

DISCOVERIES OF UNMARKED GRAVES AT FORMER RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SITES

Montreal, July 2, 2021 – In 2015, following several years of inquiry, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada published its report on Canada’s residential schools. The report’s findings included that approximately 150,000 children had attended residential schools in Canada. Several children subjected to sexual and/or physical abuse, and approximately 3,200 died of malnutrition, tuberculosis and other illnesses related to inadequate living conditions. At the time, the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, warned that these figures were in all likelihood understated, as incomplete death records prevented the Commission from providing accurate numbers.

Since May 2021, searches conducted with ground-penetrating radars have led to the discoveries of several unmarked graves on the sites of former residential schools. At publication time, 1,148 unmarked graves have been discovered on the sites of three former residential schools, out of the 139 residential schools once operating in Canada. It is to be expected that more shocking discoveries will result from these searches. As of now, [several congregations have spoken out in response to these discoveries](#).

As such, the CRC:

- wishes to reiterate the profound sadness and compassion it expressed in [its June 4, 2021, statement](#);
- commends the determination of religious congregations involved in residential schools to make all records pertaining to residential schools available to Indigenous Peoples;
- encourages its members to make the necessary efforts so that the whole truth about the residential schools may come to light as soon as possible;
- wholeheartedly believes that to respect Indigenous Peoples and the profound sorrow they are experiencing, and that of Canadians, requires following their rhythm on this long truth seeking process;
- reiterates its determination to answer, with its members, the TRC’s calls to action, such as in the [Catholic Responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action 48](#) and in its [support of federal Bill C-15](#).

This moment of truth is a crucial step not only to shed light on these numerous deaths, but also to determine the required next steps.

Canadian religious people as a whole are experiencing this tragedy with great pain and in sincere solidarity with our sisters and brothers of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit People. We continue to support the people and institutions involved, that they may chart a path to healing in justice and peace, one step at a time. In this way, a better future is possible for Canada.

Alain Ambeault, CSV
Executive Director

Helpline

The [Indian Residential School Survivors Society - IRSSS](#) offers a 24-hour toll-free helpline to survivors and their families at 1-866-925-4419.

About CRC

The Canadian Religious Conference is a network that brings together the leaders of 250 Catholic congregations of women and men religious in Canada. The CRC's mission is to encourage its members to live fully their vocation in following Christ and to support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace in a Canadian context.

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