



# Catholic Diocese of Victoria

*Office of the Bishop*

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## **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada**

**Regional Event, Victoria, British Columbia  
April 14, 2012**

***Statement by Most Reverend Richard Gagnon,  
Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria***

Dear members of First Nations communities and friends,

I bring you greetings from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria – a community of faith that has been present here for more than 165 years. I feel privileged and honoured to have been given the opportunity to participate in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* Regional Event in Victoria and to be a part of the journey towards reconciliation and healing between First Nations People, the Church, and the wider community.

I feel very deeply, the immense responsibility given to our generation, including all of us present today, to lay the foundation for a better future – a future which is life giving. It is how we walk together, as fellow human beings that will give direction and hope for those who follow us. These days of gathering around the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* are not only historic days, but they form an honourable moment - a humble moment that will not be forgotten.

As the Roman Catholic Bishop here for the past eight years, I have grown to understand more and more, the reality of Residential Schools and their impact on First Nations People from one generation to the next. On a personal note, this knowledge and understanding has caused me to reflect upon my high school years when I was educated alongside aboriginal teenagers who numbered at least half of the school population at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in North Vancouver. It is painful for me to recall my own ignorance of, and detachment from, the woundedness and grief that I personally witnessed in the aboriginal community during those years.

I stand here today to express my deep sorrow for the suffering that has occurred to aboriginal people through the Residential School system that operated on these islands – the home of First Nations People for thousands of years. I am ashamed of the actions of some Catholic individuals over the years, who inflicted harm on young people entrusted to their care in these schools. I acknowledge and regret that these abuses occurred, as well as the separation of family members, which contributed to a breakdown of family life and loss of traditions. As the Roman Catholic Bishop of this local Church, I apologize for the harm done and for the role the Church has contributed toward the painful legacy of Residential Schools.

It is important for me to recognize not only this woundedness among the aboriginal people, but also the pain and disappointment experienced by many good men and women who worked in the schools, often giving their lives to the cause of education. Every member of the Church has, in fact, been affected by this legacy. It is humbling and a source of hope to see both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people seeking ways to bring understanding and justice within this brokenness.

We cannot change what has occurred, but what we can do is build a future – to do “the right thing” together - and this is why we are here today. We also have a responsibility to the next generation, to leave them a legacy of mutual respect, understanding, and a willingness to listen to one another. I extend a hand of friendship to all of you – may we treat this honourable moment in an honourable way, not only for ourselves, but for others as well.

As a Christian I look towards our Crucified Lord and see that in the midst of pain, alienation and grief, there is still hope – there is still the promise of new life. As Jesus was lifted up to his Father – to the Creator – so we must lift ourselves up, and each other, to walk along a new path. It is within this hope that our Church stands with you today.

Thank you, once again, for this opportunity.

Yours in solidarity and hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Richard Gagnon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Most Reverend Richard Gagnon  
Bishop of Victoria

