

PROVINCE MANDATES TREATY EDUCATION

As of mid-September the Province of Saskatchewan made Treaty Education a required part of the curriculum in provincial schools for all grades. This very important legacy has been essentially absent from the required curriculum for the past hundred years. Teachers are receiving teaching kits to inform every child about the commitments and responsibilities made when First Nations leaders signed treaties with representatives of the Crown. The decision to include Treaty Education is an important recognition that all Saskatchewan residents are “treaty people” – every one of us is a signatory to the agreements that were made to ensure that all people, First Nations and newcomers alike, would share the benefits of living on this land.

In a publication by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner titled “Treaty Implementation: Fulfilling the Covenant”, the Office, established by the federal government in 1996, has found reason for great hope in the work done by First Nations’ and federal and provincial government leaders while sitting around the Treaty Table. This hope is built in part on the nature of the treaties themselves:

The treaties represent remarkable agreements between nations. They are based on mutual respect, mutual benefit, good relations and honour. Treaties represent the Parties’ vision that First Nations people would participate in the new economy emerging at the time of treaty making. Fundamentally, the treaties affirm a commitment between the Parties that they would work together in a continuing relationship to reconcile differences between them. They are based on peace, harmony and good relations. (*Treaty Implementation: Fulfilling the Covenant*, p. xiv)

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner uses language that we people of faith can embrace and understand.

The treaties are a covenant: a commitment by both Parties made in the presence of the Creator and with the honour of the Crown and the honour of the First Nations. Indeed, the spirit of the treaties remains alive with First Nations Elders. (*Treaty Implementation: Fulfilling the Covenant*, p. xv)

Over the past 135 years the treaties have been disregarded, marginalized and subverted, leading to the degradation of First Nations people and the diminishment of all Canadians in our failure to honour agreements made in good faith. The deep divide between First Nations people and other Canadians is evidence of the sins of commission and sins of omission that have characterized our relationships. The dire situation of many First Nations people in terms of health, economy, education, and spirit can be attributed directly to the failure of Canadian governments and society to honour the treaties and their intentions.

I celebrate that school children will learn about treaty commitments. I see it as a sign of hope that First Nations people and other Canadian citizens will be learning together what it means to honour our commitment to share this land, be neighbors to one another and ensure the well-being of all people. Learning about and implementing the treaties is an important way to make this country stronger and to live closer to God's reign of justice, peace and love.

Grace and peace,
Bishop Cindy Halmarson