



## **Expression of Apology and Hope Archdiocese of Vancouver**

Distinguished members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Venerable Elders, Survivors of the Indian Residential Schools, First Nations Brothers and Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Speaking on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, I am here with you today to acknowledge the role we played in implementing the Canadian government's policy which involved forcibly separating children from their parents and families and placing them in Indian Residential Schools. Down through generations, this deeply flawed policy has led to unbearable pain and suffering.

At the five residential schools which existed within the boundaries of the Archdiocese, we were entrusted with safe-guarding the children and young people under our care. However, we failed to live up to the trust placed in us. Over the century of their existence, tragic incidents of cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse took place at these schools. We hold in high esteem those survivors who have had the courage to tell the truth about their harrowing experiences.

For any abuse which took place, I wish to apologize sincerely and profoundly to the survivors and their families, as well as to all those subsequently affected, for the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of those Catholics who perpetrated mistreatment of any kind in these residential schools. Likewise, I acknowledge our error in supporting a policy aimed at suppressing Aboriginal cultures and languages.

With its teaching that all people are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the Creator, the Gospel of Christ calls us to address with humility and with honesty the ways in which we fostered colonialism, racism, and policies of assimilation and the suppression of traditional Aboriginal ways of life.

We recognize the imperative to heal the pain inflicted. To this end, we are asking Catholics to contribute generously to help fund ongoing healing and education programs in the Archdiocese of Vancouver, including the Talitha Koum Society, and the Kateri Tekakwitha Centre program for Aboriginal ministry. Moreover, we will continue even more forcefully our initiatives to provide education to First Nation children and teach the full truth about the history of the encounter between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Before this Commission, we, the Catholics of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, recommit ourselves, in solidarity with all people of good will, to being heralds of hope and reconciliation – a process which demands patience, work for justice, and authentic mutual dialogue. If we persevere in this commitment with the help of the Spirit of Mercy, we can make straight the crooked lines of our shared history. We will then be able to hand on to our children and grandchildren a world where hope replaces despair, harmony triumphs over discord, and the light of reconciliation conquers the darkness in our past.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ J. Michael Miller CSB". The signature is written in a cursive style.

+ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

20 September 2013



Archdiocese of Vancouver  
ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE

June 2, 2015

My dear First Nations brothers and sisters:

Two years ago, at the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation event in Vancouver, I had the privilege of delivering to its distinguished members, as well as to venerable elders, survivors of Indian residential schools, and First Nations brothers and sisters, an “Expression of Apology and Hope” from the Archdiocese of Vancouver.

Now, as this historic process draws to a close, I wish to repeat once again the Archdiocese’s sincere and heartfelt apology for the role that the Church played in the federal government’s policy which involved forcibly separating children from their families and placing them in residential schools. Likewise, I acknowledge our error in supporting a policy aimed at suppressing Aboriginal cultures and language. This federal policy contributed to the pain and suffering experienced by generations of First Nations children and adults.

Five residential schools existed within the boundaries of the Archdiocese. During the century that they operated there were, tragically, innumerable incidents of cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. We failed to live up to the trust placed in us, and we honour those survivors who have had the courage to tell the truth about their harrowing experiences.

In recent years, I have been privileged to be part of ongoing efforts at reconciliation by the Archdiocese of Vancouver as it strives to build positive relationships with aboriginal peoples.

These initiatives first began decades ago, when the Archdiocese became a member of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops committee on residential schools. This was followed by the establishment of an Archdiocesan First Nations Council in the 1990s, and then by a series of healing conferences.

In 2008 I participated with other B.C. bishops in issuing an apology for the treatment of First Nations people in residential schools. At a reconciliation event at UBC’s Museum of Anthropology, we offered prayers for healing and peace.

An Invitation to Dialogue on Prayer followed, hosted by the Squamish Band in North Vancouver and drawing more than 100 band members from across the Vancouver Archdiocese as we explored ways of blending native traditions with Catholic worship.

The growing positive relationship between Archdiocese and natives culminated when in 2008 the Archdiocese marked 100 years of its history in Vancouver with a celebration bringing 12,000 Catholics together at GM Place arena, which had been transformed into a sacred space of prayer and thanksgiving. The celebration honoured the remarkable achievements in reconciliation that had been made between the Church and aboriginal peoples.

Before his retirement in 2009, one of the late Archbishop Raymond Roussin's final acts was to approve the establishment of an Office of First Nations Ministry. Its mandate was to develop a pastoral vision and find opportunities for collaboration with First Nations organizations and communities as well as to develop ways to promote healing. Today, as we mark the closing of the Truth and Reconciliation process, our Director of First Nations Ministry, who was instrumental in arranging our participation in Vancouver's concluding events, is attending the official closing ceremonies in Ottawa.

We will continue to seek ways to contribute to healing and education in the Archdiocese of Vancouver, and to teach the full truth about the history of the encounter between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

And so I close again with my words from the 2013 TRC event: "We, the Catholics of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, recommit ourselves, in solidarity with all people of good will, to being heralds of hope and reconciliation – a process which demands patience, work for justice, and authentic mutual dialogue. If we persevere in this commitment with the help of the Spirit of Mercy, we can make straight the crooked lines of our shared history. We will then be able to hand on to our children and grandchildren a world where hope replaces despair, harmony triumphs over discord, and the light of reconciliation conquers the darkness in our past."

With cordial best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Michael Miller CSB". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

# Expression of Commitment

## Archdiocese of Vancouver

June 2, 2021

Dear First Nations governments and all Indigenous communities, families and citizens,

In light of the heartbreaking disclosure of the remains of 215 children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, I am writing to express my deep apology and profound condolences to the families and communities that have been devastated by this horrific news. Each time new evidence of a tragedy is revealed, or another victim comes forward, countless wounds are reopened, and I know that you experience renewed suffering.

I take this opportunity to reflect upon the apology I gave publicly before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2013, words to which I remain committed and accountable: “I wish to apologize sincerely and profoundly to the survivors and their families, as well as to all those subsequently affected, for the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of those Catholics who perpetrated mistreatment of any kind in these residential schools.” The Church was unquestionably wrong in implementing a government colonialist policy which resulted in devastation for children, families and communities.

If words of apology for such unspeakable deeds are to bring life and healing, they must be accompanied by tangible actions that foster the full disclosure of the truth. Truth comes before reconciliation. On behalf of the people of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, I commit to the following first steps in support of the Nations, families and communities impacted by the recent heartrending disclosure:

1. We will be fully transparent with our archives and records regarding all residential schools, and strongly urge all other Catholic and government organizations to do the same. Our records regarding the Kamloops Indian Residential School (Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc) were provided to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and will remain available for review.

2. We will offer and support mental health support and counselling for family members and others whose loved ones may be buried on the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.
3. We will offer to assist with technological and professional support to help the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and other affected Nations in whatever way they choose to honour, retrieve and remember their deceased children.
4. We commit to supporting the same process and resources to all Nations in whose territories Catholic-run residential schools were forcibly located, and which fall within the historical boundaries of the Archdiocese of Vancouver.
5. We will renew our efforts to listen to Indigenous Peoples to hear from you how we can best walk with you along the path of justice.

We recognize that there is so much work remains to be done, yet we hope that, if we persevere in these commitments with humility, we can restore the trust among us that will bring healing.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ J. Michael Miller CSB". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver