



COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

Catholics to participate in First Nations event

Archbishop Miller will issue expression of reconciliation, join in walk

VANCOUVER (Sept. 13, 2013) – Vancouver Archbishop J. Michael Miller will take part in a reconciliation walk and offer an expression of reconciliation as part of next week’s First Nations Truth and Reconciliation event .

Public expressions of reconciliation are an integral part of the TRC’s daily schedule, and Archbishop Miller will offer the formal statement on behalf of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver Friday, Sept. 20.

The Archbishop will also participate in the [Walk for Reconciliation](#) Sunday, Sept. 22, beginning with a special Mass at Holy Rosary Cathedral at 8 am. Afterward he and attendees will participate in a 2K Walk for Reconciliation as part of the official ending of the week-long event.

The Archdiocese of Vancouver will be marking the Truth and Reconciliation event in other ways as well:

- With other B.C. and Yukon Catholic bishops it has issued a [Letter of Invitation](#) urging Catholics to attend the Truth and Reconciliation event and to “take the next step forward in healing this legacy of painful wounds.”
- A Churches Listening Area will be led by staff and volunteers from the John Paul II Pastoral Centre, from our parishes, and from other ecclesial community churches Wednesday, Sept. 18, to Saturday, Sept. 21. This area will provide an opportunity for participants to view photo archives from the Indian Residential Schools and engage in listening and conversation intent on reconciliation.
- On Academic Day, Wednesday, Sept. 18, and Education Day, Thursday, Sept. 19, some Catholic school classes will be cancelled so students can attend sessions aimed at promoting “an understanding of how Indian Residential Schools have impacted intergenerational survivors” and providing “a youth-centered focus to enable the TRC to hear their ideas to foster reconciliation with all youth.”

For more details of the Archdiocese of Vancouver’s participation in the Truth and Reconciliation event, please visit www.rcav.org/trc/ To arrange interviews on Church/First Nations relations, please contact:

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Backgrounder

Brief History of Indian Residential Schools

Catholic involvement in the foundation and operation of Indian residential schools is part of a long tradition of Catholic engagement in education, health and spiritual ministry, both to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

The Indian residential school system was consolidated by the federal government in the 19th century, sustained from then on mostly government funds, overseen by government officials and run primarily by various Christian churches, including some dioceses and religious communities within the Catholic Church. The Indian residential school system was rooted, in principle, in the government's obligation to provide education to Indigenous children; in practice, however, the policy was often aimed at assimilating a population often misperceived as merely an obstacle to the nation's progress.

In recent decades, the human costs of the Indian residential school system have come to light, even if they are not yet fully understood. While many former students and staff have spoken positively of their experiences at specific schools, many others speak today of far more painful memories and legacies, such as prohibitions about Aboriginal languages and cultural practices as well as cases of emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

Catholic Statements of Regret on the Former Residential Schools

The Catholic community in Canada has a decentralized structure. Each Diocesan Bishop is autonomous in his diocese and, although relating to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, is not accountable to it.

Approximately 16 out of 70 Catholic dioceses in Canada were associated with the former Indian Residential Schools, in addition to about three dozen Catholic religious communities. Each diocese and religious community is corporately and legally responsible for its own actions. The Catholic Church as a whole in Canada was not associated with the Residential Schools, nor was the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In a brief submitted to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in November 1993, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said that "various types of abuse experienced at some residential schools have moved us to a profound examination of conscience as a Church."

Already in 1991, Canadian Catholic Bishops and leaders of men and women religious communities had issued a statement that "We are sorry and deeply regret the pain, suffering and alienation that so many experienced" at the Residential Schools.

There have been, and continue to be, numerous initiatives by Catholic agencies and institutions in Canada to help heal the sufferings of the Aboriginal Peoples. The process of healing and reconciliation is ongoing.

On the following page are some of the expressions of regret that those in Catholic leadership positions have made over the years with reference to the former Indian Residential Schools:



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[Statement by the National Meeting on Indian Residential Schools](#)

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan - 13-15 March, 1991

[The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate - An Apology to the First Nations of Canada by the Oblate Conference of Canada](#)

24 July 1991

[Homilies of the Most Reverend Austin E. Burke's, Archbishop of Halifax, 1991-1998](#)

St. Catherine's, Mi'kmaq, 6 December, 1992 and Sacred Heart Church, Millbrook, 14 February, 1993

[Society of Jesus - Father Kolvenbach, Superior General of the Jesuits, "Apology to Native Americans for Past Mistakes," Idaho, May 16, 1993](#)

Extract from [Let Justice flow like a Mighty River](#), Brief by the CCCB to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995

[2008 Open letter of the Most Reverend Gerald Pettipas, C.S.s.R., Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan.](#)

Archdiocese of Diocese of Grouard-McLennan – 28 April, 2008

[CCCB statement on the Launching of Truth and Reconciliation Commission:](#) An opportunity for healing and hope, May 1, 2008

[Apology of the Most Reverend Murray Chatlain, Bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith, May 2009.](#)

Inuvik, North West Territories – 2 May, 2009