Opinion
News



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 18, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

On May 30, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced the discovery of 215 bodies buried on the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia. Pope Francis expressed pain over the discovery, but didn't offer the apology sought by Justin Trudeau, the Canadian prime minister. A delegation of Indigenous people from Canada will meet with Francis at the Vatican before the end of the year, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said June 10. Following are NCR reader responses to the news. The letters have been edited

for length and clarity.

I write in the light of the horrific discovery of the unmarked graves of children outside the former Kamloops residential school run largely by Roman Catholic priests and nuns. I am a former major religious superior of a Catholic religious order (the Discalced Carmelites), meaning that I was the closest that a woman can get to being a bishop in today's Catholic Church.

I write to appeal publicly to my fellow Canadian Catholics to demand that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops fulfil its manifest ethical obligation: (1) to publish a formal apology; and (2) to pay its ethical share of compensation for the obscene treatment of Indigenous children in Roman Catholic residential schools across Canada. The United Church apologized in 1987. The Anglican Church apologized in 1993. Yet the Catholic Church in Canada has yet to formally apologize. And a "legal misstep" in 2013 let the Catholic Church off the hook for the great bulk of the compensation it owed. How convenient. This is a stain upon every Catholic in our country.



As a member of a devout Catholic family, I was taught that Catholicism stands or "the preferential option for the poor" — a phrase used by Pope Francis. Now who in Canada deserves a preferential option for the poor more than the children of Indigenous communities kidnapped from their homes, malnourished, humiliated, and abused physically and sexually? Or their families, children, and children's children, who today are still very much the objects of racism and injustice, not to mention rates of addictions and incarceration well beyond the Canadian average? Nor is this

charity. This is justice.

Dear fellow Catholics, are you truly horrified by the discovery in Kamloops? If so, contact the Canadian bishops' conference to demand that your church issue a formal apology and honor its moral share of compensation claims. Speak to your pastors, write to the media, talk about this on your Facebook page and on Twitter.

Yes, the finances of the Catholic Church in Canada will take a hit. But oddly enough, the Catholic Church has always found vast sums of money to pay lawyers to contest cases brought by the victims of abuse at the hands of priests (and, yes, nuns). Is that how you like having your collection money spent? Speaking of collections, you can decide not to give another penny to the collection plate until you have seen meaningful action on this issue.

And bluntly, dear fellow Catholics, let us not dare to speak again of the sanctity of the life of unborn children (who after all cost us nothing), until we have addressed this obscene injustice, past and very much ongoing, perpetrated in the name of our church.

PAULA MONAHAN

Etobicoke, Ontario

***

So now it's the church in Canada's turn to refuse to take responsibility for decades of child abuse and to turn over records about the perpetrators and their bishop-enablers. And the pope "feels pain."

There have been three key series of events in my lifetime that have driven Catholics away from the church in droves. *Humanae vitae* in 1968 sent the first wave to the exits. Then came the seemingly never-ending saga of the abuse of children and its cover-up that reverberates to this day and now takes center stage in Canada. And the icing on the cake for many Catholics like myself is the disgusting alliance of so many American bishops with Donald Trump.

To me there is a common thread through this incredible insensitivity by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. That thread is no parents are making decisions in the Catholic Church. What parents would feel it is a proper burden to dump onto

parents that every time they are intimate they run the possibility of a pregnancy, especially in situations where health and finances are critical issues? What responsible parents would stand by and let a monster in a collar abuse their children and then do their utmost to cover it up? What genuine Christian parent would turn a blind eye to the racism, cruelty to immigrants and women, as well as the poor that "highlights" Trump?

No, the Catholic Church must have celibate men making the rules. The guys with no mates and no children. The guys with little experience of the day-to-day struggles of raising a family and the dangers that can lurk for them. The group unable and unwilling to listen to the Spirit or anyone other than themselves.

I have little doubt that the fourth significant series of events is awaiting us.

BILL KRISTOFCO

Parkville, Maryland

Advertisement

***

In 2015, the two-volume inquiry into the treatment of Canada's Indigenous people, which gave particular attention to residential schools, initiated by the government and operated by various, mostly Catholic denominations, was completed.

In 2018, the coordinator of the report, the Indigenous judge and senator, Murray Sinclair, along with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, called upon Pope Francis to provide an official apology to the Indigenous peoples for the spiritual and physical abuse they were subjected to in these schools. Francis, without providing an explanation, declared himself unable to offer a personal apology.

Forward to today and the discovery of 215 unmarked graves of children at the Catholic operated, now defunct, residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. Once again Sinclair and Trudeau have appealed to Francis to offer an apology. At the same time, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, a noted advocate on behalf of Indigenous rights, particularly with regard to the oppression of Indigenous peoples in the Amazon basin, has pointed out that in keeping with a collegial protocol, Francis

is not free to offer an institutional apology until the Canadian Catholic Bishops Conference expresses an apology and then appeals to Francis to do the same.

As a Canadian Catholic, I hope that before the Indigenous delegation departs for Rome, that the Canadian bishops make a gesture of good faith and offer a national apology. Such a gesture would allow the pope to do likewise, thus facilitating a more trusting environment and encouraging a process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

JOSEPH A. FARDELLA

Kingston, Ontario

***

I am thankful that the leader of my country is admitting fault and committing to bringing forth justice and healing, but I don't think justice and healing can come without another leader following the prime minister's lead.

Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Methodist and Presbyterian churches were the major denominations involved in the administration of the residential school system, according to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Catholic Church was responsible for operating up to 60% of residential schools in Canada yet the Catholic Church is the only one that has not made a formal apology.

In 2008, the federal government, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, issued a formal apology for the damage done by the residential school system. And in 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau personally asked Pope Francis to apologize during a visit to the Vatican. But the pope did not apologize.

It's puzzling especially since the pope claims absolute authority in the Catholic Church and benefits from all the power and privilege that that supreme authority brings. Yet, when the church is called out for doing wrong, the pope doesn't take responsibility.

It's past time the pope takes responsibility for the atrocities committed by the Catholic Church. Justice will not be denied to the little ones any longer.

LORI P. DEXTER

Edmonton, Alberta

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts and ideas, reactions and responses to letters@ncronline.org. The editor will collect them, curate them and publish a sampling in Letters to the Editor online or in our print edition.

We cannot publish everything. We will do our best to represent the full range of letters received. Here are the rules:

- Letters to the editor should be submitted to letters@ncronline.org.
- Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.
- Letters must include your name, street address, city, state and zip code. We will publish your name and city, state, but not your full address.
- If the letter refers to a specific article published at ncronline.org, please send in the headline or the link of the article.

Please include a daytime telephone number where we can reach you. We will not publish your phone number. It may be used for verification.

We can't guarantee publication of all letters, but you can be assured that your submission will receive careful consideration.

Published letters may be edited for length and style.

This story appears in the **Your thoughts** feature series. View the full series.