



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs  
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 25, 2022**

### **AMC and AFN Manitoba Respond to the Announced Papal Visit**

**TREATY SIX TERRITORY, ALBERTA** – Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse, Indian day School Survivor, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) Acting Grand Chief Cornell McLean, and Residential School Survivors, including former AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine, today reflected on Pope Francis' historic apology on Treaty Six Territory.

The Pope's six-day visit to Canada began with a visit to Maskwacis, Alberta, the location of the former Ermineskin Indian Residential School from 1894-1976. The Pope will meet with Residential School Survivors across Canada at events in Edmonton, AB, Lac Ste. Anne, AB, Quebec City, QC, and Iqaluit, NU.

"Today's apology from the Pope is a historical moment that recognizes the generations of harms caused by residential schools and the Catholic Church to Canada's First Nations children and families," said AFN Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse. "Every Survivor will choose how they feel about the apology. We have witnessed the Pope's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #58 – and heard a message of hope to our people, Canadians, and Catholics worldwide: First Nations cultures, languages, and traditions matter. This message will help to guide us all on the path to Reconciliation."

"The apology issued by Pope Francis on our Nations' ancestral lands is a step for many towards healing. It has been over a year since discovering over a thousand unmarked graves of children on Indian Residential School grounds, and we are still mourning them. An apology does not ease the pain of lost children who never returned home, or the legacy First Nations carry as the Survivors, their children, and their grandchildren. However, we encourage the Church to move forward in the spirit of reconciliation by making concrete commitments and true reparations going forward," said Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Acting Grand Chief Cornell McLean.

Former AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine, a Survivor of two Manitoba residential schools and the first First Nations leader to speak publicly about residential school abuse more than 30 years ago, heard the apology offered by Pope Francis. Pope Francis's words today and in Rome this spring represent a journey that has taken more than 180 years – from the time the doors of these so-called schools opened to the challenges First Nations people live today. By apologizing for the abuses of the past, Pope Francis has helped to open the door for survivors and their families to walk together with the Church for a present and future of forgiveness and healing. I accept and choose this path.

Elder Harvey Nepinak, a residential school Survivor who watched the apology from Dauphin, Manitoba, said, "The Holy Father's apology will lift some of the darkness which the Indian residential school experience represents. The missing children will be acknowledged with utmost respect and care following their families' wishes, as each circumstance requires."

***If you are a former residential school survivor in distress, or have been affected by the residential school system and need help, you can contact the 24-hour Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419***

**For more information, please contact:**

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**About the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs**

The AMC was formed in 1988 by the Chiefs in Manitoba to advocate on issues that commonly affect First Nations in Manitoba. AMC is an authorized representative of 62 of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba with a total of more than 151,000 First Nation citizens in the province, accounting for approximately 12 percent of the provincial population. AMC represents a diversity of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Nehetho / Inineew (Cree), Anishininew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.