



Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon
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Dear Clergy, Religious, Lay Faithful of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon:

I am writing to address the recent scrutiny of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) and the participation and contribution of the Catholic church entities through the Corporation of Catholic Entities Party to the Indian Residential School Settlement process (CCEPIRSS).

Last June I wrote to members of this diocese to summarize this settlement process, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon's participation and contributions. Subsequently, I have heard from many people sharing their strong concerns regarding the suffering experienced in Canada's Indian Residential Schools, the role of Catholic communities and dioceses in this system, and the obligations of these entities under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA).

As part of the IRSSA, Catholic entities agreed to support a range of programs that would advance healing and reconciliation. This included cash payment contributions, in-kind services, and a national "best efforts" fundraising campaign, which were guided by the advice and contributions of Indigenous leaders.

**THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SETTLEMENT PROCESS
& CCEPIRSS**

Many different Catholic 'entities' – including religious orders and some dioceses – were employed by the Government of Canada to staff and run the various residential schools set up across Canada from about the 1880's until the last schools were closed in the late 1900's. All these groups needed to come together to work with the Government of Canada to carry out and fulfill the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). At the request of the federal government, the Corporation of Catholic Entities Party to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement (CCEPIRSS) - a corporate entity - was temporarily established to coordinate the delivery of these initiatives.

Although CCEPIRSS is no longer operational, Canada's Catholic bishops have undertaken significant efforts to better understand the issues that have recently been raised. While I understand that further information will be forthcoming in the near future, I hope

that the following information that I am aware of as a diocesan bishop will provide some additional clarity.

The 50 Catholic entities party to the IRSSA, amongst other things, committed to contribute to finance services and programs to Indigenous survivors, families, and communities, generally as follows:

1. Payment of \$29 million in cash, comprised of \$22 million in cash and about \$8 million already paid out in compensation for cases resolved prior to the signing of the agreement. These monies were directed to programs and services to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and after its dissolution, to the Legacy of Hope Foundation (80 per cent) and “Returning to Spirit” residential school healing program (20 per cent);
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 “Moving Forward Together.” This appeal included a commitment of just over \$2 million by CCEPIRSS for the services of the fundraising company engaged to facilitate the campaign. This campaign was to also involve not only the 50 entities, but an invitation was extended to all dioceses in Canada to participate.

IN-KIND SERVICES & BEST EFFORTS CAMPAIGN

CCEPIRSS agreed to provide \$25 million of in-kind services as part of an ongoing effort to work face-to-face with Indigenous leadership and residential school survivors. In order to ensure these projects meaningfully contributed to healing and reconciliation, a First Nation band council, Métis Settlement, Friendship Centre, or other similar Indigenous body was required to identify the project as “valuable” for it to be considered part of the agreement.

The process for approving in-kind services was overseen by a multi-party committee with appointments from the Assembly of First Nations that accepted and tallied the value of these services. While in-kind services stopped being measured when the initial \$25 million was met, many of these services continue to operate today.

I cannot speak to every program that was approved by the committee, but I understand that *these efforts were taken based on constructive collaboration with Indigenous leaders, Elders, and knowledge keepers and with oversight by the federal government.* I also highlight that these ‘in-kind services’ were asked for from Catholic entities, which would provide such services given their own identity, mission, and service provision. I also offer my experience of hearing from Indigenous Elders and leaders in the dioceses I have served in across western Canada when asked, “What do you want from the Church?”... the response was an overwhelming call for more commitment of clergy in their communities, and greater help with delivering church programs for their Indigenous

families and community. Many Indigenous groups seek in-kind services from Catholic groups because these services are faith-based.

A brief comment about the “best efforts” campaign by Catholic entities: I recall that this represented a sincere, national push to engage Catholics and non-Catholics in fundraising projects that would advance healing and reconciliation. This \$25-million “best efforts” campaign, which was launched to supplement the Catholic entities’ agreed upon up-front cash payments [summarized above] to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (80 per cent) and Returning to Spirit (20 per cent), relied on outreach to major donors, regional committees tasked with engaging local businesses, and pew collections across the country. However, I share in the widespread disappointment that it did not yield the results it had hoped to achieve.

Recent events have helped to raise the consciousness of Canadians in a way that was not present several years ago. I am hearing from many people in this diocese that we as Catholics and Canadians are now better informed and want and need to do better to respond and support healing and reconciliation. I am also hearing from some Catholics that they regret not engaging more deeply in the fundraising campaign several years ago. We are hearing now that we cannot have ‘reconciliation’ without ‘truth’ – and this message is resonating with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples across cultural and religious boundaries. As such, I am personally committed to working with Indigenous survivors and their communities to provide any available information that may assist in the memorialization of those buried in unmarked graves. I am also committed to raising funds in support of reconciliation and healing for residential school survivors, their families and communities, and to continuing our efforts as a diocese to further reconciliation in our community.

RENEWED COMMITMENT BY BISHOPS OF CANADA

Catholic dioceses throughout Canada have taken many important lessons from past efforts, from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the TRC Calls to Action. In a message to Indigenous peoples of this land on September 24, Canada’s bishops together unanimously expressed our profound remorse and issued an unequivocal apology for the Catholic Church in Canada’s role in the residential school system.

I join with my brother Canadian Catholic bishops in our recent collective national financial commitment, and I will work hard to see that we are successful in contributing to delivering important contributions to programs and initiatives for Indigenous communities and residential school survivors. With a target of \$30 million over up to five years, this national effort will include initiatives in every region of the country that will be determined in consultation with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in each region.

I also join my voice with the Catholic bishops of Canada in supporting the circulation of court records to better understand issues and guide our future efforts, and to confirm the handling of legal fees. Although some individual bishops would have been involved with CCEPRISS if they represented a diocese that historically ran a residential school, the majority of Catholic bishops throughout Canada are not familiar with information on

settlement discussions. CCEPRISS carried out its work and agreement directly with the federal government, and all documents and records were entrusted for oversight and archiving by a legal steward – as per the settlement agreement. It is our understanding that Catholic entities party to the IRSSA honoured their settlement obligations.

As we work with diocesan and Indigenous partners across the country on local initiatives, we have an opportunity to not only provide support to deserving local programs, but to engage, educate, and inspire Catholics and members of the general public on ways everyone can play a meaningful role in the healing journey. In the weeks and months ahead, Canada's Catholic bishops will continue to provide updates on this work, as part of a long path towards healing and reconciliation.

MEDIA COVERAGE

I am hearing from many of you strong concerns about media coverage. Many voices are welcoming legitimate scrutiny of the settlement agreement, given the renewed awareness coming out of recent developments at former residential schools. There is a strong desire to better understand the activities of the Church entities involved in CCEPRISS, and its relationship to the Catholic bishops and dioceses across Canada. I share in this desire and know that my counterparts are collectively committed to providing information as it becomes available.

I share with many of you who have also expressed strong concern about the current media coverage that gives partial information and impedes relationship. For example, the role and contribution of Indigenous groups in the agreement and process is greatly downplayed. Looking backward and judging the appropriateness of various in-kind services is difficult when not informed by the participants and voices directly involved in the agreement process at that time.

I also acknowledge the disappointment by many of you regarding the division created by incomplete information and its interpretation. We are all on this journey together! Our efforts and responsibilities – as individuals and as organizations and communities – continues to bring clarity and *truth* as we achieve healing and eventual reconciliation. I pledge my support and leadership of our Catholic community to work with all our Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues to provide as complete a picture of past and renewed future efforts.

I trust that my brother bishops would join me in stating that, as Catholic bishops, we know that the Catholic church in Canada can and must do more as part of this healing journey. We need to examine *all* information and efforts, especially today as we struggle with a general culture of polarization and division. We need to prioritize important shared goals for all Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in our country – and the deep need to continue walking together, seeking relationships, and collaborating to address the historical and ongoing trauma caused by the residential school system. May I say that we also need to focus on moving forward to achieve the important objectives outlined by the TRC process – shaming is not helpful, and nor is it the end goal.

CONCLUSION: COMMITMENT TO HOPE & ACTION

In the conclusion of my letter last June, I shared comments I made as a bishop in 2015 at the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

“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 Canada¹ 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 diocese we have made progress on here in Saskatoon. But we still have a lot more work to do.

In the diocese of Saskatoon, we continue to work together with our partners in Catholic education and health care - and various other service organizations throughout our city and province - to accomplish these goals. We also look to many other partners – Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as we strive to achieve the long journey ahead.

There is much left to address in the TRC’s Calls to Action. Please join me in renewing our commitment to walk together in respect and solidarity, to hear the truth and to work diligently for healing and reconciliation.

I conclude below with the recent apology by myself and my brother bishops given at the end of our plenary meeting last month.

Yours in Our One Creator,



✠ Mark A. Hagemoen

¹ Between 54% to 65% of these schools were run by various Catholic church entities, from the early 1900’s to late 1960’s. See Library and Archives Canada: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/first-nations/indian-affairs-annual-reports/Pages/search.aspx>). Of the 139 residential schools identified in the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), 46% (64 schools) were operated by Catholic entities; approximately 16 out of 70 Catholic dioceses in Canada were associated with the former residential schools, in addition to about three dozen Catholic religious communities.

Statement of Apology by the Catholic Bishops of Canada to the Indigenous Peoples of This Land

We, the Catholic Bishops of Canada, gathered in Plenary this week, take this opportunity to affirm to you, the Indigenous Peoples of this land, that we acknowledge the suffering experienced in Canada's Indian Residential Schools. Many Catholic religious communities and dioceses participated in this system, which led to the suppression of Indigenous languages, culture and spirituality, failing to respect the rich history, traditions and wisdom of Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge the grave abuses that were committed by some members of our Catholic community; physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and sexual. We also sorrowfully acknowledge the historical and ongoing trauma and the legacy of suffering and challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples that continue to this day. Along with those Catholic entities which were directly involved in the operation of the schools and which have already offered their own heartfelt apologies^[1], we^[2], the Catholic Bishops of Canada, express our profound remorse and apologize unequivocally.

We are fully committed to the process of healing and reconciliation. Together with the many pastoral initiatives already underway in dioceses across the country, and as a further tangible expression of this ongoing commitment, we are pledging to undertake fundraising in each region of the country to support initiatives discerned locally with Indigenous partners. Furthermore, we invite the Indigenous Peoples to journey with us into a new era of reconciliation, helping us in each of our dioceses across the country to prioritize initiatives of healing, to listen to the experience of Indigenous Peoples, especially to the survivors of Indian Residential Schools, and to educate our clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful, on Indigenous cultures and spirituality. We commit ourselves to continue the work of providing documentation or records that will assist in the memorialization of those buried in unmarked graves.

Having heard the requests to engage Pope Francis in this reconciliation process, a delegation of Indigenous survivors, Elders/knowledge keepers, and youth will meet with the Holy Father in Rome in December 2021. Pope Francis will encounter and listen to the Indigenous participants, so as to discern how he can support our common desire to renew relationships and walk together along the path of hope in the coming years. We pledge to work with the Holy See and our Indigenous partners on the possibility of a pastoral visit by the Pope to Canada as part of this healing journey.

We commit ourselves to continue accompanying you, the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples of this land. Standing in respect of your resiliency, strength and wisdom, we look forward to listening to and learning from you as we walk in solidarity.

24 September 2021