



Archdiocese of Vancouver
ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE

June 2, 2015

My dear First Nations brothers and sisters:

Two years ago, at the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation event in Vancouver, I had the privilege of delivering to its distinguished members, as well as to venerable elders, survivors of Indian residential schools, and First Nations brothers and sisters, an “Expression of Apology and Hope” from the Archdiocese of Vancouver.

Now, as this historic process draws to a close, I wish to repeat once again the Archdiocese’s sincere and heartfelt apology for the role that the Church played in the federal government’s policy which involved forcibly separating children from their families and placing them in residential schools. Likewise, I acknowledge our error in supporting a policy aimed at suppressing Aboriginal cultures and language. This federal policy contributed to the pain and suffering experienced by generations of First Nations children and adults.

Five residential schools existed within the boundaries of the Archdiocese. During the century that they operated there were, tragically, innumerable incidents of cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. We failed to live up to the trust placed in us, and we honour those survivors who have had the courage to tell the truth about their harrowing experiences.

In recent years, I have been privileged to be part of ongoing efforts at reconciliation by the Archdiocese of Vancouver as it strives to build positive relationships with aboriginal peoples.

These initiatives first began decades ago, when the Archdiocese became a member of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops committee on residential schools. This was followed by the establishment of an Archdiocesan First Nations Council in the 1990s, and then by a series of healing conferences.

In 2008 I participated with other B.C. bishops in issuing an apology for the treatment of First Nations people in residential schools. At a reconciliation event at UBC’s Museum of Anthropology, we offered prayers for healing and peace.

An Invitation to Dialogue on Prayer followed, hosted by the Squamish Band in North Vancouver and drawing more than 100 band members from across the Vancouver Archdiocese as we explored ways of blending native traditions with Catholic worship.

The growing positive relationship between Archdiocese and natives culminated when in 2008 the Archdiocese marked 100 years of its history in Vancouver with a celebration bringing 12,000 Catholics together at GM Place arena, which had been transformed into a sacred space of prayer and thanksgiving. The celebration honoured the remarkable achievements in reconciliation that had been made between the Church and aboriginal peoples.

Before his retirement in 2009, one of the late Archbishop Raymond Roussin's final acts was to approve the establishment of an Office of First Nations Ministry. Its mandate was to develop a pastoral vision and find opportunities for collaboration with First Nations organizations and communities as well as to develop ways to promote healing. Today, as we mark the closing of the Truth and Reconciliation process, our Director of First Nations Ministry, who was instrumental in arranging our participation in Vancouver's concluding events, is attending the official closing ceremonies in Ottawa.

We will continue to seek ways to contribute to healing and education in the Archdiocese of Vancouver, and to teach the full truth about the history of the encounter between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

And so I close again with my words from the 2013 TRC event: "We, the Catholics of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, recommit ourselves, in solidarity with all people of good will, to being heralds of hope and reconciliation – a process which demands patience, work for justice, and authentic mutual dialogue. If we persevere in this commitment with the help of the Spirit of Mercy, we can make straight the crooked lines of our shared history. We will then be able to hand on to our children and grandchildren a world where hope replaces despair, harmony triumphs over discord, and the light of reconciliation conquers the darkness in our past."

With cordial best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Michael Miller CSB". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver