

## **Indian Residential Schools: Catholic Apologies and Statements of Regret**

The website of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) explains why there is not a single national Catholic statement of apology for Catholic involvement in the Indian Residential Schools:

The Catholic community in Canada has a decentralized structure. Each Diocesan Bishop is autonomous in his diocese and, although relating to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, is not accountable to it. Approximately 16 out of 70 Catholic dioceses in Canada were associated with the former Indian Residential Schools, in addition to about three dozen Catholic religious communities. Each diocese and religious community is corporately and legally responsible for its own actions

Individual diocesan bishops and religious orders have issued public statements of apology. The CCCB has posted several of these statements of regret and apology on its website [www.cccb.ca](http://www.cccb.ca)

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) were involved in the operations of many of the residential schools in Western and Northern Canada. The Oblates issued a public apology during the Lac Ste Anne pilgrimage in 1991:

“ ... we wish to apologize for the part we played in the setting up and the maintaining of these schools. We apologize for the existence of the schools themselves, recognizing that the biggest abuse was not what happened in the schools, but that the schools themselves happened ... that the primal bond inherently within families was violated as a matter of policy .... We wish to apologize in a very particular way for the instances of physical and sexual abuse that occurred in those schools.”

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was launched in 2008, the CCCB described this occasion as “an opportunity for healing and hope,” and invited “all Catholics to be attentive to the hearings of the Commission, and its eventual appeals for reconciliation.”

As the TRC has held public hearings in communities around the country, local Catholic bishops have made public statements of apology about Catholic historical involvement with the Indian residential schools,

At the Northern TRC hearing in Inuvik in 2009, Bp. Murray Chatlain, bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith, said:

Having listened to many people (speak of their residential schools experiences) and hearing the deep pain, I want to apologize for our disruption of families and parenting, our involvement in the devaluing of aboriginal language, culture and spirituality, our association with the Government of Canada in their policy of assimilation, and our failure to protect children from serious physical and sexual abuse.

At the Victoria TRC community hearings in April 2012, Bp. Richard Gagnon of Victoria said: “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.”

Just prior to the Saskatoon TRC national hearing in June 2012, the Catholic Bishops of Saskatchewan said in a statement: “We ... apologize for the abuse which took place at those schools, and for our part in the suppression of First Nations and Metis culture and language.”

The Saskatchewan bishops strongly encouraged local Catholics in their dioceses to attend the local TRC hearing.

The Catholic statements speak of looking to the future and build a new relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Bp. Gagnon says “we can build a future” and do “the right thing” together. He speaks of having “a responsibility to the next generation, to leave them a legacy of mutual respect, understanding, and willingness to listen to each other.”

The Saskatchewan bishops speak of the importance of Catholic parishes and dioceses addressing the many ongoing issues that go beyond residential schools, and of walking “with our Aboriginal sisters and brothers in advocating for justice and healing in our society.”

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