

*Elder Ernie Lafreniere is a strong and devoted Catholic and a proud Knight of the Knights of Columbus, who is widely recognized as a positive role model in the community of Thompson, Manitoba. Raised in Camperville, Manitoba, Ernie is a survivor of the Fort Alexander residential school. He hopes that sharing his story and experiences with His Holiness will help the Catholic Church understand the impact of the wrongdoings of the residential school system and the assimilation of Indigenous children. Ernie and his wife Judy have been married for 51 years and have four children, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.*

*Statement to His Holiness by Ernie Lafreniere:*


*Holy Father, I come to you as a former student to the Fort Alexander residential school. I also come as a representative from Thompson, Manitoba, where I live today, and Camperville, Manitoba, which is the village I was born in. I am also a proud member of the Knights of Columbus.*

*I do not wish to speak about my personal experiences at Fort Alexander residential school in any major detail. Instead, I will say is that I experienced dark times when I attended that school and witnessed the pain of others. I felt betrayed by the priest and the school staff, but I am proud to say that despite these horrible experiences, I never lost my love for God.*

*It is my hope that the harms and abuse that took place at Fort Alexander and other residential schools have already been shared with you, Most Holy Father, along with the tragic stories of children taking unimaginable risks to try and find their way home.*

*These truths must be brought to light and accepted as facts for reconciliation to begin to take place. It is how we can all help survivors begin to heal. We must do everything we can to make sure that no child is ever again abused by anyone, particularly by anyone who claims to be a servant to God.*





*I pray that this journey of hope and healing will bring survivors and their families back to a relationship with our Lord, as I know my relationship with God has been a great source of comfort for me throughout my life.*

*I would like to speak from my heart, Most Holy Father, and share what is on my mind about the presence of Catholic Churches in our Métis villages. I have been honoured to serve on the Parish Council at St. Lawrence Catholic Church in Thompson. I am passionate about drawing more people into our churches and to a relationship with God and this is something that we often discuss in our Parish Council. The Catholic Church must rebuild a trusting relationship with all of God's children, particularly our youth. We must continue to invest and find ways that strengthen the role of the church in rural communities, as many are in poor condition and don't even have service every week. One thing I know, Holy Father, is that the church is a place people can turn to for comfort and in times of joy — and this cannot be taken from our communities.*

*Holy Father, I bring to you a cross that was a wedding gift from my parents and a rosary that has been in the family for 50 years or more, as well as another that belonged to my Kookum. I humbly ask that these much-loved items receive your blessing. You can be sure that these blessed items will be cherished in our family for generations to come. I further ask to receive your blessing so that I may remain strong in my faith and be a light for those who wish to come out of the darkness and renew their relationship with God.*