



Prairie to Pine Regional Council, The United Church of Canada

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60 Maryland Street, Winnipeg MB R3G 1K7

15 December 2022

From Prairie to Pine Regional Council of the United Church

To: Winnipeg Chief of Police Danny Smyth

Winnipeg Police Service,
P.O. Box 1680,
Winnipeg, MB, R3C 2Z7

CC:

Coun. Markus Chambers, Chair, Winnipeg Police Service Board
markuschambers@winnipeg.ca

Mayor Scott Gillingham, City of Winnipeg, Mayor's Office: 510 Main Street, Winnipeg,
Manitoba R3B 1B9

Premier Heather Stefanson, premier@leg.gov.mb.ca;
204 Legislative Building, 450 Broadway, Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Chief Smyth,

The elected leadership of [Prairie to Pine Regional Council](#) of the United Church of Canada wishes to express our very strong concern about the decision announced by Winnipeg Police Chief Smyth that there would be no effort made to search for the bodies of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran.

It is understood that their bodies have likely been in the Prairie Green landfill site since May. Yet Prairie Green was closed to new traffic only very recently, and only after provincial intervention. Chief Smyth, you have indicated that it would not be “feasible” to search for their bodies. We strongly question this decision and also ask why earlier action was not taken. We also express great concern that Mashkode Bizhiki'ikwe's body has not been found.

Failing to search for these missing bodies sends a strong and deeply disturbing message that these women's lives are not valued: not valued as Indigenous people, and not valued as women. This message to Indigenous communities and families is especially disturbing in light of

[231 recommendations](#) of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) aimed at slowing or halting the extreme violence that targets Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people every day.

We join with community members and advocates and call on the Winnipeg Police Service to begin a search as soon as possible. We also call on the City of Winnipeg, the province of Manitoba, and the government of Canada to help as needed or requested. We support community advocates, survivors, loved ones, and the MMIWG2S+ Implementation Committee, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Southern Chiefs' Organization, the Assembly of First Nations, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, among many others, in calling for this search, and urge you to listen to them.

Beyond the immediacy of the search lie issues of racism, poverty, misogyny, and transphobia that continue to fuel this epidemic of violence against Indigenous women and girls, and impunity for the perpetrators of this violence. The police service is part of this reality, as is The United Church of Canada.

We have and continue to acknowledge our own contribution to this cycle of violence, which has many roots in land dispossession, residential schools, and the Sixties Scoop. In that spirit, **we also ask that the Winnipeg Police Service redouble its efforts to address strongly and directly the well-documented presence of racist attitudes within its officers, staff, and day to day practices.** The Winnipeg Police Service has an opportunity to correct a wrong and we ask you to do so.

With community members, we mourn Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran, and Mashkode Bizhiki'ikwe.

We look forward to receiving your response, and to seeing a change in position.

Sincerely,

Pat Bird and Erica Wiebe, co-chairs, Prairie to Pine Regional Council

Rev Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister