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Shilak kat nihs'at givihxia nihdhan. (Gwichin: All my relatives I would like to speak to you.) Uummatimnin uqautiniaqtuami ilignun quyanaini. (Inuvialutin: Thank you from my heart that I may speak to you.) Wegho gots'ede gha wehodi le ko sedze t'a nahits'o gohde ha. (Tli cho: It is a difficult thing but I want to speak to you from my heart.) Diri yati Yedariye hurel'i nesthen. (Chipeywan: I think God wants me to speak these words.). This is a difficult task, partly because I have not been involved personally with residential schools and I am new to the Diocese, but especially because I have a sense of how long people have waited for this and how much pain is connected to this apology. I pray for all those elders and younger people who have already passed on.

Over the last few years I have had many people share with me their experience of residential schools. While there were positives, it is obvious that many people suffered traumatically from the experience. People I genuinely care about have suffered and are suffering. Almost all the people I have talked with speak of their first day at school and just how painful was the clash between their culture and the European style school system. The sad part for me is that our Church has played a significant role in that suffering. Having listened to many people 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.

As a Church we participated in a system that sought to strip away aboriginal language and culture. I truly believe that most of the sisters and people that worked in the schools did not know the real agenda of the government policy. Yet most of us brought the baggage of colonial arrogance which I believe is at the root of this legacy. We failed to appreciate the utter importance of language, culture, and the land. Tragically we contributed to a feeling of shame around being aboriginal. In 1984, right here in the North West Territories, Pope John Paul II stated:

It is clear from the historical record that over the centuries your peoples have been repeatedly the victims of injustices by newcomers who, in their blindness, often saw your culture as inferior . . . It is time for forgiveness, for reconciliation and for a commitment to building new relationships . . . And so today, in speaking with you I want to proclaim that freedom which is required for a just and equitable measure of self-determination in your own lives as native peoples. In union with the whole Church I proclaim all your rights – and their corresponding duties. And I also condemn physical, cultural, and religious

oppression, and all that would in anyway deprive you or any group of what rightly belongs to you (John Paul II, Address in Yellowknife, NWT, Canada, Sept. 18 1984).

Those of us who have come to love the people, we know how hard we all work to help build healthy self-esteem. In our work in the schools we have contributed to the loss of your language and culture and to the burden of shame. When Pope John Paul II met with aboriginal leaders of the America's he stated, "Keep alive your cultures, your languages, the values and customs which have served you well in the past and which provide a solid foundation for the future." I am deeply sorry for the part we played in devaluing aboriginal culture and language and I pray that today our Church can be a place of valuing and practicing your language and culture.

I understand that we, as a Church, have failed to value enough the importance of family. The separating of children as young as five or six years old from their families and extended families, for ten months of the year or for ten years, has been a mistake. This has caused tremendous pain and loss of nurturing and traditional parenting skills. Many of the Sisters tried their best to care for the children, but it was an impossible situation. No one can make up for the love and presence of parents or grandparents and the critical role they play in passing on traditional knowledge and the aboriginal perspective.

I also recognize that the strictness of discipline left many wounds. I can only imagine what a dramatic shift it was from the traditional way of raising a child to the discipline of European style boarding schools. I know that the young children who suddenly found themselves in a totally different environment for ten months to ten years have been deeply affected by the experience.

To all those who suffered sexual abuse I am deeply sorry. I work often with victims of sexual abuse and I know how deeply and profoundly a person is affected. We now know that sexual predators were at work in some of our schools. We failed to protect children; to take seriously enough the accusations from children and their families and to act quickly on them. There was also instances of abuse from older students and again we failed to protect these children who were in our care. There is no way to make up for the pain and loss of sexual abuse. It cries out for the continuing need to protect all our children.

I know that the Church often sought to remove the traditional spirituality of the people whether it was the drum, sacred dances, sacred medicines or spiritual connections with the land and the animals. In hindsight it would have been much richer for both of us to have taken the best of the different traditional spiritualities and combined it with the best of our Catholic tradition.

This apology would be incomplete for me if I did not include how this has affected the sisters and brothers, priests and laypeople. The fact is that we have and continue to hurt from the legacy of Residential Schools as well. Most of the people did the best they could in terribly difficult situations. Now all priests and religious sisters are immediately and uncritically connected with the worst abuse of residential schools. Perhaps the key part of our fault is the fact that we tried to "fix" another people in the way we thought was best for them. We participated in the government's plan which was rooted in colonial arrogance. Everyone is suffering from the legacy of Residential

Schools. The government has recognized the tremendous hurt caused by its policies and it has apologized.

Today I stand before you and say that I am sorry and ask your forgiveness for the sins of our Church. I pray that the Church learns from the past; that we do not act out of paternalism, look for quick fixes, or simply distance ourselves from the problems. We are here today and there are many problems that face us right now. Together we need to find new hope and faith and self-respect. Together we need to break cycles of abuse and find more positive and real images of our loving God. I pray that we may have a deeper openness to each other, a renewed dialogue between equals, and even a deeper love. This will not be easy, but through the power of God, our Creator, and His Son Jesus, and grace of the Holy Spirit, my hope is strong.

Your brother in our Lord, Nihwehtsine,

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