

TRC & IRSSA

A LETTER FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

The Pas, December 17, 2009

Are you wondering about the meaning of the acronyms TRC and IRSSA?

In response to requests for more information, this letter aims to provide more information on the *Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement* (IRSSA), its impact on our archdiocese and the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) which is part of that agreement.

Early in 2007, after many years of sometimes very tense negotiations, the federal government, the Assembly of First Nations and the now 54 Catholic entities (dioceses and religious congregations) involved in the Indian residential schools in Canada, signed an agreement to settle litigation facing the government and the churches that the government had third-partied.

In that agreement, the federal government committed to providing compensation to all who attended a residential school; a system that is now acknowledged as a flawed policy of colonization and assimilation. Those who have suffered abuse are able to seek further compensation through an Independent Assessment Process.

As part of that agreement, the Catholic dioceses and religious congregations who ran 70% of the schools are committed to providing funds for healing and reconciliation. We are to provide \$29 million in cash; \$25 million of In-Kind services and community work, and an additional \$25 million through a best-efforts national fundraising campaign.

This arrangement with the Catholic entities paved the way for a comprehensive *Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement* (IRSSA) signed September 20, 2007 by all the parties (the AFN, the federal government and the four churches involved with residential schools). The terms of this agreement were extended to the other churches involved.

Because our archdiocese was involved in four residential schools (Beauval, Sturgeon Landing, Guy Hill and Cross Lake), we are obliged to provide 1 million in cash over five years, 1.6 million of In-Kind services and community work over ten years, and to support the fund raising Canada Wide Campaign (CWC).

As a result of this commitment, we are paying out \$200,000 a year since 2007, which annually uses up much of our operating funds. As a result, we have had to fundraise for any new programs we want implemented; something we will have to continue to do for two more years.

We are appealing to all the parishes and missions to try to be as self-sufficient as possible, and to pay for their ordinary expenses such as heating, insurance, taxes, the maintenance of buildings and even the salary of priests and pastoral workers. This type of support will make the Archdiocese's commitments easier to reach.

We want to thank all of you for your efforts to be self-sufficient, which helps us continue to operate as a diocese intent on building up the reign of God and to meet the many pressing needs of the faithful.

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* is an attempt to provide former students and indeed anyone impacted by the residential schools, the opportunity to share their experience, good or bad, pleasant or painful, for the historical record. The Chair Judge Murray Sinclair and two commissioners will hold seven major events across the country over the next five years to hear the stories. There will also be a series of regional events and meetings in which we will be able to participate.

Former national chief, Phil Fontaine, expressed the hope that this commission would help write the missing chapter of the residential school experience, especially for those Canadians who remain quite ignorant of this part of our country's history.

Judge Sinclair has been quite clear that he wants to hear from all who were impacted by the schools. We would encourage those from our archdiocese who attended the schools, or had family members and relatives who attended, to contribute to the process, so that the historical record can be accurate. Whereas over the past few years many held back from sharing positive experiences out of fear of being politically incorrect, now is the time to speak your truth so that it is heard and recorded.

As an archdiocese, we are doing our best to write our history of residential schools with the help of our archivist and the historical materials on hand. There is some urgency to this effort as the first national event of the TRC commission will be held in Winnipeg in the summer of 2010.

Each person's experience is important. For example, our own archdiocese of Keewatin-The Pas has received \$18,500 from individuals who donated to us out of compensation they received, as a statement of appreciation for their positive experience at the schools. That too is part of our history, and does not take away from the abuse many others experienced at perhaps the same schools. Each person should feel free to share their experience for the sake of a more accurate history.

Again, thank you for your collaboration in striving to be self-sufficient as faith communities, and also for your participation in the TRC. May the Lord bless all of our efforts to be responsible and diligent in His service.

Sincerely, in the Lord and Mary Immaculate,

Most Rev. Sylvain Lavoie OMI
Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas