

EMBARGOED UNTIL May 30, 2025 at 10:00 AM EDT

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Location

Anderson Lake, Ontario — nestled on tranquil, forested lands near Espanola, the Anishinabe Spiritual Centre stands as a sacred and spiritual gathering place for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike.

A SHORT HISTORY

The Anishinabe Spiritual Centre was established in the early 1980s by the Jesuits of Canada in collaboration with the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie and local First Nations, in response to a growing desire among Indigenous communities for a spiritual retreat and formation centre rooted in both Catholic faith and Indigenous cultural traditions.

Situated on the shores of Anderson Lake, the Centre has, for over five decades, welcomed thousands through retreats, formation programs, and cultural gatherings that honour both the Gospel and Indigenous ceremony. With its humble dormitories, gathering spaces, chapel, and natural surroundings, the Centre has served as a place of healing, reflection, and community connection.

A major milestone in the Centre's history came in 1981, with the launch of the **Ministries Program**—a collaborative initiative founded by Bishop Alexander Carter, the Jesuits, the Diocese, and Indigenous leadership. This program has since become the cornerstone of Indigenous Catholic ministry in Northern Ontario, offering formation for lay people called to serve as spiritual leaders within their communities.

Blending Indigenous teachings with Catholic theology, the Ministries Program nurtures leadership grounded in culture, service, and faith. A globally unique feature of the initiative is the **Diocesan Order of Service (DOS)**, which formally mandates both **men and women**—a rare and progressive model within the Catholic Church. DOS members serve their communities through pastoral care, liturgical leadership, wake services, and sacramental preparation.

Rooted in deep respect for Indigenous spirituality and grounded in Catholic tradition, the Ministries Program reflects a dynamic and evolving model of lay leadership—one that continues to inspire, empower, and heal.

THE MOMENT OF TRANSITION

In May 2025, a major milestone will be marked as the Jesuits of Canada formally transfer governance of the Anishinabe Spiritual Centre to a newly formed, Indigenous-led Board of Directors, with continuing sacramental oversight provided by the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie.

This transition honors the long-standing presence of Indigenous leadership at the Centre and responds directly to Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It also repositions the Centre as a model for respectful partnership between Indigenous communities and Catholic institutions.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Under its new governance, the Anishinabe Spiritual Centre is entering a revitalization phase to better serve a growing number of communities and institutions. Key elements of the vision include:

1. Revitalized Facilities

Plans are underway to renovate and upgrade the dormitories, improve accessibility (including AODA compliance), replace aging infrastructure (including the septic system), and ensure that the physical environment is welcoming, dignified, and culturally affirming.

2. Educational Outreach

The Centre is strengthening partnerships with Catholic & public-school boards and educators to deliver culturally grounded Faith and Reconciliation Programs for elementary and secondary students. These half-day, full-day, and five-day experiences blend Catholic teaching with Anishinabe spirituality, land-based learning, and teachings from Elders.

3. Cultural & Spiritual Programming

Anishinabe Spiritual Centre will continue to offer retreats, workshops, and formation events that reflect both Indigenous and Catholic traditions, including seasonal events (e.g., Lent meditation, solstice ceremonies), daily Mass, and Speaker's Corner events featuring local and national Indigenous leaders.

4. Expanded Reach

While the Anishinabe Spiritual Centre's roots are in Northern Ontario, the Centre aspires to become a national "centre of excellence" for training in lay ministry, Truth and Reconciliation awareness, welcoming groups from across Canada for spiritual formation, education, and cultural exchange. Outreach to Catholic institutions, Indigenous communities, and the broader public will be supported through enhanced digital presence and media partnerships.

5. Pilgrimage Destination

The Anishinabe Spiritual Centre has been designated as an official Jubilee 2025 Pilgrimage Site, recognizing its spiritual importance and its role in bringing together Indigenous and Catholic communities in shared journey and reflection.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Truth & Reconciliation:** Embracing honesty, healing, and restoration through spiritual and cultural practice.
- **Cultural Integration:** Celebrating the wisdom of Indigenous traditions in harmony with Catholic faith.
- **Community & Hospitality:** Offering sacred space for all people to gather in respect and relationship.
- **Education & Empowerment:** Building knowledge, awareness, and future leadership rooted in culture.