



The **Catholic Bishops**
of **Alberta** and the
Northwest Territories

Les évêques catholiques
de l'**Alberta** et des
Territoires du Nord-Ouest

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Letter of Invitation

Dear Catholic Faithful,

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is coming to Alberta from March 27-30, 2014 at the Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton. This will be the last of the seven national TRC events that have been taking place across Canada over the past four years. The Edmonton national gathering, together with the preparation leading to it, represents an important historical moment for First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples, and for everyone who calls Alberta home.

We encourage you to learn more about this historic event, and to become directly involved through attendance, volunteering and praying for its success.

The TRC is working to document the history and the continuing legacy of the Indian Residential Schools in Canada. The schools, which operated for over 120 years, were instituted and funded by the Federal Government, and administered by Canadian church organizations. The majority of these schools in Canada and Alberta were administered by Roman Catholic dioceses and religious congregations.

Those who attended the Residential Schools often had to leave home at a young age. We recognize that there were students who benefited from the experience and education they received at these schools. At the same time, we acknowledge with deep pain that others speak of their experience at Residential Schools in terms of pain, suffering, and lengthy alienation from family, local community, language and culture. Some also speak of being subjected to sexual and physical abuse at these schools.

In 2009, at a meeting with Canadian Aboriginal leaders and Canadian church leaders at the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his sorrow at the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some members of the Church and offered his sympathy and prayerful solidarity with those who were negatively affected by their attendance at the Residential Schools.

We are adding our voice to those of the Catholic bishops and leaders of religious communities across Canada who have already expressed words of apology and regret. We, the Catholic Bishops of Alberta and Northwest Territories, apologize to those who experienced sexual and physical abuse in Residential Schools under Catholic administration. We also express our apology and regret for Catholic participation in government policies that resulted in children being separated from their families, and often suppressed Aboriginal culture and language at the Residential Schools.

It is also important to embrace with understanding and compassion the many sisters, brothers and priests who, out of love, gave themselves entirely for the service of the children entrusted to their care in these schools, and sought only to do good under difficult conditions. Horrified and heartbroken at the suffering inflicted on children by some of their colleagues, they, too, are suffering. Together with the bishops of our country, they have expressed their commitment to healing and reconciliation.

The upcoming TRC Alberta event presents an opportunity for us to listen to the experiences of the Aboriginal students who attended the Residential Schools. This is an important and necessary first step on a long-term journey of moving towards healing and authentic reconciliation.

At each TRC National Event, one of the seven Aboriginal Sacred Teachings is chosen as an overall theme. Wisdom is the theme for the Edmonton event. This theme helps to provide an opportunity for us to learn about wisdom from the Aboriginal spiritual traditions during the event.

The recent canonization of Kateri Tekakwitha has helped us to recognize how God has manifested abundant blessings and holiness through the life of this extraordinary Aboriginal woman. This special historic moment in the life of the North American Church encourages all Catholics to discover the ways that God is speaking to us today through the gifts of Aboriginal culture and spirituality.

We commit ourselves to work in the Catholic community and the wider society to challenge attitudes of racism and prejudice that continue to exist in Alberta and Canada today. Aboriginal communities still face many serious issues that go beyond what will be addressed at the TRC, including land, treaty rights, education, health care, housing, jobs, and environmental threats. We will continue to find ways for Catholics together with other concerned Canadians to support more effectively Aboriginal peoples in their ongoing struggles to achieve justice and equity in Canadian society.

We invite you to attend all or part of the Edmonton TRC event, either in person or at www.trc.ca. Volunteer if you can. We ask that you pray personally and publicly in your parishes for the success of this event, and for progress in the long-term journey of healing and reconciliation. May St. Kateri guide us and strengthen us to be faithful in this important work.

Catholic Bishops of Alberta and NWT



Most Reverend Richard W.
Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton



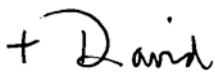
Most Reverend Frederick Henry
Bishop of Calgary



Most Reverend Gregory J.
Bittman
Auxiliary Bishop of Edmonton



Most Reverend Gerard Pettipas
CSsR
Archbishop Grouard-McLennan



Most Reverend David Motiuk
Bishop of the Ukrainian Eparchy
of Edmonton



Most Reverend Mark Hagemoen
Bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith



Most Reverend Paul Terrio
Bishop of St. Paul

24 February 2014