

Archdiocese of Vancouver  
ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE

Letter of Invitation to attend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission  
from the Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon

15 August 2013

Dear Catholic faithful of British Columbia and Yukon:

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) will be meeting in Vancouver from September 18 to 21, 2013. We, the Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon, are writing to invite you to support this event through your prayers, volunteering and attendance.

The purpose of the TRC is to tell Canadians the story of the policy of the Government of Canada regarding “Indian Residential Schools” and the impact it had on Aboriginal children and their families. This policy entailed that many young children were forcibly removed from their families, with disastrous results for all concerned. It also led to the suppression of First Nations’ languages and cultures. The administration of most of these schools was contracted to various churches. Catholic religious congregations and dioceses ran a significant number of them. Today, many former students of residential schools and their descendants live in British Columbia and Yukon. By shedding the light of truth on this history, the TRC is also guiding a process of reconciliation between and among First Nation families, communities, churches and governments.

As the Catholic Church in British Columbia and Yukon, we were entrusted with safeguarding the children and young people in the residential schools under our care. Many Catholics worked there with good will and generosity. At times, however, we failed to live up to the trust placed in us. Over the century of their existence, tragic incidences of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse took place at some of these schools. Because of these failures, we have a moral obligation to be fully involved in the healing and reconciliation initiatives proposed by the TRC.

In April 2009, at a historic meeting with Aboriginal leaders and representatives of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his “sorrow at the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some members of the Church,” and he offered his “sympathy and prayerful solidarity” with all those who had suffered negative consequences because of their attendance at a residential school.

As Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon, we once again express our deepest regret and we apologize for any abuse which took place in the residential schools under our care. Likewise, we recognize the error of a government policy aimed at suppressing First Nations’ culture and language. While conscious of this history, the time has come to take the next step forward in healing this legacy of painful wounds and to foster a renewed mutual understanding.

With its teaching that all people are created in God’s image and therefore are brothers and sisters, the Gospel calls the Catholic Church to address the legacy of colonialism, assimilation policies, racism, prejudice, and suppression of traditional Aboriginal ways of life. We must face up to, acknowledge, and make every effort to heal the anguish that has been caused, whether it was intentional or not.


We want to work together with Aboriginal communities in building a shared future marked by reciprocal respect, harmony and justice. We are convinced that the “truth will make us free” (cf. Jn 8:32). The TRC event gives us the opportunity, as it has already done in other centres in Canada, to hear the true story of the residential schools. We will be not taking part as spectators but as joint participants in a process of learning and healing.

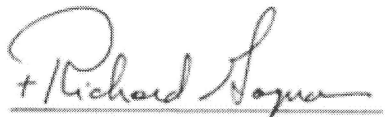
As your Bishops, we urge you to pray for the success of the TRC, as well as to attend the event in Vancouver from September 18-21. There are many possibilities for participation: from spending time at the PNE Centre, to marching in solidarity on Sunday morning in the Walk for Reconciliation, to fully taking part in these events over the three days. Together we will learn about our past – a necessary step in coming to greater mutual understanding. But, even more significantly, we will learn how our parishes and communities can move forward together in hope.


In this Year of Faith, a year of grace for God’s People, we are called to be heralds of reconciliation. Only the mercy of God, sincerely and contritely received, can make straight the crooked lines of our shared history. As the TRC event approaches, we must be willing to let ourselves be transformed and renewed by the Spirit’s call. He alone can lead us to a deeper appreciation of the true foundation of the unity and solidarity of all peoples.


In the lengthy journey that lies ahead, let us pray that Saint Kateri, the admirable young woman who is the pride and joy of all our people, will enlighten our path to the place of truth and reconciliation.


Sincerely yours in Christ,


  
Most Reverend J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver


  
Most Reverend Richard Gagnon  
Bishop of Victoria

  
Most Reverend John Corriveau, OFM Cap  
Bishop of Nelson

  
Most Reverend David J. Monroe  
Bishop of Kamloops

  
Most Reverend Gary Gordon, DD  
Bishop of Whitehorse

  
Most Reverend Ken Nowakowski  
Bishop of New Westminster Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy

  
Most Reverend Stephen Jensen  
Bishop of Prince George