

Bishop Riesbeck supports request for a papal apology

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On Sunday, June 21, Bishop Riesbeck took the opportunity once more to share his sorrow over the recent discovery of 215 unmarked burial sites at the former Kamloops Residential School. “Like many of you my heart has been rather unsettled these past few weeks,” he said. Noting that he has received a number of email messages about this he said, “it’s understandable that people are shocked, angry and sad. This has evoked many strong emotions and a lot of grief, especially in the hearts of our Indigenous brothers and sisters.”

Saying that he, “can’t even begin to imagine the trauma that residential school survivors must relive every time we hear of such discoveries,” Bishop Riesbeck had strong words of remorse over the participation of Catholics in operating residential schools. “One thing we are certain of: the Church should never have been involved in the government’s policy on residential schools. I deeply regret and apologize for the involvement of Catholic organizations and entities in the government’s policy of assimilation, which led to the separation of children from their families, the devaluing of Indigenous culture and languages, neglect, and abuse in many residential schools. My heart is with all those who are suffering, especially our Indigenous peoples.”

Acknowledging that many have been calling for a papal apology, Bishop Riesbeck said he supports this request. “Even though the expression of sorrow from Pope Benedict in 2009 was accepted as an apology by Indigenous leaders, if an apology from the present pope will help with the healing and reconciliation, then I’m all for it,” he said. Noting that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)’s call to action #58 made the request for this apology to be delivered on Canadian soil, he recalled that the Holy Father responded by saying he wasn’t able to come to Canada at that time but encouraged the Canadian Bishops to continue working diligently toward healing and reconciliation. He highlighted that in addition to the ongoing work of the CCCB (which can be seen at <https://www.cccb.ca/indigenous-peoples/indigenous-pastoral-initiatives-since-the-origins-of-the-ccb/>), for the past two years the CCCB has been planning to gather a delegation of Indigenous leaders for a trip to Rome to meet with the pope. These plans, which were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have resumed and this visit will take place likely before the end of the calendar year. “It is expected that the request for an apology will once again be made. I, for one, certainly support this request,” he said.

Bishop Riesbeck has also reached out personally to the Chiefs of the seven Indigenous communities in our diocese, to “express my solidarity with them, among other things,” and to ask, “what the diocese or I can do to strengthen our relationship with them.” Noting that he has encouraged pastors where Indigenous communities reside to reach out as well, Bishop Riesbeck said he is, “really edified to hear of all the plans that are in the works to have healing services, listening circles, and other efforts to assist with the grieving process.”

As we continue to grieve with our Indigenous communities, Bishop Riesbeck said that “it’s in these challenging times that I’m thankful for the gift of faith that is an anchor, so as not to be discouraged.”

“The Church being in turmoil at times is like a boat being tossed by the waves. But Jesus is watching even when he is ‘in the stern asleep on the cushion’ – he is in control,” he said. “He’s steering the ship; we should never doubt it in spite of appearances to the contrary. Even though her members (including those in important positions) may fail at times, due to their weak and sinful human condition, we can trust Jesus to preserve and protect his Church such that all peoples can continue to encounter the Lord in the Church, especially through the Sacraments.”

Concluding in prayer Bishop Riesbeck said, “may the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with the peace that surpasses all understanding and strengthen us to walk in your ways and co-operate with you as members of the Church, eager to share the joy of the Gospel with others ‘for the love of Christ urges us on’ (2 Cor 5:14).”