



Statement from Archbishop Marcel Damphousse
of the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall
on the Discovery of the Remains of 215 Children at
the Former Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia

"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

Matthew 2:18

Like many of you, I have been deeply disturbed and sorrowful over the enormously tragic discovery of the remains of the 215 children at the Indian Residential School on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation. The pain of this great tragedy has been expressed in the many recent ceremonies, memorials and tributes across Canada. It has touched all of us who desire a world in which all life flourishes -- especially the life of innocent children.

Let me say to the Indigenous peoples living within the Archdiocese: with an earnest heart, I have been praying for your consolation. This discovery has aggravated the pain of those who have already been touched by the many losses encountered through the Indian Residential School system. Through my ministry as bishop of Alexandria-Cornwall and of Sault Ste. Marie, and now as Archbishop of Ottawa-Cornwall, I have had the opportunity to meet many of you. Through these encounters, you have made me aware of the continued need for healing which is the result of historical forms of colonization which persist under new guises in the present day. Let us work together for true and lasting efforts to make real the reconciliation for which we all long.

Let me say to the members of the Roman Catholic Church in Ottawa-Cornwall, who have also expressed grief for the loss of these children: let us work together with our Indigenous brothers and sisters to ensure a future in which we all thrive. Their healing is also our healing since, as Pope Francis has said, we are all interconnected (cf. *Laudato si*, No. 240). Reconciliation, which is at the heart of our Christian faith, will give us all new life, setting us free from the fear that has kept us apart (cf. *Fratelli tutti*, No. 78). I encourage pastors and all the members of our parishes to create opportunities to become aware of the causes and the need for healing and reconciliation so desperately desired in this present time.

With prayers to the Creator and Christ his Son and through the intercession of St. Joseph, the Blessed Mother and St. Kateri Tekakwitha, may we follow the Spirit in our efforts to heal broken relationships, to build trust and to commit ourselves to truthful reconciliation with the first peoples of this land -- not only with our words but with our actions.

+ Marcel Damphousse
Archbishop of Ottawa-Cornwall