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## Anglican parishes sponsored residential school students, house of bishops told

MARITES N. SISON  
STAFF WRITER  
Jun 1, 2009

### Niagara Falls, Ont.

Anglican parishes across Canada may not be aware that, in the 1920s, some of them sponsored students at the Indian residential schools through a monthly cash donation that went towards the purchase of clothing and supplies, members of the Canadian house of bishops were told at their spring meeting.



GENERAL SYNOD ARCHIVES

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The house of bishops learned in April that numerous Anglican parishes and individuals sponsored students attending Indian Residential Schools by providing about \$30 a month for clothing and school supplies.

This little-known fact was recently discovered by the General Synod

Archives, which is playing a major role in gathering and sharing documents related to Anglican-run Indian residential schools across Canada. Documents have shown that members of the Women's Auxiliary or other groups, many of them from southern parishes, gave about \$30 a month for a student whom they only knew by name.

Henriette Thompson, director of the partnerships department at the Anglican Church of Canada's General Synod, urged bishops to encourage parishes in their dioceses to determine if student sponsorships were part of their history and to use that as an opportunity to learn more about the legacy of the residential schools as well as to bring about healing and reconciliation. "Realizing that a part of your very local history is tied to a national process is an amazing opportunity that can be used as a catalyst for healing and reconciliation," she said.

Suggestions were made by General Synod staff involved in the healing and reconciliation work that parishes consider praying for the former student that they had sponsored and even initiate a parish event where the former student is invited to attend.

Ms. Thompson also briefed the bishops about the Truth and

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Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and said that churches and other groups are hoping that the new members will be named by this summer. She said that the report of the TRC commissioners who resigned is due in June. "It's something that we're quite eagerly awaiting," she said.

Ms. Thompson said that residential schools survivor societies have urged churches to make awareness-raising about the residential schools a priority.

The diocesan bishop of Keewatin, David Ashdown, meanwhile, urged bishops to include former residential school staff in the telling of stories about what took place in the boarding schools. "Part of the story is the untold story of staff. We all know that there was abuse; no one is denying that. But there were a number of staff who tried to do something about it, and a number of them got fired by the very church that's now ignoring their existence," he said.

Bishop Ashdown, who once worked on a residential school staff, said that "there were staff who, on a very meager income, spent their money trying to provide for students' needs. Some physically risked their lives."

He lamented that those staff, who are now in their late 50s and 60s, "are considered pariahs and are told, 'you can come and sit at the hearing but you won't be allowed to speak.'"

He added, "They are absolutely shattered... their stories are being shunted aside, as well as those students who found their experience to be a positive one."

Bishop Ashdown said "the whole story needs to be told" or the church runs the risk of "replacing one injustice for another."


Ms. Thompson acknowledged Bishop Ashdown's remarks and said that there is no attempt to exclude anybody and that work is being done to address the pastoral needs of former residential school staff.

Archbishop Terence Finlay, the primate's special envoy for residential schools, noted that the former bishop of Qu'Appelle, Eric Bays, is writing a book that captures the stories of former residential school staff.

In her briefing, Ms. Thompson reported that the Anglican fund for healing and reconciliation funded 37 projects totaling \$416,159 in 2008.

This year, it has received 68 applications totaling \$908,353. Since the total amount being requested is more than the fund's annual budget of \$600,000 not all projects will be eligible for funding.

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