



Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

123 Nelson Rd
Saskatoon SK S7S 1H1
www.rcdos.ca

Phone: 306-242-1500
Fax: 306-244-6010
Toll free: 877-661-5005



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Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

**Dear Clergy, Religious, Lay Faithful – Brothers and Sisters
of the Diocese of Saskatoon:**

The recent scrutiny of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) and the participation and contribution of the Catholic church entities has compelled me to provide for you my best attempt at a summary of this settlement process, and the Diocese of Saskatoon's participation and contributions.

This process is familiar to me because of my assignment as bishop in the Mackenzie-Fort Smith Diocese from 2013 until 2017. The Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith had completed an agreement with the Government of Canada in 2006. However, it also participated with the 48 Catholic entities that entered the IRSSA, with legal representatives of plaintiffs, the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit Representatives, and other denominational religious organizations. My memory of the negotiation of the IRSSA was that it was a constructive and collaborative process to assist residential school survivors with healing programs.

It should be noted that there was one entity among the other 48 Catholic entities that did not operate residential schools but nonetheless wished to be a part of this settlement process and to support its purposes – this was the Diocese of Saskatoon. I believe this was both because of the history and ongoing commitment throughout the diocese to build relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, led by the strong leadership to such commitment of the bishops at that time, Bishop Albert LeGatt and Bishop Donald Bolen.

The 48 Catholic entities party to the IRSSA, including the diocese of Saskatoon, amongst other things, committed to contribute to financing services and programs to Indigenous survivors, families, and communities, generally as follows:

1. Payment of \$29 million in cash, which was directed to programs and services, the supervision of First Nations organizations, and to the “Returning to Spirit” program. This amount included contribution from other previous agreements. In the beginning, the funds went to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and after its dissolution, to the Legacy of Hope Foundation.
2. A “services-in-kind” commitment, whereby various community services and programs worth more than \$25 million were organized by the various Catholic entities, to be provided for Indigenous communities;

3. A final fundraising appeal that was titled the “Moving Forward Together.” This appeal featured a commitment of \$2 million by the Corporation of Catholic Entities Party to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement (CCEPIRSS) in order to fund the fundraising company engaged to facilitate the campaign. This campaign was to also involve not only the 48 entities, but all dioceses in Canada.

The fundraising campaign was identified in the IRSSA as a “best efforts” campaign aimed at supporting the process of healing and reconciliation with survivors, their families and their communities. The entities hired a leading national fundraising firm. Prominent Board of Directors provided leadership and profile, including: AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine, chair; Mary Simon, a prominent Inuit leader; and a former senior official from the Government of Canada. At that time, the response from large corporations and individuals totaled only just under \$4 million. A collection in churches across the country was held on December 8, 2013. My former diocese – the Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith – participated in a limited way through collection in our larger centres as the majority of the people in the diocese were people who were themselves affected by the Residential School Legacy. I understand that the leaders of various Catholic dioceses and groups put their efforts behind each component of the campaign. However, they were disappointed by the results.

Here in the Diocese of Saskatoon, efforts were made which involved printing and distributing promotional materials, with then Bishop Donald Bolen strongly encouraging participation across the diocese. When a first collection was disappointing, the bishop also ordered a second collection.

To summarize, the Diocese of Saskatoon’s contribution to the settlement agreement was as follows:

The diocese made an initial \$25,000 contribution to the \$29 million cash amount identified in the IRSSA.

Our diocese’s in-kind contribution for Restorative Ministry was valued at \$43,000.

The total amount raised from the Moving Forward Together appeal as our diocese’s contribution was about \$34,600.

If I was to summarize why the efforts yielded this kind of result, I would say that many of our parishioners, like many non-Indigenous Canadians, have been slow to understand the impact and the legacy of the residential school system, and this seems to be reflected in the response at the time. However, we have continued efforts to raise awareness and to support reconciliation and healing throughout the Saskatoon diocese.

Several media reports allege that a ‘legal loophole’ allowed the Catholic entities to be ‘let off the hook’. The Government of Canada confirmed the agreement with the entities once they had fulfilled the three areas of the financial commitment described above, even though one element – the Moving Forward Together fundraising best efforts campaign – fell far short of its goal. The accusation of a ‘legal loop-hole’ referred to the negotiation process that occurred between the 48 Catholic entities and the other parties to the IRSSA regarding legal fees incurred by the entities toward the final tally of the \$29 million. The

entities reported nothing more was owed once incurred fees were taken into account. The Government of Canada indicated that about \$1.6 million was still owed. They eventually agreed on a sum of \$1.2 million. In 2015 Judge Neil Gabrielson declared that there was a binding agreement between Canada and the Catholic entities which entitled the Catholic entities to the Releases and Indemnities as provided for in the IRSSA. The settlement funds were forwarded to the Government of Canada for the Legacy of Hope Foundation.

In the conclusion of my letter to the Mackenzie-Fort Smith diocese in 2016, I stated the following:

“It needs to be continually acknowledged and affirmed that the Indian Residential School legacy – a policy and structure set up by the Government of Canada and administered by the major Christian churches of Canada – was an inherently flawed policy and process that resulted in much pain and disenfranchisement of Aboriginal peoples from their families, communities, and culture. The country-wide reflection on this legacy was the fruit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, which concluded ...with the Calls to Action issued in June 2015, and the final reports issued in December of 2015.”

As I reflect on these comments now some six years later, I am grateful for the clarity and focus of the Calls to Action, especially as they relate to church responses. Some of these, as a Church and as a diocese, we have made progress on. These include:

#59 – the development of ongoing education strategies to ensure congregations learn about the church’s role in the residential school legacy;

#60 – the development and teaching of curriculum - in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders and Survivors – for schools of theology, ministry for clergy and laity;

#61 – the establishment of funding for healing and reconciliation projects, education and relationship building;

#49 – the repudiation and clarification of concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*.

In the Diocese of Saskatoon, we join with our partners in Catholic education and health care, and various other service organizations to accomplish these. May I say that both Catholic education and Catholic health care groups have made great strides at both prioritizing and addressing many of the Calls to Action.

However, there is still much left to address in the Calls to Action. One of these is the request for Pope Francis to provide an apology to residential school survivors, their families and communities, for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that happened in the residential schools. On this issue, I note that former Saskatoon Bishop Donald Bolen (now the Archbishop of Regina), Bishops of the Prince Albert Diocese, Keewatin Le Pas, Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon, and I were among those who were encouraging the Holy Father to come to Canada in the time following the issuing of the TRC report. We were among those who were disappointed by

the March 2018 announcement that Pope Francis would not be coming to Canada to make an apology at that time. I again state my support for such a visit by the Holy Father to Canada, and I believe that an apology from Pope Francis would bring healing to many and would help to further the journey of reconciliation in our Church and our country.

An item not explicitly related to the Calls to Action, but under much scrutiny at present is the short-fall of the \$25 million ‘best efforts’ appeal of 2013-14. I will simply say that I would very much support revisiting this appeal today. The discoveries of grave sites at cemeteries near former residential schools has drawn an even greater awareness of the need for an appeal to support the healing of survivors and their families from the legacy of residential schools. I think Catholic members in our diocese and across Canada would respond with a heightened sense of solidarity and support.

Since discovery by the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation of 215 unmarked graves at the site of the former Kamloops residential school, and more recently of the over 751 unmarked graves at the former Marieval Indian Residential School at Cowesses First Nation, I have added my apology to those of other church leaders in our country. I take this opportunity to conclude by re-stating my apology:

I deeply regret and apologize that Catholics were part of this system which was designed to separate children from their families and communities and to assimilate them into a culture that featured a colonial attitude and approach. I deeply regret and apologize for the damage done to children at these schools, which for many included neglect and abuse, and I apologize for the deaths that happened at these schools, with children dying far away from mothers, fathers, grandparents and families, and I apologize to the families and the communities who have not been able to honour children’s burial sites.

While it is true that the discovery of graves is exposing the wounds and scars from the Indian Residential School legacy which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission revealed – it is also raising greater awareness of the work, findings and the recommendations of the TRC, and of the great work still ahead for us and our diocese. I ask for your prayers, support and participation with this work ahead.

Yours in Our One Creator,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark A. Hagemoen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a plus sign at the beginning.

✠ Most Reverend Mark A. Hagemoen