



## **Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith** **Office of the Bishop**

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6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, May 1, 2016

**Dear Clergy, Religious Sisters, Lay Faithful - Brothers and Sisters of the  
Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith:**

I am contacting you given the recent media coverage regarding Catholic groups and their obligations arising from the Residential Schools settlement process. Much scrutiny has been given to the recently completed agreements with the Canadian Federal Government in regards to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Process.

I begin by pointing out that the Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith completed its own agreement with the Government of Canada in 2005. This was one of the early agreements completed with a Catholic party involved in an attempt by the Federal Government of Canada to conclude a constructive process towards concluding the Indian Residential School legacy, and featured a financial contribution to the Government of Canada of just over \$2.1 million, which was to be used for the IRS settlement process for residential school survivors, and for healing programs. Thus, our diocese was not a party of “The Corporation of Catholic Entities Party to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Process.” However, the Diocese followed the work of the entities closely, and attempted to support their work with the Government of Canada as much as possible.

The 50 Catholic Entities party to the settlement agreement contributed to finance services and programs to the First Nations survivors, families and communities, roughly as follows:

1. Payment of \$29 million in cash, which was directed to programs and services under the supervision of First Nations organizations, and to the ‘Returning to Spirit’ program. This amount included contributions from other previous agreements, including from our own Diocese. At first, the funds went to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and after its dissolution, to the Legacy of Hope Foundation.
2. A set of community services and programs worth more than \$25 million were organized through Catholic Entities individual leadership.
3. Two million dollars were put up by the same Catholic Entities to organize and to promote the “Moving Forward Together” campaign in almost every region of Canada. Unfortunately the

response from large corporations and individuals was weak and totalled almost \$4 million. These funds were applied to various programs for the benefit of residential school survivors.

The fundraising campaign was identified as a “best efforts” campaign in 2006, because it was to be a part of a good faith engagement by the entities in support of the process of healing and reconciliation with survivors, their families and their communities. The Canadian Federal Government negotiator - Justice Frank Iacobucci - likened this to any other capital campaign that would be launched by a university or a hospital foundation.

In order to bring their best efforts to the campaign, the Entities engaged the services of a leading national fundraising firm. Prominent individuals served the Board of Directors of the campaign. These included: the AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine - who served as chair of the Board; Mary Simon - a prominent Inuit leader; a former senior official from the Government of Canada. These and other members sought to provide leadership and profile to the campaign. Having established a fundraising plan, the leaders and the Catholic groups put their efforts behind each component of the campaign. Despite putting great efforts towards the campaign over a lengthy period of time, they were disappointed by the results.

It should be noted that a claim in one Globe and Mail article that there was no national drive for church members to contribute, is not correct. A pew collection in churches across the country was held on December 8, 2013, and the Government of Canada was informed of such an initiative. Regrettably, the financial campaign was a disappointment.

I wish to add that the Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith also participated in a limited way in the fundraising efforts. However, it was noted that the majority of the people to whom the Diocese would appeal for financial support were also people who were affected by the Residential School Legacy, and thus the Diocese realized the paradox of seeking financial donations from the very people for whom the entire process was attempting to support. Thus, collection efforts were limited to the few churches in our larger centers.

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Some further comments regarding the theme of meeting ‘moral obligations’.

Several recent media reports allege that a ‘legal loophole’ provided the opportunity for the Church entities to be ‘let off the hook’. The Government of Canada was obligated to confirm the agreement with the 50 Catholic entities once they had in turn fulfilled the three areas of the financial commitment already described above, even though one element – the *Moving Forward Together* fundraising best efforts campaign – fell far short of its goal. Again, it is noted that despite great efforts being applied to fulfill this feature of the agreement, this part of the effort was clearly not successful.

The accusation of a ‘legal loop-hole’ was made in reference to the negotiation process that occurred between the 50 Catholic entities and the Government of Canada regarding legal fees incurred by the entities toward the final tally of the \$29 million. I understand that the entities had the position that there was nothing more owing when these incurred fees were taken into account. The Government of Canada legal negotiator took the position that about \$1.6 million was still owed. They eventually agreed on a sum of \$1.2 million, after which Judge Neil Gabrielson declared that the agreement was fulfilled. The settlement

funds were forwarded to the Government of Canada, which would in turn forward the amount to the Legacy of Hope Foundation.

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It needs to be continually acknowledged and affirmed that the Indian Residential School legacy - a policy and structure set up by the Government of Canada and administered by the major Christian churches of Canada - was an inherently flawed policy and process that resulted in much pain and disenfranchisement of Aboriginal peoples from their families, communities, and culture. The country-wide reflection on this legacy was the fruit of Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, which concluded last year with the Calls to Action issued in June 2015, and the final reports issued in December of 2015.

Three weeks ago a statement was issued by four Catholic groups in regards to the Calls to Action. I communicated my full endorsement and support of these expressed commitments. I look forward to working with our Diocese in continuing to *Move Forward Together* as we strive to achieve all that has been worked and hoped for realizing true reconciliation among all peoples in our diocese and across our country.

Given the recent reflection on the settlement process with the 50 Catholic entities, I wish to point out one key feature of the agreement that relates to the provision of \$25 million of in-kind services. In the agreement with the 50 entities, a time frame of 10 years was given to fulfill the target of services that provided support to Aboriginal peoples recovering from the Residential School legacy. However, this target was exceeded in less than five years. Many of these services and programs are offered to the present.

The provision of such support is also a major priority of the work of the Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith. Such services include: healing and support programs and retreats, especially dealing with addiction and grief recovery; partnering with Aboriginal groups regarding wellness and healing programs; providing training and support to local Aboriginal leaders in the church communities; youth and family support. We continue to work towards a situation whereby many of these services would be provided by an increasing number of Aboriginal peoples, as our Diocese is largely Aboriginal - Dene, Inuit, and Métis. Of course there is so much more we can do and achieve.

I stated in my pastoral letter of April 10, 2016 that "the eyes of the world are on us here in Canada more than we may realize." As our world tries to find a way forward given the global struggle and conflict with honouring cultural diversity, especially after many historical transgressions, many in our world look to what is currently happening in our own country of Canada. Along with our efforts, I hope and pray that here in the North, the Catholic community will continue to strive to achieve all that is hoped for in the Truth and Reconciliation journey. Indeed, let us *continue to move forward together!*

With gratitude and the assurance of my prayers, I am

Sincerely yours in Our One Creator,



✙ Mark A. Hagemoen  
Bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith