

# Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Key Messages and Reactive Q&As

Updated: September 27, 2021

## Topline Key Messages

- We are profoundly saddened by the residential school legacy and fully committed to working with Indigenous Peoples and communities across the country to support healing and reconciliation.
- The Catholic Bishops of Canada, gathered in Plenary this week, issued an unequivocal apology for the Church's role in the residential school system and the suffering of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
- 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.
- The path to reconciliation is long and difficult, but we are committed to every step of this journey.
- As a tangible expression of our commitment, we are pledging to undertake fundraising in each region of the country to support initiatives discerned locally with Indigenous partners.
- Furthermore, we invite Indigenous Peoples, especially Elders and knowledge keepers, to work with us in providing education for 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.
- We are moving forward with the delegation of Indigenous survivors, Elders/Knowledge keepers, and youth that will meet with the Holy Father in December 2021.
- There is no single step that can eliminate the pain felt by residential school survivors, but we collectively hope these measures will position us to walk together on the path of hope.
- As we continue on this journey, we will listen to the experience of Indigenous Peoples, especially to the survivors of residential schools, to guide our path forward.
- We approach this journey with humility and will provide regular updates as this work unfolds.

### **Supplementary Points: Fundraising**

- When the Canadian Bishops came together in Plenary last week, there was consensus that Catholic entities needed to do more to address the suffering experienced in Canada's residential schools.
- As a tangible expression of their commitment to walk with the Indigenous Peoples of this land along the pathway of hope, the Bishops of Canada are making a nation-wide collective financial commitment to support healing and reconciliation initiatives for residential school survivors, their families, and their communities.
- With a target of \$30 million over up to five years, this will include initiatives in every region of the country to support initiatives discerned locally with Indigenous partners.
- We intend for the fundraising activities to be a grassroots effort, with individual dioceses ensuring that the objectives of healing and reconciliation are achieved.
- It's important that our efforts, and the programs we fund are informed by meaningful conversation with neighbouring Indigenous Peoples with whom we share the land. These conversations are ongoing.
- Inspired by these discussions, we have committed to developing and announcing a national fundraising plan this November.

### **Supplementary Points: Papal Visit**

- We have heard calls for a papal apology on Canadian soil – in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and in various conversations with Indigenous Peoples.
- While we cannot speak for the Holy Father, we are confident in his understanding of the ongoing and historical trauma caused by residential schools, as well as his commitment to playing a constructive role in the healing and reconciliation journey.
- As a first step, he has agreed to meet with a delegation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit survivors, Elders/Knowledge keepers, and youth. This request has been fulfilled and will take place at the Vatican from December 17-20, 2021.
- The delegation to Rome will provide Pope Francis with a unique opportunity to hear directly from Indigenous Peoples, express his heartfelt closeness, address the impact of colonization and learn more about the impact of Church involvement in the residential schools.
- We view this as an important step in fostering more meaningful dialogue and healing to address the historical and ongoing trauma caused by the residential school system.
- We are confident that Pope Francis will respond to the suffering of Indigenous Peoples of Canada in a way that expresses the Church's regrets and sorrow.
- As Catholics, we believe in the role that contrition can play in building a more hopeful and

promising future.

- We will continue to work with the Holy See, and our Indigenous Partners to listen and learn as we walk in solidarity with one another.

## **Reactive Q&A**

### **1. Earlier this year, multiple media outlets reported that the Church fell short of its financial commitments to residential school survivors. How can your apology be taken seriously when you are unable to meet these basic commitments?**

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops was not a signatory to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and cannot specifically comment on the fundraising goals of participating Catholic entities. What we can say, is that we know there's an acute need to do more. That's why the Bishops are pledging to undertake fundraising in each region of the country to support the work of healing and reconciliation, with an overall financial pledge of \$30M.

We expect these efforts to be informed by meaningful consultation with Indigenous partners, with spirited grassroots efforts across the country. Inspired by these consultations, we have committed to developing and announcing a national fundraising plan, including financial targets, in November.

### **2. Did you consult with Indigenous Peoples on this apology?**

Our approach to the healing and reconciliation journey has been informed by the principle that we should not speak about Indigenous Peoples without speaking with them. We have had ongoing conversations with Indigenous leaders, both at the local and national levels, and bilaterally with First Nations, Métis and Inuit national organizations.

At our national Plenary Assembly, Canadian bishops were presented with statements from Indigenous leaders and much of our work is informed by ongoing contributions from the Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle, a coalition of Catholic organizations and individuals working together to renew and foster relationships with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council, an advisory body of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. We will continue to be inspired and motivated by these conversations as we walk together along the path of hope in the coming years.

### **3. Are you committed to implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action?**

All of our efforts that relate to healing and reconciliation are directly informed by conversations with Indigenous Peoples, whether they be survivors, Elders, knowledge keepers, or youth. The path to reconciliation is long and difficult, but we are committed to every step of this journey.

We are pledging to undertake fundraising in each region of the country to support initiatives discerned locally with Indigenous partners. Furthermore, we invite Indigenous Peoples, especially Elders and knowledge keepers, to help us provide education for our clergy and 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. And we are moving forward with the delegation of Indigenous survivors, Elders/Knowledge keepers, and youth that will meet with Pope Francis in December 2021.

There is no single step that can eliminate the pain felt by residential school survivors, but we collectively hope these measures will position us to walk together on the path of hope.

**4. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for Pope Francis to apologize on Canadian soil. Why has this not taken place?**

The delegation to Rome will provide Pope Francis with a unique opportunity to hear directly from Indigenous Peoples, express his heartfelt closeness, address the impact of colonization and learn more about the impact of Church involvement in the residential schools..

We view this as an important step in fostering more meaningful dialogue and healing to address the ongoing and historical trauma caused by the residential school system. We are confident that Pope Francis will respond to the suffering of Indigenous Peoples of Canada in a way that expresses the Church's regrets and sorrow.

We recognize that there is much more to do in the long walk towards healing and reconciliation and will continue to work with Indigenous Peoples to guide our efforts. As part of that work, the Canadian Bishops are committed to engaging in a dialogue with the Holy See to ascertain the possibility of an eventual pastoral visit that would include a formal apology.

We will continue to work with the Holy See, and our Indigenous Partners to walk towards a more hopeful future.

**5. XX has been unable to access any records in relation to the residential school at YY. When will you be releasing these records?**

We have heard clearly from our Indigenous partners that here must be Truth before Reconciliation. With this understanding, we have collectively committed to continue the work of providing documentation or records that will assist in the memorialization of those buried in unmarked graves, in a manner that respects the confidentiality of residential school survivors and their families. These efforts are intended to complement the independent assessment process established for residential school survivors to obtain records through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Church Archival Records database.

**6. How much are you aiming to raise?**

The Canadian Bishops are pledging to undertake fundraising in each region of the country to support initiatives discerned locally with Indigenous partners. Our total financial target is \$30M over a maximum of five years. We intend for the fundraising activities to be a grassroots effort, with individual dioceses ensuring that the objectives of healing and reconciliation are achieved and have committed to developing and announcing further details about a national fundraising plan in November.

**7. The Church's last fundraising campaign only raised \$3.5 million, short of a \$25 million goal. Why will this time be different?**

When the Canadian Bishops came together in Plenary last week, there was clear consensus that Catholic entities needed to do more in a tangible way to address the suffering experienced in Canada's residential schools.

To this end, the Bishops of Canada are making a nation-wide collective financial commitment to support healing and reconciliation initiatives for residential school survivors, their families, and their communities. With a target of \$30 million over up to five years, this will include initiatives in every region of the country.

There is no question we have significant work ahead of us. At the same time, we have a shared commitment and resolve to leave a lasting legacy of healing and reconciliation. We intend for this work to be a grassroots effort, motivated and inspired by discussions with Indigenous partners across the country. Informed by our consultations, we are committed to developing and announcing a national fundraising plan in November.

*If pressed on failures of the CCEPIRSS campaign:*

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops was not party to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. However, we understand that there was widespread disappointment in the underperformance of the “best efforts” campaign launched by participating Catholic entities. We understand that this campaign represented a sincere, national push to engage Catholics and non-Catholics in fundraising projects that would advance healing and reconciliation.

This work included outreach to major donors, regional committees tasked with engaging local businesses, and pew collections across the country. It did not yield the results that many had hoped for and we intend to learn from the challenges that participating entities faced in reaching their goals.

#### **8. Why did it take so long for the Church to apologize for their role in the Residential School system?**

We have heard the pressing demands from our Indigenous brothers and sisters for an official apology by the Roman Catholic Church of Canada. That is why the Catholic Bishops of Canada, gathered in Plenary this week, issued an unequivocal apology for the Church’s role in the residential school system.

We recognize that our own, collective apology could have come sooner. But we did not wait for this important moment to begin walking on the road towards reconciliation. We know that there is much more to do in the long walk towards healing and reconciliation, and we will continue to look to our Indigenous brothers and sisters to guide our efforts.

#### **9. Was the Church avoiding apologizing because of legal concerns?**

No. We recognize that our own, collective apology could have come sooner. But we did not wait for this important moment to begin walking on the road towards reconciliation. Further, we’ve been encouraged by the formal apologies previously issued by local dioceses and religious orders known to have been involved in the residential school system.