


[Home](#)
[Arts](#)
[Events](#)
[Jobs](#)
[Directory](#)
[Print Media](#)
[About Us](#)
 quicksearch 

## Commissioner plans wide-ranging hearings on residential schools

By Deborah Gyapong

THE newly-appointed chair of the **Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)** plans wide-ranging public hearings that will hear from all sides.

"The only way to understand this tragic legacy is to understand all its components," said Judge **Harry LaForme**, 61.

LaForme said the residential schools policy intended to "remove the Indian from the child" by taking him from his family, because the "wigwam was more powerful" than the institution.

"That's the tree that poisoned all the fruit," he said.

However, LaForme acknowledged that not every residential school survivor was a victim. Some had positive experiences; he wants to hear their stories, too. He also wants to hear from the churches and from the people who worked in the schools.

"I can tell you that their love of their church is as great as the love the Aboriginal people had to their communities," he said.

Indian Affairs Minister **Chuck Strahl** announced LaForme's appointment April 28 in Ottawa. An Ontario Court of Appeal justice, LaForme is a member of the **Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation** of southern Ontario.

"This is an important step in our commitment to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, and another example of our government doing the right thing for former students, and for all Canadians," said Strahl in a statement, noting that LaForme is the "most senior Aboriginal judge in the country."

The unanimous choice among 300 candidates, LaForme will join Strahl and **Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine** in selecting an additional two commissioners. The Commission hopes to start hearings June 1.

"I think it's good that finally someone has been named and the process can begin," said **Keewatin-Le Pas** Archbishop **Sylvain Lavoie** in an interview from Le Pas.

The 50 Catholic entities -- dioceses and religious orders who ran residential schools -- have been "on hold" waiting for the TRC process to start, Lavoie said. As part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the entities are responsible for \$80 million towards healing and reconciliation that includes case and in-kind services. Lavoie said the entities also plan a major fundraising campaign.

Though he does not know LaForme, Lavoie said he seems to "have a fairly balanced view and be open to hearing everybody's story."

Lavoie said he and a few other Catholic bishops involved in the settlement agreement hope to meet with LaForme and the commissioners before the formal hearings start.

AFN Chief Fontaine has talked about how the TRC will help write the "missing chapter" of Canadian history. The churches and the government have promised full access to their records to further this goal.

LaForme stressed the role of the TRC to allow survivors to tell their stories, but also to fill in a canvass with much of the detail, positive and negative that is missing. "I look at it as a canvas that is blank right now," he said. "We know in a general way what the painting will look like."

"There's a dark side and a light side, a grace side and a sinful side," Lavoie said.

He noted that the "missing chapter" is "quite a story," which involves 100 years of Canadian history. He acknowledged that the separation of children from parents was "terrible."

But there are some amazing stories of religious sisters and brothers who gave their lives, he noted. Some of the older sisters have told him about how they left their homes, never to go back -- and the loneliness they experienced working at the schools.

"We have to set aside some political correctness here and deal with what really happened on all sides," he said. "It wasn't fairyland anywhere. There were a lot of challenges."

He added: "People were people, weak human beings, and sometimes the worst comes out of us."

LaForme said he hopes the TRC will include healing, understanding and truth. "In order to understand where we are presently, we have to understand the past and know what the past is . . . Only by knowing how we got here will we know how to make it positive in the future."

LaForme also recognized that most First Nations people identify themselves as Christian.

"My first impression would be they're not talking about delivering a particular kind of faith or religion," he said, noting the objections may rest more in the process.

"My mom is Catholic," he said. He was not baptized Catholic, however, as his mother's faith had lapsed at the time. She has since returned to the church -- and takes her faith seriously, he said.

-- *Courtesy of Canadian Catholic News. Please do not reprint without permission.*

### Related stories:

**The good side of the residential school story is valid, too**  
Not everyone who attended was scarred. Some children learned valuable, life-long skills  
Richard Wagamese, *Vancouver Sun*, May 12

### Minister names members of commission on residential schools

Indian Affairs Minister **Chuck Strahl** announced the appointment of **Jane Brewin Morley** and **Claudette Dumont-Smith** as commissioners in the House of Commons. Last month, Justice **Harry LaForme** was named head of the commission, which will examine the conditions that gave rise to residential schools, and hear stories from survivors.  
CanWest News Service, May 14

### PM to apologize for residential school abuses

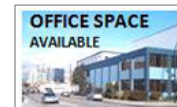
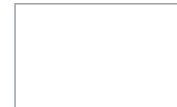
Move comes after many rejections of request  
*Globe and Mail*, May 15

### PM to formally apologize to survivors of residential schools next month

Prime Minister **Stephen Harper** will formally apologize to residential school survivors on June 11. "This is going to be a very meaningful and respectful apology that First Nations have been asking for for many, many years," said Indian Affairs Minister **Chuck Strahl**, pictured, after giving a speech to the Empire Club of Canada in Toronto yesterday.  
*National Post*, May 16

### Residential School Blues

The Canadian government is launching a five-year-long Truth and Reconciliation commission to deal with the pain and



**Advertising enquiries**

Several of Canada's Catholic bishops have spoken out about the overwhelmingly negative narrative that prevails in the media, which seems to blame every problem Aboriginal people face on the residential schools experience.

dysfunction caused by the country's federally funded, church-run aboriginal residential schools. But is this what the country, and aboriginals, need?  
Douglas Todd, The Search, *Vancouver Sun*, May 21

May 22/2008

[Continue article >>](#)

### Comments

They[[government](#)]should have started to table the files early at 1960's and why now for the ones have passed away now and my reserve is bad enough at it is through alcoholism and drug abuse.

Money talks and screams and the sound of silences plague the churches and the government who try and to cover this up.Their lawyers are trained to gobble up the money and making excuses to drag this along and while the older ones die away.Pay up the money and stop making excuses and make sure we get for what we deserve,

#1 **Baba** - 05/22/2008 - 12:30

Personally, I have serious doubts about this process. The TRC in S. Africa under Tutu [an Anglican bishop] was flawed and to a great extent a political sideshow. Current events in S.Africa speak to its failure.

There is always a problem when policians [clerical, secular or judicial] head up these events. Mr. Lavoie [sic]is already making statements like this: ""There's a dark side and a light side, a grace side and a sinful side."

Well people, try as I will [and I have spent countless hours staring at my three children age 7, 4 and 2 in contemplation and prayer] I cannot see one single measure of 'grace' or 'light' in armed federal para-military officers [the RCMP] abducting my children and relocating them God only knows where but where my love can no longer touch them; my eyes can no longer see them and where their collective fate is just a government/church sponsored attempt at genocide.

50,000 of those kids simply did not come back and to this day the churches refuse to say what happened to them or where they are buried.

I might have more faith if the appointment was someone WITHOUT any connections to church or state... Well, good luck Mr LaForme/Lavoie; don't forget to read Tutu's report before you start and remember his grace's political bias and a total disregard for the poor while living in outrageous luxury helped bring S. Africa back to the nightmare that exists there today.

#2 **Rev. Malachy Egan** - 05/22/2008 - 15:24

Comment

To prevent automated Bots form spamming, please enter the text you see in the image below in the appropriate input box. Your comment will only be submitted if the strings match. Please ensure that your browser supports and accepts cookies, or your comment cannot be verified correctly.



Email (won't be shown)

Name

canadianchristianity.com encourages readers feedback, and in the forum interaction. We will not edit your comments, but reserve the right to select responses and delete any inappropriate ones. All comments are immediately forwarded, read and screened. To report offensive or inappropriate comments, contact our [editor](#).