



June 2, 2021

To all the people of the Diocese of New Westminster,

The discovery of the mass grave at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, and the remains of 215 children buried there has shocked us all.

The reporting of horrors of abuse and brutality at Residential Schools is not new to us but this burial site has brought into sharp focus the structural disrespect, cultural violence and cruelty that took place on a regular basis. We cannot ignore that two hundred and fifteen children were buried without markers, without notification to families and likely little or no ritual or ceremony of burial. How are we able to respond with so many emotions swirling around and within us?

It is a difficult but painful truth that some of those children were potentially baptized in the Anglican Church and quite possibly in our Diocese of New Westminster. We have a connection to this ghastly discovery, much as it might shock us to understand that.

A journey is taken one step at a time and the journey of reconciliation is a lifetime pilgrimage, not something soon done and finished. We are on that journey and we must seek ways to continue and never give up.

On August 6, 1993, the then-Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, Archbishop Michael Peers, said this to Indigenous people of Canada:

"I accept and I confess before God and you, our failures in the residential schools. We failed you. We failed ourselves. We failed God. I am sorry, more than I can say, that we were part of a system which took you and your children from home and family. I am sorry, more than I can say, that we tried to remake you in our image, taking from you your language and the signs of your identity. I am sorry, more than I can say, that in our schools so many were abused physically, sexually, culturally and emotionally."

On July 12, 2019, the Primate of that time, Archbishop Fred Hiltz said this:

"I confess our sin in failing to acknowledge that as First Peoples living here for thousands of years, you had a spiritual relationship with the Creator and with the Land.... I confess our sin in demonizing Indigenous spiritualities, and in belittling the traditional teachings of your Grandmothers and Grandfathers preserved and passed on through the elders. I confess the sin of our arrogance in dismissing Indigenous Spiritualities and disciplines as incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus, and insisting that there is no place for them in Christian Worship. I confess our sin in acts such as smothering the smudges, forbidding the pipes, stopping the drums, hiding the masks, destroying the totem poles, silencing the songs, stilling the dances, and banning the potlatches. With deep remorse, I acknowledge the intergenerational spiritual harm caused by our actions. I confess our sin in declaring the teachings of the medicine wheel to be pagan and primitive. I confess our sin in robbing your children and youth of the opportunity to know their spiritual ancestry and the great wealth of its wisdom and guidance for living in a good way with the Creator, the land and all peoples. For such shameful behaviours, I am very sorry."

Those are the words of two former primates of our Anglican Church, words that have much to offer us now. But at a time like this we need to listen deeply and intently and hear from Indigenous voices, not only from settlers.

Archbishop Mark MacDonald, National Indigenous Archbishop recently said this,

"I once heard someone say that Jesus, who died on the Cross, also died in the Holocaust. If that is true, they will find him among those children (buried in Kamloops). But we who have seen him die on the Cross and suffer with us, know that this is not the end of the story. He came back to us whole and sound, in a Resurrection body, from the World to Come. A world that he said we could start living in now, through love, through prayer, through the Sacred Circle, and through his Body and Blood. His justice, his truth, his love, is walking in us, and through us, towards that day and we have seen it. It will rise, is rising, with those children and with a truth that could not be hidden."

This is a time to listen. To listen to the voices of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. To listen to their pain, their truths, their voices, their understanding. To listen to how we live into reconciliation not with words alone but actions that build hope and compassion and new life. To listen and find a way to keep moving forward on this path to reconciliation. Chief Robert Joseph once said, "True reconciliation, fundamentally, is about relationships. It means that you and I can coexist in mutual respect and all of us can afford each other dignity." May we live into this hope, aware of the harm and violence that has taken place but seeking true reconciliation by listening and responding with action.

With this in mind here is a section of Kukpi7, Rosanne Casimir's, (Chief of the Tkemlúps te Secwépemc) May 31st Media Release:

Regrettably, we know that many more children are unaccounted for. We have heard that the same knowing of unmarked burial sites exists at other former residential school grounds. It was something that the TRC raised in the early days of their work. However, it was not part of their original mandate. The TRC sought for it to be included and were turned down twice by the federal government. That said, the TRC was nonetheless able to do some important work on the topic and we encourage you to revisit [Canada's Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 4](#). For further important context, we also direct your attention to the report "Where are the Children buried?" completed by Dr. Scott Hamilton. The report

“addresses the question where deceased Indian Residential School (IRS) students are buried. This is difficult to answer because of the varying circumstances of death and burial, coupled with the generally sparse information about Residential School cemeteries. It requires a historic understanding of school operations that contextualizes the patterns underlying death and burial.” [\(Link to report here\)](#)

We ask all Canadians to reacquaint themselves with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report and Calls to Action—upholding the heavy lifting already done by the survivors, intergenerational survivors, and the TRC. In addition, to show your solidarity, we encourage you to wear an orange shirt and start conversations with your neighbours about why you are doing so.

Tkémúlps te Secwépemc is now accepting donations that will automatically be deposited into a separate account set up for this initiative. The email is: donations@kib.ca There is no other fundraising initiative that Tkémúlps te Secwépemchas authorised or is participating in at this time.

[\(Here is a link to the full media release\)](#)

May God guide us to move forward in ways that honour renewed relationships and with determination that there must be a change in how we share this land with Indigenous people, how we uphold with respect and resolve the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of this country, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, Residential School survivors and those who have much to teach us about living out the gospel of grace and love.

May God’s blessing be on all of us in this crucial time in the history of this church and this country of Canada.

BLESSINGS & PEACE

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'J' followed by a horizontal line that extends to the right and then curves back down.