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# Leaders of Maskwacis will welcome Pope Francis

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The four Nations of Maskwacis – Ermineskin, Samson, Louis Bull and Montana Cree Nations – are looking forward to the pope's much-anticipated visit to their territory on July 25.

"This is a pivotal moment for the world to witness and understand the impacts of the intergenerational traumas suffered by Indigenous people in the residential school systems in Canada and around the world," reads a statement from the Maskwacis Cree Tribal Council. "This is an important step towards reconciliation for everyone to be part of, to collaborate for a true sense of truth and reconciliation."

"For six years the Truth and Reconciliation Commission listened to the lived experiences of residential school survivors," said former TRC Commissioner Chief Wilton Littlechild. "We heard over 7000 testimonies."

"For me, it's been mixed emotions because I spent 11 years in Ermineskin Residential School, and a few more years in another school. But it's not about me – it's about all the other students we heard from, many times through tears and anger."

IRS survivors want to hear Pope Francis deliver an apology on our lands and territories, he added. We are also responsible to the students and survivors who went ahead in their spiritual journeys and never got to hear the words, I am sorry.

Chief Littlechild shared that he asked the pope to endorse the Ten Principles of Reconciliation. "It's about peaceful coexistence," he said.

Ermineskin Cree Nation Chief Randy Ermineskin said that 80 percent of the students who attended Canada's Indian residential schools are not here anymore. "I am going to listen on their behalf," he explained. "I made a vow to one of my classmates who is no longer here. Before he passed away, he asked that I be his voice."

He added that there are a lot of mixed emotions about the Pope's visit to Maskwacis. There are some members who will not attend because it is too triggering. "It was supposed to be an educational journey, but it wasn't."

However, said Ermineskin, for the last 20 years Chief Wilton Littlechild has been requesting that the Pope come to Canada and apologize to the survivors and their families who attended residential schools.

"There is a call to action from the TRC, number 58, to have the Pope apologize on Canadian soil. It's so important... People want closure."

The media has a role to play in telling the truth about what happened at Canada's residential schools, he added, and educators must also share the truth about what happened to the students and survivors in these institutions.

Louis Bull Tribe Chief Desmond Bull said that he is the product of intergenerational trauma.

Chief Bull heard the stories of residential schools from his parents and grandparents. Indigenous parenting skills were and continue to be negatively impacted by Canada's policies including residential schools, the sixties scoop and the current child welfare system, he added.

"Parents forgot how to take care of their kids."

According to federal statistics 52.2% of children in foster care are Indigenous but account for only 7.7% of the child population. This means 14,970 out of 28,665 foster children in private homes under the age of 15 are Indigenous.

Chief Bull said that things are gradually changing for the better; small improvements are being made and reconciliation is happening.

He noted, "We have a rich history, and I believe reconciliation cannot be watched on videos or read. You have to be involved and be a part of it in ceremonies and discussions."

Chief Bull said the Pope's visit will open old wounds for the survivors and families who had very negative experiences in residential schools, but some will find "closure."

And he noted that this is "one step forward in reparation."



Leaders from the Four Nations of Maskwacis are welcoming Pope Francis to the Ermineskin Cree Nation on July 25.

residential schools and what they meant for his parents.

"Once I understood what my parents went through at residential schools, I was able to understand the impact it had on me and my family," he said.

"I think that's why the Pope needs to come and apologize on First Nation soil."

"Reconciliation begins with the truth and an apology. I'm excited that Pope Francis is coming because of the opportunity that will be available for all First Nations people of Canada, especially my people in Samson."

"I'm looking forward to his visit, and I know my Elders who were part of residential school survivors are mostly excited about it as well."

Chase McDougall-Rabbit, Montana First Nation Councillor and nephew of former Chief Carl Rabbit, said, "We acknowledge the Pope's desire to come to our lands and apologize to First Nations, Metis and Inuit survivors and their families for the church's role in the Canadian residential school system."

"This is a significant moment in our history; it is also a delicate time, as Indigenous people we begin a long and difficult road of healing and hope for the future," he added.

"Today, there is an opportunity to walk together in truth and reconciliation. It is about establishing and maintaining a mutual and respectful relationship; it is about coming to understand the truth of what happened under residential schools, its structure, and the traumas many experienced. It is about acknowledging those truths."

The Pope's trip starts in Edmonton on July 24 and ends in Iqaluit on July 29. On July 25, Pope Francis will join IRS survivors from across the country in a formal program at the site of the former Ermineskin Residential School in Ermineskin Cree Nation. That school was one of Canada's largest and operated from 1895 to 1975.

The Pope will then attend mass at the reopening of Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples in downtown Edmonton.

On July 26, the Pope will attend an open air mass at Edmonton's Commonwealth Stadium. He will then travel to Lac Ste. Anne for the first night of the annual Lac Ste. Anne Pilgrimage.

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Chief Vernon Saddleback said that when he started his healing journey, he looked at his parents, who attended residential schools and died of alcoholism.

The Samson Cree Nation chief said that to heal, he had to go back and revisit

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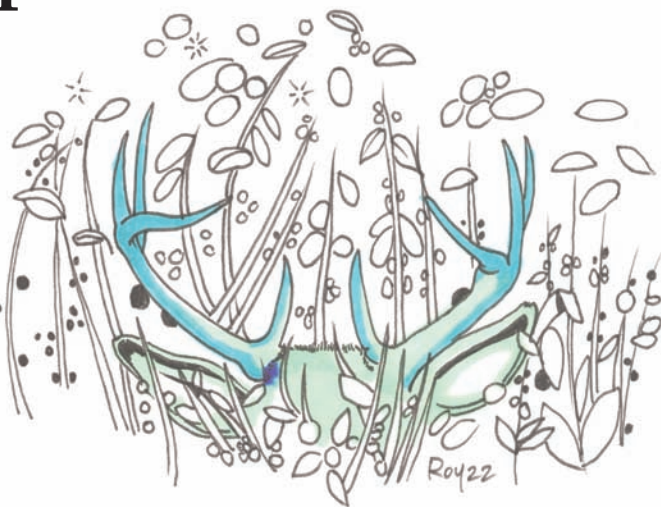
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# Ottawa appoints special interlocutor for residential school gravesites

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



The federal government has appointed Kahnawake lawyer Kimberley Murray as a special interlocutor to assist in the search for unmarked graves at the sites of former residential schools.

Murray is the former executive director of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Ontario’s first assistant deputy attorney general for Aboriginal justice and led a group investigating unmarked graves at the Mohawk Institute, a former residential school near Brantford, Ont.

She told *APTN News* she expects her role to be challenging.

“It was not an easy decision to take this role as special interlocutor,” Murray says. “But after consulting with survivors, elders, my family and community members, I’ve committed to doing this work with humility, with respect, honesty and courage.”

Part of Murray’s role is to help Indigenous communities in collecting data from unmarked grave sites and assist in resolving jurisdictional disputes if they arise.

However, she will not have the power to pursue criminal prosecutions. Justice Minister David Lametti said appointing a prosecutor is not in his jurisdiction.

“I will be honest and say that the accountability and the lack of prosecutions is something survivors at Indigenous communities, at Indigenous leadership, have pointed out time and time again and with reason,” he says. “And it is something that we need to correct.”

“In my role as attorney general, at the federal level, I can’t appoint a special prosecutor.”

Murray will nonetheless work alongside

communities to determine if they want to pursue criminal prosecution.

“I expect when I go to communities and meet with survivors and leadership, that I will hear about these conversations. About how they’ve struggled with what to do, how to have prosecution,” she says.

“Do we invite the police in? What police – RCMP, provincial police, municipal police, First Nations police? And there are pros and cons to all of those that I’ve heard (from) talking to survivors in the last year.”

Chief Cadmus Delorme of Cowessess First Nation, where 751 likely unmarked graves were found in June 2021, told *APTN* that his community’s number one priority is attaching names to the gravesites, but that it will also work with Murray to ensure any evidence is preserved.

“This position will make sure that Cowessess, if there is any criminal activity, we are making our site like a criminal site,” he says. “We are making sure that everyone on our technical teams gathers every piece of evidence. We can’t go to the local RCMP because what are we going to show them?”

In a statement, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) applauded Murray’s appointment, but expressed concern about her limited mandate, namely the lack of prosecutorial powers.

“The FNLC is concerned that the current mandate for the Special Interlocutor is short-sighted and limited in scope. This mandate must include an international and human rights legal framework, be built upon the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and uphold the

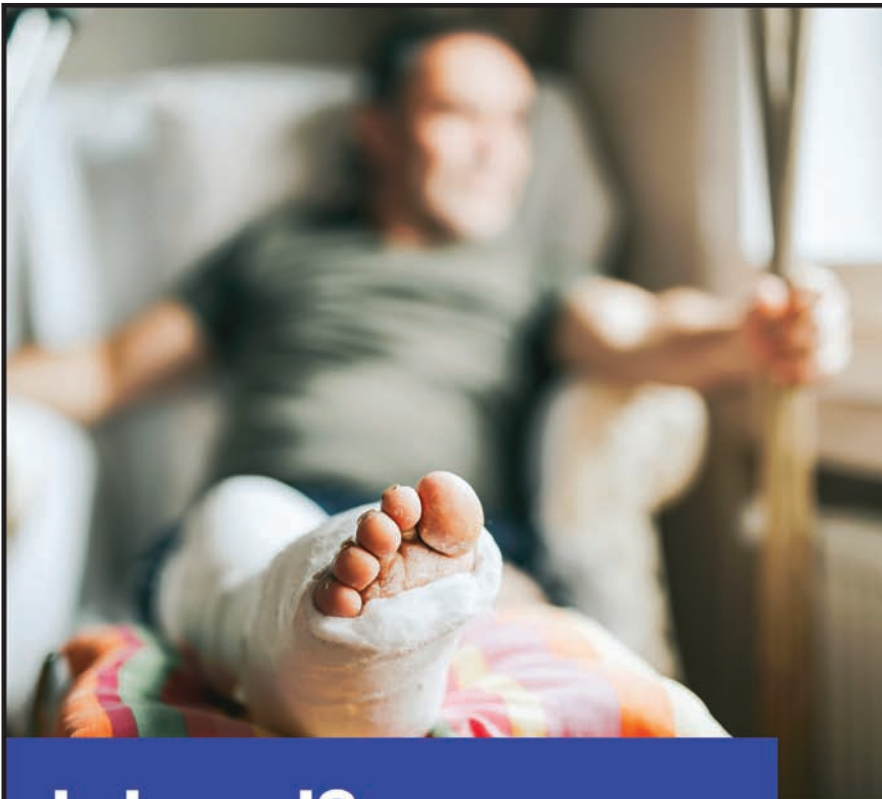
highest standards, Protocols, and conventions involving missing persons and genocide to address the severity of crimes that have been committed at former Residential Schools across Canada,” said Cheryl Casimer, the First Nations Summit Political Executive.

Regional Chief Terry Teegee said a special prosecutor must be appointed “as an opportunity for serious, comprehensive action and amount to real change.”

Union of BC Indian Chiefs president Grand Chief Stewart Phillip said the Canadian government must acknowledge the reality that residential schools were part of a “systematic state-sponsored genocide.”

“While they failed miserably in their pursuit of forced assimilation, those who perpetrated these crimes must be held to account and brought to justice with the full force of domestic and international law through nothing less than rigorous independent investigations,” Phillip said.

Murray officially began her two-year term on June 14, with a \$10.4-million budget allocated to her position.



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# We must prepare for Climate Change

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Chief Desmond Bull is passionate about ensuring that the next generation can inherit a future containing sustainable energy. Before being elected Chief of the Louis Bull Tribe, he was an educator for 12 years and worked in I.T. – he also created online programs for youth.

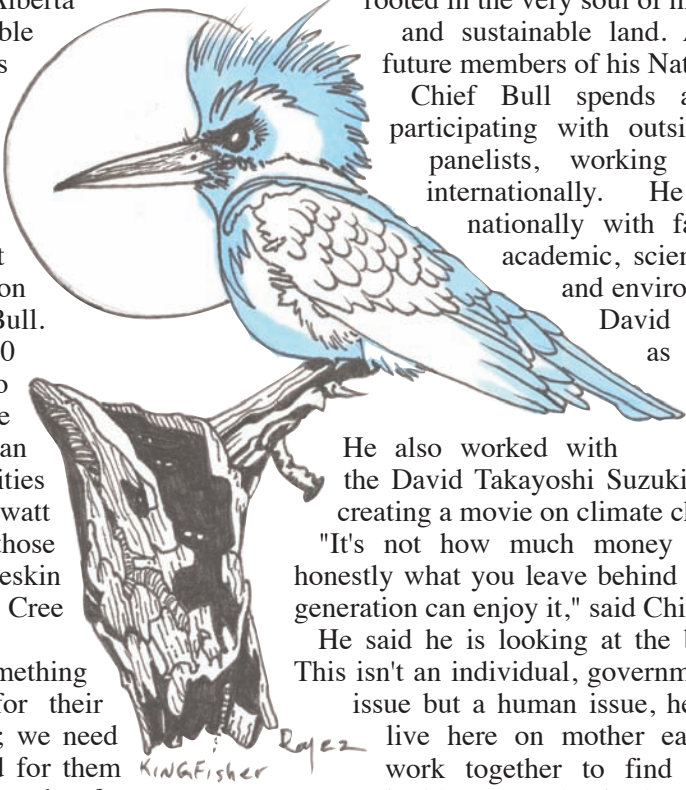
Chief Bull, a direct descendant of Chief Frances Bull, also facilitated his leadership skills by completing the Aboriginal Leadership, Governance and Management program at the Banff Art Centre in 2012.

He is currently one of Canada's only Cree Chiefs leading the way on clean energy, and he is urging leaders to prepare for climate change; “the world is changing,” he warns.

"I spoke at the Royal Alberta Museum about renewable energy from an Indigenous lens, and NDP MLA Shannon Phillips heard me speak. She asked me to be on a committee and do the reporting on renewable energy and meet with other First Nation communities," said Chief Bull.

After the reporting, \$20 million was injected into Indigenous renewable programs. This created an opportunity for communities to develop these megawatt programs like those implemented on Ermineskin First Nation and Montana Cree Nation.

“We need to leave something for future generations, for their children, or grandchildren; we need to leave something behind for them to enjoy, like things we take for granted,” said Chief Bull. "It's not what you



enjoy now but how you prepare for later, that's legacy.”

He said there is an opportunity to take advantage of clean energy projects to help reduce climate change and prepare our nations for it. Climate change is happening here and right now, he added, and most First Nations need to prepare for it.

His community has been at the forefront of utilizing sustainable energy projects.

"We are right now, at a point in climate change, where it will impact us. We've got to get better at preparing ourselves for later as the world's climate changes," said Chief Bull.

He said part of his goal is to leave a legacy rooted in the very soul of his Nation. Clean and sustainable land. A gift that the future members of his Nations can enjoy.

Chief Bull spends a lot of time participating with outside groups and panelists, working federally and internationally. He collaborated nationally with famed Canadian academic, science broadcaster, and environmental activist David Suzuki as well as climate change think tanks on clean energy.

He also worked with the David Takayoshi Suzuki Foundation on creating a movie on climate change.

"It's not how much money you make but honestly what you leave behind so that the next generation can enjoy it," said Chief Bull.

He said he is looking at the broader picture. This isn't an individual, government, or industry issue but a human issue, he added. We all live here on mother earth and should work together to find a solution for sustainable energy that is clean.

Continued on page 5



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# New poetry collection centres on Speaking the Unspeakable

Reviewed by Regan Treewater, LJI Reporter

Michelle Poirier Brown’s curiously titled collection of poetry, *You Might Be Sorry You Read This*, is a haunting chronicle of pain, disjointed glimpses of lingering trauma, and the struggle to survive. Brown, who uses this surname to distance herself from being associated with her mother, and the accompanying emotional scars connected with her, feels that her journey to inner peace is driven by creativity.

“I intend to speak publicly about my life. I have changed my name to Brown and have gone under that name for some years now. There is no need for people who know you, but do not know me, to associate my name with you. That is, you can continue to keep the secret. But I can’t,” she writes in a letter to her mother printed along with her equally raw poems.

Brown’s collection begins with a quote by Padraig O Tuama: “One of the functions of poetry is to make you comfortable.” Brown’s intention in selecting this as the opening prelude to her book is clear – there is little comfort in the poetry she shares.

“It is essential to my mental health that I spend considerable time in creative process,” she writes. This process has earned Brown some mentionable acclaim and notoriety. *PRISM International* awarded her the Earle Birney Prize in 2019 for her poem *Wake*. She is the author of both poetry and prose, with her publications appearing in several literary journals and anthologies. According to her website, Brown’s

current works are centrally focussed on Indigenous identity, queer identity, and what she terms “speaking the unspeakable.”

Giving voice to the unspeakable, or at the very least, the uncomfortable, is woven into each of the episodic poems that appear in Brown’s debut collection. In *A Child’s Book of Holy Services*, she writes: “Barbie doll mothers/ have infants that died./ Their stiff arms empty./ They take their beds,/ while priest/ and non-existent husband/ bury the bit of air/ with a spoon.” Brown’s unapologetic portrayals of trauma are so vivid despite their occasional minimalism, that it almost literally knocks the air right out of the reader’s body while processing the reality of her lived experiences.

The meaning behind each echoing moment, each haunting snapshot painted by Brown’s words is rarely straightforward and demands considerable reflection and contextual unpacking. Quite often the significance behind the resonating scenes moments Brown captures is not immediately decipherable by the reader. At times it is possible to dig into the text and unearth fragments of meaning, but her work is so deeply personal that many poems may never be adequately understood – perhaps intentionally so. The poet challenges her readers in this way to continue to engage with her messages even after they close the book.

Her collection vacillates between staccato stanzas and occasional compositions of denser

You Might  
Be Sorry  
You Read  
This



description, but it is evident that certain lines and thoughts are directed at specific people that Brown believes may be among her readerships. The vast majority of Brown’s poetry is a byproduct of her ongoing healing process following decades of trauma cascading from her childhood experiences. Whether any of it was ever intended for a larger audience is unclear.

In *Wake* she writes, “You dream me still, Racialized, de-racialized, de-colonialized...You ask me flat out if I’m queer. If you can tick off another box on that giant application.”

This is a publication that ticks off many boxes, but also defines some new ones of its own. Brown’s collection is a compelling read, but certainly not a light one – her chosen title, a warning that she pulls no punches and gives voice to her wounds, raw though they may still be.

*You Might Be Sorry You Read This* (ISBN 978-1-77212-603-7 paperback) was published by University of Alberta Press in March 2022.

## Climate Change *cont. from p 4*

He advises other advocates or leaders to network, work together, and find ways to create sustainable and renewable energy.

"We all have a common interest in saving Mother Earth," said Chief Bull.

He added it's good to educate those that don't understand the importance we as First Nation people place on our ancestral connections to Mother Nature.

Chief Bull has made significant strides for his Nation. In 2018 he successfully spearheaded the installations of 188 Kwh of P.V. (solar) on eight separate public buildings. Trained band

members installed the projects, which are 100 % owned by the tribe, and fully funded through grants/subsidies, infrastructure development, sponsorship, and fundraising.

This work in renewables opened opportunities for Chief Bull to affiliate himself with a variety of high-profile sustainable energy groups. And most recently, he helped ensure Maskwacis Cultural College MCC solar panels and worked with local elders to create a word for solar panels.

Legacy for Chief Bull is one of hope, leaving something for future generations and

working today for the long-term prosperity for his people.

Too many leaders are thinking about the now – “cars and houses,” but they should work toward the greater good of society and future generations, he concluded. About his own community, he said, we can do waste management better, food sustainability better, and public transportation better in Maskwacis.

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# Ashley Callingbull: Movement is medicine!

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Ashley Callingbull-Rabbit is emerging from the pandemic healthier and fit! Never one to just take a break, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic Ashley found herself at a loss at what to do.

Two years later, she is married to hockey coach Wacey Rabbit, a former Saskatoon Blades captain who is now returning to the Blades organization as Assistant Coach. Ashley is also joining the Blades, as well as the Saskatchewan Rush as a brand ambassador. The couple will also be engaged in Indigenous community outreach.

In the Spring of 2020, the former Mrs. Universe decided to focus on her fitness – a journey that led to landing a coveted photo shoot in *Sports Illustrated Magazine* and to being named the in-game host for the Edmonton Elks Football team with CISN Country’s Chris Scheetz.

The most powerful thing is that she did it by herself and at home, proving that much can be accomplished with willpower, space, allocated time, and commitment.

A Cree woman as an in-game host is a monumental moment for all Cree women and a first for Canadian Football.

“Being a proud member of Treaty Six, I’ve

always been a fan of Edmonton’s sports teams,” said Ashley. “I’m excited to join one of my hometown teams with the Edmonton Elks.”

“Having Ashley be a game-day voice of the Elks is not only a source of pride for Enoch, but all Treaty Six First Nations,” Enoch Cree Nation Chief Billy Morin said.

Ashley is also in talks to speak at an upcoming Walk a Mile in A Ribbon Skirt event which is being led by Lannie Houle and the co-founders of the event.

Her fitness journey started in 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic.

“I thought I needed to make a change,” she said. “My lifestyle is busy – like constantly flying, traveling, and working. But when the pandemic started and it was time to go into quarantine, I just felt lost.”

I felt sad, she added.

“I was sitting there on the couch eating cheeses. I wasn’t feeling as ambitious as before because everything was just so uncertain, so I thought, I’m not feeling good mentally right now.”

She said she decided to start with small



workouts and gradually built up her workout routine.

Her first thought was, “Maybe I should just start moving – movement is medicine.”

“So, I just started doing little things like stretching, walking my dogs. And then I started doing actual workouts in the basement; everything I’ve done for the last two years has been at-home workouts.”

“It felt good to sweat, but it also took my mind off everything,” said Ashley.

She considered every little workout as a win for her fitness journey and every day she would ask herself, “What else can I accomplish today?”

The workouts started just by moving, and they have gradually progressed. “And now I’ve been doing it for almost two years. I’m in the best shape of my life. I feel amazing,” said Ashley.

“It feels good to take care of myself physically because it helps mentally, and I feel stronger all around.”

Her physical and mental fitness have paid off. In May, the former Mrs. Universe became the first-ever Indigenous woman to grace the pages of *Sports Illustrated* magazine’s Swimsuit Edition.

It was an incredible opportunity, said Ashley, because thousands of women applied for it.

She had put a video together for *Sports Illustrated* that showcased who she was and what she stood for. She received a message that she made it to the casting round with 50 other models – all from different backgrounds, with different stories and accomplishments.

“And then, I remember it was almost 6 am on March 1 and no one calls me at 6 am unless it’s an emergency,” said Ashley.

“I answered the phone, and I was half-awake, and they said: We’re calling from *Sports Illustrated*, and we want to let you know that we’ve selected you. Are you free to fly to the Dominican Republic?”

“I said yes and I was crying. I thought it wasn’t real,” recalled Ashley.

“I thought maybe I would wake up, like a dream. And then within days, I was in Dominican Republic shooting for *Sports Illustrated*, it just happened so fast.”

It was a wonderful experience and a real honour, she added. “I have always been pushing myself and always working toward my goals.”

One of her goals is to help vulnerable and exploited women. “One day, I hope to start a women’s shelter because my mom was escaping domestic violence,” said Ashley.

“It’s essential for me to give women a second chance at life, and especially help their kids,” she added. “I don’t want them to go through what I went through.”

Ashley ended the interview by challenging others to add movement to their lives, for both their physical and mental wellness. “Movement is medicine!” she concluded.

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# Alberta approves transfer of cemetery to Enoch

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The provincial government has approved the transfer of a small parcel of land in west Edmonton that holds an Enoch Cree cemetery back to the nation, CTV News reported.

The piece of land, which is near Anthony Henday Drive and Whitemud Drive, was part of the Enoch Cree Nation’s reserve land until the Canadian government forced it to surrender in 1908.

The nation reached a \$54-million settlement with the feds in 2004 over the surrender.

At a June 20 ceremony, the province announced it approved the transfer as an effort towards meaningful reconciliation.

Ground penetrating radar showed the likely presence of 80 gravesites on the land, including the graves of Enoch Cree Nation’s first leaders, such as Lazarus Lapotac, Enoch Lapotac, and Tommy Lapotac, whose descendents attended the ceremony.

“They’re our founding family, our founding chiefs of the Enoch Cree Nation,” said Chief Billy Morin.

“We are all standing where our ancestors are buried,” he added. “In a lot of ways this site was forgotten, but now we are here.”

Morin approached the provincial and federal governments last year with the proposal to transfer the land as a reconciliation gesture.

“It took collaboration between those two levels of government to say, the right thing to do is to give Enoch Cree Nation back their land,” he said.

Indigenous Relations Minister Rick Wilson said the transfer is the first of its kind in Alberta.

The province has never approved this type of land transfer before, he explained.

“Most of us pass this spot,” Wilson said. “You are driving on the highway and you do not take notice about what is back here.”

In a news release he added that “for the people



Alberta has approved the transfer of a traditional cemetery in west Edmonton back to the Enoch Cree Nation.

of Enoch Cree Nation, it is a spiritual place where their ancestors may lay.”

While the government has approved the transfer, it will take a few months before it is fully implemented.

“Surrounding lands will continue to be publicly owned and used for current and future pipeline development without harm to the historic cemetery,” the release notes.

In Alberta, there are as many as 400,000 acres of surrendered Indigenous reserve land, some of which were fraudulently surrendered as a result of the actions of the Canadian state.

# ACFN announces addition to Reserve in Fort Chipewyan

(Fort McMurray) – The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) has successfully completed phase one of the Addition to Reserve (ATR) process in Fort Chipewyan.

Ottawa signed the order on June 1 and ACFN leadership announced it at their Treaty Day celebration on June 16.

“After almost two decades of advocacy, negotiation and discussion, we are pleased to share the news of the successful completion of the initial phase of the ACFN ATR in Fort Chipewyan, which will see the addition of 89 residential lots to our Reserve land,” said ACFN Chief Allan Adam.

“On behalf of Chief and Council, I want to acknowledge the tireless dedication of the leadership of ACFN, our legal counsel including Anita Thompson of Ackroyd Law, our CEO Maggie Farrington and our entire administrative team for making ATR a key priority to ensure a strong and sustainable future for our Members and our Nation.”

Marc Miller, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations acknowledged Chief Adam and his team for their diligence and efforts in completing this phase of their efforts to expand the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation’s reserve land base. “The addition of the 89 residential lots in Fort

Chipewyan will contribute to the continued social, cultural, and economic prosperity of the community and its members,” stated Minister Miller. “Our government will continue to work together with First Nations to advance reconciliation and respect Treaty relationships.”

ACFN’s ATR process respects the unique history and development of Fort Chipewyan. Before 1970, ACFN members lived on a reserve along the Athabasca Delta. After the construction of the Bennett Dam, wildlife populations in the Delta collapsed and ACFN’s reserve became largely uninhabitable. Further, the federal and provincial governments began to centralize housing, health, education and municipal services in Fort Chipewyan and most ACFN Members had little choice but to relocate to Fort Chipewyan.

ACFN Members were housed on lots in Fort Chipewyan purchased by Ottawa from the province. ACFN members still reside on these same lots located in Fort Chipewyan. Since the relocation, Canada and ACFN have purchased additional houses for ACFN members. However, both the federal lots and the lots bought by ACFN since the 1960s are still

within the jurisdiction and control of the Government of Alberta.

Approximately 15 years ago, ACFN initiated litigation against Canada for failing to set aside reserve lands for ACFN. Instead of litigating the matter, the parties elected to seek a negotiated settlement. The first phase included the addition of 89 lots. ACFN is currently working on Phase 2 of the ATR which will likely include additional residential lots in Fort Chipewyan and the Acden lot located in Fort McMurray. The ATR process is complex and has involved the resolution of a number of legal, environmental and political issues.

Chief Adam said: “Our work on ATR is not yet finished, and we will continue to advocate, negotiate, and press for reserve status for the land our Members and Nation deserve and need to ensure our future success. While we are proud of this recent achievement, we will not relent in our pursuit of the full completion of all phases of the Addition to Reserve process.”

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# Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples prepares for the Papal visit

By Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At Edmonton's Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples, the months of June and July have proven to be very trying, albeit in a good way. Those who attend the services there can feel it, they sense something special in the air.

There's an excitement waiting to burst forth and it seems to grow with each passing week. Many surmise it has everything to do with the special visit the church will receive on July 25, the day that Pope Francis is scheduled to grace the facility with his presence. And, yes, it's rubbing off on the city at-large which is likewise preparing to host him at Commonwealth Stadium the following day.

As Sacred Heart Church members and nearby

communities prepare for the Pope's visit, the staff, volunteers and supporters have been working hard to ensure that everything is properly in place and ready for an historic gathering of the church's faithful, highlighted by the physical presence of the Pope.

One might inquire as to what makes this particular occasion so special. For starters, it signals a new and positive relationship between the church and the community. Second, it's not every day (or year) that such an occurrence transpires. In fact, the last papal visit to the city was by Pope John Paul in 1984 – that was 38 years ago! Third, this visit could well result in very positive relations that could promote a



Pope Francis wearing his orange stole - with Fr. Susai in Rome.

smooth transition to reconciliation.

One of Sacred Heart Church's local Elders, Fernie Marty, thinks his visit will "be a good thing." He expressed his optimism that his visit will encourage others and contribute to the "process of reconciliation." One of the volunteers joining hundreds of others is parishioner Caitlin Schmidt. She feels "his visit will help to bring the people and the church together."

Sacred Heart's associate pastor, Fr. Mark Blom, sees the Pope as a humble and simple man who'll likely spend about an hour here. Some people will get to meet him and he'll probably accept a gift or two. "In the Argentine," Blom explained, "he rode the subway trains, visited the swamps, tried to stay on the people's level and didn't get grandiose." He went on to add that he's more about helping people heal and "getting them on a good path of life."

As for Edmonton itself, just how did it manage to land one of the world's leading religious figures anyway? Read on and you be the judge.

"I never expected I'd be part of the delegation," said Fr. Susai. Originally he was not one of those selected to go to Rome. However with some push and support from parishioners and Archbishop Smith, he was approved. He had one of the parishioners make an orange stole that he took with him while hoping to somehow present it to the Pope.

When the whole group was inside the Papal Palace, Fr. Susai placed himself near the exit where the Pope would likely depart. Once he finished the final blessing, and was approaching the area where Susai stood by the exit, "I held out the orange stole, he came directly toward me and I was able to place the stole on him."

Susai then informed the Pope of the meaning of the colour... how it symbolized the residential school survivors' hurt, reconciliation and peace. He received it so gracefully and it all happened in "such a simple and wonderful way," Susai stated.

He also invited the Pope to visit Edmonton. "On behalf of the Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples I gave a letter to Pope Francis inviting him to come to Edmonton and to bless our restored church as a sign of restoration of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the First Peoples of this land," he added.

Whether the gift and/or letter was the button that did the trick or perhaps it was a combination of that plus something else, is anybody's guess. Whatever spurred the Pope to visit Alberta, he will be here.

Of one thing you can rest assured, a lot of Albertans are thrilled and excited. And, if the 1984 Papal visit is any indication, many of this Pope's fans will travel from out-of-province to see him, on July 26 at Commonwealth Stadium or at the opening event of the Lac Ste. Anne Pilgrimage.

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**POWWOW COMMITTEE CONTACT**

Louise Omeasoo  
(w) 780-585-3793 (c) 780-335-0459  
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Angela Boysis-Bull  
(c) 780-335-7013  
Email: ang\_bbull@yahoo.com

**SPECIALS**

Kirby Buffalo (c) 880-235-1946 Email: kirbybuffalo@yahoo.ca

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