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SACRED COVENANT

between

TK'EMLÚPS TE SECWÉPEMC NATION

ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF VANCOUVER

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF KAMLOOPS

ON THE 31ST DAY OF MARCH
2024



WHEREAS the people of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Nation desire that the historical truths regarding the Kamloops Residential School be shared and that a path to healing be set out clearly in this sacred Covenant.

WHEREAS the Archdiocese of Vancouver and the Diocese of Kamloops acknowledge the deep flaws in the Residential School system, their part in the resulting tragedies and the desire to journey with the people of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Nation on a path to healing and understanding.

WHEREAS all Parties seek to build on official Catholic teaching supporting the rights and freedoms of Indigenous people and the promising historical relationship held between Fr. Jean-Marie-Raphael Le Jeune, Chief Louis Clexlixqen (Xlxléxken) and Chief Johnny Chiliheetza (Ts'elcít's'e7).

WHEREAS the purpose of this sacred Covenant is to establish our shared path to reconciliation and to reflect our mutual belief that honour, truth, justice, and healing are necessary to guide our future.

Therefore, the Parties agree as follows:

HISTORICAL PRECEDENT FOR A SACRED ACCORD

1. On June 2nd, 1537, Pope Paul the Third promulgated a bull relating to the rationality, souls, and rights to freedom and property of any Indigenous people encountered by Catholics in their universal mission. It states in part:

*“We, who, though unworthy, exercise on earth the power of our Lord and seek with all our might to bring those sheep of His flock who are outside into the fold committed to our charge, consider, however, that the Indians are truly men and that they are not only capable of understanding the Catholic Faith but, according to our information, they desire exceedingly to receive it. Desiring to provide ample remedy for these evils, We define and declare by these Our letters, or by any translation thereof signed by any notary public and sealed with the seal of any ecclesiastical dignitary, to which the same credit shall be given as to the originals, that, notwithstanding whatever may have been or may be said to the contrary, the said Indians and **all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property**, even though they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ; and that **they may and should, freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and the possession of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved; should the contrary happen, it shall be null and have no effect.**”*

This is the official Catholic teaching, and it was published after a period of confusion in the late 1400s surrounding several letters from Pope Alexander the Sixth. These earlier letters are sometimes referred to as the “Doctrine of Discovery.”

2. On June 24, 1610, the first jointly developed Concordat (covenant) between Mi'kmaq and Pope Paul the Fifth was agreed to. The terms were agreed to orally, but the Mi'kmaq traditions and understanding were recorded in wampum strings and eventually a wampum belt. The terms included recognition of Mi'kmaq rights, jurisdiction, and traditions within their territory, protection of Mi'kmaq sovereignty against European princes by the Holy See, and rights to the Church to spread Catholicism within Mi'kmaq territory.



HISTORICAL RECORD AND EVENTS

3. In the late 1800s, residential schools for Aboriginal children were created under a Canadian government policy and some of the schools were managed by various Catholic orders and organizations (“the Missionaries”). While focusing on educating the young, the Missionaries also sought to introduce the Aboriginal community to Christianity.

4. The Kamloops Indian Residential School (“KIRS”), opened in 1890 as a Government-run Industrial School. In 1893, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, were appointed to administer the school. KIRS was one of 132 federally sponsored schools in Canada.¹ It was also one of five residential schools that existed within the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Vancouver. In late 1945, the Diocese of Kamloops was established and assumed oversight for the Catholic community in the region.

5. In 1920, the Indian Act was amended to give the Department of Indian Affairs the authority to require that all school-aged Aboriginal children attend either a day school or a residential school. This enabled the Government of Canada to use financial and other systems to pressure Indigenous families to comply. At times, some children were even forcibly removed by government officials. These punitive measures isolated Aboriginal children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions, and cultures, and contrived to assimilate them into the dominant culture.² These objectives were based on the Government assertion that Aboriginal cultures and beliefs were inferior and unequal.³

6. For longer than a century, Indian Residential Schools facilitated the separation of approximately 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities.⁴

7. Some Residential schools were far away from their students’ communities, and at times children were inadequately fed, clothed, and housed. First Nations languages and cultural practices were prohibited by government policy in these schools. Tragically, some children died while attending residential schools, most of disease and others from accidents and even suicide.

8. According to some reports, Aboriginal students died at rates that were higher than those experienced by the general school-aged population and their parents were sometimes uninformed of their children’s sickness and death. Some seriously ill students were returned home or admitted to hospitals or sanatoria where some died later. Some of the deceased were returned home but most others were buried in cemeteries on school grounds, or in nearby Church, reserve, or municipal cemeteries.

The annual number of reported deaths at Indian Residential Schools declined after the Second World War, coinciding with more effective public health measures including the use of antibiotics and vaccines.

9. The Government of Canada did not establish an adequate set of standards and regulations to guarantee the health and safety of residential school students and did not adhere to the minimum standards and regulations that it did establish. Moreover, the Government chronically underfunded and understaffed Residential schools, including the Kamloops Residential School.

¹ Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools, 11 June 2008.

² Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools, 11 June 2008.

³ Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools, 11 June 2008.

⁴ Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools, 11 June 2008.



10. While most of the Indian Residential Schools ceased to operate by the mid-1970s, the last federally run school closed in the late 1990s. The Kamloops Residential School was operated by Catholic entities until 1969, after which it was run as a student residence by government staff.

11. Insufficient consideration was made for the continuing maintenance of residential school graveyards after the residential school system was discontinued. There is uncertainty today about responsibility for cemeteries at the sites of former residential schools. The KIRS property is owned and maintained by the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Nation.

12. In 2007, a Settlement Agreement was reached between Indigenous survivors of Residential Schools, the Catholic entities who administered the schools, and the Government of Canada. The Settlement-mandated cash and in-kind remuneration were paid in full, but a “best efforts” fundraising campaign, while technically completed, fell far short of the stated objectives.

13. Another aspect of the Settlement Agreement required a Commission be established to record the historical record, including of abuses and hardships experienced by First Nation people. The result was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (the “TRC”). Between 2007 and 2015, the TRC travelled to all parts of Canada and heard from 6,500 witnesses about the Indian Residential School system and its impacts. The TRC’s objective was to create as complete an historical record as possible of the Indian Residential School system and legacy and to preserve and make the record available and accessible to the public for future use and study.

14. In 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada offered a full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools system.⁵ In 2008, Archbishop Michael Miller participated with other B.C. bishops in issuing an apology for the treatment of Aboriginal students in residential schools.

15. In 2013, Archbishop Michael Miller made a statement to the TRC on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church of the Archdiocese of Vancouver. He acknowledged that the Church’s role in implementing the Government of Canada’s policy has led to unbearable pain and suffering. Further, Archbishop Miller apologized to the survivors and their families for the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of those Catholics who perpetrated mistreatment of any kind at residential schools, including cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that took place at those schools.⁶

16. In 2015, Archbishop Miller reiterated the Archdiocese’s apology and recommitted to seeking ways to contribute to healing, education, and reconciliation.⁷

17. In December 2015, the TRC released its six-volume final report.

18. The TRC undertook the first systematic effort to record and analyze the deaths at the schools as well as the location and condition of student cemeteries. The TRC documented that more than 3,200 children are reported to have died at Indian residential schools during approximately 150 years of operation, and that there is uncertainty where many are buried. Many of these children died far from home.

⁵ Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools, 11 June 2008.

⁶ This narrative is based on Archbishop Miller’s 20 September 2013 document entitled “Expression of Apology and Hope Archdiocese of Vancouver.

⁷ See Archbishop Miller’s 02 June 2015 letter addressed to “My dear First Nations brothers and sisters”.



19. The TRC identified communicable diseases as a primary cause of poor health and death for many Indigenous People during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is believed some residential school children might have contracted disease at home prior to attending school, but others were likely infected with crowded, often unsanitary, and poorly constructed schools. Further, it is also likely that significant numbers of chronically ill children died within a few years after school discharge.

POST TRC EVENTS

20. In May 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation reported that preliminary findings from a ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey of the grounds at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School revealed “approximately 200” anomalies, some of which might be unmarked graves of former students. The Nation cautioned that more research was needed to determine what exists in that part of the former Residential School site.

21. This report has caused renewed grief and dismay in Indigenous communities, especially for those who attended the Kamloops Indian Residential School and for intergenerational survivors. Many of those grieving are devout Catholics who, with others, are seeking solace, affirmation, and accountability from the Catholic Church.

22. Regardless of confirmations and future findings, a known cemetery does exist in another part of the property and deaths and burials of former students have been recorded.

23. In order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation, the TRC issued 94 calls to action. Four of those calls to action relate to Canadian churches, including a recommendation for the Pope to deliver an apology in Canada addressing the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of Indigenous children in Catholic-run residential schools.

CONFIRMATION OF TRUTHS

This sacred covenant confirms the following shared truths:

24. The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate established missions, parishes, schools, colleges and retreat centres throughout British Columbia. A focus of the Oblate missionaries was the evangelization of Aboriginal peoples. As part of this focus, they opened or administered Indian residential schools in British Columbia, including the Kamloops Indian Residential School.⁸

25. That Father Jean-Marie-Raphael Le Jeune, OMI and other Oblate priests during the early contact period supported the efforts of First Nations from the Secwepemc, Sylix, Nlaka'pamux, and St'át'imc Nations to protect their jurisdiction and title, in the same spirit as the Papal Bull of 1537 and the Concordat of 1610 with the Mi'kmaq recorded on the great wampum belt.

⁸ Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate fonds: Research Guide, (updated 17 May 2023), Royal BC Museum.



26. That Father Jean-Marie-Raphael Le Jeune, Chief Louis Clexlixqen (Xlexléxken), and Chief Johnny Chiliheetza (T's'elcits' e7) visited Pope Pius X in 1904 to petition his support for Indigenous jurisdiction and title over Indigenous lands.

27. The Catholic Church now recognizes that the consequences of Indian Residential Schools were profoundly negative and have had a lasting and damaging effect on Aboriginal culture, heritage, and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experience at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, these stories are overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from their families and communities, including Secwepemc, Sylix, Nlaka'pamux, and St'át'imc Nations.

28. In 2022, Pope Francis visited Maskwacis, Alberta, with representatives from First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities. There, he asked for forgiveness for the evil committed by Christians against Indigenous Peoples.⁹ He acknowledged the suffering and abuse endured by Indigenous children in residential schools, describing the residential school policy as catastrophic and a dangerous error incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ He apologized for members of the Catholic Church who co-operated with Canada's "devastating" Indian Residential School policy.¹¹ Pope Francis committed to a serious investigation into the facts of what took place in the past and pledged assistance to residential school survivors to enable them to experience healing from the traumas they suffered.¹² He expressed his hope that the sufferings of the past can lead to a future of justice, healing, and reconciliation.¹³

29. Regardless of future findings, the Catholic Parties agree that the Indian Residential School system did great harm to the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation and other communities who sent children to the Kamloops Residential School. Separating children from their families without considering individual circumstances violates Catholic social teaching.

30. Cooperating with Government policy during the history of Residential Schools often exploited the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation and other communities and did great damage to their ability to pass on their language, customs, and traditions.

⁹ Text of Pope Francis' Residential School Apology (26 July 2022).

¹⁰ Text of Pope Francis' Residential School Apology (26 July 2022).

¹¹ Text of Pope Francis' Residential School Apology (26 July 2022).

¹² Text of Pope Francis' Residential School Apology (26 July 2022).

¹³ Text of Pope Francis' Residential School Apology (26 July 2022).



COMMITMENTS TO ACTIONS

31. This covenant commits us to the following actions in pursuit of honour, truth, justice, healing, and reconciliation:

- (a) That we will seek fitting ways to memorialize the children of residential schools and regularly call them to mind in sacred ceremonies that we shall conduct together to ensure their lives are never forgotten.
- (b) That we will work together and share information in full transparency to determine the truth: the identities of the children, the circumstances of their deaths, and all information about the missing children to ensure we can accurately determine their home communities so they can rest in peace and their families have answers.
- (c) That the Catholic Parties will offer and support mental health support and counselling for family members and others whose loved ones may be buried on the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.
- (d) The Catholic Parties, through the Healing and Reconciliation Grant program, will provide technical and scientific expertise and technical services needed to answer the questions raised by the previous GPR survey. This provision is offered as an act of reconciliation in action as called for by the TRC. The Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and other affected Nations will choose how and when to honour, repatriate, and remember their deceased children.
- (e) The Parties acknowledge that the work the TRC initiated in identifying and commemorating those students who died at residential schools needs to be finished. Archbishop Miller issued an Expression of Commitment in June 2021 to be fully transparent with the archives and records in the Vancouver Archdiocese's possession and control relating to the Kamloops Residential School.
- (f) Developing a strategy to address unmarked graves is complicated and will require long-term thoughtful discussion about the most appropriate procedures to document, commemorate, and protect those burials. The Parties have confirmed their commitment to work collaboratively to implement the TRC's calls to action and to address issues relating to missing children, unmarked burials, and archival records about residential schools.
- (g) That the dioceses will renew their commitments to support a fair and just recognition and implementation of First Nation jurisdiction and title.
- (h) That the dioceses will support fundraising to support those First Nations who wish to maintain their residential schools as national monuments.
- (i) That the Parties will identify lead officials to work together regularly to implement these commitments to action and as leaders we will meet regularly as needed to review progress on this covenant.
- (j) That we will hold a sacred joint ceremony each year during the Easter season to light a candle signifying our progress toward truth, justice and reconciliation.
- (k) That we will pass this candle on to other First Nations and dioceses until the light of truth becomes strong enough to replace this darkness with reconciliation.



BLESSING

TOGETHER WE CALL ON THE CREATOR TO BLESS THE CHILDREN WHO ATTENDED RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND THEIR FAMILIES, AND THIS COVENANT. THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS COVENANT, WITH THE CREATOR'S BLESSING, MAY WE COME TO FIND PEACE AND BE RECONCILED WITH ONE ANOTHER, NOW AND FOREVER.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF THE PARTIES HAVE CAUSED THIS COVENANT TO BE EXECUTED BY THEIR DULY AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES AND SIGNATORIES AS OF THE REFERENCE DATE FIRST SET OUT ABOVE.

TK'EMLÚPS TE SECWÉPEMC:

Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir (Chief)

Witnessed By:

ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF VANCOUVER:

Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB

Witnessed by:

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF KAMLOOPS:

Bishop Joseph Nguyen

Witnessed by: