

28 April 2008

An Open Letter

To the Native Peoples of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan

My Brothers and Sisters,

The Right Honorable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, has now appointed Justice Harry LaForme to head up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. When the other two commissioners are named, the TRC will begin the task of traveling across our nation in search of a chapter of our national history: the Indian Residential Schools legacy. The stated goal of this enterprise is to bring about a healing and reconciliation in Canadian society, between First Nations people of our land and the non-Native population. The hope is to heal past wounds in order to build a different and better future. I personally share and support the stated goals of this Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Over the past fifteen months as your archbishop, I have attempted to get to know you better, and I have tried to become familiar with your strengths and struggles. As time has allowed, I have visited your reserves and tried to meet you; in some cases I have also met the Chief and Band Council. I have started to establish a Native Pastoral Committee in the Archdiocese, to help me in understanding and meeting the religious and spiritual needs of those among you who embrace the Catholic faith. It is my hope that in this part of Alberta, we will be able to share in local experiences of truth and reconciliation.

As the Commission is being launched, I take this opportunity to share with you, the Native Peoples of this Archdiocese, my sadness for the cultural and personal wounds that many of you carry, arising from the residential school experience. I acknowledge that these are not only personal wounds, but scars that you bear as a whole community. To the extent that you may feel that the Catholic Church was complicit in these harms, I express my deep sorrow and ask your forgiveness.

I look forward to a new and hope-filled relationship with our First Nations people, which is the goal of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

+ Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan