NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Canada aboriginals receive pope's 'sorrow' for abuse

Francis X. Rocca Ron Csillag Religion News Service | Apr. 30, 2009

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI met aboriginal survivors of Canada's residential school system Wednesday, April 29, and voiced his "sorrow" over "deplorable" abuses in the church-run schools.

"Given the sufferings that some indigenous children experienced in the Canadian Residential School system, the Holy Father expressed his sorrow at the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some members of the Church and he offered his sympathy and prayerful solidarity," the Vatican said in a statement.

"His Holiness emphasized that acts of abuse cannot be tolerated in society."

Benedict privately received a delegation led by Phil Fontaine, grand chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and Archbishop James Weisgerber of Winnipeg, president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, after the pope's weekly public audience.

The private meeting resulted from more than two years of diplomatic efforts between native leaders and the Catholic Church.

For a century starting in the 1880s, the Canadian government and four churches ran some 130 residential schools. An estimated 150,000 aboriginal children were removed from their homes and forced to attend the schools in an attempt to assimilate them into the dominant white, Christian culture.

Students were prohibited from speaking their native languages and engaging in cultural or spiritual practices. Many were physically, emotionally and sexually abused.

The Presbyterian, Anglican and United churches had already apologized for their roles in the schools. The sole hold-out was the Catholic Church, which ran about 75 percent of the institutions. Last June, the Canadian government issued a historic apology.

"There was a feeling that despite the apologies that were offered by the oblates and some bishops, that the Catholic Church as a whole has not recognized the part that we played," Archbishop Weisgerber told the Canadian television network CTV following Wednesday's papal meeting.

"It was important to hear from the one person who does speak for the Catholic Church around the world, to hear him say `I am sorry,'" Weisgerber said.

Fontaine, himself a survivor of Canada's residential schools, acknowledged that the pope's statement did not amount to a formal apology, but told CBC News that he hoped it would "close the book" on the issue of apologies for residential school survivors.

"The fact that the word 'apology' was not used does not diminish this moment in any way," he said. "This experience gives me great comfort."

Source URL (retrieved on *08/30/2016 - 14:14*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/canada-aboriginals-receive-popes-sorrow-abuse