

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver


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Editorial

Catholic bishops attend native reconciliation event



By Paul Schratz

Catholic bishops from Vancouver and Whitehorse offered apologies for wrongs committed at residential schools within their jurisdictions, as well as prayers for healing and peace, as the next stage in a national healing process took place in Vancouver.

About 200 people attended a ceremonial walk March 5 from the Vancouver School of Theology on the UBC campus to the Museum of Anthropology.

The tour was organized by the Anglican, United, and Presbyterian Churches, with the Assembly of First Nations, and was aimed at raising the profile of a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission set to begin later this year as part of a healing process set out in the 2006 federal Indian Residential Schools Agreement.

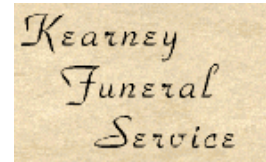
The Remembering the Children tour began in Ottawa March 2 with an ecumenical service that brought together native and church leaders. Catholic bishops and representatives of religious orders that ran schools included Archbishop Roger Ebacher of Gatineau, Bishop Donald Theriault of the military ordinariate, Oblate Provincial Father Andy Boyer, retired Jesuit Provincial Father Bill Ryan, Catholic lay people, and Sister Bibianne Lavictorie of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa, who offered the closing prayer in French.

The tour also made stops in Saskatoon and Winnipeg.

Archbishops Raymond Roussin, SM, and J. Michael Miller, CSB, as well as Bishop Gary Gordon of Whitehorse, took part in the Vancouver gathering, along with Anglican, United, and Presbyterian Church representatives.

In his remarks to the crowd, Bishop Gordon apologized to those who had suffered from attending the Catholic Lower Post School, which operated in the 1950s and 1960s near the B.C.-Yukon border.

He offered particular apologies "for the sexual and physical



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abuse some of you suffered from some of the staff," and to "all the students and families who suffered hurt to your culture and human dignity during the Lower Post era in the Diocese of Whitehorse."

As for those students and families "who found some blessing in their experience at Lower Post, I thank God; and I am grateful to those staff who exemplified Christ's love and care within a flawed education approach."

Bishop Gordon has had a decades-old friendship with B.C.'s native peoples that began in the Lower Mainland and has continued since his appointment to Whitehorse in 2006. He said he looked forward to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work and to fostering "the telling of truth for all who were part of our diocesan history in the Lower Post era."

Although the Archdiocese of Vancouver never operated a residential school, Archbishop Roussin attended the event to acknowledge that government/religious schools were run within the historical geographic boundaries of the archdiocese.

Archbishop Roussin noted in his remarks that five residential schools operated within the archdiocese's territory over the years, with positive as well as tragic results.

"Although these schools involved many people who worked selflessly and honourably, the system itself was deeply flawed," he said. "Removing children from their culture and their families is a profound moral concern. It is especially painful to know that some children suffered sexual and physical abuse at the hands of their teachers and caregivers. As Archbishop of Vancouver, I express my deep regret and I apologize for any wrongs committed here."

Archbishop Roussin closed by quoting Psalm 107, which says those who are brought low through oppression, trouble, and sorrow "will be raised up from their distress, and will gladly know of the steadfast love of the Lord, the great Creator."

"As we move forward, confident that only the truth will set us free and that reconciliation is the path to wholeness, I pray that the good Lord will direct all of us to healing and peace," he said.

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