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Shilak kat nihs'at givihxia nihdhan. (Gwichin: All my relatives I would like to speak to you.) Uummatimnin uqautiniaqtuami ilignun quyanaini. (Inuvialutin: Thank you from my heart that I may speak to you.) Wegho gots'ede gha wehodi le ko sedze t'a nahits'o gohde ha. (Tli cho: It is a difficult thing but I want to speak to you from my heart.) Diri yati Yedariye hurel'i nesthen. (Chipeywan: I think God wants me to speak these words.). This is a difficult task, partly because I have not been involved personally with residential schools and I am new to the Diocese, but especially because I have a sense of how long people have waited for this and how much pain is connected to this apology. I pray for all those elders and younger people who have already passed on.

Over the last few years I have had many people share with me their experience of residential schools. While there were positives, it is obvious that many people suffered traumatically from the experience. People I genuinely care about have suffered and are suffering. Almost all the people I have talked with speak of their first day at school and just how painful was the clash between their culture and the European style school system. The sad part for me is that our Church has played a significant role in that suffering. Having listened to many people and hearing the deep pain, I want to apologize for: our disruption of families and parenting, our involvement in the devaluing of aboriginal language, culture and spirituality, our association with the Government of Canada in their policy of assimilation, and our failure to protect children from serious physical and sexual abuse.

As a Church we participated in a system that sought to strip away aboriginal language and culture. I truly believe that most of the sisters and people that worked in the schools did not know the real agenda of the government policy. Yet most of us brought the baggage of colonial arrogance which I believe is at the root of this legacy. We failed to appreciate the utter importance of language, culture, and the land. Tragically we contributed to a feeling of shame around being aboriginal. In 1984, right here in the North West Territories, Pope John Paul II stated:

It is clear from the historical record that over the centuries your peoples have been repeatedly the victims of injustices by newcomers who, in their blindness, often saw your culture as inferior . . . It is time for forgiveness, for reconciliation and for a commitment to building new relationships . . . And so today, in speaking with you I want to proclaim that freedom which is required for a just and equitable measure of self-determination in your own lives as native peoples. In union with the whole Church I proclaim all your rights – and their corresponding duties. And I also condemn physical, cultural, and religious

Schools. The government has recognized the tremendous hurt caused by its policies and it has apologized.

Today I stand before you and say that I am sorry and ask your forgiveness for the sins of our Church. I pray that the Church learns from the past; that we do not act out of paternalism, look for quick fixes, or simply distance ourselves from the problems. We are here today and there are many problems that face us right now. Together we need to find new hope and faith and self-respect. Together we need to break cycles of abuse and find more positive and real images of our loving God. I pray that we may have a deeper openness to each other, a renewed dialogue between equals, and even a deeper love. This will not be easy, but through the power of God, our Creator, and His Son Jesus, and grace of the Holy Spirit, my hope is strong.

Your brother in our Lord, Nihwehtsine,

Bishop Murray Chatlain
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