Moosonee on the
eve of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
September 29th, 2023**



Shingwauk Cemetery Memorial Cairn

Shingwauk cemetery is a short walk down a tree lined path behind Algoma University, the site of the former Shingwauk Residential School in Sault Ste. Marie. It's just a few kilometres from Bishophurst and I visit it several times a year to remember the children who are buried there, as well as the thousands of others who rest in marked and unmarked burial sites on the grounds of former Residential Schools across Canada.

While we know that 4130 children are recorded as having died in Residential Schools, it is estimated that over 6000 children are believed to have died at the schools as unmarked burial sites continue to be discovered.

Following the closure of Shingwauk Residential School in 1970, Shingwauk Cemetery fell into a state of disrepair and was vandalized on several occasions. Survivors of the Residential School returned in 1981 and discovered that many of the student grave markers, most of which were wooden, had been lost. The Survivors set about restoring the cemetery to honour the children buried there. A fund was set up to pay for the ongoing maintenance of the cemetery and a memorial cairn was erected and dedicated to all who are buried in the cemetery.

We honour the resiliency and dedication of the Survivors who took it upon themselves to do this work and who continue to meet as the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association (CSAA) so that

the past is never forgotten, the present is celebrated, and a hopeful future is anticipated for all peoples of this land as we learn to live lives of reconciliation respecting the dignity of every human being. I was privileged to attend the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association reunion on the long weekend in August this year and to present a Reconciliation Blanket from the Indigenous Friendship Centre in Gravenhurst to Survivors of Shingwauk. They are persons of great courage, inner strength, and resiliency.



Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association reunion 2023

Shingwauk Cemetery is one of the few cemeteries where a register exists giving statistics on known burials. The statistics record the total number of burials at Shingwauk to be 120 with the student age range at death being between 7 and 19 years. It tells us that the average age of death is 12 years old and that the most common causes of death were tuberculosis and related diseases, pneumonia, drowning, brain related illnesses, and typhoid fever. It tells us that the children came from 25 different communities in Ontario, from three communities in Quebec and one in Alberta.

The children are named in the records – first and last. Some of their names are still visible on the grave markers, but others have faded on the stone weathered by the ages. Asa Peters, Josephine Sampson, Edward Waukay and his sister Caroline, William Esquimau and Mary Petuhwepejhik, William Stonefish and Henry Kechege are but a few of the children who rest beneath the earth at Shingwauk. Reading them reminds me again of words from the prophet Isaiah that in life or in death we belong to the One who holds us in the palm of his hand, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you *are* mine.” (43.1) And I am reminded of Jesus who did not turn away the little children when they came to him, but gave them his blessing, and reminded us that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

What the statistics and the records don't communicate are the number of broken lives and hearts in families that continue to bear the scars from the trauma and horrible experiences of children in residential schools. The statistics don't record the number of trinkets taken away when the children arrived at the school or the number of beautiful braids cut off. They don't tell about the children's tears or sobbing as they held onto their blankets in the middle of the night when they felt so alone.

They don't record the number of children physically abused through beatings and floggings, or the number of children sent into solitary confinement because of a minor misdemeanor. They don't tell us the impact of the loss of identity of these precious children who became 'wards of the State'. Statistics don't record the intergenerational trauma that is still experienced today by thousands of

indigenous people across our land. They don't record the experience of indigenous peoples being dispossessed and at times dislocated from their own communities.

At the beginning of our Provincial Council meeting in Hamilton Ontario this week, members of Provincial Council participated in the Kairos Blanket Exercise. It was led by the Rev. Val Kerr, a Mohawk woman of the wolf clan from Tyendinaga. This was the fourth time I have participated in the Kairos Blanket Exercise <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org> . Once again, I found it to be a deeply moving exercise as it has been updated to include new movements and moments in Canada's history with the indigenous peoples of the land. Afterwards, members present were invited to reflect on the experience of participating in the Blanket Exercise. From my perspective, it felt as if we were standing on holy ground listening silently to the story and taking in again our history, recommitting to walk forward in a new way.



Members of Provincial Council following the Kairos Blanket Exercise at Christ's Church Cathedral, Hamilton

On September 30th, citizens across Canada will mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and are invited to wear orange t-shirts which say that *Every Child Matters*. In your own way, please remember the children who are no more, praying for their peace in God's Presence.

As members of the Dioceses of Algoma and Moosonee, and as part of our commitment to truth telling, justice seeking, and living lives of reconciliation:

- Let us mark September 30th as a day of prayer and remembrance.
- Let us continue to acknowledge our complicity with a policy of assimilation which was intended to strip Indigenous Peoples of their identity and deprive them of their traditions and cultures.
- Let us confess our failures to live up to the Gospel of Jesus by abusing the little children He loved while they were in our care.
- Let us remember that someone in your parish or community circle may have experienced firsthand the horrors of residential school. Others may be suffering the effects of

intergenerational trauma. Not everyone will want to talk about it. Choose your words carefully and always speak with kindness.

- Let us remember these words from the Truth and Reconciliation Report, *“Reconciliation must become a way of life. It will take many years to repair damaged trust and relationships in Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Reconciliation not only requires apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada’s national history, and public commemoration, but also needs real social, political and economic change.”*
- Let us remember that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5.18) that it is a big responsibility, and that it comes from a heartfelt desire to understand and be transformed more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
- Let us remember that reconciliation begins with me and often takes place in conversations and in building relationships and friendships.
- Let us continue to pray for a spirit of hope for all who will find tomorrow a most difficult day and loving care around them through every moment of their lives.
- Let us pray for the children entrusted to our care that we may see in them enthusiasm for life, their delight in discovering new things and their joy at play. As their parents and grandparents, teachers, mentors, and guides, may we be patient and understanding and always ready to guide them in good ways. May our children come to know the tender love of God for them as they grow into happy, mature, healthy persons.

In the love and peace of Christ,

+**Anne**

Archbishop of Algoma and Moosonee