



Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador

June 9th, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador:

Grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is with great outrage and bewilderment that many Canadians received the news reports from Kamloops regarding the 215 unmarked graves of children found at the former Indian Residential School operated by agents of the Catholic Church. For many, this moment served to open their eyes to the reality of Canada's colonial past, its effect on the First Peoples of this land and the part the Catholic Church played in it.

I, too, have been deeply affected by the stories that have been shared with me over the last sixteen years, the work done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the gruesome discovery made at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. And, in response to the Catholic Church's involvement in the inter-generational harm that was done, I am truly sorry.

Knowing, therefore, what was done to our First Peoples was wrong, infringing on their dignity, cultural identity, freedom, language, right of self-determination and basic human rights, I apologize to the First Peoples of this diocese for all that they were forced to endure at the hands of a system in which the Catholic Church played a role. I offer this apology, on behalf of the Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador, to all those who have suffered, and are still suffering, as a consequence of the Indian Residential School System. Not only do I offer this apology today, I will continue to offer it for those who might not be in a position to accept it now, due the sheer rawness of the pain. I am also willing to make myself available, in whatever way necessary, to assist in the healing and reconciliation process.

I further apologize to our First Peoples of Western Newfoundland and Labrador, all the Faithful of the Diocese and all residents of this area that, in our eagerness to preach the Gospel, we were blind to the suffering we were causing, and have failed, in the eyes of many, to be true ambassadors of Christ. As a result, many of the faithful have felt ambivalence towards their Church, have had reason to question their faith and have had to bear the criticism of others.

Finally, as we await the specifics of the present investigation, I ask that we join our tears to those of our First Peoples as we mourn the loss of their children and their forceful separation from their families, even in death. Let us pray that, as we come to know the full truth of what transpired, we may be open to the healing and reconciliation that needs to take place. Let us pray to God, who never tires to extend his forgiveness, that we may come to see in Christ's sufferings the suffering of our First Peoples, and in Christ's Resurrection our hope for healing in this dark chapter in the Church's relationship with our First Peoples.

Fraternally in Christ,

+ Bart van Roijen

Bishop Bart van Roijen

Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador

