



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First Light Responds to the Discovery of 215 Remains of Children Found at Kamloops Residential School

Monday, May 31, 2021

St. John's, NL – The First Light community is saddened and disturbed by the discovery of an unmarked mass grave on the grounds of the former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. First Light stands in solidarity with the members of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, and indeed with all Indigenous Peoples across Canada, in grieving the loss of the 215 children found in Kamloops and for the many others who never returned home.

As terrible as this discovery is, we regret that we are not surprised by it. The horrors of the residential school system, and the intergenerational trauma that that system continues to perpetuate even to this day, are unfortunately too well known among members of our community. To those who survived residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador, and to their families and friends, please know that First Light is here to support you. We have set up our community tent on the front lawn at 716 Water Street West, and our team welcomes you to drop by for tea at any time this week between 10am and 4pm.

To those in the non-Indigenous community who may be struggling to find an appropriate way to express their support for those of us who are grieved by the news out of Kamloops, we call on you to educate yourself and those around you – whether they be family, friends, co-workers, or acquaintances – about the terrible history and legacy of the residential school system in this country, including in Newfoundland and Labrador. Online resources are available, free of charge and for all ages, at <https://firstlightnl.ca/resources/orange-shirt-day/>.

And to those at all levels of government: while we welcome your gestures of sympathy, we call on you to move beyond mere symbolism and to begin taking real action to advance truth and reconciliation. Both the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the 2019

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls put forward recommendations specifically to address the ongoing legacy of colonial violence that exists in this country. That system was not created by accident and it will only be dismantled by deliberate action. We challenge you to work with us to realize the promise of the Calls to Action and the Calls for Justice, so that future generations will not have to grapple with a colonial system that would bury innocent children in unmarked mass graves.

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Formerly known as the St. John's Native Friendship Centre, First Light is a registered non-profit that has been serving both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in St. John's since 1983. The organization provides programs and services rooted in the revitalization, strengthening, and celebration of Indigenous cultures and languages in the spirit of trust, respect, and friendship.