



Office of the Bishop

Indian Residential Schools – Further Information

9 July 2021

To all of the Catholic Faithful of the Nelson Diocese:

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? Yet in all this, we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us.”
(Romans 8.35, 37)

I quote these words from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans because they are more important now than ever. As with the early Christians, they are meant to encourage us and help us through these difficult times when it is a challenge to be Catholic Christian.

Since the news of the unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, and now, other residential school sites, there has been quite a backlash against the Church. As disturbing and disheartening as it has been, we must continue to search for the truth, for *“the truth will make you free.”* (John 8.32) We cannot give-in to the illusion of truth, and we have to be mindful of imposing our current way of thinking, our current attitudes, and our current culture on past events. This is not helpful and why it is so crucial to wait until all of the facts unfold.

Currently, more and more information is being made known. I have attached various articles and links that provide a broader picture and perspective of the Indian Residential Schools. I share them with you to provide more information.

In particular, I recommend *The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Reports*, which are found at: <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>. As well, I have attached a letter written by Bishop Emeritus Henry that responds to the federal government’s comments on the Catholic Church and Indian Residential Schools. I have also attached a letter written by the Bishop of Saskatoon, which does a very good job outlining the history of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). Although the letter pertains to Diocese of Saskatoon, the information contained therein is very helpful.

As was noted in Bishop Hagemoen’s letter, even though they were not involved in running the schools, every Catholic entity and Catholic arch/diocese in Canada was asked to fundraise for the ‘best efforts’ campaign, “Moving Forward Together” as part of the IRSSA.

The Diocese of Nelson held special collections between Dec. 31, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2014 and raised \$14,873.81, and paid \$5,000 in administrative costs toward the appeal.

In closing, we cannot speak to someone's experience, but we can speak to the truth at the time, the prevailing circumstances, and deepen our understanding of that period in history. We must discover the truth if we are going to learn from the past, and build a better future.

God bless you.

Sincerely in Christ our Lord,



✠ Gregory J Bittman
Bishop of Nelson

Articles from The National Post

<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/raymond-j-de-souza-it-is-historically-inaccurate-to-suggest-the-catholic-church-hasnt-apologized-for-residential-schools>

<https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/newly-discovered-b-c-graves-a-grim-reminder-of-the-heartbreaking-death-toll-of-residential-schools>

<https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/the-graves-were-never-a-secret-why-so-many-residential-school-cemeteries-remain-unmarked>

<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/fr-raymond-j-de-souza-the-truth-about-the-churchs-obligation-to-aboriginals>

Articles from Real Women of Canada

<https://realwomenofcanada.ca/jumping-to-conclusions-without-the-facts-in-the-indigenous-residential-schools-question/>

<https://realwomenofcanada.ca/the-blame-for-residential-schools-lies-with-the-federal-government/>

Article by John Edmond – *LawNow*

<https://www.lawnow.org/indian-residential-schools-chronology/>

Office of the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary

June 7, 2021

The Right Honorable Justin Trudeau, P.C., B. A., B.Ed.
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister

This past week you said in your press conference that you, as a Catholic, were “deeply disappointed” in how the church has responded to the residential schools tragedy. You singled out the Catholic Church for not formally apologizing for its role in running residential schools, and for resisting calls to cooperate with efforts to document and uncover more information about residential schools.

As a Catholic and a Canadian, I am disappointed in how you have chosen to respond to the Kamloops Residential School horrific discovery of children’s remains.

Your comments are not only unhelpful but must be considered posturing for political purposes and yet another blatant attempt at ongoing dissimulation. The apology and regret made by the Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories in 2014 to our indigenous brothers and sister

In 2014, the Alberta Bishops apologized to our indigenous brothers and sisters which included the following statement: “We also express our apology and regret for Catholic participation in government policies that resulted in children being separated from their families, and often suppressed Aboriginal culture and language at the Residential Schools.”

While acknowledging our own sorrow and guilt, and trying to own our sinfulness in the participation in residential schools, it is important to note the wording in our statement, especially the words, “participation in government policies.” Primary responsibility must be owned by the federal government.

This is underscored in Volume 4, Canada’s Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials - The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Permit me to refresh your memory by quoting some sections pertaining to the substance of the report.

1. Executive Summary

“The most basic of questions about missing children—Who died? Why did they die? Where are they buried?—have never been addressed or comprehensively documented by the Canadian government.” (P4)

2. Statistical Analysis

“That these rates may not be as high as has been reported elsewhere should not detract from the fact that the federal government failed to take appropriate action address a

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national health-care crisis in the residential schools and in the Aboriginal community in general." (P33)

3. Operational Policies and Custodial Care

"There are four major conclusions ... First, the federal government never established an adequate set of standards and regulations to guarantee the health and safety of residential school students. This failure occurred despite the fact that the government had the authority to establish those standards. Second, the federal government never adequately enforced the minimal standards and regulations that it did establish. Third, the failure to establish and enforce such regulations was largely a function of the government's determination to keep residential school costs to a minimum. Fourth, the failure to establish and enforce adequate standards, coupled with the failure to adequately fund the schools, resulted in unnecessarily high residential school death rates.

Students were housed in poorly built, poorly heated, poorly maintained, crowded, and often unsanitary facilities. Many of the schools lacked isolation rooms or infirmaries. Many lacked access to trained medical staff. It was not until the late 1950s that the federal government attempted to provide sufficient funding to ensure that student diets were nutritionally adequate. Such combination of poor housing, inadequate medical care, and poor diet left the students vulnerable to infections and reduced their ability to overcome them. Indian Affairs' failure to address the tuberculosis crisis in the broader Aboriginal community by improving housing, diets, income, and access to medical treatment, coupled with the failure to screen out infected children prior to admission to residential schools, guaranteed that students would be exposed to infection. It must be stressed again that the tuberculosis death rate in the general Canadian population declined in the early twentieth century, prior to the development of effective drug treatment. This decline is generally attributed to a variety of factors such as improvements in sanitation, housing, and diet, and the isolation of infectious individuals in sanatoria. Policies that would have had these same positive effects were recommended for residential schools—but were not adopted. As a result, tuberculosis remained a persistent residential school problem and death rates remained elevated until the introduction of drug treatment.

Student safety was further compromised by the failure to adopt and enforce fire safety standards in the construction and maintenance of buildings, and to construct and maintain safe, accessible fire escapes.

The failure to establish and enforce system-wide discipline policies left students subject to exceptionally harsh and often abusive punishment. This would have increased stress levels and undermined resistance to disease.

The federal government never adopted a national policy on the reporting of the physical and sexual abuse of students. As a result, parental and student complaints were often

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dismissed without investigation. In other cases, investigations were not carried out in an impartial manner. A common practice was to dismiss a staff member suspected of abusing students rather than to report the incident to the proper authorities. In cases of actual or suspected abuse, parents were not informed and students were not offered any support. Recommendations to put staff screening procedures in place were not adopted. The failure to adequately address physical and sexual abuse in the school undermined the physical and mental health of countless students.

Harsh discipline and physical and sexual abuse led many students to run away. The failure to establish and enforce national policies and procedures on the measures that principals should take when students ran away from school further contributed to the elevated rates of school deaths." (p122-123)

4. Where Are the Children Buried? Cemeteries and Unmarked Burials .

"Tuberculosis was the cause of death in 48.7% of the cases for which there is a reported cause of death (on the Named and Unnamed registers combined.) A child's vulnerability to tuberculosis and ability to recover from the infection was in large measure governed by diet, sanitary conditions, ventilation, quality of clothing, and physical strength. Due to limited government funding, students in most schools were malnourished, quartered in crowded and unsanitary facilities, poorly clothed, and overworked. The fact that the government was not able to impose and maintain a screening mechanism that kept infected students out of the schools meant that the schools amplified an existing tuberculosis crisis in the Aboriginal community. Students who died at school were rarely sent home unless their parents could afford to pay for transportation. Unless they lived in close proximity to the school, most parents could not afford such costs. As a result, it is likely that most students who died at residential school were buried in either a nearby mission cemetery or a residential school cemetery. Although some of these cemeteries remain in operation, many more have been abandoned after the closure of either the school or the mission. In recent years, in a number of important instances, Aboriginal communities, churches, and former students have taken steps to rehabilitate cemeteries and commemorate the individuals buried there." (p138)

To conclude, I would suggest a re-reading of 72, 73,74,75. of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action re Missing Children and Burial Information. We have a right to less pompous posturing and more forthright action on the part of federal government.

Wishing you all the best, I remain,

Sincerely yours

✠ F. B. Henry
Bishop Emeritus of Calgary.

cc. The Honourable Carolyn Bennett
The Honourable Marc Miller



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June 29, 2021
Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

**Dear Clergy, Religious, Lay Faithful – Brothers and Sisters
of the Diocese of Saskatoon:**

The recent scrutiny of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) and the participation and contribution of the Catholic church entities has compelled me to provide for you my best attempt at a summary of this settlement process, and the Diocese of Saskatoon's participation and contributions.

This process is familiar to me because of my assignment as bishop in the Mackenzie-Fort Smith Diocese from 2013 until 2017. The Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith had completed an agreement with the Government of Canada in 2006. However, it also participated with the 48 Catholic entities that entered the IRSSA, with legal representatives of plaintiffs, the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit Representatives, and other denominational religious organizations. My memory of the negotiation of the IRSSA was that it was a constructive and collaborative process to assist residential school survivors with healing programs.

It should be noted that there was one entity among the other 48 Catholic entities that did not operate residential schools but nonetheless wished to be a part of this settlement process and to support its purposes – this was the Diocese of Saskatoon. I believe this was both because of the history and ongoing commitment throughout the diocese to build relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, led by the strong leadership to such commitment of the bishops at that time, Bishop Albert LeGatt and Bishop Donald Bolen.

The 48 Catholic entities party to the IRSSA, including the diocese of Saskatoon, amongst other things, committed to contribute to financing services and programs to Indigenous survivors, families, and communities, generally as follows:

1. Payment of \$29 million in cash, which was directed to programs and services, the supervision of First Nations organizations, and to the "Returning to Spirit" program. This amount included contribution from other previous agreements. In the beginning, the funds went to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and after its dissolution, to the Legacy of Hope Foundation.
2. A "services-in-kind" commitment, whereby various community services and programs worth more than \$25 million were organized by the various Catholic entities, to be provided for Indigenous communities;

3. A final fundraising appeal that was titled the “Moving Forward Together.” This appeal featured a commitment of \$2 million by the Corporation of Catholic Entities Party to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement (CCEPIRSS) in order to fund the fundraising company engaged to facilitate the campaign. This campaign was to also involve not only the 48 entities, but all dioceses in Canada.

The fundraising campaign was identified in the IRSSA as a “best efforts” campaign aimed at supporting the process of healing and reconciliation with survivors, their families and their communities. The entities hired a leading national fundraising firm. Prominent Board of Directors provided leadership and profile, including: AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine, chair; Mary Simon, a prominent Inuit leader; and a former senior official from the Government of Canada. At that time, the response from large corporations and individuals totaled only just under \$4 million. A collection in churches across the country was held on December 8, 2013. My former diocese – the Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith - participated in a limited way through collection in our larger centres as the majority of the people in the diocese were people who were themselves affected by the Residential School Legacy. I understand that the leaders of various Catholic dioceses and groups put their efforts behind each component of the campaign. However, they were disappointed by the results.

Here in the Diocese of Saskatoon, efforts were made which involved printing and distributing promotional materials, with then Bishop Donald Bolen strongly encouraging participation across the diocese. When a first collection was disappointing, the bishop also ordered a second collection.

To summarize, the Diocese of Saskatoon’s contribution to the settlement agreement was as follows:

The diocese made an initial \$25,000 contribution to the \$29 million cash amount identified in the IRSSA.

Our diocese’s in-kind contribution for Restorative Ministry was valued at \$43,000.

The total amount raised from the Moving Forward Together appeal as our diocese’s contribution was about \$34,600.

If I was to summarize why the efforts yielded this kind of result, I would say that many of our parishioners, like many non-Indigenous Canadians, have been slow to understand the impact and the legacy of the residential school system, and this seems to be reflected in the response at the time. However, we have continued efforts to raise awareness and to support reconciliation and healing throughout the Saskatoon diocese.

Several media reports allege that a ‘legal loophole’ allowed the Catholic entities to be ‘let off the hook’. The Government of Canada confirmed the agreement with the entities once they had fulfilled the three areas of the financial commitment described above, even though one element – the Moving Forward Together fundraising best efforts campaign – fell far short of its goal. The accusation of a ‘legal loop-hole’ referred to the negotiation process that occurred between the 48 Catholic entities and the other parties to the IRSSA regarding legal fees incurred by the entities toward the final tally of the \$29 million. The

entities reported nothing more was owed once incurred fees were taken into account. The Government of Canada indicated that about \$1.6 million was still owed. They eventually agreed on a sum of \$1.2 million. In 2015 Judge Neil Gabrielson declared that there was a binding agreement between Canada and the Catholic entities which entitled the Catholic entities to the Releases and Indemnities as provided for in the IRSSA. The settlement funds were forwarded to the Government of Canada for the Legacy of Hope Foundation.

In the conclusion of my letter to the Mackenzie-Fort Smith diocese in 2016, I stated the following:

“It needs to be continually acknowledged and affirmed that the Indian Residential School legacy – a policy and structure set up by the Government of Canada and administered by the major Christian churches of Canada – was an inherently flawed policy and process that resulted in much pain and disenfranchisement of Aboriginal peoples from their families, communities, and culture. The country-wide reflection on this legacy was the fruit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, which concluded ...with the Calls to Action issued in June 2015, and the final reports issued in December of 2015.”

As I reflect on these comments now some six years later, I am grateful for the clarity and focus of the Calls to Action, especially as they relate to church responses. Some of these, as a Church and as a diocese, we have made progress on. These include:

#59 – the development of ongoing education strategies to ensure congregations learn about the church’s role in the residential school legacy;

#60 – the development and teaching of curriculum - in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders and Survivors – for schools of theology, ministry for clergy and laity;

#61 – the establishment of funding for healing and reconciliation projects, education and relationship building;

#49 – the repudiation and clarification of concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*.

In the Diocese of Saskatoon, we join with our partners in Catholic education and health care, and various other service organizations to accomplish these. May I say that both Catholic education and Catholic health care groups have made great strides at both prioritizing and addressing many of the Calls to Action.

However, there is still much left to address in the Calls to Action. One of these is the request for Pope Francis to provide an apology to residential school survivors, their families and communities, for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that happened in the residential schools. On this issue, I note that former Saskatoon Bishop Donald Bolen (now the Archbishop of Regina), Bishops of the Prince Albert Diocese, Keewatin Le Pas, Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon, and I were among those who were encouraging the Holy Father to come to Canada in the time following the issuing of the TRC report. We were among those who were disappointed by

the March 2018 announcement that Pope Francis would not be coming to Canada to make an apology at that time. I again state my support for such a visit by the Holy Father to Canada, and I believe that an apology from Pope Francis would bring healing to many and would help to further the journey of reconciliation in our Church and our country.

An item not explicitly related to the Calls to Action, but under much scrutiny at present is the short-fall of the \$25 million 'best efforts' appeal of 2013-14. I will simply say that I would very much support revisiting this appeal today. The discoveries of grave sites at cemeteries near former residential schools has drawn an even greater awareness of the need for an appeal to support the healing of survivors and their families from the legacy of residential schools. I think Catholic members in our diocese and across Canada would respond with a heightened sense of solidarity and support.

Since discovery by the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation of 215 unmarked graves at the site of the former Kamloops residential school, and more recently of the over 751 unmarked graves at the former Marieval Indian Residential School at Cowesses First Nation, I have added my apology to those of other church leaders in our country. I take this opportunity to conclude by re-stating my apology:

I deeply regret and apologize that Catholics were part of this system which was designed to separate children from their families and communities and to assimilate them into a culture that featured a colonial attitude and approach. I deeply regret and apologize for the damage done to children at these schools, which for many included neglect and abuse, and I apologize for the deaths that happened at these schools, with children dying far away from mothers, fathers, grandparents and families, and I apologize to the families and the communities who have not been able to honour children's burial sites.

While it is true that the discovery of graves is exposing the wounds and scars from the Indian Residential School legacy which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission revealed – it is also raising greater awareness of the work, findings and the recommendations of the TRC, and of the great work still ahead for us and our diocese. I ask for your prayers, support and participation with this work ahead.

Yours in Our One Creator,

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✠ Most Reverend Mark A. Hagemoen