



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