

A VISION. A DIALOGUE. A WAY FORWARD.

CHAIR IN
INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY
AND RECONCILIATION



ST. THOMAS MORE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN



As a college, a community, and a country, we are making steps forward in reconciliation; however, we continue to be reminded that much is yet to be done and that we must walk in hope, with intention, and in relationship with one another. As diverse individuals and communities, we must be resolute with hearts, minds, and actions to unite, but yet honour our distinct beliefs, religions and spiritual practices.

With acknowledgement of the truth of the stories of the past and the impact on the reality of today, there exists a marked opportunity to, *together*, author our future. We must commit to doing so in a way that honours and fosters the strength, resilience, and ingenuity that is inherent to Indigenous peoples, and the lands we have the privilege to share.

**“When a person seeks
knowledge the knowledge
moves, shapes and changes
their thoughts and their spirit.”**

– Elder AJ Felix



St. Thomas More College (STM), a Catholic liberal arts college, delivers the Religion and Culture Program at the University of Saskatchewan. The College takes the responsibility of ensuring the representation and exploration of world religions and spiritualities seriously.

What may be less expected but is increasingly natural is the acknowledgement that quality of education, connection with others, and life itself are shaped by our willingness to learn from and with those who hold spiritual beliefs outside of the Catholic faith. Situated in Treaty 6 Territory and the traditional Homeland of the Métis people, STM is embracing this in a way that goes beyond the dissemination and acquisition of knowledge to recognize Indigenous spirituality and validate and respect that it is beautiful and alive.



Rather than viewing the two practices as mutually exclusive with opposing viewpoints and beliefs, STM is opening the door to enter into respectful dialogue and to hold rightful space for Indigenous spirituality alongside the Catholic Faith, and most importantly, outside of a Catholic or colonial framework. Through such an approach STM, the academic and greater community truly experiences and becomes an offering of the riches that come when we are invited and even challenged to expand our minds and hearts in such a way that the world around us is influenced in a positive way.

In an active, and increasing commitment to reconciliation since 2012, the appointment of the Scholar in Indigenous Education since 2019, and the marked choices supportive of “Authentic Indigenization” as one of five priorities of the College Plan, the creation of the **Chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation** is a united and empowering endeavour that honours Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Recognizing the importance of having a place where learning and respectful dialogue can occur, the Chair will ensure and promote understanding as enriched by multicultural, multidisciplinary, multidimensional, and relational knowledge.



The STM College Plan 2025 presents Authentic Indigenization as one of its five priorities of equal importance, interdependent, and illustrative of a reconciling community with strategies to:

- 1** Build capacity for Authentic Indigenization at STM
- 2** Collaborate and Consult
- 3** Honour Indigenous Culture

Collaborative Commitment.

The actions of reconciliation and decolonization must be a collaborative commitment. The Chair will foster reconnection to and growth of spirituality, ceremony, and faith within and outside of the church, set an example, and build a model for implementation across the country.

With the goal of presenting a way to celebrate the uniqueness and similarities among cultures, faiths, religions, and spirituality, the Chair's purpose is to:

- encourage and foster awareness and appreciation of Indigenous spirituality and reconciliation by facilitating dialogue within the academic community and the broader society, and through exemplary teaching and research;
- explore with humility, respect and courage the history, cultures and traditions that have shaped the intricate nature of Indigenous spiritualities in Canada;
- interact with and listen thoughtfully to Elders and community leaders who have preserved, protected and communicated this fertile spiritual heritage down through the generations;
- consider and analyze the complexities of the interaction between Indigenous spirituality and Christian traditions historically and currently in order to advance reconciliation; and
- serve as a source of intellectual leadership both inside and outside STM.



If the ultimate mission of a Catholic college is to bring people to “the full measure of their humanity”, as Ex Corde Ecclesiae puts it, it will never be accomplished once and for all. What then should we seek to be that we are not already? One answer to this question seems inescapable, at this time and in this place: we should seek to be “a reconciled community”, in which Indigenous students, scholars, and staff will find a home and flourish.

— Dr. Carl Still, PhD




Respectful Dialogue. Meaningful Engagement.

There is a need today for a forum where non-Indigenous people of the Catholic faith and those from other religions and secular views can respectfully dialogue with people in the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities—those who practice the richly diverse traditional cultures, values, symbols, and spiritual traditions of their distinct group, tribe, or nation, along with those who embrace Catholicism or Christian churches of the west.

For the College, the academic, and greater community, the Chair presents the opportunity to:

- enter into a deeper and meaningful relationship with the Indigenous community,
- look with intention at faith through the lens of Indigenous spirituality, and
- create a forum where Indigenous voices can lead the development of new theological discourse that emerges from honouring the relationship.



As colonization removed the right for Indigenous elders and spiritual leaders to teach, the Chair provides a forum to gather, communicate, learn, and heal, and a space for Indigenous voices to be reclaimed, shared, and elevated.

A Celebration of Rich Diversity.

An Advisory Circle for the Chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation provides ongoing advice to the STM President on the scope and nature of the activities of the Chair. There exists a commitment and concerted effort to diversify the representation of members from the larger Indigenous communities from the various groups, tribes, and nations throughout Treaty 6 territory. There is also interest in adding those from within the academic and greater community who bring international Indigenous perspectives.



The Advisory Circle members currently include A.J. Felix, Elder; Patricia Felix, Elder; Harry Lafond, STM Scholar in Indigenous Education; Gordon Martell, STM Board Member; Candace Wasacase-Lafferty, Senior Director, Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, University of Saskatchewan; Jennifer Briere, STM Faculty Member; Carl Still, President; and Gertrude Rompré, Director of Mission and Ministry for STM.


The Plan.

The Chair has been established by an initial major endowment through a generous legacy gift of the Basilian Fathers, who founded St. Thomas More College in 1936. Fundraising to fully fund the Chair is ongoing. Only the annual investment return from the Fund shall be used to support the activities of the Chair and, eventually, to permanently fund the appointment of a distinguished Indigenous scholar to hold the position of Chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation.


The eventual appointee to the Chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation shall be a distinguished Indigenous scholar who either already holds or is qualified to hold a tenure-track or tenured appointment at a senior academic rank. When a chair holder is eventually appointed, the Chair will be housed in either the humanities or social sciences areas of the College and will report directly to the STM College President. The study of Indigenous spirituality and reconciliation will encompass several disciplines within the areas of humanities and social sciences.



STM first began the formal work of reconciliation and Indigenous engagement in 2012.



The Chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation was inaugurated on May 17, 2016. This Chair is unique in the history of Western Canada.



Currently, the fund is at \$1.3 million. While fundraising continues toward the target of \$6 million to appoint someone to the Chair position full-time, the College will continue to host conferences and events, bring people in to speak, and provide a forum wherein people can learn about, and understand, Indigenous spirituality.

A fully funded Chair position will also enable STM to expand its research, curriculum, and programming. Activities will include such things as hosting ceremonies; awarding a teaching fellowship to an Indigenous graduate student; enabling the regular presence of an Elder at STM; guest lectures, conferences, and curriculum development. All activities will be focused on Indigenous spirituality and reconciliation through the study of one or more of history, culture, traditions, language and understandings of formal or informal religious and/or spiritual practices.



A Way Forward—Together.

The path of reconciliation is one that must bear the imprints of the footsteps of us all. It will not be a short journey, but one that when we walk together, will create a future where mutual respect, understanding, and inclusivity are the norm.

St. Thomas More College's ongoing commitment to reconciliation and Indigenous engagement has led to the creation of the Chair in Indigenous Spirituality and Reconciliation. The Chair will serve as an important forum for learning and respectful dialogue fostering the reclamation and elevation of Indigenous spirituality. The hope and vision for the Chair is that it will set an example and build a model for implementation across the country.

STM invites individuals and organizations to walk forward on this path with us and to support this vibrant initiative on the path of reconciliation and decolonization.

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For more information, please contact:

Kari Sinkewicz
Manager of Development and Alumni Relations
1437 College Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0W6
ksinkewicz@stmcollege.ca
306-966-8918



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stmcollege.ca