

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

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Listening as an Act of Solidarity - A Reflection for the National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples

Each year, on **December 12th**, the Catholic Church in Canada observes a day of National Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. Led by the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council¹, it is an opportunity for Catholics across the country to lean into prayer as a way of remaining open to the work of truth and reconciliation, and to be strengthened in it. We know that Christ came to reconcile all peoples. We believe, through God's Spirit, that we can participate and assist that work of reconciliation.

Catholic schools across Ontario and Canada are places of prayer, reflection and action that reflects our Catholic social teaching. Solidarity is an important aspect of Catholic social teaching. It means "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good."² It is acknowledging the bonds between us all as individuals and as communities and nations.

It is remembering, as Pope Francis said, that we are brothers and sisters of one another regardless of where we are born or live.³ In this year's webinar for the **National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples**, we focused on how listening can be an act of solidarity.

Julian Paparella, a Canadian scholar and theologian in Rome, is studying how we can learn from listening to Indigenous families, in particular. He began our webinar with a few insights about the hospitality that we both

extend and receive when we listen deeply to one another, as well as the need for humility, which allows us to acknowledge all that we still must unlearn, relearn and learn anew about one another. He offered two images and these two lines of inquiry to help prepare those who had gathered to listen well:

The image of the interior space as a space which can be expanded

How can each one of us make space inside of ourselves to receive not just the words of our Indigenous brothers and sisters, but who they are, where they come from, what matters to them, and whatever they want to share with us? This happens by being together, spending time with one another, talking together, even becoming friends with each other. What a gift that is, when we do not just see each other as "the other," but we see people's faces, we know their names, and we have heard their stories.

The image of the interior space as a space which may require some 'cleaning out'

In order to listen deeply, in order to become friends, what is it for me as a non-Indigenous person that I need to empty myself out of? What are the ideas, the attitudes, the pre-conceived notions, the fears that I need to gradually let go of in order to become increasingly open and able to listen with the ears of my heart? This kind of deep listening truly has the power to transform us. It promotes solidarity not just as an outward action but as an inward attitude of the mind

and heart, following the example of Jesus who emptied himself to be with us and become our brother.

Listening to the Indigenous panel members that day was very impactful for those gathered. There is always such generosity when someone shares their own story. As one panelist, **Sharon Giroux** shared, we must acknowledge and make space for the ways in which our stories change and develop over time. The deepening of our own understanding and the reflections we share with others, especially in our families and close communities, are ways in which our stories become ever richer. We learn and can be transformed in both the telling and the hearing.

We invite you into an experience of listening as you read. Indigenous Student Trustee, **Gabby Jette**, has agreed to share her story in the words she used on that day.

Gabby's Voice

I am really grateful to have the opportunity to speak today and share my story. I am an Indigenous student who grew up off-reserve and a little distant from my culture, my journey in Catholic education has been full of learning, unlearning, and finding my voice. That is what I would like to share with you.

As the Indigenous Student Trustee for my board, my role is to represent every Indigenous student. **Ensuring the students who might feel disconnected, confused or even invisible are heard and are part of the conversation, and not just as a checked box.**

A big part as to why this role means so much to me comes from my own experiences. Growing up off-reserve meant I was not surrounded by the language, traditions, or community that many people assume all Indigenous students have. It created distance. Not just physically from my cousins, aunts, and uncles, but from my culture and identity too. And because of the generational impacts of residential schools on my family, a lot of our culture and language disappeared long before I had a chance to learn it.

So for me, this role is not just about leadership. It is also about reconnecting, learning, and using my voice to help other Indigenous students feel seen in ways I did not get to.

Growing up, and even now, I often feel caught between two worlds. On one hand, I am in the Catholic education system, learning in classrooms where Indigenous culture was not always a part of everyday learning. On the other hand, I am an Indigenous student trying to connect with my family history and an identity that I had not really grown up with.

Traditions, language, and family stories always felt unreal, creating a sense that I did not fit anywhere. I felt trapped in this in between space. Which caused a lot of stress and self-doubt. At Indigenous events I often felt “too white” and out of place. In grade 9, I even turned down going to a strawberry festival. I remember sitting with the invite for days, trying to decide if I should go. I did not know anyone attending, I did not know much about my culture yet, and I do not look stereotypically Indigenous. Even though I had literally been invited and had people coming up to me asking if I was going, I still convinced myself that I would not be welcomed. I regret not going to this day.

That same feeling followed me to the classroom. If teachers or peers asked if I was Indigenous, I would always say “yeah, but...” and then talk down on myself because I did not feel “Indigenous enough” to claim my Identity. **Even though I spent years stuck in that “in between space”, I started to notice my two worlds joining. I noticed my culture being welcomed, like really welcomed, in Catholic Education.**

I first remember a teacher asking me if the land acknowledgment they wrote was correct and appropriate. I had no idea, and I did not want to say the wrong thing, so I brought it home and asked my mom and grandma what they thought. That moment taught me a lot. It showed me that I did not need to have every answer to still have a voice, and it was the first time I felt genuinely appreciated and heard.

After that, I started noticing more. When I took NBE3U, Indigenous Literature class, it was the first time I saw Indigenous voices, stories, and issues centered in a way that felt meaningful and respectful. Not as an add-on. But as part of the real curriculum, encouraging difficult conversations. It was the first class where I felt like I did not have to shrink myself or question whether I belonged. Instead, I got to learn alongside everyone else, with space for Indigenous perspectives to lead the conversation rather than sitting on the side lines.

Outside of school, I found even more ways to connect with my culture and community. Lacrosse became one of the most important ways for me to do this. Last year I had the incredible opportunity to play for Hannah Lazare who is now the Indigenous Director for Lacrosse Canada, I first played for her in Toronto with Indigenous Team Ontario. Later, she invited me to play for High School select in California. I went with a couple of girls from Tyendinaga, which is my reserve, and a few I had met briefly in Toronto, but most of the team were new to me and came from all across Canada. Despite that, we competed together and won silver, creating memories I will never forget.

Lacrosse allowed me to grow not only as an athlete but also as a person. I built meaningful relationships with these girls, and I learned about their stories, languages, and traditions. It reminded me how powerful community and identity can be.

Overall, these experiences shoved me out of my quiet little shell and taught me to trust myself and my abilities. They helped me realize that my voice does matter, even when I feel out of place and unsure. Slowly, I started to embrace my culture, differences, and flaws. Giving me a sense of confidence in myself and who I am. **I eventually saw that growth really does come from challenges and opportunities.**



CCCB Resource on the National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples



Knowing that these opportunities are so important for youth to learn about their culture, I spend some of my time volunteering as a Co-Chair for the *Circle of C's*. Which is focused on fostering culture, community, and connection, giving youth the chance to reconnect with their culture, traditions, and feel supported along the way. Creating a space that welcomes everyone, whether they are trying to reconnect or simply want to participate in something that's part of who they are.

Similarly, as Indigenous Student Trustee, I have the opportunity to support Indigenous students within the school board and help create safe, welcoming spaces where they can explore their identity. This year has been full of learning and growth for me as well. I was fortunate to attend the OSTA-AECO Fall General Meeting, with my two co-trustees, where I connected with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous Student Trustees and learned more about how to advocate effectively and represent students' voices. Beyond this, I have also been able to work with high school too on consent education, bringing an Indigenous student perspective to the conversation. I will continue collaborating with students and trustees throughout the year to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard, valued, and continue to be reflected in the decision-making which I have seen throughout my high school journey.

I have seen how Catholic education has expanded and begun to embrace Indigenous culture in meaningful ways, by integrating it into the curriculum, creating experiential learning opportunities, and celebrating Indigenous voices in classrooms, art, and events. To me these efforts go beyond symbolism, showing a genuine commitment to acknowledging, honouring, and learning from Indigenous perspectives.

I have also seen the importance of prayer in these spaces. Not just as a ritual, but as a form of respect, reflection, and concrete action toward reconciliation. It reminds us of the responsibility we all have, to be thoughtful, kind, and intentional in how we engage with each other.

It has been amazing to see how far Catholic education has come and to see the impact of these efforts. As they have truly affected me, helping me find my voice and understand how important student voice really is.

Together, we can continue expanding Catholic education in a direction that honours Indigenous voices and ensures every student has a place and a voice.



Take a moment in silence to sit with these words. Listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as you reflect.

On December 12th each year, all Canadian Catholics are encouraged to pray in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. Let us who serve in Catholic Education join our hearts and our voices on this day.

The prayer on this page comes from the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council in 2024. Feel free to use this prayer or another of your choosing in your classrooms, schools, offices, boardrooms and associations.

O God, Creator and Father of all,
with humility and hope we your children acknowledge
the relationship in You of all living things.

For this we thank You and praise You.

We call on You, Great Mystery,

our God who comes to us

in Jesus Christ Your Son

– our Lord, teacher, prophet and brother –

to open our minds and hearts

as we continue to walk the difficult yet critical journey
of reconciliation and healing.

We see in our time so many struggles and obstacles
to oneness and unity

in our world of such blessed diversity.

We implore You to heal our brokenness and division.

Show us in Jesus the way to unity

among the multiplicity of Your peoples in our world.

We also pray that You will guide and lead us

in the Truth, and show us

how to be a people who walk with You.

May we be a people of Respect, Humility, Courage,
Honesty, and Compassion

- as we find Your Wisdom on the Spirit-led journey
that supports deep healing and fosters renewed
relationships.

Lord make us channels of

Your Peace, Hope, and Love!

Amen

Webinar Panelists

- **Gabrielle Jette**, Indigenous Student Trustee, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board.
- **Sharon Giroux**, a member of the M'Chigeeng First Nation, Vice President of Equity for OECTA Provincial.
- **Julian Paparella**, originally from London, Ontario and is non-Indigenous. He recently completed his PhD in Rome, studying what we learn when we listen deeply to Indigenous families.

References

1. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops [Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media](#), May 2023.
2. [XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops First Session, October 2023](#), Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004.
3. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, on *Fraternity and Social Friendship*, #1, 2020.

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