



July 9, 2021

3 pages via e-mail plus one attachment

To all clergy and staff of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

These past several weeks have seen a continuous flow of information and public outcry regarding the history of residential schools in Canada.

In the coming weeks and months, we can also anticipate more news and opinions that will be most challenging and unsettling for many, including our clergy and staff. We have also seen acts of vandalism and violence against Catholic churches throughout the country in recent days.

During these turbulent moments, we must be thoughtful and prudent in how we communicate with the faithful – I would suggest that our focus should be to assist in healing the wounds of those who have suffered and to engage in the journey of reconciliation, building on the commitment and efforts made by so many across the country.

A recent poll suggested that only 10% of Canadians have a thorough understanding of the history of residential schools. In addition to resources like the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report](#), we have prepared a webpage at: [www.archtoronto.org/residentialschools](http://www.archtoronto.org/residentialschools) with numerous resources available. I also attach our most recent resource, a lengthier frequently asked questions document that you or others may find helpful – feel free to distribute as appropriate. It is also available online [here](#). Page two of this communication also provides some basic messages that you may wish to utilize if you choose to speak about this topic.

Parishes may continue to permit respectful memorials on church property. It may also be an appropriate gesture to pray at these memorials or join in solidarity with other peaceful moments of reflection and repentance. I encourage you to continue to offer the prayer of the faithful previously shared throughout the month of July.

We have received numerous inquiries regarding financial support related to residential schools. Currently, dioceses across the country, including the Archdiocese of Toronto, are in discussions to determine how to best engage in a renewed financial effort to meet the goal of the \$25 million “best efforts” campaign. In addition, the archdiocese is developing a series of pastoral initiatives, with Indigenous participation, to engage parishioners and the broader community in a continued journey of prayer, listening and dialogue as part of ongoing reconciliation efforts.

I also appreciate that many parishes are concerned about issues related to security. Separate communication will be forthcoming regarding this issue.

Once again, thank you for all that you continue to do during these difficult days. Be assured of my continued prayers for you and your parishioners.

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, pray for us.

*+ Thomas Card. Collins*

Thomas Collins  
Archbishop of Toronto



## **(INTERNAL USE) Key Messages for parishes regarding Residential Schools – Archdiocese of Toronto**

- We acknowledge the terrible suffering that took place and condemn the system, established by the federal government and operated by faith communities, which separated children, often forcibly, from their parents and attempted to strip away their language, culture and identity.
- It is undeniable that some Catholic teachers (priests, religious men and women and lay staff) entrusted to care for children at residential schools assaulted the dignity of the students through mistreatment, abuse, neglect and abuse.

We echo the words of one of the original apologies made by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1991:

*“We apologize for the existence of the schools themselves, recognizing that the biggest abuse was not what happened in the schools, but that the schools themselves happened... We wish to apologize in a very particular way for the instances of physical and sexual abuse that occurred in those schools... Far from attempting to defend or rationalize these cases of abuse in any way, we wish to state publicly that we acknowledge they were inexcusable, intolerable and a betrayal of trust in one of its most serious forms. We deeply and very specifically, apologize to every victim of such abuse and we seek help in searching for means to bring about healing.”*

- We know that many Canadians are not fully aware of the story of residential schools. There are numerous resources available for people to fully educate themselves on this important conversation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, issued in 2015 is particularly relevant. The Archdiocese of Toronto has also compiled a number of resources especially to assist the Catholic community in learning more residential schools. These resources can be found by visiting: [www.archtoronto.org/residentialschools](http://www.archtoronto.org/residentialschools)
- Pope Francis will be meeting in Rome with a delegation of Indigenous leaders, Elders/ Knowledge Keepers, residential school survivors and young people over four days, December 17-20. We pray this encounter will offer a significant opportunity for dialogue, healing and reconciliation.
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- Most importantly, let us pray and journey together on the path to reconciliation. This will be a lengthy process and we pray that the truth will continue to come forth, now and always. Let us keep all those who have suffered close in prayer.



### **Together We Pray**

*“For the children who died in residential schools throughout Canada and for all those who continue on a journey through the darkness, that there may be healing founded on truth and that the Spirit will inspire our ongoing commitment to reconciliation.*

*God, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, continue to offer us correction so that your grace might change and transform us in our weakness and repentance.*

*Give us humility to listen when others reveal how we have failed and courage to love others as ourselves, mindful of your love for the weakest and most vulnerable among us. Amen.”*