



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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May 29, 2015

On the occasion of the closing events for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

May 31 - June 3, 2015

Dear members of First Nations communities and all the People of God in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg,

This Sunday marks the beginning of the closing events for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Ottawa (May 31-June 3, 2015). In conjunction with this important occasion, the City of Winnipeg, along with several other cities in Canada, will be hosting simultaneous local gatherings to mark these closing events for the TRC. In light of this, I wish to express a few words to all members of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and in a special way, to First Nations People living in southwestern Manitoba – the geographical location of our archdiocese.

I feel very deeply, the immense responsibility given to our generation to lay the foundation for a better future among aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples – a future which is life giving; it is how we walk together, as fellow human beings that will give direction and hope to those who follow us. The closing events for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are not only historic days, but they form an honorable moment – a humble moment that is not to be forgotten.

As the Roman Catholic Archbishop in Winnipeg, I simply wish to say that I have grown to understand more and more, the reality of Residential Schools and their impact on First Nations Peoples from one generation to the next. It is painful for me to recall my own ignorance of, and even detachment from, the woundedness and grief that I witnessed among First Nations People during my time as a school student on the west coast of Canada – the student body of my high school was one-half aboriginal and located next to a First Nations community in North Vancouver.

With the concluding events for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission before us, I wish to express my deep sorrow for the suffering that occurred to aboriginal people through the Residential School system. It is important for all of us in the Church to acknowledge with regret, that some members of our Faith inflicted harm on the young people committed to their care in these schools and that the separation of family members contributed to the breakdown of family life and loss of traditions among First Nations peoples. We have a moral responsibility and an obligation to repent of this wrong doing and work towards healing and peace.

It is also important to recognize not only this woundedness among aboriginal people, but also the pain and disappointment experienced by many good men and women who worked in the schools, often giving their lives for the noble cause of education. Every member of the Church has, in fact, been affected by this legacy. At the same time it is humbling and a source of hope to see both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people seeking ways to bring understanding and justice within this brokenness.

We cannot change what has occurred, but what we can do is build a future –to do the ‘right’ thing together – and that is why we must pray for healing among all those affected by Residential Schools and work sincerely for true and lasting reconciliation. We have a responsibility to the next generation, to leave a legacy of mutual respect, understanding, and a willingness to listen to one another. Let us extend the hand of friendship to one another and treat the days ahead as an honourable time to bring about reconciliation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples.

As a Christian, I look toward our crucified Lord and see that in the midst of pain, alienation and grief, there is still hope –there is still the promise of new life. As Jesus was lifted up to his Father – to the Creator of all-so we must ask for the grace to lift ourselves up, to walk a new path towards true and lasting relationships with one another.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard Gagnon". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Yours in Christ,".

✙Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg