



June 17th, 2021

Diocesan Communiqué regarding Residential Schools

Following the disturbing discovery of the remains of 215 children from the Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia, Mgr. Daniel Jodoin, Bishop of the Diocese of Bathurst, wishes to express his utmost sadness at the tragic loss of the Aboriginal children of the Kamloops Residential School : *" This breaks the hearts of all of us. We recognize that this tragedy has a significant impact on all Indigenous communities. As a bishop, I want to offer my prayers for these children, their families and their communities. I also wish to offer my prayers to all Aboriginal communities that have suffered from the Government of Canada's policy of assimilation "*.

Although this was a government policy and the schools were built by the government, their operation was largely entrusted to various churches (Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian), which had the missionary ability and resources to send teachers to remote areas.

The teachings of the Catholic Church have always been to respect human dignity, as evidenced by the proclamation of Pope Paul II in 1537 concerning the rights of the indigenous peoples of that time. It affirmed their dignity, defended their freedom, and declared that they should not be enslaved or deprived of their property and property rights. This was always the position of the Church (*cf. Pastorale officium, 29 mai 1537, DS 1495*).

Although the Diocese of Bathurst has never operated a residential school, we still express deep regret that some members of the Church have not always lived by its teachings. However, the Church has been involved in the process of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples for more than 20 years.

This was reaffirmed in the CCCB's statement which states: *"The Bishops of Canada are committed to continuing their march side by side with Indigenous Peoples in the present, in search of greater healing and reconciliation for the future."* (ccc.ca)

In 1984, Pope John Paul II told the organizers of his Canada-wide tour that he would like to meet with Indigenous peoples on their ancestral lands. Unfortunately, the tour was cancelled due to thick fog. However, the Holy Father then promised to return.



In September 1987, this visit took place. In his speech, the Pope proclaimed the dignity of the Aboriginal people and support for the future: *"The Church exalts the equal dignity of all peoples and defends their right to preserve their own cultural heritage with its particular traditions and customs."*

In 1991, religious congregations, including the Oblates that administered its residential schools, formally apologized to First Nations in Canada for *"the role they played in the cultural, ethnic and religious imperialism that marked the mentality with which European peoples approached Aboriginal peoples and that consistently affected the way civil governments and churches treated Aboriginal peoples."*

[Oblate Conference of Canada Apologizes to First Nations of Canada \(scribd.com\)](http://scribd.com)

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI met with representatives of former students of Indian Residential Schools to discuss their experiences with residential schools. The Aboriginal representatives were all former students of Indian residential schools: Mr. Phil Fontaine, then national chief of the Assembly of First Nations; Mr. Peter Kinew, former; Mr. Edward John, Grand Chief of the Tl'azt'en Nation of British Columbia; Ms. Delia Opekokew, Cree lawyer, and Ms. Kathleen Mahoney, professor of law and negotiator for the Indian Residential Schools Agreement.



During the meeting, the Pope listened to the testimony of representatives and expressed regret for the suffering that many Aboriginal people had suffered in residential schools. He also expressed regret for the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some Members of the Church and offered his sympathy and solidarity in prayer. He also prayed that those affected would experience healing.

[Pope Benedict XVI - Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops \(ccb.ca\)](http://www.cccb.ca)

Dr. Phil Fontaine, then National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, called this an incredible moment for everyone involved. He said that the past must never be forgotten, and that the destiny of indigenous people is to build a future with lasting foundations, the cornerstone of which is forgiveness. *(Source : First Nations Drum)*

[Canadian First Nations Delegation Meets Pope Benedict XVI - First Nations Drum Newspaper](http://www.firstnationsdrum.com)

On June 10, 2021, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops announced that a meeting that had been planned for months between a delegation of Indigenous people and the Pope could finally take place shortly with the end of the pandemic.

Cardinal Lacroix shared that: "The path to truth and healing is so important; we continue to go through it with Indigenous Peoples. We announce that a large delegation will meet with Pope Francis soon! »

[CCCB Statement - Delegation to the Holy See - Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops \(ccb.ca\)](http://www.cccb.ca)

The Archdiocese of Toronto has published a series of frequently asked questions about residential schools, as well as answers to these questions.

[Archdiocese of Toronto - Statement from Cardinal Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto re Discovery of Children's Remains at former Kamloops Residential School \(archtoronto.org\)](http://www.archtoronto.org)