

Statement from the Canadian Catholic Bishops on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples of Canada

The Catholic Bishops of Canada, gathered in Plenary this week, took the opportunity to affirm and acknowledge to the Indigenous Peoples the suffering experienced in Canada's Indian Residential Schools. Many Catholic religious communities and dioceses participated in this system, which led to the suppression of Indigenous languages, culture and spirituality, failing to respect the rich history, traditions and wisdom of Indigenous Peoples. They acknowledged the grave abuses that were committed by some members of our Catholic community; physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and sexual. They also sorrowfully acknowledged the historical and ongoing trauma and the legacy of suffering and challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples that continue to this day. Along with those Catholic entities which were directly involved in the operation of the schools and which have already offered their own heartfelt apologies, the Catholic Bishops of Canada expressed their profound remorse and apologized unequivocally.

Together with the many pastoral initiatives already underway in dioceses across the country, the Bishops pledged to undertake fundraising in each region of the country to support initiatives discerned locally with Indigenous partners. Furthermore, they invited the Indigenous Peoples to journey with us into a new era of reconciliation, helping us to prioritize initiatives of healing, to listen to the experience of Indigenous Peoples, especially to the survivors of Indian Residential Schools, and to educate our clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful, on Indigenous cultures and spirituality. They further committed to continue the work of providing documentation or records that will assist in the memorialization of those buried in unmarked graves.

A delegation of Indigenous survivors, Elders/knowledge keepers, and youth will meet with the Holy Father in December 2021. Pope Francis will encounter and listen to the Indigenous Peoples, so as to discern how he can support our common desire to renew relationships and walk together along the path of hope in the coming years. The Bishops of Canada have pledged to work with the Holy See and our Indigenous partners on the possibility of a pastoral visit by the Pope to Canada as part of this healing journey.

We are committed to continue the journey with the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples of this land. For more information, please contact the diocese or visit www.cccb.ca.