

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