

## **GONZAGA MIDDLE SCHOOL – STATEMENT ON RECONCILIATION**

**Winnipeg, January 2016**

2015 marked a historic time in Canada and Winnipeg with the publication of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada and the establishment of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba. The Gonzaga Middle School Board and Advisory Committee profoundly respect the Commission's work and acknowledge the sorrowful legacy of residential schools with respect to Indigenous peoples, cultures, spiritualities and families. The decisions, policies and actions which led to the legacy of residential schools must never be repeated in this country. The Commission calls institutions and Canadians from all walks of life to take actions that contribute in a practical way to reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Gonzaga Middle School is committed to doing its part.

Gonzaga Middle School (GMS) is working hard to be sensitive to this historical context and to build trust with all communities with whom we will work. We are committed to participating in meaningful and lasting change and creating a peaceful and respectful relationship with parents, students, and communities while building a better Canada.

GMS will be a school for students from low income families in the Point Douglas and North East Downtown neighbourhoods. It will accept students of all faiths, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and given the neighbourhood demographics we expect our students will be from a variety of backgrounds including Indigenous, new-Canadian and other visible minorities. We recognize that the neighbourhoods we will serve are home to organizations and community leaders whose work and contributions are incredible examples of resiliency and reconciliation that are strengthening our city for everyone. GMS's model of additional supports, programming and long-term educational commitment reflects the longstanding values and traditions in these neighbourhoods.

Leaders from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have graciously provided their advice and expertise as planning for the school moves forward. They have reminded us of the TRC's findings with respect to the sorrowful legacy of residential schools and also of the important challenge it provides all Canadians: "to establish new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect that will forge a brighter future."

GMS will be inspired by Catholic and Jesuit values according to the "Nativity" school tradition and the spirit of reconciliation. It will operate inclusively being open to a variety of cultural traditions and expressions of spirituality including Christian and indigenous traditions. GMS will not proselytize, or aim to "convert" students of non-Catholic backgrounds. While students will be expected to participate in lessons, ceremonial activities and celebrations held throughout the school year, accommodation can and will be made for any student's additional spiritual needs in a way that is respectful of their own and other students' backgrounds. It is the hope of all involved in Gonzaga Middle School that all students will be exposed to a breadth of spiritual traditions and practices from all walks of life.

The concern for a holistic education is seen as part of a Jesuit endorsed school's mission "to develop men and women for others" where we will support our students of all cultural and faith backgrounds

becoming hopeful, confident, morally responsible leaders for love and service of their families and communities. GMS will strive to encourage our students to become people who are loving, intellectually competent, open to growth, spiritually alive and committed to doing justice. These five key aims are common to all Jesuit schools. GMS will strive to create a school culture of individual care and concern for each student – where students feel they are known and cared for by their teachers, where they feel respected and where they learn to respect themselves and others and learn a sense of responsibility for serving their community.

Concern for the spiritual development of our students is seen as part of providing a holistic education which also attends to students’ academic preparation, physical health and general wellness, and development of social skills. GMS will not follow the traditional approach to teaching religion. Instead Catholic and Christian beliefs and spiritual practices will be infused into the overall curriculum and school practices. Teaching about and showing respect for other faiths, beliefs and traditions including Indigenous beliefs, and prayer practices will also be included in curricula and the school day. As with most schools, there will also be curriculum regarding the residential school legacy in Canada as well as the Catholic church’s role in its development and delivery.

GMS’s goal of encouraging students to be “spiritually alive” means to help them learn to respect their own faith and spiritual traditions, to understand where they come from and who they hope to become and to also learn to respect other faiths and traditions. We will encourage the understanding that we are all Treaty people and that we need to nurture a relationship of mutual care and support between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. As suggested in the TRC Report, Indigenous studies will be part of the curriculum and we will continue to seek the support of Indigenous educators and consult Indigenous elders with respect to this curriculum and Indigenous spiritual teachings and practices.

Finally, we endorse and encourage the Calls to Action of the TRC Report with respect to education and also with respect to how we treat each other: that “reconciliation must become a way of life” and that it is “about respect – both self-respect for Aboriginal people and mutual respect among all Canadians.” We understand that we will need to continue to learn from the community and our students as we embark together on our educational journey. The TRC Report concluded, “Establishing respectful relationships involves learning to be good neighbours. This means being respectful—listening to, and learning from, each other; building understanding; and taking concrete action to improve relationships.” Our commitment at Gonzaga Middle School is to put that conclusion into action. It is an incredible privilege and responsibility — and it is essential for our city, for our province and for future generations.



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Gonzaga Middle School Board of Directors