



24 July 2024

**From strong words to meaningful partnership:  
A renewed Catholic commitment to Indigenous reconciliation**

Two years ago this month, Pope Francis stood before an assembly of Indigenous Elders and former residential school students in Maskwacis, Alberta. He offered a profound and heartfelt apology to the Indigenous Peoples, and sought God's forgiveness, for the suffering endured in Canada's residential schools.

On this anniversary, we find ourselves reflecting on the profound sorrow Pope Francis expressed for the devastating effects of the residential school system on Indigenous communities, and on the journey of reconciliation and healing we have embarked upon together. Two years later, the Pope's words still compel us to recognize this painful legacy and walk alongside the Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of repentance, solidarity, and hope.

We contemplate the Holy Father's words: "The Church is the house where we conciliate anew, where we meet to start over and to grow together". This vision of the Church as a "living body of reconciliation" has guided us in our ongoing commitment to justice and healing. In this spirit we reaffirm our pledge to work for healing and reconciliation, and to reflect on our efforts since the Holy Father's visit to Canada in 2022.

***"We want to talk together, to pray together and to work together, so that the sufferings of the past can lead to a future of justice, healing and reconciliation." – Pope Francis***

**Financial Support for Indigenous Priorities**

Reconciliation calls for a deep understanding and respect for Indigenous culture, identity, and priorities. In 2021, the Bishops of Canada pledged to raise \$30 million for projects that support healing and reconciliation. These initiatives are identified and selected by Indigenous Peoples at the local level and overseen by the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund (IRF). We are pleased to announce that the Fund has already raised over \$15 million, and is therefore ahead of its five-year timeline.

***"Drawing strength from our experiences and using that understanding to help others guides us in assessing proposals, and grounds our efforts in the traditional teachings and ways of healing that are so important for Indigenous people." – Rosella Kinoshameg, Chair, Indigenous Reconciliation Fund***

The IRF has funded important projects emphasizing healing and reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples and their families, the revitalization of cultures and languages, education and building of communities, as well as dialogues for promoting spiritualities. We encourage the Catholic community to review the [work of the IRF](#) and promote opportunities to contribute.

## **Transparent Access to Records**

Pope Francis emphasized the significance of uncovering and recognizing truths about the historical injustices faced by residential school survivors and their families. Truth must come before reconciliation and all dioceses are strongly encouraged to make their relevant records available to Indigenous researchers and communities, in order to help them find the truth they seek. To support this work, we have established [Guidelines](#) for documentation and access to relevant records, including mission, sacramental and burial records, to help Indigenous Peoples identify the facts pertaining to their loved ones. This work is supplementary to that of other Catholic entities that administered or operated residential schools established by the Government of Canada and who have made relevant documents available to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

This painstaking work will take time, and, with you, we are committed to the journey of truth. It is incumbent upon us to assist survivors and their communities in finding healing from traumas they suffered. We join the Holy Father in his prayer “that Christians and civil society in this land may grow in the ability to accept and respect the identity and the experience of the Indigenous Peoples.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Continuing the Dialogue with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples**

We are deeply grateful for the relationships we have established with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. We want to continue to walk side by side in solidarity. Since each Indigenous community brings unique gifts and challenges, local dioceses and parishes play a fundamental and leading role in fulfilling this commitment. Above all, this means walking together by a humble and open listening to the wisdom and counsel of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

As Bishops, we have established structures within the CCCB to support dialogues and foster greater understanding of Indigenous cultural, linguistic, and spiritual traditions and values. We also wish to develop academic collaborations to understand the concepts commonly associated with the “Doctrine of Discovery”, as well as to engage with the Canadian government on shared concerns, such as the Indigenous belongings currently held at the Vatican museums.

## **Embracing the Path of Unity and Hope**

As we continue this journey of truth and reconciliation, we also acknowledge the many difficult conversations taking place around the country regarding our painful legacy. For example, we know that some have called for more rigorous investigations into reports of unmarked burial sites, which we had to confront as a nation three short years ago.

Let us keep in mind that this deep desire for truth and transparency resides first with Indigenous communities and residential school survivors. Decisions to study this history are best made locally by Indigenous leaders, who have the most direct understanding of the needs of their respective communities. Many resources can be made available to explore and understand residential school history, such as archival and archaeological research. We encourage dioceses and all Catholics to

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<sup>1</sup> [Apostolic Journey to Canada: Meeting with indigenous peoples: First nations, Métis and Inuit at Maskwacis \(25 July 2022\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#)

support their local Indigenous communities in this sensitive work. We invite all parties to move forward in mutual transparency, respect, humility, compassion, patience, and trust.

Our aim must be to help Indigenous Peoples seek and know the facts pertaining to their loved ones and community ancestors. By working together in these and many other ways, we are all prepared to advance more effectively along the path of reconciliation.

When Pope Francis visited our country, he called the Church in Canada to firm action and an irreversible commitment to the new path we are forging with the Indigenous Peoples of this land. The way of reconciliation and hope is one that must be walked together. That is why we shall continue to listen to and support survivors and Indigenous communities during this journey. We are grateful to all who accompany us on this path of healing and reconciliation.