



My Dear Friends,

The Sad Legacy of Residential Schools

With the recent news about more unmarked graves being discovered at a former residential school in Saskatchewan, I felt it was necessary to share with you a few notes about how this news is broadcast to us.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came to Thunder Bay some years ago, I participated in this gathering and I expressed, at that time, my sadness and sorrow as to what the residential school policy has done to our Indigenous peoples. I prayed with them and listened to the stories and showed my support in whatever way I could. I also released to the commission, when I was requested to do so, any records that the Diocese of Thunder Bay had on file about any residential schools in our area.

With the discovery of the unmarked graves in Kamloops and then in Saskatchewan, like many, I was shocked and saddened again on how this news brought a recurrence of the pain and suffering to so many Indigenous communities and also to the Canadian population as a whole.

Yes, these schools were run by Catholic religious communities and there was strong discipline and some abuse in these schools by some of their members. As a church community we must live with the shame of this abuse. These religious communities have offered their apologies and have pledged their support and indicated they are willing to release any information, that they have not already released, to clarify the issue concerning these unmarked graves both in Kamloops and in Saskatchewan.

The bishops of the dioceses where these schools are found, have also pledged their support to the Indigenous communities in whatever way they can help them.

The bishops of Canada have been working with the staff of Pope Francis in Rome, to see about a time when Pope Francis can make a statement concerning the residential schools in Canada and the severe harm it has caused our Indigenous communities. The bishops are taking this process one step at a time to make sure that what is done, is done well and for all Indigenous, Metis and Inuit peoples. The first step is a special meeting in Rome of Indigenous leaders with the Pope. The Canadian bishops have always shown concern for our Indigenous peoples and have pledged support in whatever way they too can help.

As a Church, we need to pray for our Indigenous peoples and to listen carefully and sincerely to their stories and their hurts, as a means towards reconciliation and healing. This will take some time and much patience and honesty on all our parts.

The government policy of residential schools was a terrible and harmful policy for all of Canada. We see this now and we must live with the legacy of hurt this policy has caused our Indigenous peoples and our country. We must now move forward in hope and healing, and we ask the Lord to guide us in this important journey together.

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