

A Statement by Archbishop John Privett, Metropolitan of the Anglican Church in BC and Yukon, to the Regional Event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, April 14, 2012

I am privileged to send this message to you this morning and offer my apologies for not being here in person. A friend and colleague died this week in Kelowna and I have returned this morning to attend his funeral and be with his family.

I acknowledge that we gather at this time on the traditional territory of the Esquimalt and Songhees people and am grateful to have been present to bear witness to those who have shared their experiences with us. I am also grateful for the presence of four of my colleagues: Bishop James Cowan of this Diocese, Bishop Michael Ingham of New Westminster, Bishop Barbara Andrews of the Anglican Parishes of the Central Interior – formerly the Diocese of Cariboo - and Bishop Mark MacDonald, our National Anglican Indigenous Bishop.

I have been present since Thursday and have had the opportunity to read much of the TRC report “They Came for the Children” which was released last December. I have also had the opportunity to visit displays, hear the personal stories of several people during the commissioner’s sharing panel and to attend the town hall meeting yesterday.

I have been deeply moved by the experiences that have been shared and the accounts that have been written about the history of residential schools in this country. When I was a young boy growing up in Yukon I remember visiting the Chooutla residential school at Carcross. I remember a large imposing building that reminded me of the hospital in Whitehorse. It must have been a standard government design! I met many of those students later as classmates at high school in Whitehorse. I also met many of the staff of the schools. As a young person, I thought that the residential schools were a way for aboriginal people to receive a good education. I have been learning, however, how much of a failure they were. It is as if, for me, a great curtain is being pulled back on the legacy of the schools. They were meant to be a place of learning and they often failed to be so. They were meant to be a place of safety and they often failed to be so. They were meant to be a sign of Christian love and they often failed to be so. They separated families, they left children without the love of parents and parents longing for

their children, they tried to destroy traditional culture and they have left a legacy of suffering and pain. I have been learning and our church has been learning. And we have much more to learn.

I have been shocked, saddened, and shamed by this legacy and the part our church has played in it. I echo the words of our Primate in 1993 when on behalf of our whole church he presented to the National Native Convocation in Minaki, Ontario our apology. I am deeply sorry for the suffering that our church has caused.

The curtain is being drawn back for members of our church and for Canadians in general. The work of the TRC is a critically important work for our country. I admire the Commissioners, the elders, the staff and the leaders in the work that they are doing. The telling of the stories of the legacy of relationships between aboriginal peoples and the settler peoples is essential in the writing of the history of Canada. I deeply respect and honour the survivors of the schools who have come forward with great courage to share their experiences. I am grateful to the work of our archivists who are bringing to light the stories of those who no longer have a voice.

It is my prayer that this time of truth telling will begin the journey toward a new chapter for our church and for our country. As we tell the stories, as we draw back the curtain, we are laying the foundation for healing and for new relationships of respect, dignity and understanding – for reconciliation. That work is always God's work and it will unfold in God's time.

Our church is committed to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and more than that, we are committed to seeking healing and reconciliation. I am personally committed to this work and will work with other church leaders in this movement that is underway. We have much to learn and it is my prayer that as we continue this journey, the Spirit will lead us along a new path where we come to respect the dignity of every human being made in the image of the One who has created each one of us and who cherishes the whole creation.

Thank you for the privilege of this time together.