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Bishop William McGrattan of Calgary, Alberta, vice president of the Canadian bishops' confere

Bishop William McGrattan of Calgary, Alberta, vice president of the Canadian bishops' conference, is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS photo/Michael Swan, The Catholic Register)

Michael Swan

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A national framework for a five-year, $30 million (US$23.5 million) fundraising campaign to help with healing and reconciliation of residential school survivors and their communities is coming in the new year, Bishop William McGrattan, vice president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, told The Catholic Register weekly.

Church officials hoped that plans for the campaign, first announced Sept. 27, would be complete by November, but getting the framework in place for a national diocese-by-diocese effort has turned out to be more complicated than first thought.

Bishop McGrattan said he hoped that in January or February, "announcements of details would be able to be shared with the public and with Catholics."

"We realize that it has taken longer than expected, but it's important that we do this right and that we make sure that it is both transparent and that it demonstrates accountability," Bishop McGrattan said.

"We've drawn upon the expertise of people in terms of governance — yes, fundraising and also legal — because we do have to make sure that these funds are received by a nonprofit and are directed to a nonprofit organization or initiative. There are a lot of details."

Extra care is being taken to ensure that mistakes made with the 2008-2014 "best efforts" campaign will not be repeated, an insider on the campaign organizing committee told The Catholic Register.

The organizing committee, made up of bishops, finance officers and fundraising experts from dioceses across the country, is focused on ensuring the campaign is consistent with the 94 Calls to Action that came out of the 2015 final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the source said.

That report said the removal of Indigenous children from their families over a century, when they were sent to residential schools, amounted to "cultural genocide." About 60% of the government schools were run by Catholic dioceses and religious orders.

In a September apology, the Canadian bishops acknowledged the residential school system "led to the suppression of Indigenous languages, culture and spirituality, failing to respect the rich history, traditions and wisdom of Indigenous peoples."

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"We acknowledge the grave abuses that were committed by some members of our Catholic community: physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural and sexual. We also sorrowfully acknowledge the historical and ongoing trauma and the legacy of suffering and challenges faced by Indigenous peoples that continue to this day," the bishops said.

Unlike the previous $25 million "best efforts" campaign that raised just $3.7 million, the CCCB commitment to raise $30 million over five years is absolute. If parishioners and donors fail to give the full amount, dioceses will make up the difference. Much of

the organizing effort has gone into ensuring that, while bishops can be held accountable for the money raised, they are not seen as directing or dictating how the funds are spent.

Dioceses or regions will form local committees of Indigenous leadership to consult with bishops on the disbursement of funds for Indigenous priorities.

At a Dec. 2 news conference, Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith said: "We've started the process here in the Archdiocese (of Edmonton) to reach out to Indigenous leaders, to help us to discern the needs that are in the community. Might there be some programming that exists already in the community that can be supported by the dollars that are raised?

"This is going to be unfolding over the next little while, but I think the key thing for us to keep in mind is that these efforts will be Indigenous discerned and Indigenous led," the archbishop said.

While the national campaign will be largely locally driven, larger dioceses with higher fundraising ceilings and less exposure to Indigenous communities may share some of the funds raised with smaller dioceses where Indigenous reconciliation needs are greater, a source told The Catholic Register.

In September, Graydon Nicholas, Mi'kmaq elder and former New Brunswick lieutenant general, told The Catholic Register the whole church, not just the bishops, had to take responsibility for the legacy of residential schools and the failures of past campaigns.

"I didn't hear too many priests from the pulpit or many bishops (during the failed best efforts campaign) saying, 'Hey, look this is something we're responsible for — this is something we have to do.'"

Rather than a mere financial commitment, Nicholas said the campaign must build lasting relationships between non-Indigenous Catholic parishioners and Indigenous communities.