

STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL MEETING  
ON INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan - March 13-15, 1991

For two days we listened, discussed, struggled and prayed about our relationship with the aboriginal peoples in the context of Indian Residential Schools.

We identified and acknowledged the positive and negative aspects of the schools, began an analysis of the current situation and explored possibilities for a new relationship with the aboriginal peoples.

We are sorry and deeply regret the pain, suffering and alienation that so many experienced. We have heard their cries of distress, feel their anguish and want to be part of the healing process.

We recognize that the negative experiences in the Residential Schools cannot be considered in isolation from the root causes of the indignities and injustices suffered by aboriginal peoples in our country.

Therefore, we:

*pledge solidarity with the aboriginal peoples in their pursuit of recognition of their basic human rights;*

*reiterate our respect for the dignity and value of their cultures and spiritualities and reaffirm the principle of inculturation;*

*will support aboriginal peoples in pressing governments at all levels to respond to their legitimate aspirations;*

*urge the federal government to assume its responsibility for its part in the Indian Residential Schools;*

*urge our faith communities to become better informed and more involved in issues important to aboriginal peoples.*

All dioceses in which Residential Schools were located and that are represented here agree to set up, in collaboration with aboriginal peoples, a process for disclosure, which respects confidentiality, and for healing of the wounds of any sexual abuse that occurred in Residential Schools.

We have considered the request by some for a federal public inquiry. While we are committed to uncovering the truth, we do not think that an inquiry of that nature is the best vehicle for healing. The dioceses preferred to commit themselves to establish local forums of dialogue or other avenues for listening that will bring together former students and their families and the religious, clergy and lay staff who were involved in the schools so that they may reflect on their experience and work together towards healing and reconciliation.

The group that assembled here this week is firmly committed to building a renewed relationship with the aboriginal peoples and is very aware that much work still remains to be done. We intend to meet again and have selected a Steering Committee for one year with the mandate to propose to the concerned Catholic bodies (CCCB, Religious Congregations) a mechanism to follow up, coordinate, network and plan with native leaders and our ecumenical partners.

As Church, we are sent by the Lord Jesus Christ to liberate humanity from all oppression, especially from sin and evil, (Evangeliū Nuntiandi, No. 8), so that all may have life and have it more abundantly. (Jn. 10:10) Our gathering this week has been motivated by this basic mission.

March 15, 1991

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan