

ENTITIES' RESPONSE TO TRC FINDINGS

I am grateful for the opportunity to be here today to represent the over 50 Catholic dioceses and religious communities that were in some way a part of the Indian Residential Schools System. While the legacy of the schools challenges the whole church, the government and the whole of Canadian society, in a particular way it involves us who are party to the Settlement Agreement and to the work of the TRC.

In their name I want to express our appreciation to the Commissioners who have worked tirelessly to lead us all in a very searching examination of conscience in regard to a painful period in our history. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, thousands of former students, their families and communities have given voice to their experience and we have been forced to confront the great harm and depth of suffering so many experienced. Through them we have had to face the pain of our past and that work has not finished. We have heard stories of resilience and some have also offered forgiveness and expressed a desire for reconciliation. In this way, they have held open a door of hope.

The Commission has now presented all Canadians with Calls to Action. On behalf of Catholic entities, I receive these challenges and encourage others in our community to do so as well. In the next few months, I will be presenting these Calls to Action to all of the Bishops of Canada and to the Canadian Religious Conference as direction posts and milestones on the way to a reconciled future.

In the many events that I have attended, it has become apparent that the road will be long, but the end point is more than a faint hope. In Northern Alberta, where I now serve, people are strengthened by the prophetic words of Chief Poundmaker: *"We all know the story of the man who sat beside the trail too long and then it grew over and he could never find his way again. We can never forget what has happened, but we cannot go back, nor can we just sit beside the trail."*¹

His prophetic words join with the encouragement of Pope Francis who reminds us that *"God is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew"*.²

As the work of the TRC is coming to a close, we can say with humility that, while we may have not done enough, neither have we been sitting beside the trail. Through the TRC, Reconciliation Canada, Kairos, Returning to Spirit, the Oblate Justice and Peace Committees, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs of the Western Catholic Bishops and in many other ways, we have been seeking and finding our ways of healing and reconciliation with our aboriginal peoples.

While the schools no longer exist, we have been learning how these former institutions are connected to the rupture that still exists in our relationships. We are learning that reconciliation is not only about the past, but is about our present need for justice, and it is about our capacity together to build a better future.

¹ *Petocahhanawawin (Chief Poundmaker), 1842-1886,*

² *Evangelii Gaudium Para 3*

As we look to that future, we will continue to be committed to remembering the past, to working in the present for healing and justice, and to animating our work with the hope of a reconciled future.

Meegwich.

+ Gerard Pettipas, C.Cs.R.

Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan

President of the corporation of Catholic Entities party to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement (CEPIRSS)

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