

Dear Members of St. Mary's and the Missions Parish,

The recent discoveries of children graves at the residential school in Kamloops, BC, have reopened old wounds, and filled our indigenous brothers and sisters with pain and sorrow. I join with all people of good faith in praying for all involved, especially the children. The question that has been on my mind is: "how do I respond, how should I respond, how would God want me to respond"? As I'm asking the question of proper response, it becomes clear to me that blaming and pointing fingers at each other is not helpful and does not bring reconciliation.

The sin of residential schools has been addressed in many ways and through many important initiatives over the last 30 years. Countless apologies have been offered by different leaders within our Catholic Church: Members of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop Crosby of our Diocese, Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton, Pope John Paul II(2000), Pope Benedict, Pope Francis, the list goes on and on. Commitment in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's efforts have been ongoing for 30 years, with the Catholic Church participating from the very beginning. This is important to know, especially since it is not being mentioned in the media during the last 2 weeks.

Regarding the events of recent days which prompted shoes being left at different Catholic Churches, I want to say that we are all hurting. I believe we must be careful to wait for the investigation to be completed before we join in the accusations which are being offered by many. There is still much that we don't know, and the investigators have said as much. Before we take responsibility for something we need to understand it more. We've had shoes left at our various Catholic churches, in one case with a letter incriminating the Church in evils that are not confirmed by the investigation at this point. I believe that solidarity with our Indigenous people is very important, especially through prayer and repentance for the sins of our brothers and sisters in the past, but we cannot heal injustice by engaging in another form of injustice. People have expressed that solidarity by placing shoes in front of their own homes, which I believe to be a very appropriate gesture. It is completely different, in my mind, to place the shoes in front of someone else's house, as it is no longer a memorial of solidarity and prayer, but much more a tactic of pointing fingers and blaming. This is not the way.

Hurt and suffering from the past is not easily resolved, and wounds take a long time to heal. We pray with St. Francis: "Lord, make me a channel of your peace". Let us continue to pray for healing, truth, and reconciliation.

In Jesus, Fr. Kuzma