

## Remarks following the April 29, 2009 meeting with the Pope

Below is an assortment of quotes from participants and others following the historic April 29, 2011 meeting with the Pope.

“The Pope is a bridge builder. That is the meaning of the word ‘Pontiff’. For that reason, he has invited us to visit him in Rome, in a gesture of reconciliation and healing. By accepting this invitation, as representatives of the Catholic Church in Canada and of the First Nations we can show and celebrate our mutual determination for a renewed partnership and a new beginning.” – the Most Reverend V. James Weisgerber (at a CCCB and AFN News Conference, 15 April, 2009; [http://www.cccb.ca/site/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2687&Itemid=1152](http://www.cccb.ca/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2687&Itemid=1152))

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“‘We hoped to hear the Holy Father talk about the residential school experience, but also about abuses and hurts inflicted on so many and to acknowledge the role of the Catholic Church,’ [Chief Phil] Fontaine said in a news conference following the meeting. ‘We wanted to hear him say that he understands and that he is sorry and that he feels our suffering, and we heard that very clearly.’” (Sarah Delaney, Catholic News Service, “Pope expresses sorrow for suffering of Canadian aboriginal students”, April 29, 2009)

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“Delia Opekokew, a Cree lawyer and former student of an Indian residential school, said that the Pope told them he was ‘sorry for our anguish’. She said he ‘used the words abuse and wrongs. And he went on to talk about reconciliation.’” (Sarah Delaney, Catholic News Service, “Pope expresses sorrow for suffering of Canadian aboriginal students”, April 29, 2009)

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“‘His face spoke even louder than his words,’ said Archbishop Weisgerber. ‘He listened intently and one could see how saddened he was by these traumatic events of the past and their continued effects on the lives of the people today. The Holy Father expressed the prayer and hope that this event would help the Aboriginal communities of Canada be internally freed from this historic tragedy and enabled to create a strong future. The Pope offered his spiritual support and presence for the Church in Canada as it continues to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities in building this future together.’” (CCCB media release, April 2009, <http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/archives/media-releases/2009/2689-deep-gratitude-for-popes-meaningful-meeting-with-canadian-aboriginal-representatives>)

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“I was very pleased and encouraged by the spirit of good will and I sense a real commitment on the part of the Catholic Church to rebuild this relationship’, he [Chief Phil Fontaine] said.” (Sarah Delaney, Catholic News Service, “Pope expresses sorrow for suffering of Canadian aboriginal students”, April 29, 2009)

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“We heard the Prime Minister's apology a year ago in June. And today, to listen to the Holy Father explain his profound sorrow and sadness and to express that there was no room for this sort of abuse to take place in the residential schools, that is an emotional barrier that now has been lifted for many people,’ he [Grand Chief Edward John of the Tlazten First Nations in B.C] told CTV.” (CTVBC.ca: “Pope's residential schools apology hits home in B.C.”,  
[http://www.ctvbc.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20090429/bc\\_stolo\\_apology\\_090429/20090429/?hub=BritishColumbiaHome](http://www.ctvbc.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20090429/bc_stolo_apology_090429/20090429/?hub=BritishColumbiaHome), Apr. 29, 2009)

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“The Government of Canada welcomes the Pope’s expression of sorrow to former students of Indian Residential Schools. This is a significant step that will allow former students and their families to continue with their healing process. ... We recognize that bringing closure to the legacy of the Indian residential school system lies at the heart of reconciliation and a renewal of the relationships between Aboriginal people who attended these schools, their families and communities, and all Canadians.” (The Honourable Chuck Strahl,  
Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, “Statement: Government of Canada Welcomes Pope's Expression of Sorrow to Former Students of Indian Residential School”,  
<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/nr/j-a2009/nr000000320-eng.asp>, April 29, 2009)

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“I am very pleased for the survivors that this audience is being granted,’ said BCAFN Regional Chief A-in-chut (Shawn Atleo), ‘This marks yet another opportunity to turn the page on this dark chapter in our history and move forward with the continued healing of our people.’

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“I strongly support the AFN's planned Papal visit,’ said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip,

President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. ‘Without question, this historic visit shall greatly contribute to the vital healing journey of our Indian Residential School Survivors. The survival of our cultures depends on our willingness to move beyond the dark and tragic shadow of the Residential School experience.’”

(The First Nations Leadership Council, “BC First Nations Leaders to Meet Pope Benedict XVI on Indian Residential Schools Reconciliation”, [http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/print/News\\_Releases/UBCICNews04280901.htm](http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/print/News_Releases/UBCICNews04280901.htm), April 28, 2009)

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“[Grand Chief Edward] John said the Pope acknowledged the suffering of those who are still living with the consequences of their experiences at the schools. ‘I think in that sense, there was that apology that we were certainly looking for,’ John told CBC News. ‘This is a message that needs to be heard in every church, in every parish across the country, and we are hopeful that the clergy in Canada will take this message and repeat it in every one of these churches in every parish.’” (CBC News, “Pope expresses 'sorrow' for abuse at residential schools”, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2009/04/29/pope-first-nations042909.html>, April 29, 2009)

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“[First Nations elder Herb] Strongeagle says that must be the byword from now on. ‘The people that came back [from Rome] had a really good feeling of let's go to the next phase now: the healing. This was something that just had to happen. I felt that it sounded like he [the Pope] was very sincere and emotional. There was enough there to indicate the sorrow about the abuse that happened.’” (Lexi Baines, The Citizen, “Local part of 'historic' Vatican visit”, <http://www2.canada.com/cowichanvalleycitizen/news/story.html?id=05ec3fe2-5d46-4408-b072-8c8f9aa2b4f8&p=1> May 13, 2009)

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“‘The most important thing was the blessings of the sacred medicines,’ said Anishinaabe Elder Tobasonakwut Kinew, who was one of five members of the Assembly of First Nations' (AFN) delegation.

“Not only did the Pope bless the medicine pouch Kinew carried, but he also blessed the pipes, staff and eagle feathers.

“‘The significance of the blessing of these sacred items must be put in context with residential schools,’ said Kinew. The Catholic Church, along with the United, Methodist and Presbyterian churches and the Canadian government, placed Aboriginal children in residential schools in order to take away their culture, their language and their beliefs.

“To have all of these (sacred items) in the place where we were going to engage in private conversation with the Holy Father held great significance for all of us. This is beyond words,’ said Kinew.” (Shari Narine, “Blessing of sacred items helps the healing”, *Windspeaker*, Volume: 27, Issue: 3, Year: 2009, <http://www.ammsa.com/node/6759>)

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“We had a special Mass said for us. At that point, I came to realize I had put those years of my life in residential school to rest. I can now recognize I'm a Christian. I don't have trouble saying to anybody I'm a Christian and I'm also a member of the Sundance and Midewewin,’ said Kinew. He's confident that the combination of Christian practice and Native sacred tradition will help his people in their healing.” (Shari Narine, “Blessing of sacred items helps the healing”, *Windspeaker*, Volume: 27, Issue: 3, Year: 2009, <http://www.ammsa.com/node/6759>)