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Dear Friends,

The recent discovery of the remains of 215 children buried in unmarked graves on the grounds of the former St. Andrew's Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia has gripped the hearts of many people throughout Canada and around the world. It has re-opened the terrible grief of so many Indigenous families whose children died in Residential Schools. It has ripped open wounds that had begun to heal for survivors of residential schools and their families, as well as those committed to walking in peace and reconciliation with 'all our relations'. (Abp. Mark MacDonald)

The grief which we acknowledge is the kind of which the prophet Jeremiah writes. "Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." (31:15)

It is said that Rachel's weeping resulted from an assault on her people by peoples who had come from afar to conquer them. In the era of colonial expansion by European empires bent on conquest, Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island were assaulted- their lands stolen, their social structures considered primitive, their spirituality and ceremonies dismissed as pagan and their very identity denigrated. It was not long before a scheme was developed to, "absorb Indigenous People into the body politic." It was called the policy of assimilation, enforced through The Indian Residential Schools established in 1879. According to conservative estimates from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission approximately 4000-6000 children died amid abuse and neglect in the residential school system. Between the 1800s and 1996 about 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were separated from families and forced to attend boarding schools, where at least one in 50 children died. This information has been known for years.

The purpose of the schools was to “civilize and Christianize”. “In order to educate the children properly,” wrote Hector Langevin, Public Works Minister of Canada, 1883, “we must separate the children from their families. Some people say this is hard but if we want to civilize them we must do that.” So it was that, ‘they came for the children’—that is the Indian Agents. They tore children from the arms of their parents and grandparents and loaded them onto trucks and planes and carried them away.

They Came for the Children is the title of a book produced in 2012 by Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It documents the horrible experiences of thousands of aboriginal children. Upon entry their clothes and trinkets from home were discarded, their bodies scrubbed raw and their beautiful braids cut off. Forbidden to speak their own language or to socialize with their own siblings, they were terrorized into silence. In many of the Schools the children were malnourished. Many were sent to the woods to cut and haul wood and to the fields to farm. It is said “they were worked too hard and taught too little.” Many of them were physically abused through beatings, strappings, and floggings. Many were punished through solitary confinement in dark closets. Many were sexually abused and made to feel ‘dirty.’

This publication also documents how parents were often lied to when they made inquiry as to the well-being of their children. And it documents how many children died in the schools and were buried at night in unmarked graves. Many parents were told their children had run away and the staff had no knowledge of their whereabouts.

The discovery of the remains of the holy innocents buried in unmarked graves in Kamloops, BC has justly angered Indigenous Peoples all across the country. They are fed up with cover-up and lies. And they are not alone. Many non-indigenous people across the country are incensed by this atrocity against children. In placing teddy bears, toys, and shoes on the steps of government buildings and churches they are one with Indigenous People both in mourning and in demanding accountability for the assaults borne by these children and ‘all their relations’ through several generations.

Because They Are No More

- We all hang our heads in shame for Canada’s crime against Indigenous Children. We acknowledge our complicity with a policy of assimilation intended to strip Indigenous People of their identity and deprive them of their traditions and cultures--social and spiritual.
- We are deeply sorry, as Archbishop Michael Peers said in The Apology of 1993, “that we tried to remake you in our image.” We continue to confess the sins of our spiritual arrogance named in an Apology offered by Archbishop Fred Hiltz at General Synod in Vancouver, July 2019.

- We confess our failure to live up to the Gospel of Jesus, who took little children in his arms and blessed them. We confess our betrayals of his love. With heavy hearts we confess every sin which we most grievously committed in abusing children in our care in the Residential School. We know Jesus' comment on assaults that will cause children to stumble—"It would be better a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18.6)

Because They Are No More

- We invite you to gather with us at 7 pm on Sunday, June 20 for a Service of Mourning honouring all Indigenous children who died in Residential Schools. This liturgy will take us into June 21st which is National Indigenous Peoples' Day. Details of the service will be posted on the Diocesan websites on Monday.
- We invite you to stand with us and all people in Canada who are calling for an annual National Day of Mourning for the children who died in Residential Schools.

Because They Are No More

- We commit to give immediate attention to *Calls 71 - 76* within the *94 Calls to Action* from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They address missing children and burial information. They call for a National Residential School Registry (72), an online registry of Residential School Cemeteries (73) and appropriate commemorations, ceremonies and markers and re-burial in home communities where requested (74); and all in accord with aboriginal protocols for honouring the deceased children.
- We will make every effort to respect the oral tradition of Indigenous peoples. We will listen attentively to their stories about children who went to Residential Schools and who died there.
- We will help in the search for graves. We are committed to assist in the preservation of these graves with suitable markers and maintenance in a manner that honours the children whose precious remains lie there. So that this sacred work can be done properly and thoroughly we will draw on a refund of funds requested of the diocese through the 2001 Settlement Agreement between the Government of Canada and our Church.

Because They Are No More – But We Know Them To Be In The Tender Care of Jesus

- We pray for their peace in His Presence.
- We pray in a spirit of humility and hope for all who mother and father and grandparent children, and all who teach and minister to them.

Let us pray:

“God, our Creator and Redeemer, we thank you for the gift of the children entrusted to our care. Give us joy in their enthusiasm for life, their delight in discovery and their fun at play. May we be patient and understanding, ready to nurture and guide them in good ways. Through our love may they come to know your love and your will, that they be healthy and happy. We pray in the name of your dear Son whose heart for the children was beautiful, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

+ Anne

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