

“We as a Nation suffer as much today as when it happened. One hundred years. It will last forever. Hope to see you when you come to Canada. Healing will come from you, our Holy Father.”

– Louis Bellrose

This powerful artwork was designed to acknowledge, highlight, and share Métis residential school survivor experiences in collaboration with respected Métis Elder Angie Crerar, Author Jude D. Daniels, Canadian artist Lewis Lavoie, Métis community, Rupertsland Institute, and Werklund School of Education. Mural image inspired by Métis Artist Samantha Pratt

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LORD HEAR OUR PRAYER

We invite you, Creator, to sit with us and guide our discussions so we may be understood as we tell our story in prayer. Lord, provide us with direction and inspiration as we build a road of peace and hope for the Métis Nation and the Catholic Church.

Creator, we pray that we can move forward in forgiveness and reconciliation. That the hurts of the past may be healed through the common good for all. Lord give us **all** the strength to do what is right in our journeys forward.

As in Ephesians, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. {LET US} Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave. Oh Lord, Let our eyes look straight ahead; fix our gaze directly before you to help in guiding a path to forgiveness.

God our creator, give us the wisdom to make good choices and rational decisions which affect our nation today and always.

We pray for the children that our communities lost to residential schools, the children who were found in unmarked graves and those that are yet to be found.

We thank you Lord for this special day and helping us to think about the future of our children and grandchildren. We pray that the same harms are not cast upon them. And that they may grow into loving, patient and forgiving souls.

We pray for those in our communities that struggle as a result of the harms they experienced. That they may find strength in this move towards reconciliation.

Lord, help to strengthen our families and communities through a stronger, and understanding relationship between the Holy Father and Our Nation.

We pray, creator, for the Holy father and the Catholic church. That you may help them in the days and months that come, to practice reconciliation and love for our community.

As the bible teaches us, that they, be of good courage, and let the Holy Father be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God. Let the holy father, take courage! Do not let his hands be weak, for his work shall be rewarded.

We shall pray for the Holy Father; to be strong, and we shall let our heart's take courage.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

HI HI

Emile Janvier

Residential School Survivor

Li Saent Paap kiiya li Boon Jheu kaa niikaaniishtamwut. Payaakwun ka ishi niikaaniishtamun chi taapwayhtamihk L'igliiz Catholic. Manito gii ooshiihikoonaan, li Boon Jheu, nutr Kriiyaateur. Niiya kiniipowiishtaatin pi wiishtaa Manito li Boon Jheu chi itwayshtamwaakik nutr Naasyoon lii Michif, li moond kaa tipaymishooyaahk Manito li Boon Jheu ka kii ooshiikooyaahk. Niiyaanaan li Boon Jheu gii miikoonaan nutr Naasyoon pi miina la tayr iita kaa wiikiiyaahk aashpinay Manito kaa ooshikooyaahk, taapishkoot payaakwun wiiya Manito, li Boon Jheu kaa waapahtayikooyaahk wiiya.

Holy Father, you are the representative of God. You lead in a distinct way of believing in the Catholic Church. We are a creation of Manito, God, our creator, and I stand before you and God to represent our Métis Nation, a distinct people of God. We are a god given people of the land; a special people created in the image of God.

Ooma li taan kaa miyiyaahk namooya aakooyikoohk li taan induhk chi payhtawiiyaahk chi achimooyaahk nutr histwayr kaa ishi mishaak. Avik li Boon Jheu chi wiichihikooyaahk ji swayt ooma kaa itwayaahk chi payhtamun shoohki pi klayr, pi l'igliiz pi li moond aanchyii. Ooma la paarchii l'histwayr kischi chi achimoohk.

The time provided will never be enough to hear the full story. With Gods help I hope our message is heard loud and clear to you, the church, and the world. This part of history must be told.

Gii mishkaynaan lii mil di foos iita lii z'ikol, l'igliiz kaa kii ooshihtaata chi nipaahaatahk pimaatshiwin nutr zaanfaan. Manito, li Boon Jheu kaa kii miyaat, l'isprii chi taakoohnaahkik li Boon Jheu, Manito ooshchi. Kii kimootamaakoonaanik ooshchi kaa shookishiyaahk iita ooshi kaa ooshchiyaahk. Kaahkiyow ki mooshihtaanaan ka kii tootaamihk chi nipaayikooyaahk pi miina paakaan chi pimitshahamaahk, namooya kiiyaanaan kaatipayhtamaahk.

We are finding thousands of unmarked graves at the institutions the church created to take the Indian out of the child. It's the spirits of the children that were stolen from us that keep us strong through the effects of intergenerational trauma that was caused by genocide and forced assimilation

Ooma kishchi nutr vayritii, namooya poor aniki kaa atooshkaychik daan l'igliiz miina pikoo l'igliiz, maaka ooma li pleu aenportaan chi kishchii itwayhk kaa kii ishpayihk iita lii zaanfaan ka kii pakinikaashochik pi li lway d'igliiz kaa piikoonikaatayki.

This is our truth, not about the clergy or the church, but about what happened to our children as a result of breaking the laws of the church.

Aniki ka machitootaahkik namooya kii pimitshaahamwaak lii lway di Boon Jheu, Mantio pi lii komaandmaan pi chi kishinahaamaakayhk pi ka kii niikaan waapahtayiwaychik sa praan la koonfesyoon pi li paardoon chi natootaamaakaychik iita kaa kii tahkamikuhk sur la tayr kaa kii ishpayihk. Oomishiishi piko kiikaywin ka kaaskitaawuk chi piikishkwaatuhkik la pinitaans l'igliiz chi tootaahk ka kii piikoonuhk pi ka kitimaahaata. Aykooshiishi pikoo l'absoolisyoon ka aashtew chi mishkakhkik.

The perpetrators were not following the ways of God and the commandments and teachings and what they represented. A confession and apology on the land where it took place is what must occur. The church's penance will be to repair what has been damaged and only then will there be absolution.

Kaa shookishshiyaahk daan nutr Naasyoon di Michif ki waapahtayiwaanaan taapitow pi aykwaanima kischi kaa pimaatshiikooyaahk kayaash pi anoosh. Awiyyuk kaa noochihish chi pimitshaahamun paahkaan awiyyuk pimaatishiwin pi miina nipahtaakaywin namooya miyaashin chi atooshkaatayhk pi namaakaway li keur.

Our strength in our Métis Nation is distinct and keeps us resilient to this day. Transitioning in forced assimilation and genocide doesn't work and is callous.

Taapitow niyaanaan lii Michif gii naakatwaymaanaan pi gii waahkoomaanaan li Boon Jheu, Manito, aashpinay ka kii ooshiikooyaahk. Nishtum kayaa kwaayesh kaa kii piihtikwaayikooyaahkook daan l'igliiz. Taapitow gii ayaawaanaan li Boon Jheu, nutr Manito, nutr Kriiyaateur. L'igliizh ki mashinaahamaakoonaan kiiyaanaan lii Michif kwaayesh chi aashtaahk. Aansaamb, mamawii ka kiikaanaan maaka niikaan chi itwayayk taapwaywin. Maarsii, Mantio, Li Boon Jheu ditwan

We were always mindful in our relationship with God before the forceful ways of the church. We've always had God, our Manito, our creator. The Church owes us, the Metis Nation reparation. Together we can begin healing after you tell the truth.

Maarsii, thank you

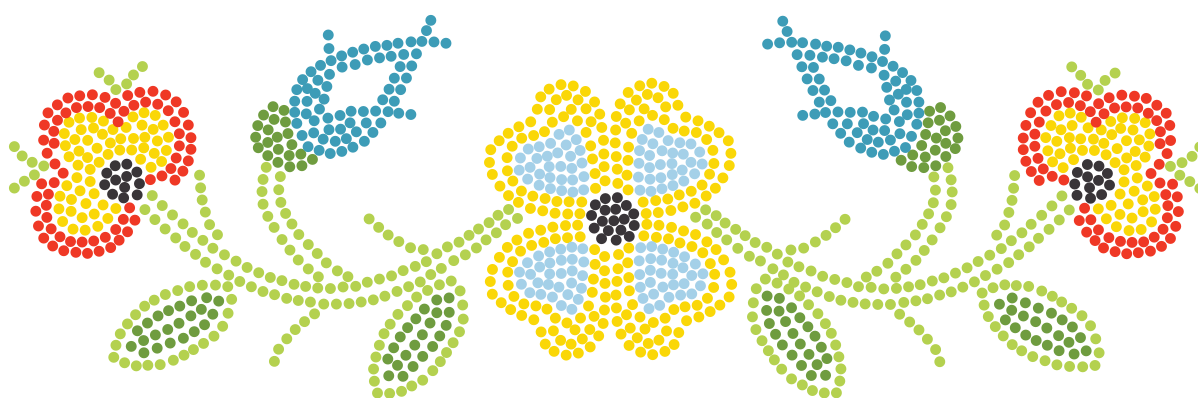


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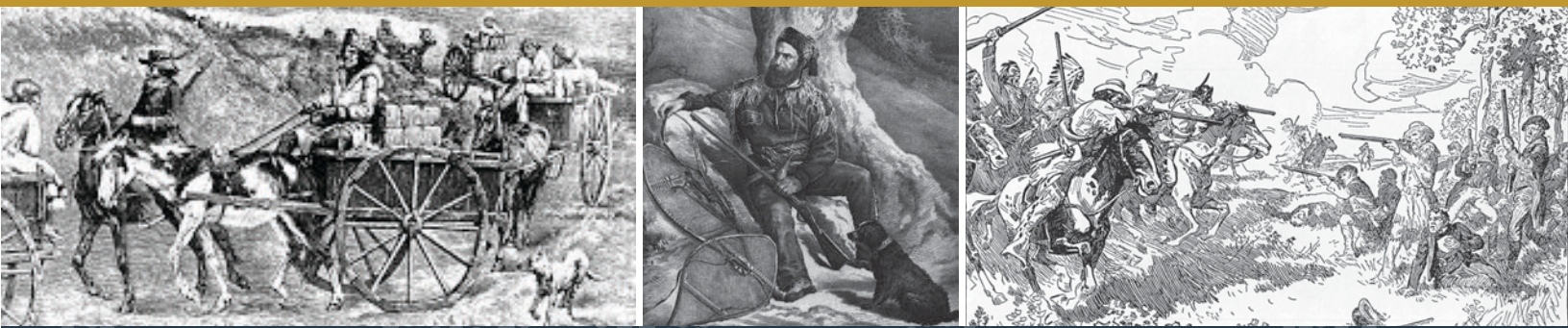
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WHO ARE THE MÉTIS?

The Métis are a distinct Indigenous People in Canada who, in addition to their mixed First Nations and European ancestry, developed their own unique customs, languages, spiritualities, way of life, and socio-political identity.

The birth, or ethnogenesis, of the Métis people dates to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Successive generations of marriages between mixed-heritage children, born of unions between European men and First Nations women facilitated through the North American fur trade, led to the formation of new and distinct communities, whose citizens were no longer identifiably European or First Nations, but rather something entirely new and unique—and were recognized as such by their European and First Nations neighbours alike.

Tracing the routes of the fur trade, historic rights-bearing Métis communities formed throughout the Upper Great Lakes, across the Plains, and into north-eastern British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. Through extensive kinship ties and the development of a collective political consciousness, these distinct communities collectively formed the Métis Nation and asserted their inherent rights to self-government and self-determination throughout their traditional territory—the Métis Nation Homeland.

The Métis way of life has always been intrinsically connected with the land and with the unique circumstances of the ethnogenesis through which a distinct Métis culture emerged from the coming together of First Nations and European peoples. Métis spirituality, for example, can be seen as a unique blending of European and First Nation traditions, but is best understood as existing on a continuum with Christianity (especially Catholicism) on one end, traditional First Nations spirituality on the other, and a blend of both in the centre.

While successive generations of racist and colonial attitudes and malicious campaigns designed to strip Métis of their traditional lands, eradicate their culture and spirituality, and dismantle their collective identity—including the land scrip system, settler violence, burning of Métis villages, mandatory Residential and Day School attendance, and imposed food insecurity—forced many Métis to integrate into non-Indigenous communities, relocate to outside the Homeland, and become disconnected from their Métis customs and belief systems, over the last century, the Métis Nation has reorganized and reasserted its rights to self-government, self-determination, and substantive equity within Canadian society.

Throughout the Métis Nation Homeland, Métis have organized and established democratic Métis governments at the local, regional, and national levels. Many of these governments have enshrined space for diverse voices and perspectives, including those of youth, women, veterans, Elders and

members of the 2SLGBTQQA+ community. By tirelessly advocating for their citizens' inherent rights and interests, many Métis governments have become fully recognized by the Government of Canada and are now entering a process of jurisdictional transfer in diverse socioeconomic areas ranging from health to education to poverty reduction and environmental stewardship.

Still, though, many Métis Residential School Survivors and families of survivors have yet to tell their truths regarding their experiences at Residential, Industrial, Day Schools, Boarding Schools and Convents—many of which were funded and/or managed by religious institutions, including the Catholic Church. Métis Survivors were largely left out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process and were almost completely excluded from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement due to legal actions by the Church and government which sought to limit the number of claimants. This exclusion led to the re-victimization of Métis Survivors and created new pain for Métis communities, which many continue to grapple with today.

The dark chapter of Métis Residential Schools attendance is one that needs to be told—for those who remain unaware of this important truth and for the healing of Métis people. Concerted effort, appropriate funding, and unfettered access to relevant Residential School and Church records are required for the Métis Nation and its Survivors to finally begin addressing the intergenerational impact that this distressing legacy has had on Métis families and communities, and to achieve meaningful and lasting Truth, Reconciliation, Justice and Healing.



STORIES



About a boy...

*The Forgotten People
Part 3*

After the interviews in Grouard, Alberta was completed, I spent some time photographing St. Bernard Catholic church, the residential school, which is now a store, and the boys' residence. The town was quiet, almost eerie, as I focused on everything except the heavy silence that enclosed me. It was a sweltering summer day that failed to entice anyone outdoors, so I was surprised to see a young boy out riding his bike along the road.

He was wearing a dirt bike helmet, much too big for his head, and it bobbed back and forth to the rhythm of his pedaling legs. He didn't seem to have a particular destination in mind, only the simplicity of freedom a child his age has for adventure.

He rode closer to me with a curious apprehension, and I waved at him. He took my gesture as an invitation and came towards me, hitting the brakes, stopping abruptly, while his tires skidded to a halt creating a cloud of dust that consumed the air around us.

He got off his bike, swung his leg around in one fluid motion, and set the kickstand in place. He took off his dirt bike helmet to reveal a dirty face and a toothless grin that beamed with pride as he gently put his helmet down.

His keen big brown eyes stared up at me, sparkling with interest that held my gaze as I smiled back at him. I knew he wondered about me as much as I did him and introduced myself.

He told me his name was Stephen, and he was seven years old, explaining to me he and his older brother Michael were out riding bikes. As Michael rode towards us, I quickly realized their family had probably noticed me well before I even knew they were there.

The boys, excited to have a new captive audience, were eager to share stories of their life to me. They described their daily adventures, where their family lived, and some areas of interest that provided me with knowledge about the small town.

After catching up like cousins who hadn't seen each other in a while, Stephen's attention went to the camera I had slung over my neck. I saw his interest and asked if he wanted to look at it. His face lit up, and I put the strap around his neck, letting him know it was a bit heavy. He told me not to worry and explained that he was a very hard-working boy with big muscles to hold the camera. He brought the camera to his eye and looked through the viewfinder, looked up at me then back, instantly in awe of how different everything looked through a new lens. I showed him how to take a photograph, and Stephen snapped away with a big grin on his face.

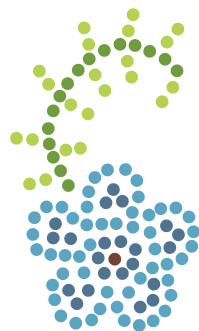
Once he finished, it was Michael's turn. They asked what I was doing with the camera, and I briefly explained to them that I was working on a residential school project called the Forgotten People when suddenly, their smiles fell from their faces. The boys looked at each other with silent words, and Michael began to tell me about his Moshum and Kokum, who had attended several residential schools. His words pulled us back in time to memories that took place right where we stood.

We looked towards the church steps as the boys talked about people from the community placing kids' shoes to represent the remains of the 215 missing children in Kamloops, B.C. We left the bikes behind and walked over. Stephen slowly walked up the steps, pausing to show me some of the shoes. When he got up to the top, he sat down.

I looked up at him for a moment, pondering his life, and wondered what his ancestors must have endured for him to be there. I thought of my own children and I honestly could not comprehend the instant pain that engulfed me as I thought of the countless children who disappeared at residential schools, their deaths hidden away in unmarked graves. The thousands of children who didn't return home and their families never to see them again. So many lost generations. So much suffering.

In the short amount of time I spent with Stephen, I quickly realized he is loved. He is a child unbending in his joy for life, unbeknownst of the surrounding chaos of an outside world that can't seem to accept him for the color of his skin.

I walked up the steps and sat down beside him. I asked Stephen if he was ok as he sat with his silence. He turned his head to me and said, "I'm ok; I'm just sitting with the kids who didn't get to go home..."





Ready to talk...

The Forgotten People
Melvin Whitford
Part 1

After a 4-hour drive from Edmonton, I turned off the highway at the sign to Grouard, Alberta. I was there to document interviews of two survivors who, as children, attended the residential school. As the speed limit changed to 50km, I rolled my window down, feeling thankful for the fresh country air while I weaved my hand in and out to meet the wind.

My senses were on high alert, and I surrendered to nature's orchestra of sounds. The birds, unaware of those who listened, filled the airwaves with their songs. The leaves danced in unison with the warm breeze while the fishermen sat at the bridge smoking cigarettes, waiting for their luck to change.

I was unsure where I was going until I saw a chain-link fence covered in brightly colored orange ribbons and knew I had arrived. The Church was up ahead, and I made a right-hand turn into the driveway towards the graveyard to meet Melvin and his family. I drove in slowly, looking around, taking in the sites of buildings I had seen in photographs while doing my research. Suddenly an unexpected heaviness of emotion rose, threatening to expose an onset of unshed tears. I thought to myself, keep it together; this is not your time to cry.

I arrived, exchanging pleasantries about the weather and travels as I unloaded my camera gear from the car. I had met Melvin and his family at their home in Kikino Metis settlement a few weeks prior, and our connection was instant. At that time, we agreed to meet again in Grouard to take a photo of him and listen.

This was the first time Melvin had been back to the residential school he called home for 13 years. He was only three years old when he was taken from his family home in Kikino. He was transported along with three other siblings to St. Bernard Indian residential school, 381 km away.

We set off to find a bit of shade for the interview, and I was keenly aware of the silence that followed us. It seemed to me, everything in nature held their breath while Melvin walked around the graves, pausing to search for names etched in crumbling stone.

When he sat down, he sighed with relief and told me he was ready. I looked at Melvin, and I saw a strong man who had been strong far too long, and for the first time in his life, he was ready to talk.

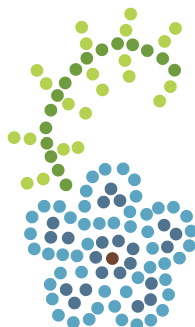
Melvin shared with me memories of what it was like to grow up at St. Bernard residential school. He was forced from his family, his culture, and his language and talked about being beaten while he was there. He remembered boys going missing from the residence, never to be seen again and pointed to the window at the top right corner of the building. One night, he couldn't sleep, so he got up and looked out the window. To his surprise he saw flickering lights guiding the nun's way out to the graveyard as they carried something they didn't return with. He shared with me how quickly he forgot he had a mother or father. Melvin talked and talked until he couldn't anymore. He looked down at his hands and paused, stopping to gain his composure, stumbling on his words as he whispered, I'm sorry, I cannot continue. I nodded, and shut the camera off.

I started to pack up, and his grandson Beau, came over to lend him some of his strength. We walked back together, lost in our thoughts, for no words could be said.

We said our goodbyes, and I let Melvin's wife Sandra know, I would check up on them to see how Melvin was doing.

Forever connected, we made promises to stay in touch.

I watched them drive away and loaded everything back in the car. I sat down in the driver's seat, placing my hands on the steering wheel, and I cried...





Tell your story...

The Forgotten People
Louis Bellrose
Part 2

After a good cry, I made my way to a hotel in Slave Lake, where I stayed the night. The sun was going down as I hit the highway, and I realized the birds didn't seem to sing as loudly as they did when I drove into town. I looked around and noticed the leaves stopped dancing, and the wind was still. Maybe it was my mood, or maybe, just maybe, mother nature had heard Melvin's story too...

The next day, I drove back to Grouard to listen to another survivor. We agreed to meet at the bridge just before town. I got out of my car, stretched, and noticed the number of fishermen out that day.

There is something so peaceful about fishing on a hot summer day. Lines cast lazily over the edge of the bridge, mesmerizing ripples of water glistening under a kaleidoscope of colors beneath the sun's light.

I smiled to myself, thinking of all the memories this spot must hold. The excitement of a child's first catch, celebrations, disappointments, and stories swapped about the 'one' that got away.

I looked around and searched for the familiarity of a stranger I was about to hold space for. I must have looked out of place because when Louis got out of his car, he instantly knew who I was and waved.

We chatted a bit and agreed the activity on the bridge would be a distraction, especially for a fisherman like him. It wasn't a place we could talk, and we decided to meet at St. Bernard's church.

We arrived and found some shade, hoping the noise of the nearby quads and lawnmowers would settle. Louis started the interview off by sharing a bit of his family history. He had a contagious smile, but after a while, his smile disappeared. I got a sense that perhaps, even though he had shared his residential experiences before, this was going to be a tough day for him, and it hurt my heart.

Louis attended St. Bernard Residential School from the age of seven to eleven. He lived in the area and walked three miles to the school and back every day. He told me even though he was a residential day school kid, he was treated just as severely as the children who lived on site.

Louis told me he felt the priest and nuns had absolute control over the children and took everything they were all born to be away. Instead of learning how to read and write, Louis was hit, kicked, and sexually abused. He was exposed to lessons from the nuns no child should ever learn. His innocence and thoughts of what love meant were stolen and altered. Louis quietly told me, "It's hard to take that kind of abuse and find love after that."

One day while attending class, Louis must have done something the nun thought was wrong. Holding onto a thick book, she raised it above her head, threatening to strike down on him. This particular nun used to hit everyone over the head with her books, and for some reason, this time, he had enough and stopped her from hitting him. She ran and told the priest, and he knew what was coming next. While running down the hallway to the stairs, he could feel the priest behind him. Louis reached the second step and felt something hit the back of his head, not knowing it was the priest kicking him. Louis fell down the stairs, lost consciousness, and woke up to the priest putting snow on his face. He struggled to get up and was told to stay down. Louis pushed him aside, got up, and walked the three miles to his home. Louis didn't stay in school much longer after that.

At the age of fifteen years old, Louis started to drink. He was an angry young man and decided he needed something to help him forget what was done to him. When Louis drank, he admitted he was mean and fought everyone that got in his way. Pain and suffering had a way of taking over, and hurt turned into anger. Louis confessed it was because of the trauma he suffered at the Residential school but stated it was still his choice and eventually learned to take responsibility and make positive changes in his life.

While we took a break, I reflected on what Louis had shared with me. I realized we all stumble in life pretending to be ok, but we aren't. For some, shame silences us, and our memories that aren't diluted by self-destructive tools wait to be heard.

We protect and keep our deepest pain, storing them safely on the inside, convincing ourselves, the bad memories will go away, but like most things that sit below the surface, will rise in one way or another.

If and when we are ready to share our stories, we can release the horror of what happened from our body and mind. We have all experienced being afraid of vulnerability, the feelings that terrorize us, preventing the baring of one's soul to a world of stone-throwers who look out from their glasshouses.

We need to realize that when we talk about the things that scare us the most, we connect through stories and compassion. Thus, freeing ourselves of our suffering and the agony of something or someone that has us in its hold.

I shook my head of my thoughts as Louis ended the interview with some last words.

"They want us to hide what happened to us, to pay us off with a few bucks. Tell everyone your story of what happened to you."



Photo taken of the gravesite beside what used to be the St. John's Mission residential school in Wabasca Alberta.

Joseph

I wrote this story after I listened to Joseph's daughter share some of her memories of what her father shared with her of his residential school experience and of her own experience with him.

There was a hard knock on the door and they all looked at each other, dreading this moment. The government and the church had come to take the children and the families had no choice but to let them go. The First nations and Metis were considered savages and it was decided by the government, the children needed to be taken away. Take away to be converted by the church and integrated into a civilized Canadian society.

Joseph was the oldest boy and at the age of 5 years old, he was already built strong and tall for his age. Joseph had dark kind eyes and a quick sense of humor and possessed a true love of hunting and riding horses.

They opened the door and the bright light spilled into the room, highlighting the dark shadows their figures made. Fear filled the little boys' heart as he tried so hard to be brave but once he saw the panic in his mother's eyes, he ran to her. They grabbed him from her hold and he screamed and kicked at them as they took him away. He was forced out of his home with his mother's cries being the last thing he heard.

When he arrived on the doorsteps of St. John's Mission Wabasca Residential School in 1928, he had nothing but the clothes on his back. Joseph was greeted by a stern and angry looking woman. She was dressed in a full-length black dress with a gold cross hanging loosely around her neck. She looked down on him and he was instantly terrified of her. She grabbed him by the ear and painfully twisted it as she ushered him inside the building. "Go clean yourself, she said as she pushed him forward giving him the harsh lye soap. Scrub your skin, your dirty, you're a dirty Indian. God doesn't like the color of your skin so wash it until you take all that filthy brown off". He had no idea what she said but somehow, he was filled with shame.

Once he was finished, he was given someone else's clothes to put on, they were itchy and smelled funny and the pants were much too short. Joseph was then taken into another room, and was made to sit down on a wooden chair. His whole body was shaking and even though he tried to stay brave as his mother would have wanted him to, he couldn't stop the tears that mixed in with the hair that fell down around his feet.

Joseph was directed into a common area, which was a larger room filled with kids like him of various ages. With his hand touching where his hair used to be, he sheepishly walked in trying to be invisible. A creak of a loose floorboard, betrayed him and announced his arrival and prompted the other children to look his way. They looked so sad and heartbroken and he wondered if he looked the same to. He started to panic when an older boy walked up to him. He looked around terrified, but relief flooded him as he was met with a grin. The older boy motioned for him to follow him. He led him to a quiet corner where he whispered to him in their own language words of advice. He told him they were never allowed to speak in their language because they were there to learn English and the white people's way because God thought they were savages. If they spoke Cree, they would be severely punished and that was just the start of it. As the older boy continued, Joseph shook his head; he had no understanding of what was happening to him or why. He didn't understand the world of the new language or why he was there. All he knew was, he wanted to go home.

That first night haunted him for the rest of his life. The cries and the screams that echoed with the wind, closed in on him. His little hands covered his ears to drown out the noise. Little did he know, in the years to come, he would later be another child adding his own voice to the screams heard throughout.

The days started early with a routine of repeated hard labour and classes. The rules were strict and punishment was sharp and fierce.

As the days and months went by, Joseph quickly learned more than just a new language from what they called the civilized world. He learned about trauma and suffering, he learned abuse, shame and even death.

Children of all ages were dying around him. Food was scarce and there was never enough to go around, and being hungry was now a constant way of life. There were multiple outbreaks of tuberculosis as well as Small pox. Luckily, he wasn't infected but if you could have asked him, he would have told you the children who died were the lucky ones.

There was a graveyard out back, that grew in size over the years. Children lay eternally in the ground marked by crosses, just like the ones the sisters wore around their necks.

One day he had the courage to ask one of the older kids why screams could be heard every night coming from a room in the cellar? The older boy explained to him, one by one they were taken to what everyone called 'the torcher room'. He explained, children were beaten, raped and when the young girls had babies, they disappeared as soon as they were born.

Three weeks after Joseph arrived, two boys ran away, and as quickly as they fled, they were brought back and made examples of. That night they were stripped down naked in front of everyone and beaten so badly, no one dared to ever leave again.

The church did not want the children and families to come in contact with each other for fear of the children resorting back to their savage ways. The only time contact was allowed was once a year at Christmas time. The children were allowed two days away. If the parents could come and pick them up but if they weren't returned in the two days, they would be put in jail. Two days was never enough so parents didn't come.

On the weekends there were no classes and after the Saturday morning chores were done, the kids would race across the school yard to peer through the fence that held them captive. There across the road was a general store and the children would stand silent for hours hoping they would catch a glimpse of their parents going in.

One day, one beautiful and glorious day, Joseph saw his mother out of the corner of his eye coming out of the store. She was walking in haste, her long hair blowing in the wind. He had been waiting months for this day and there she was still as beautiful as the last time he had seen her. He wanted her to notice him and he saw her looking over, but there were so many of them waiting and they all blended together. He knew he couldn't shout out to her, or there would be severe consequences. He walked along the fence line, taking faster steps trying to get her attention but she never looked back again and disappeared down the road.

9 years later Joseph Beaver was allowed to leave and return to his home in Sandy Lake. He served the mandatory time allocated by the government and church and was given his freedom. Freedom, what did that even mean? He may have been able to leave that place but he was never free again. How does a young man of 14 years of age begin to integrate his broken heart and spirit back into a culture that had been stripped away? How was he supposed to begin again? Joseph lost so much of who he was and his family's connection. He had been taught for 9 years to hate the color of his skin and the shame and humiliation he carried within his dark shadows lasted a lifetime and he disappeared into himself. He was stuck between two ways of life never knowing who he was.

Everything he should have been was stripped away and he never lived one single day as he should have. Joseph only existed and walked the remainder of his life a silenced man...



Mary

Mary sat down at her table and could hear the infectious laughter of her granddaughter enter the kitchen before she walked in. Her sweet little face looked up at her with a toothless grin as she sat down for a snack of warm bannock and blueberry jam. Mary smiled to herself, her granddaughter was starting her first day of school in a few days and the thought brought back so many memories for Mary of her first day, so long ago. As she ate, Mary's allowed herself to remember that day...

Mary was 6 years old and it was her first day of school. She was uneasy about the day and wondered if she would make any friends or learn the new language her sister told her about. She tilted her head looking up at her older sister with an anxious grin on her face. She slid her tiny hand into hers and found comfort in the small gesture as it set her mind at ease knowing she wouldn't have to face the day alone. All her life she spoke Cree, and now a different language was being forced on her and she didn't understand why. Mary's sister knew she was nervous so the day before, she decided to teach her an English word to start preparing her for school. They took turns practicing and it had taken Mary an entire day to learn how to say it. Hello...

They started off on their mile-long journey as the cool morning breeze gently played hide and seek with the fallen leaves that covered their path. Summer was saying goodbye as Mary skipped ahead imagining a new world filled with endless possibilities. She swung her tin lunch bucket carelessly back and forth kicking rocks with her rubber boots stopping along the way to pick a few of the last remaining berries of the season to ease the hunger in her belly. As Mary continued, a sense of sadness overcame her. She stood for a moment and realized she wished her mom was the one walking alongside of her. She didn't remember much of her anymore, it had been 3 years since the man who had claimed to have loved

her, shot and killed her. For the longest time, Mary didn't know what death meant and waited by the window for her to wake up and come back home.

After her mom died, life fell apart for all of them. There was no one to care for the 10 children and they were scattered around, given to whoever would take them in. Luckily, she and her sister went to a kind family from Imperial Mills. They taught them the ways of their life, living off the land and how to survive in the bush. They learned about making bannock, picking berries and how to preserve them as well as fishing, hunting and trapping. Life was hard and she was often hungry, but she will always be thankful to the elders who gave her a second chance at a real home.

Mary's sister ran up to her and grabbed her hand just as she was about to cross the train tracks. There around the corner stood the old one-room schoolhouse. Little did she know, this day would forever leave its mark in her memory. She glanced up at her sister once more and took a deep breath and ran her hands down her dress, smoothing out the wrinkles of her first-day school clothes. Her family was very poor and the 'new' clothes she had on were handed down to her from her older sisters but that didn't matter, they were new to her and she was thankful for them.

Mary walked into the schoolhouse as the floorboards creaked under her weight and an old musty smell welcomed her in. There in the middle of the room was a wood stove surrounded by two rows of perfectly aligned wooden desks. On each desk, was a newly sharpened yellow pencil along with a scribbler for each student to use. At the front of the classroom was a large chalkboard behind a desk that contained a few stacked books. She continued to look around unsure of herself or where to go when she saw a lady at the front of the class. At that moment, her eyes widened. Mary thought to herself, she was the most beautiful lady she had ever seen. Her skin was as fair as fair could be and her hair, golden in color, was pulled back into a neat and tidy bun. Miss Diesel looked down at her and Mary shyly said in English, hello and was rewarded with a smile. Mary beamed with pride as she took her seat.

As the students found their seats, younger children at the front and older ones towards the back, Miss Diesel began the lessons. Mary looked around confused and wondered if she was the only one who didn't understand what was being said. Miss Diesel was speaking to them in English and the language was so foreign and confusing to her. She spoke quickly and tapped her ruler on the chalkboard at every letter but Mary had no idea what was being said and looked around again suddenly feeling very small hoping she wouldn't be called on or noticed.

As the morning went on, Mary realized she had to relieve herself but didn't know how to ask for permission and held it in. The only English word she knew was hello and struggled with how to ask in English if she could use the outhouse. When it started to get worse, she sat on her hands and swung her feet anxiously back and forth while tears of frustration threatened to reveal themselves. Mary raised her hand and asked in Cree to use the outhouse. Miss Diesel didn't understand and quickly dismissed Mary. She looked around panicking but couldn't hold it anymore and made a mess down her legs onto the floor beneath her desk. Mary felt the blood rush to her face and couldn't stop the flow of tears that gave way as she ran out of the school. She was completely humiliated and so hurt and ran as fast as she could all the way home without stopping. When she got there, she threw herself on her bed and cried. Her sister arrived soon after and quietly held her until the tears stopped.

Mary did not want to ever experience the shame she felt that first day again and so she made it her priority to practice at home with her older sister every night.



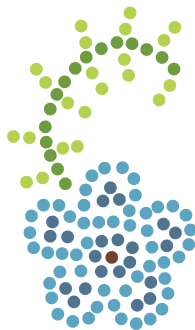
"May I use the outhouse, was the next set of words she learned".

To ensure the students were making an effort in learning and speaking the English language, Miss Diesel randomly invited the students to stand up in front of the class to read out loud. In her way, she ensured, shame was the key motivation to learning and therefore if a student couldn't ask a question in English, she ignored them until they could. Miss Diesel was a lovely teacher until she wasn't and like the other students, Mary learned the strict discipline style that was often used especially when they spoke Cree. Sometimes it was the strap, other times, the ruler or a smack with the sole of an old shoe on the back of the head. Regardless, no one was exempt from that learning experience either.

Days turned into weeks and seasons gave way to change, her humiliation of what happened on that first day of school started to subside and she shifted her focus on learning as much English as she possibly could. She was never going to feel that way again. At the end of each school day, Mary ran as quickly as she could out of that musty old one-room schoolhouse back to her home where she was free to be herself again. Free to run wild in nature surrounded by her language, culture and a family who loved her.

Looking back at her life was very painful at times and she didn't often allow herself to go back there. She was taken away from her family from Imperial Mills at the age of 9 years old and life was never the same after that. She suffered greatly in the years since that first day of school but she walked with courage and she's proud to have kept her language and she still speaks Cree every chance she gets. The government tried their best to wipe out her culture and language, they made it their mission to 'kill the Indian in the child', and they taught them to feel shame for who they are and how they lived. Mary refused to feel that shame; she is and always will be a strong and proud Metis woman.

Mary was startled out of her thoughts and turned back to her granddaughter; her heart filled with so much love as she wiped the blueberry jam from the corner of her smile. She has her whole life ahead of her, to live as she should live and to be anything she wants, the sacrifices Mary made in her life to be able to give that to her granddaughter was everything and if you asked her, she wouldn't change a thing...



Poem: My face, my race

*Written By: Arliss Hedquist
Submitted by: Elder Doreen Bergum*

Father, you're no respecter of persons
You know me by my name
Why am I here before you
With no face, my race, a shame?

You've accepted me in the Beloved
You meet me in places of prayer
But within the great congregation
My face, my race, is not there.

You've invited me into your presence
Gathered me to your great throne
Even here with saints all around me
My face, my race, is unknown.

You've sent my ministry to others
Praying grace into hearts of stone
I stand forlorn at the close of day
My face, my race, hauntingly alone.

Listen to me my chosen, my love
What you look for you cannot see
The beautiful countenance created within
Your face, your race, reflects back for me.

Hear me now my sent out one
Understand that from places of prayer
My child you're standing behind your face
Your face, your race, brightly shines everywhere.

Come closer to me handmaiden of God
You cannot gaze upon your own face
It's to others this beautiful gift has been given
Your face, your race is my gift of grace.



Angie's Message to the Pope

On February 29-1880, a letter from Bishop Grandin posted in the Saskatchewan Herald to the Canadian Government was the beginning of a step toward a relationship with the aboriginal people.

The letter of the bishop clearly stated to the Government If you brought us one hundred Indians and Half-Breed children to the convent Mission. When they leave our convent, they would no longer be Indian, they would become good citizens earn a good living and be useful to their country.

So it began, as across Canada from coast-to-coast children were literally taken from their families. A new chapter in their lives began, suddenly you are with strange faces, different colored hair and skin, they speak a different language, the dress is different, and their voices are loud and demanding.

The opening of the Residential Schools started the most Tragic, Destructive, and separation of the Native People. Crying for the loss of our values and culture, which left a legacy of loss on so many levels.

- ∞ Loss of Family
- ∞ Loss of Community
- ∞ Loss of Language
- ∞ Loss of Culture
- ∞ Loss of Sacred Teachings
- ∞ Most important: Loss of Identity

This was our destiny for over a hundred and fifty years.

The Mental Abuse of trying to convince you the way to salvation was to accept their way of life.

We were punished severely if you talked back, missed prayer time, wet the bed or did not do your chores on time. You were slapped across the face, beat with a stick or belt almost every day. The words, you had to remember!



Saint Joseph's Mission at Fort Resolution, showing students dressed for a hospital play. Angie is dressed as the nun. SPRA 2009.17.13.



"Yes Sister!!... I will Obey Sister!"

The beatings, many were left disfigured, the threats kept us in line, learning to keep our mouths shut. To endure quietly the anger and rage building up within us.

The most terrifying were the night invasions, both in the girls and boys' dormitories. Those who professed to be there for the love of God, took advantage of their positions by sexually abusing the very children they called savages. Those who were going to teach us a better way of life.

When your innocence is stripped from you, when your people are run down and ridiculed, when your family is denounced, your cultural and sacred ceremonies are told they are primitive and savage, you start believing you are no longer human.

Your former life no longer exists. The sense of helplessness, no hope and forever living with the memories of those years behind closed doors.

Can you imagine how devastating it was for us, coming from devoted loving parents and community, a safe, carefree and happy child, to walk into a cold, unfeeling, unknown life. Being Beaten, threatened, neglected and abused with no one to turn to, talk to and no where to go. So, we learned to endure, to kiss away the tears and talked away the Fears.

“No one cared we were only children”.



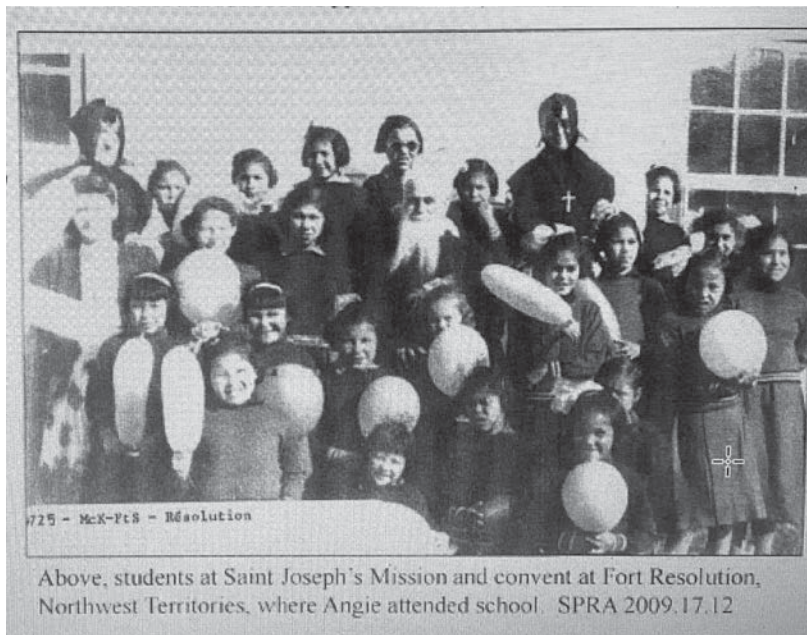
I hope and pray that someday we will all learn to forgive each other. That the government, our Catholic church and our Aboriginal people will work together to build a relationship.



“And to never, ever forget what we went through, the life we endured, and the memory of those children will be part of our destiny forever”.

Angie Crerar

Metis Local 1990- Grande Prairie, Alberta Canada



November 29, 2021

Your Holiness, Pope Francis

My name is Chantel Jeannette Sparklingeyes, maiden name Chantel Jeannette Boucher, and I am a proud 33-year-old Metis woman from Alberta Canada. I am a mother to three beautiful First Nations and Metis blood children, I am a member of Region One of the Metis Nation of Alberta and come from a long line of strong Metis peoples. My Kokum, Grandmother in Cree, comes from the Cardinal clan of Metis people and my Mosum, Grandfather in Cree, comes from the Boucher clan of Metis people. In my family, we have a long line of Residential School History that has devastated and harmed us for many generations. Although I was not in a school of torture that we, as Indigenous people, know as the Indian Residential School System, I still live and feel the legacy of deep harmful impacts that these schools left in Canada.

Although there are hundreds of deep impacts that I am working to break free from, I have chosen to only write to you about the biggest impact, the disruption and destruction of Love for Metis and all Indigenous peoples in Canada. This has, without a doubt been the biggest impact that I can see and feel within my family, and this is the one thing that I am proud to say is that I am breaking this negative cycle that Residential Schools has given my family, and hundreds of thousands of other Metis and Indigenous families.

To begin my story of changing the history that I was born into, I must go back to the beginning of what I know as my family history in the shameful time in Canadian History. I know that on my Kokum's side of my family there are many generations who were raised in and victims of residential schools. My great-great Grandmother was raised in residential school, so she was raised with corporal punishment, physical abuse, slave labour, malnutrition, and so much more. She then raised her children and grandchildren in that manner. My great grandmother died in child labour when my Kokum was 8 years old, so she was raised by her grandmother. My Kokum did not ever have loving parent in her life and was raised in a very strict cold way because this is all her grandmother knew. My Kokum attended a day school in Owl River Alberta but only ever received a grade 3 education because she was being hit from the nuns who taught her. Her Grandfather never let her go back after she left the school and walked home alone after being strapped.

Physical punishment was a typical way to correct children for many generations in our family but no love in the form of hugs, kisses, security, positive reinforcement, words of love was typical. And this is a direct result of many generations being raised in the cold and cruel environments that Residential schools were. How can my and my mothers' generations of Metis women know how to love if we were never shown how from the generations before us? How can those generations know how to love if they were ripped away from their families and parents for years to be raised with all forms of abuse and lack of love or healthy affection in anyway? How can abused and broken children grow into healthy adults and good parents if they were never taught that? And that is the legacy I inherited because of residential schools. This is a deep shame for all parties involved in this dark history, including the Catholic Church.

My Kokum did not know how to be sensitive or show emotions for a very long time which disrupts the way mothers' bond with their children. This disruption of attachment and love trickled down to my mother and then down to me. I also must point out that all the best professionals in the fields of child development and attachment in the world today say that children MUST get this to give this later in life. Everything we go through as children directly relate to the adults and parents we grow to be until we learn different. I am learning different, but I should never have had to.

My mother did not have a good secure attachment with my Kokum for many years which led to her and I not having the connection and attachment that I needed as a child. I was not raised in a home where we hugged, kissed, shared good words, gave acknowledgement when I was learning new things, and I was not told I love you everyday. I know that my mother and my Kokum loved me, but they did not know how to express it in any way until I was a young woman. This is how I began to parent my own children when I became a mother. I am ashamed of this. It was when I began learning the dark and hurtful history that my family carries did I then make the connection of why I felt uncomfortable being affectionate to my children, or why it felt awkward when my mother tried to hug me, or why it was weird to see my mother and Kokum expressing love to each other. As I began to recognize the Intergenerational impact of residential schools within my own family, I was able to identify it in MANY Metis and Indigenous families that I know.

Today, I am the first-generation cycle breaker of many different cycles of dysfunction that residential schools have stained Canada and its Indigenous peoples with. This includes the most important cycle to break and that is the disconnection to love. Metis and Indigenous people are the embodiment of love. Our culture and way of being in life is centered in love. This is what religion is supposed to represent also, but how can what was done to babies and children be anything of love when it literally ripped love from the hearts of children and their families? I am bringing that love back. Everyday I tell my children I love them, I kiss them, I hug them, I support them, I share everything that I am as love with them. Will you help bring this back by acknowledging the hurt? Will you support the love that I have in my heart for all children by owning this history that we inherited? We did not create this, but we can fix it together with love in the center of it. In the true spirit of reconciliation, I pray that you find this love in your heart as I have in mine, and I pray for the love and wellbeing for all humans as I know you do too.

All my best to you in good faith, Your Holiness.

Chantel Sparklingeyes



Metis Intergenerational Residential School Survivor

December 1, 2021

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Vatican City, Italy

Your Holiness,

Let me start off with saying Thank you. Thank you for making the time to meet with the Métis Nation Delegation to discuss the ongoing affects of the Residential School System in Canada. Thank you for reading the letters sent to you by Métis Residential School Survivors. I am pleased that our Leaders have been able to make this meeting happen.

My name is Francis Dumais and I am 88 years old and I live In Bonnyville, Alberta. I attended the Blue Quills Residential School. After all these years it is difficult to remember all of the details. My parents sent me to Blue Quills to be educated so that I would have a good future. During my time at Residential School, I did not learn. I attended Mass and I worked. Blue Quills was a very successful farm and I spent the majority of my time there working. I would also serve Mass. I witnessed and experienced abuse at Residential School. I recall at times working in the field until very late at night and coming in after the work was done for the day and being denied a meal and being sent straight to bed. I witnessed another young boy getting his face rubbed in his own urine soaked sheets. This boy wet his bed very often and suffered because of it. I ran away from Blue Quills three times while I was there. My parents always sent me back. I couldn't explain to them what was going on there. I was too young and too scared. My parents thought that they were doing a good thing and thought I was just homesick. The final straw came when a supervisor at the school hit me with the thick end of a pool cue on my behind. I fell to the floor and thought I was done for. I was finally able to get up and decided then that I would run away for good. I left Blue Quills with two other boys, one from Cold Lake First Nation and one from Kehewin First Nation. I swore them to secrecy, as I wasn't going home this time. I decided to walk to a farm my father had worked on near Derwent, AB. The walk was approximately 85km to the farm. The boys and I stayed overnight near the junction where they would go north, and I would go south. I made it to the farm and the farmer took me in and gave me a job. There were three boys on the farm, and we all worked together. I had a roof over my head, a warm place to sleep and good food. I was there about three weeks or so before the farmer asked me if my parents knew where I was. I was honest and said they didn't. He didn't get angry, he just said we need to let them know as they are probably worried. I don't remember how he contacted them, but some time later they showed up with the team of horses to take me home. My parents didn't make me go back to school after that. They told me that the Government said that Métis Children were no longer allowed at the school, the schools were only for Treaty Children. I did eventually tell them the things that happened there. I had a good childhood and my parents provided and brought me and my siblings up in a good home. This did not stop me from becoming a drunk. I drank for many years, and I know now that it was because of the abuses I endured and witnessed when I attended Blue Quills Residential School. One day I woke up and decided it was time to quit drinking. I thank God the Creator that he watched over me in those dark days and that HE still does today.

My parents were Catholic, and I was baptized in the Catholic Church. I also was taught First Nations spirituality by my First Nation Family. A lot of what I learned as a Catholic is very similar to First Nations spirituality. One of the Spiritual Practices that I was taught was the Pipe Ceremony, this is a prayer ceremony. During this Ceremony we pray in Cree to the Creator. These prayers are very similar to the ones I learned in the Catholic Church. I believe we all need to respect each other and understand that the Creator and God are the same.

When the news of the 215 Children's bodies were found at the Kamloops Residential School, I was not surprised. We all knew that children were dying in these awful places. However, it is still horrifying to know that some were buried in mass graves and a lot were unaccounted for. Girls were having babies born of rape. Why did these terrible things happen? It was the devil doing his evil work in these places, not God the Creator. The Families of these Children need to be able to bury their Children and have Ceremony. They need this Peace.

Alongside our First Nation Cousins, we the Métis endured years of abuse and hardship attending residential schools. We lost so much, our language, culture, loss of identity and childhood innocence. The impacts of residential schools continue to be felt by our young people. There is a lot a talk about Reconciliation, I believe there needs to be "Reconcili ACTION". Some examples of this ACTION could be, providing funding for Intergenerational Trauma Healing, repatriation of the bodies of these children to bring them home, providing the records of all the children who attended Residential Schools. We need these records so that families can heal.

Finally, I ask you, Your Holiness for your Prayers. Prayers for Peace, for forgiveness and for good health.

May God Bless you and keep you.

Sincerely yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Francis Dumais".

Francis Dumais
Métis Elder
Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 2

His Holiness Pope Francis,

I write to you today as a plea to acknowledge the involvement and wrongdoings of the Catholic Institution regarding the residential school system.

I am a practicing Catholic and proud Métis woman in Ontario, Canada.

I have much to learn about my Métis heritage, and only last year learned of the shocking treatment of my ancestors at residential schools. It broke my heart and tainted my relationship with the Catholic Church to hear of this, at a time when I wanted to be excited about baptizing my firstborn son when he was six months old.



“You baptized your son? Aren’t you Métis? Haven’t you heard about residential schools?”

These are the judgements I received as people learned of the baptism of my Métis son, the same year that the world was learning of the thousands of deaths resulting from the horrific treatment of Aboriginal peoples in residential schools at the hands of the Catholic Church.

I was embarrassed. I felt that I needed to explain my reasoning for baptizing my son and defend my relationship with God, while being unsure of that relationship myself.

The judgements I received made me question everything about who I am. I feel like my core beliefs contradict each other. I thought, I cannot possibly be Catholic and Métis at the same time. I wondered if I could reverse my son’s baptism. I grieved for my future children that may not have the same relationship with God that I do.

Métis Nation of Ontario President, Margaret Froh, acknowledged my devastation during a meeting regarding the upcoming trip of our representatives to the Vatican. She made a comment similar to the follow that I will carry with me forever:

“Your relationship with God is too precious to let it be affected by the Institution.”



As a Catholic woman struggling with her relationship with God and unsure of how to raise my children in the Catholic Church, I ask you to take responsibility for the involvement of the Institution in residential schools. I ask for a public apology to my people. I ask for compensation to residential school survivors.

I ask of this from you in hopes for reconciliation between the Catholic Church and Aboriginal peoples, and to help mend my own relationship with the Catholic Church.

Miigwetch
Thank you

Amanda Ferguson

December 4th, 2021

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City

Dear, Your Holiness

I am writing to you today to share and tell you about the experiences of fellow friends of my mother who experienced colonization and trauma in the residential school system. I am acknowledging that I am on the traditional territory of the Historic Mattawa-Ottawa River Metis Community and many Indigenous Nations who share this land.

A good and long-time friend of my mother's, who was taken from her community in Northern Ontario at an unknown young age and put into residential school system for many years. She endured many traumatic experiences of sexual, mental, emotional and physical abuse from the catholic priests and nuns. She shared stories of being severely beaten by a priest because of trying still speak her own language and also being hit on hand for not following the rules set by the nuns.

Also, she had shared a story of being forced to watch her close friends being violently beaten and abused because of the culture they were connected to.

Later in her life, she became a severe alcoholic and having a stroke at early age in life due to the trauma from the residential school system.

Before I conclude, I will share the experience of former MNO citizen who I had the pleasure of knowing and who shared her experience in residential day school and witnessed that a young girl at was put into the electric chair by the priests for being too Indian. After, the girl returned to the classroom, she was shaking and urinating while trying to listen to the teacher aka the nun.

In conclusion, I ask that you to sincerely consider and think deeply about the ongoing effects of trauma and intergenerational trauma that has been passed down due the policies of the colonial governments and the church as well. What if this was you? How would you feel? And what are your intentions to truly reconcile with Indigenous People.

Sincerely,

Ish Van Der Rassel

Citizen of the Metis Nation of Ontario

December 6, 2021

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City, Italy

Your Holiness,

My name is Louis Bellrose, I am eighty – five years old and live in High Prairie, Alberta, Canada. I attended St. Bernard Residential School from the age of seven to twelve. I lived in the area and walked three miles to the school and back every day. Even though I was a residential day school kid, the nuns and Priest treated us just as severely as they did the children who lived on site.

Instead of learning how to read and write, I was hit, kicked, mentally, emotionally, and sexually abused. I was exposed to lessons from the nuns no child should ever learn. My innocence and thoughts of what love meant were stolen and altered. It's hard to take that kind of abuse and find love after that.

We weren't allowed to speak our language, and if we did, a Nun would hit us with a strap. We were forced to eat our lunch outside, even in the cold weather. The priest and nuns had complete control over us and tried to remove all aspects of who Métis people are, and they did this through shame and humiliation. We were made to feel less than human.

One day while attending class, I must have done something the nun thought was wrong because the next thing I knew, she grabbed a thick book and raised it above her head, threatening to strike it down on me. This particular nun used to hit everyone over the head with her books, and for some reason, this time, I had enough and stopped her from hitting me. She left to tell the priest, and I knew what was coming next, so I ran to the back of the classroom as it was the quickest way to the stairs to get outside. I could hear the other kids yelling for me to run.

While running down the hallway to the stairs, I could feel the priest behind me. I reached the second step and felt something hit the back of my head, not knowing it was the priest kicking me. I fell down the stairs and lost consciousness. When I woke up, the priest was putting snow on my head. I struggled to get up and was told to stay down. I pushed him aside, got up, and walked the three miles home. I didn't stay in school much longer after that.

At the age of fifteen years old, I started to drink. I was an angry young man and decided I needed something to help me forget what was done to me. When I drank, I was mean and fought everyone that got in my way. Pain and suffering had a way of taking over my life and hurt turned into anger. I know now it was because of the trauma I suffered while I attended the Residential school. I eventually learned to take responsibility for my actions and make positive changes in my life. I have been sober for 20 years now.

They want us to hide what happened to us, to pay us off with a few dollars. I want to tell my story for those who can no longer speak.

Louis Bellrose

High Prairie
Alberta, Canada
Métis Nation of Alberta – Region 5

December 05, 2021

Dear Pope Francis:

Impact: residential school and intergenerational traumas.

Tansi/Hello my name is Maxine Desjarlais I am a First Nations woman, I reside in Lloydminster, I have four children and seven grandchildren. I was raised by a residential school survivor her name was Christina Emma Desjarlais and her maiden name was Quinney. She was raised at the St Barnabus School in Onion Lake First Nations. I began my journey looking into my mother's upbringing, when I participated in a university project about "Indigenous Women Health Stories" and this is an excerpt from the story: "I am 52-year-old Aboriginal women, and I had my first opportunity to visit the place where my mother was raised. It is crazy to think that it took me so long to see the place; I only live 30 minutes from the location. My mother grew up in a residential school and I had no idea where it was located. I was so ignorant of the way my mother grew up. She would only share a few stories about her childhood. One story she shared "I went to the residential school with my mom, they took me in gave me a bath and changed my clothes. When I came out my mom was still sitting there so I told her I am ready to go now, I didn't realize that I had to stay, I thought I was only going there to get cleaned up." My mom would have been approximately four years old. I cannot imagine the thoughts that went through my grandmother's mind, she had no choice but to leave her sweet daughter there. The sadness, fear and grief must have been

overwhelming and heart breaking. My mother must have been so traumatized the first night she had to stay there and no chance of seeing her mother for a very long time. What a shock for a young 4-year-old to be placed in the hands of strangers. She must have thought what is wrong with me. Why isn't my mother coming back to get me?

I grieve for my mom the losses that have never been spoken about, the loss of nurturing (hugs, kisses, conversations) dresses, hair combing, bath times, family times together, sibling ties, birthdays, celebrations, and traditions. The loss of culture, identity, and language. My mom would not have been seen as someone special, someone to be taken care of with love and compassion."

In retrospect I have seen the detrimental impact of residential schools and its destructive force on the families. My mom did the best that she knew how to raise her family and I am forever grateful for her resiliency and strength to survive such a system.

The traumas that were faced by residential survivors were passed on to their children and grandchildren. **Emotional detachment**, the children were not allowed to express their emotions they were silenced.

Therefore, the residential school survivors did not know how to teach their children to express emotion or the proper way to nurture their children. This left a disconnect between the parents and their children which caused a loss of belonging and ever child needs to feel they belong, and this was lost due to residential school upbringing. **Corporal punishment** was used in the schools, strappings, beatings, name calling (dirty Indians), and they were also sexually abused, therefore, the survivors disciplined and abused their children the same way. This caused residential school survivors' children a lot of emotional pain and trauma, and the children would turn to alcohol and drugs to help cope. **Loss of sibling ties** in the schools, the children were not allowed to talk

with their siblings, the siblings did not get to really know each other; they would not even know what food their brother liked or their favourite color. Due to loss of sibling's ties, there was a loss of extended family, the children and grandchildren would not really get to know their own relatives because of the disconnect between family members in the residential schools. **Loss of language**, the children at the residential schools were not allowed to speak their language if they did, they were severely punished. Due to this there was a loss of language, and the next generations would not know their own language. Language makes people unique, when a person speaks their language, you know where they came from (community/tribe), their culture and identifies their ancestry. A lot of the residential survivors and their children **lost the sense of community** and felt they no longer belonged when they returned home. Before, residential schools in the communities there was harmony everyone knew their roles, due to residential school their roles were lost. Now there is a lot of lateral violence which creates disharmony between families because they don't know how to communicate with each other due to loss of protocols.

For the thousands of children (survivors) that experienced abuse, traumas, death, and loss of identity at the residential schools. I am asking you Pope Francis to acknowledge and apologize for what happened at the Canadian Residential Schools that were overseen by the Roman Catholic Church.

Sincerely,



Maxine Desjarlais

December 6, 2021

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City, Italy

Your Holiness,

My name is Melvin Whitford and I am seventy-eight years old. I live in Kikino Métis settlement in Alberta, Canada.

June 6th, 1943, during the great war, an Indian agent and a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer showed up at my family home in Kikino Métis Settlement in Alberta, Canada. Along with three of my siblings, I was forced from our home and transported to St. Bernard Indian residential school, 381 km away, where I lived for thirteen years. I was only three years old.

When I got there, they put me into a nursery; then, as I got older, I was moved to a dormitory with the older boys. During the 13 years I lived there, I was abused and punished for my culture, the color of my skin, and for speaking the only language I knew how to speak.

I lost my childhood memories and forgot I had a mom and dad; I forgot I had a family who loved me.

I grew up without love, without the care of my mother and father. I didn't learn the teachings of my ancestors. After being gone for thirteen years, I finally returned home; but I didn't fit in with my family or community. I was a stranger, and so were they. I couldn't communicate with them because I had lost my language. I didn't belong anywhere. I was lost.

Until a few months ago, I had never spoken about what I had suffered while there. My voice had been silenced by shame. I think back to the memories I want to forget, and over the years, I have tried, but they haunt me. As painful as it is to share them, people need to know what happened. Our silence was bought, and that is why I have decided to start sharing what I have gone through with others, so these memories are not lost.

A few months ago, I went back to St. Bernard Indian Residential school after being away for over 60 years. I walked through the graveyard among the crumbling stones, searching for names I might have recognized. I looked up at the boy's residence, where I stayed, and allowed myself to remember what I desperately tried to forget.

We were fenced in, confined and couldn't get out of the yard. We were watched to make sure no one crossed the line. We had no say in how we were being treated, I had welches on my body from being beaten. We were only children and they were so cruel to us.

I remember one night, I couldn't sleep and got up. I noticed flickering lights outside of the window. The nuns were walking in a procession towards the graveyard, carrying something they didn't return with. After that, I noticed the kids went missing from the residence, never to be seen again. I was one of the lucky ones, I got out alive.

I try to forgive what had been done to me and so many others, but when I allow myself to think back, the angrier I get. It's hard. My life, the one I should have lived, was taken from me at three years old. I have suffered in silence and have had to be strong for too long. It's been a burden to carry these memories. As I learn to talk about what I went through, I know that, at the age of seventy-eight, I will not be silent anymore.

Melvin Whitford
Kikino Métis Settlement
Alberta, Canada
Metis Nation of Alberta – Region 1



4 Dec 2021

Dear Holy Father:

My mother's mother was lucky enough to avoid the Residential Schools in her childhood. Some of her cousins were not so lucky. Since my Métis grandmother, Doris, was the youngest in her family she learned from her family and cousins that when the "Man from the government" came around the school, she was to say that she was French. Her name was Doris McFarling. Her father had moved the family to the towns east of Sault Ste Marie, Ontario for work in the lumber mills. The town they moved to was primarily French speaking.

What my grandmother learned was to hide her Métis heritage, to take on another language as a shield against the "Man from the government". She learned to deny herself, her heritage.

Doris eventually married a man with the last name Desjardins. She gave birth to seven children in the 1940's and 1950's. My grandparents told their kids that if the "Man from the government" ever came to their school, that they were to say that they were French.

My own mother, Jeannine, spoke a lot about her grandfather, James McFarling. James moved all around Georgian Bay and the North Channel following employment, as many of the Métis men were taken to do in those days. James was a widower and lived his last months with his youngest daughter, her husband and children, telling them stories, and demonstrating games of skill and strength that he would have learned in the camps.

My uncles would show me these games and tests of strength when I young. It wasn't until I was in my 30's, attending a Métis cultural awareness event in Sault Ste Marie that I was struck by the sudden awareness that the games my uncles taught me were Métis games. James, Doris, Jeannine and I suppressed our cultural heritage for fear of being separated from our families.

We, all these generations, grew up with a strong and devout faith life, even though it was the Catholic Church that played a part in separating some of the cousins from their families. For us, the practice of the faith was an element that enhanced the family bond.

It wasn't until I was in my 40's, now an ordained Permanent Deacon working as a counselor in the schools in Sudbury, that I began to realize a profound distrust of myself by the First Nation students and their parents. Many of them were directly affected by the Residential Schools. The trauma is generational.

In my own small way, in my school community, the more I rediscovered and embraced my own Métis heritage and culture, the more I was accepted and trusted by the Indigenous students and their families.

I know that you have championed the cause of the Indigenous people in Argentina. I hope that you will further support the Indigenous peoples of Canada as we seek to have the Truth be made known to all and move towards Reconciliation so that we may all live in peace as children of the one Creator.

With hope in my heart and prayers for You,

Deacon Steven Callaghan p.d.

Diocese of Sault Ste Marie

Senator for the PCMNO (Provisional Council of the Métis Nation of Ontario)

Delegate Interviews

The following transcripts correspond with video interviews conducted with the official Métis National Council delegation who attended the private audience on March 28th, 2022. These conversations were recorded prior to the private audience to ensure each delegate was provided with an opportunity to have their voices heard due to the limited amount of time allotted to share stories and perspectives with Pope Francis during the private audience.



DELEGATE INTERVIEWS

Elder Angie Crerar
Métis Nation Alberta

Good Evening. My name is Angie Crerar. I-I m Métis, Local 9090 of Grand Prairie. And Also a survivor of 10 years. I have a story that I wanna share with you.

On June 11, 2008, Minister Stephen Harper made a statement of apology to former students at residential schools to publicly acknowledge that a grave mistake was made. This was a step forward to Canada's relationship with the Aboriginal People.

Opening of the residential schools started the most tragic, destructive and separation of the Native People, creating loss at so many levels: loss of family, loss of community, loss of language, loss of culture, loss of sacred teachings. Most important of all was loss of identity.

This was our destiny for over 150 years and we were only children. With many children buried in unmarked graves with no identity across our country, we will never know the whole story or have closure to this tragedy.

Many have been able to finally let the walls of silence break and tell their stories. Hearing so many speak their truth that gave me the courage to tell my story. How can I express my feelings of pain, neglect of my past, and what I've lived through and buried for so many years.

I was only eight years old. My sister was five and the youngest child was three. We asked--walked into a different life. We were so lost. How do you explain that to a child who once lived a happy life and then they are put in a cold, uncaring, brutal lifestyle.

Flashbacks of so many years of silence, memories of being alone, no one to turn to and nowhere to go. Memories of physical, mentally and sexual abuse leaving many of our children deeply scarred, hurt and emotionally lost and wounded. Help us! But no hope.

Why were we there and treated us so cruelly? What did we ever do wrong? Where are our children, our parents, our friends? What is happening to our home?

The pain I still feel, thinking back. Last words of my mother were: please look after your sisters. To this day I still have the feeling in my heart that I failed. I came out of the school at 17, unprepared to meet the challenges of the real world.

Yes, my journey has been hard and challenging. I wanted a better life for my children and how was I to do, with no education, no skills and facing a divorce.

There was no life for us in Yellowknife, so I moved to Grand Prairie in 1966 and it turned out to be the best decision of my ever life. And I made it. So happy for the rest of my life.

My husband, Doug, with unconditional love was always there to pick me up when I weakened. He was my heart. My children who are my world and we beat it all, altogether. We did meet the missions that had predicted for us. And my sister, Rita, was always there for me. Love you, my Sis.

For many years I lived with my guilt that I should have been aware of what was happening to the same girls. I was ignorant to the need, to the corruption happening behind closed doors in the night.

I am no longer the lost child searching, reaching for love and acceptance. Sixty years later I live before you, a woman of my regret, a devoted wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. I have worked so very hard and long to achieve my dreams and vision and my job is still going.

I hope and I pray that some day we will learn to forgive each other. With the government and the Catholic Church and the Pope and our Aboriginal People we'll work together to build a strong relationship between all of us.

I hope and pray and leave you with this thought. Be kind to each other. Respect each others values and traditional ways. Let love rule your day. My name is Angie Crerar. I am Métis. I love you and I am a survivor.
(end)



Elder Ann Lafleur
Métis Nation

It is with great honour that I am given the opportunity to meet with you. For me it's a trip of a lifetime. It has been a dream for me to see you in person. My name is Antoinette Caisse Lafleur. I am a survivor of the boarding school Île-à-la-Crosse.

I went into the school in 1948, barely five years old. For me it was a culture shock and it was totally different for a child to have that experience. I'm fortunate to have the opportunity to take this trip. Today, I am here to promote who we are and to be able to be heard internationally and show that as Aboriginal People we are thriving and being proud of who we are; our culture and traditions.

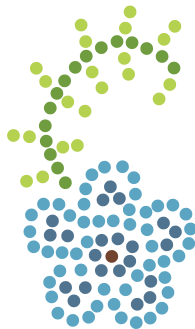
My journey has been a long and difficult one. Our childhood experiences, my childhood experiences was the most difficult time of my life. I carried this to my adult life which prevented my quality time with my children who were waiting for me to heal myself and I deprived them of good parental guidance.

It has been a difficult time when I started. But with the guidance of my recovery, with my friends and the church where I work I got a lot of help from our Bishop Murray and our Pastor here in (Bovale) and other friends.

Till today they had helped me overcome some of my bad experiences in the boarding school where I attended for ten years. It was not always bad. I know that we had those bad experiences but there was also good times where we were taught some life skills that we continue to use in our daily lives today.

We tell our stories for closure. And one day all people will know what happened. They have taken our dignity but our spirits are still alive. We just have to learn from these experiences and move on. We still hear a lot of discrimination in society, but we have to leave something for our children, a legacy they can all be proud of.

Because the past has given us a lot of pain, but it doesn't have to control our future. Thank you.
(end)



Pixie Wells

Métis Nation British Columbia

Taanishi. (Métis language) Pixie Wells. Hello, my name is Pixie Wells. I stand here today to bring the voice of the Métis, the voice of the forget-me-not. I bring to you the voice and ask you to do what needs to be done to bring truth to the Nations. We must know our stolen children. We must know our lost children. We must heal our survivors.

Through the years over 130 residential institutions that over 150,000 children attended. Of the children that attended, Métis were some of those children. These schools spread right across the Nation. The biggest residential institution to date, from my understanding, is in Kamloops, BC.

We need to know the names of the stolen children and the taken and the survivors of the institutions and the day schools, which removed some of their families far away from each other. To reconnect those families I think the Holy See needs to come to Canada and Pope Francis and bring an apology, but also bring the documentation to bring those lost children home, the stolen children and the names of survivors which names have been changed as we know them today.

Through the genocide and assimilation much was lost in our culture and the matriarchal societies and our traditional people, like our healers, the two spirited people - our cultures were lost. Why I say "forget me not."

Again I ask you to look, when you come to Canada, at a place that will be rightfully the place to send that apology to all survivors and the Three Nations together. Not knowing which area that might be, knowing that there were approximately 20 residential schools in each province, I think we should ask the survivors, Pope Francis, the survivors of where they would like that apology to take place. As we know, for the Métis people there are many places within the Métis Nation where our Métis people and children went to school. So I ask you to take a long look at where this might be and ask that the survivors of where they feel is the best place for the Pope to visit.

I also stand here with the voice of Métis BC. I also stand here as a two spirited individual. As I've said, through assimilation, through genocide those cultural teachings of the lost children, I call them. Two-spirited people were healers, knowledge keepers and our matriarchal societies which were torn apart by the institutions and by genocide and assimilation. We must bring those forces back as our children, they need these voices. Our culture needs these voices. We need to heal.

So I ask the Pope, when you come please bring with you the opportunity to heal. Working together, walking together in this endeavour of to truth and reconciliation. We must have the truth. We must know the truth and we must have the files before reconciliation and apologies can begin.

So I ask you to please, when you come to Canada, bring the records and help us restore that matriarchal society and take away the trauma that was caused by the residential institutions and bring our people to truth and reconciliation and healing as we move forward. And we ask the Church and we ask the Holy

See to help provide trauma informed centres. Financial costs to these, yes; however, I feel that these are the best way to move forward, working within the confinements of both of our institutions and working together to make them work. And I think together we can actually do that. And I believe that walking together for our children and for our children's children - seven generations ahead and seven generations behind - to bring the culture back to its existence and where we were as peoples.

I ask you to ask the government also to take part in this, as they also need to help engage this engagement of to truth and reconciliation trauma informed centres that can help our survivors heal and their families heal from many years of harm.

As I stand in front of you today and I ask you to forget us not, forget me not. As we move forward in truth and reconciliation, I ask that you come humbly and in good faith with the things that the nations are asking of you or asking of the Holy See.

As I stand here today as a two-spirited individual, and I hold them highly in regard and I ask you, please help us bring back the voices of our people that were lost, the lost children, and awaken our nation. I ask you, (Métis language) Miigwetch, merci.
(end)



Mitch Case
Métis Nation

Holy Father, I come to this work as an intergenerational survivor of the residential school system, as an activist and as a community leader and an elected official within one of the Métis governments. And I've always been told by my elders that we should always speak from respect and speak with respect. And I've worked to put down some thoughts that I have to share with you about the residential school system and the legacy and the responsibilities that the Church has and the responsibilities that Church officials have and quite frankly, responsibilities that you have.

And it's been suggested to me by some within the Church establishment that we need to almost not tell the truth in order to spare your feelings or others. And I just simply thought that that would be disrespectful. It would be disrespectful to you to not tell you the truth. It would be disrespectful to you. It would be disrespectful to me. It would be disrespectful to our community, to our survivors and to our people to not simply tell you the truth.

And the truth, the honest truth is that the residential school system was a crime against humanity. It was an act of genocide. It was deliberately established in collaboration and in collusion between the Canadian state and the churches, your Church being one of them.

The goal of that system was to remove us from our land. That was overall the goal of that system. By changing our world view, by changing our perspective, by changing our religion and locating us away from our traditional territories in order to open them up for colonization and for settlement by the Canadian state.

Holy Father, the truth is that that system, that residential school system unleashed monsters into our communities, monsters of abuse, physical, mental, spiritual and sexual abuse and those monsters continue to consume our people today. And those monsters continue to consume our people today, continue to destroy the lives of our community.

All of that harm and that pain and that trauma continues to compound through the generations because it has been left unaddressed and we have been left without the proper resources, tools or supports in order to heal the way that we deserve to heal.

And I would humbly submit to you today, Holy Father, that it is your responsibility. It is the Church's responsibility to work to make that right. And I would suggest that the first thing that needs to happen is a complete and total acceptance, admission and apology for what happened. Reconciliation cannot happen so long as it continues through the lens of "but we meant well." Your intentions are meaningless considering the incredible amount of harm that was done.

But I would submit, Holy Father, that that is only the beginning. It is literally the very first step. And beyond that I would call on you, your Bishops, your Priests to stand up for what is right and to work to challenge the Canadian state, challenge the provincial government and have them come to the table and create meaningful processes for reconciliation for the Métis nation.

The reality being, as I think was said by the Anglican Archbishop of South Africa that at one point we had the land and they had the Bible and they came and we have the Bible and they took the land. And that is the reality here in Canada as well, that the Métis nation, one of the largest nations by territory, is today completely and totally landless. And that is because the Church made that possible. The Church stood by and facilitated that process for the Canadian state to take our lands from us.

And so I would ask you, Holy Father, to put some energy, put some effort and put some words into helping us achieve justice.

I have read many of your speeches. I have read many of your writings and I believe you are a man of action. I believe you are a man of humility and of integrity. And I hope that you will hear what we're saying, what our survivors are saying and put some real meaningful, tangible action behind your effort. And then, maybe then, reconciliation is possible and then maybe we could consider forgiving you for what happened.

(end)



Louise Simard
Métis National Council

Holy Father, my name is Louise Simard and I'm Métis. I know that you are more than familiar with the problems experienced by Métis people, families and communities. And the purpose of this video is to help shed some light on why and to explain from a more scientific approach intergenerational trauma.

Now I'm not a physician but I have worked for a long time in the health care sector as Minister of Health in Saskatchewan, amongst other portfolios, and as well by sitting on medical boards.

When I was on the Medical Council of Canada, they asked me to go to seminars on the issue of the developing child and early brain and biological development. So I attended a number of those and the information I gleaned from those seminars I would like to share with you today. Thank you.

So there is a correlation between adverse childhood experiences and adult disease such as diabetes, substance abuse, cardiovascular disease, cancer. And we ask ourselves, well what is an adverse childhood experience? It could be abuse, physical or sexual, living in poverty, separation from family, racism and colonialism, witnessing abuse of another, or it could be simply the neglect of a child. These are just some adverse childhood experiences or ACES, as we call them.

Toxic stress created by adversity that is intense and endures over a long period of time has a negative impact on the developing child. The body responds to stress by releasing stress hormones for fight or flight. If these hormones are elevated too much and too long, they will disrupt the proper development of a strong and healthy brain architecture in the developing child.

Toxic stress in childhood interrupts the development of executive skills such as integrated cognitive skills, social and emotional skills, such as paying attention, planning ahead, dealing with conflict, following rules and controlling emotions.

Toxic stress can affect brain chemistry and that in turn affects other neural endocrine, cardiovascular and other systems of the body, how they operate and how we react to circumstances and situations. And this influence can last a lifetime.

Adversity has a powerful impact on physical and mental health. And it can happen to anyone. All people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are vulnerable to the consequences of experiencing toxic stress. However, because of harmful discriminatory policies, Métis people have experienced more adversity in childhood than most non-Indigenous children. And there is no doubt ACES are a major pathway to mental illness, substance abuse and chronic disease in adulthood. The more ACES the greater likelihood of health and social problems. The absence of ACES and it's unlikely there will be any problems at all. As a child develops there are interactions between the environment and how the child's genes are expressed. In fact, experiences in early life become biologically embedded and they change the way genes are expressed. We call these epigenetic changes.

Further, these changes can be transmitted to the next generation and that is what helps to explain intergenerational trauma and how it occurs. This trauma cannot be reversed easily and not in one generation. It's by definition intergenerational.

Positive stress is good but toxic stress without a loving, caring adult to buffer against the stress disrupts the development of a healthy and strong child and increases lifelong health risks, family dysfunction and intergenerational trauma.

Residential schools have had a negative impact on our People, on our families and communities. Children were torn from their homes and their parents and sometimes shipped far away from home. They often lived in circumstances we would consider intolerable today.

The effects of colonization and discriminatory policies, including harmful integration policies such as residential schools, have eroded the traditional way of life for the Métis, resulting in the disruption of families, communities and culture. But the good news is this trend can be reversed.

The harmful effects of adversity can be reversed. But as I said earlier, it won't happen in one generation and it will take a lot of loving, nurturing caregiver for our children. The next generations need positive experiences and lots and lots of love.

It's time for the Church to acknowledge the trauma, apologize and work with us on a path to reconciliation in a genuine and meaningful partnership in the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous People. Thank you. Thank you.
(end)



Cassidy Caron
Métis National Council President

Taanishi. I want to begin by thanking you for taking the time to listen to all of the stories that we're bringing from the Métis National Council to you, Pope Francis, at the Vatican.

I want you to understand though that many of our Métis residential school survivors and families of survivors have yet to tell their truth regarding their experiences at residential, industrial, day schools and convents, many of which were funded or managed by religious institutions including the Catholic church.

We need ongoing and concerted efforts. We need funding. We need unfettered access to relevant residential school and church records. All of this is required for the Métis nation and our survivors to finally achieve meaningful and lasting truth, reconciliation, healing and justice.

We need to really work to fully understand the Métis residential school experience and the intergenerational trauma that it has created in our communities.

We need to uncover where the lost Métis children are. We need to find out where they are located so that we can bring them home. We need the Catholic church to release all church records and documentation that may shed light on the Métis residential school experience. And we need to own that data. We need to document the stories of our elders and our Métis residential school survivors so that we can start really understanding the stories and the experiences of our Métis families and what has led us to where we are today.

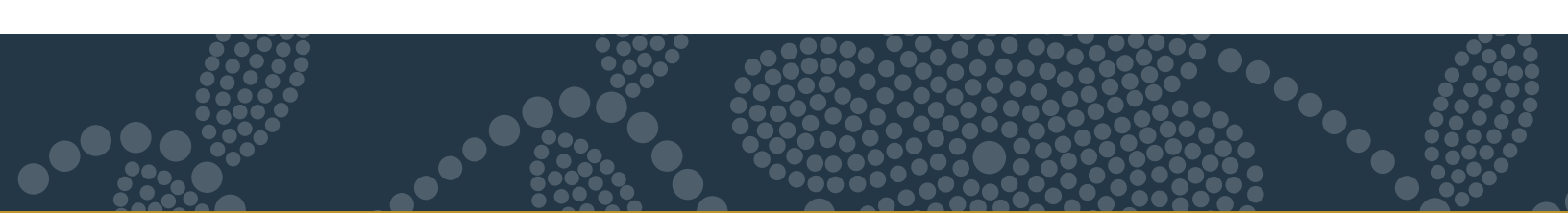
Before all of this, we hope that you will listen to our stories and that you will come to Canada and provide an apology, an acknowledgement of the harms that were done to our people and our communities. We need you to come to Canada and apologize to our survivors and to our families. We need you to recognize all of the harm that was done to the individuals and also intergenerational trauma. You need to recognize that this still affects our people today.

We hope that there will be accountability of the perpetrators of crimes and abuse, regardless of their age. We hope that you will come to Canada and visit residential school sites including some of the Métis residential school sites that have yet to be recognized.

We need funding for Métis truth, reconciliation and healing initiatives and this needs to be guided by our communities. They need to respond to the needs of our Métis people.

All of our Métis residential school survivors, families and communities and our generations to come want to live happy and healthy lives and we need to heal. We need to be proud Métis people and we need to do this work today.

Healing will be an intergenerational pursuit just as colonization and the residential schools which caused this hurt were. We need compensation and recognition for our Métis survivors, many of whom today live in poverty. We need trauma support and healing centres for all of our Métis people. All of this work can be done alongside the Catholic church and alongside you. Please join us in our journey for reconciliation.





The Métis People and the Legacy of Residential Schools

The Métis are one of three legally, politically, and culturally distinct Indigenous peoples in Canada, recognized by the Constitution Act of 1982 (Government of Canada, 2021). The Métis Nation emerged in the 1700's, birthing a unique collective identity, robust culture, and distinct Michif language. They occupied a key economic role in the fur trade and political spaces (Smylie, 2009). Presently, over one-third (35%) of Indigenous peoples in Canada identify as Métis (Government of Canada, 2016).

Root Cause of Many Chronic Health Conditions in Adulthood Lies in Adversity in Childhood

Health and well-being in adulthood is influenced heavily by events and conditions in early childhood rather than lifestyle choices in later years. The root cause of many chronic health conditions in adulthood lies in adversity faced during childhood. The Métis suffer from chronic diseases and conditions at an alarmingly disproportionate rate to non-Indigenous peoples.

Science tells us that the experiences we have in early life heavily affect the physical architecture of the developing brain. This means that brains are not just born, but built over time and interactions with caregivers and the surrounding environment influence how a brain develops. Just as a house needs a sturdy foundation, our brains require a strong foundation as they develop. Building a sturdy foundation for brain development aids in the development of good habits, leading to living a healthy life.

Positive experiences affect brain development positively, however, prolonged toxic stress affects brain development negatively. Toxic stress and adversity in childhood, such as emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, neglect, poverty, and racism all have serious impacts on the developing brain. Such adversity and toxic stress influences brain chemistry. Negatively impacted brain chemistry influences the neuroendocrine, cardiovascular, and other systems of the body, particularly on how they operate and the control of reactions to situations. This influence can last a lifetime. In fact, experiences in early life can become biologically embedded and they change the way genes are expressed, which is known as epigenetic change

*Epigenetic change
in gene expression
is passed on to the
next generation.*

(Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, 2014). These changes have a powerful impact on physical and mental health for a lifetime and can be passed on intergenerationally.

Chronic Disease and Other Health Challenges Amongst the Métis

Métis people have higher rates of chronic or life-threatening conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and/or substance use challenges than the non-Indigenous population (Turpel-Lafond, 2021). The Métis also have a significantly higher premature mortality rate and lower survival rate than the non-Indigenous population in Canada (Bruce, Kliewer, Young, Mayer, and Wajda, 2003).

A 2008 study found that the Métis were nearly twice as likely to live in crowded residences or residences in need of major repairs in comparison to the non-Indigenous population. Métis individuals and households also report consistently lower median income and lower levels of education in comparison to non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Service data and verbal reports gathered by Métis governments suggest that poverty amongst Métis Elders is a growing challenge, with many Seniors reporting that they cannot even afford to purchase their daily medications.



Boarding School at Île-à-la-Croix, Saskatchewan

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)

The intensity of the adversity faced in childhood, as well as the duration of the stress, are all factors in assessing the impacts on a child's developing brain. Hence the quality of interactions in a child's environment play a vital role in shaping the child's developing brain and stress systems. The effects of this can be witnessed through their behaviours, capacity to learn, and their health and social outcomes in adulthood.

A child's executive function and self-regulation skills (managing stress and coping mechanisms) are important skills to develop, but these are hindered through toxic stress and adversity. These are incredibly important tools for the child when developing executive function and self-regulation skills needed for a healthy life (Alberta Family Wellness, 2011).

The more adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) that a child experiences, such as physical, mental, and sexual abuse, neglect, racism, household dysfunction, poverty, bullying, etc., the more likely they are to experience chronic disease in adult life. ACE's affect all of us. All peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous are all vulnerable to the consequences of experiencing severe toxic stress. However, because of harmful discriminatory policies Metis People have experienced more adversity in Childhood than most non-Indigenous children.

Numerous studies have proven a direct correlation between ACE's and future health outcomes and family dysfunction. A Scottish study has shown that children who experienced 4 or more ACE's were three times more likely to live in a deprived situation (NHS Scotland, 2021).

Colonialism

In the spirit of reconciliation, it is important to understand the role of discriminatory colonial policies to ACE's and historical trauma. The problems that were created will not be reversed in one, two, or even three generations. Reconciliation is multi-generational and will require a long term, dedicated and sincere commitment.

Imagine a Police Officer shows up at your door or in your yard and simply takes your children away. Many Indigenous peoples did not speak the language and did not know what was happening. The experiences of grief, confusion, terror, and wondering what they did wrong plagued parents and communities. Children were taken from communities and

The problem this creates will not be reversed in one generation, nor in two or three. Reconciliation is multi-generational and will require a long term, dedicated and sincere commitment.

sent far away from home to live in residential schools primarily operated by the Church. They were put in the care of priests and nuns. The separation from their families alone is traumatizing for a child. Many were put into situations of abuse and neglect, compounding their adversity and toxic stress.

The effects of colonization and these discriminatory policies including harmful integration policies (such as residential schools) have eroded the traditional way of life for many Métis, resulting in the disruption of families, communities, and culture. Discrimination, racism, lack of cultural safety, and lack of access to necessary healthcare services persists to this day, and are felt particularly harshly in remote and northern communities. Colonial policies have had a long and enduring negative intergenerational impact on Métis individuals, families, and communities.

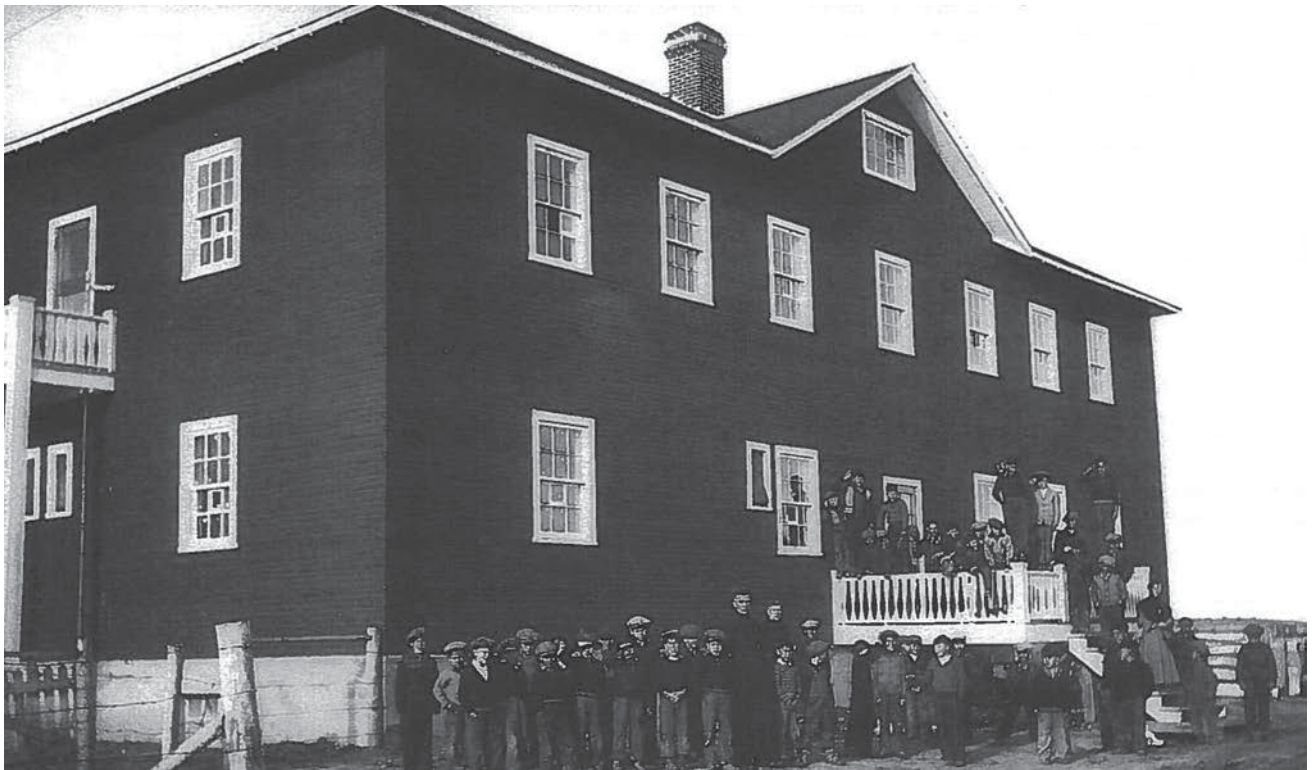
It is important to understand the effects of past discriminatory policies, to acknowledge them, to apologize to Indigenous people and to work with Indigenous people towards reconciliation.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), is about the respect and recognition of the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. In the spirit of UNDRIP, it is important to understand the effects of past discriminatory policies, to acknowledge them, to apologize to Indigenous communities, and work with Indigenous Peoples towards reconciliation.

To understand and recognize the profound impact on individuals, generations of families, and communities, it requires an understanding of the harmful role toxic stress and adversity plays in affecting brain chemistry, the development of brain architecture, and the epigenetic changes from adversity that are passed along from generation to generation.

The good news is that the harmful effects of Adversity in Childhood can be reversed, but it won't happen in a generation and it will take a lot of loving, nurturing caregiving for our children. The next generations need positive experiences and lots and lots of love.

Respectfully submitted
Louise Simard
Metis National Council



Group of boys in front of their boarding school October 7, 1946

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Photo Credits: Métis National Council, Children of the Métis Nation - Residential Schools Dialogue (March 2013) and the Archdiocese of Keewatin-The Pas.



Life was difficult for the teachers and the Métis students at Île-à-la-Crosse school in the 1870's. The school matron slept on a pallet in the classroom, the female students on the floor, while the male students slept in the oblate residence.



Boys dormitory

All Mission Records are Residential School Records

The entire missionary archive of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) in Canada, or any other religious order including the Grey Nuns, is about residential schools; a fact is obscured by archival taxonomies that — self-consciously or not — are rooted in (and that replicate) a colonial logic of separate spheres.

When the missions were established the fathers and brothers worked in concert to build the entirety of the mission which would have included the church proper, hospitals, orphanages, and economic centres such as sawmills and farms. As the fathers maintained their records which included the sacramental documents (baptismal, marriage, burial records as well as catechisms and other forms of missionary processes) they also kept records about the visitors, pupils, orphans, traders to the sites they occupied so the Liber Animarum and Codex Historicus plus the correspondence to the HBC as well as the Canadian government. Collectively these records make up the body of material generated by the mission, about the mission. Because these records make up the whole narrative, the notion that there are school records separate from other records is absurd. In the same vein there are not Metis and/or Inuit and/or First Nations records—they are Church records and they belong together. So, for instance, to know who is buried in school graveyards and when they were buried, we need full and open access to the school, catechism, and burial records. We need to be able to cross reference these documents against one another to have a full and complete rendering of events as they took place.

By the late 19th/early 20th century the OMI acted as an agent of the state by running schools and distributing treaty annuities in some regions. They had the best, on the ground, access to the history of Indigenous communities in their totality and particularly with regards to the schools. Missionaries did not separate their mission activities from one another but understood that the entire enterprise was about bringing and teaching the faith and instilling Catholic values to the congregants regardless of age or gender.

For us, today, knowing about missionary involvement in residential schools we need access to every scrap of seemingly meaningless paper in the archive and we need to read them as a singular record source. To separate them is to fracture the narrative of the schools from the narrative of the mission and that of their communities of origin.

These are not simply Church records—ownership is shared with the State (in this case Canada) as missionaries increasingly took on the role of government officials in many communities. Removing these records from the communities obscures their true nature and segmenting some records from others fractures the history of Residential Schools and continues to do harm to Indigenous communities.

We call on the Catholic Church to address this ongoing process to hide and obscure the histories of these institutions by returning, in full, ALL records associated with every mission site in Canada and, therefore, every school.

"My language was taken from me.
I couldn't tell my mother what
happened to me."

- Métis Survivor, Alberta



Truth, Reconciliation, Justice, and Healing: A Pathway Forward

Dear Pope Francis,

On March 28th, 2022, you took the time to listen to a small sample of the many stories of our Métis Residential School Survivors. In these stories, Métis Survivors, their families, and our Métis communities speak of the need for truth, reconciliation, justice, and healing.

Untold numbers have now left us without ever having their truths heard and their pain acknowledged. Without ever receiving the very basic humanity and healing they so rightfully deserved.

That is nothing short of a travesty. Both of justice and of conscience.

And while the time for acknowledgement, apology, and atonement is long overdue, it is never too late to do the right thing.

The Métis Nation has already begun the difficult and essential work of hearing the truths that our Survivors and their families carry. Of understanding what substantive justice means to them. And of forging a pathway toward the lasting healing that our entire Nation deserves.

We have done the difficult work of preparing for our journey, for our conversation with you. We have done the work of translating our words to those you will understand.

So now it is your turn to join us in that work. You must now do the work of translating the words we have spoken from your head, into your heart, and ultimately into real action.

Below, we have outlined that pathway forward alongside some meaningful first steps to which the Métis Nation hopes the Church will commit.

Truth means listening empathically to fully understand the Métis Residential School experience and the resulting intergenerational trauma that continues to plague Métis communities, as unique and distinct from those of other Indigenous peoples. Truth must include:

- ∞ Providing unfettered access to and releasing all Church records and documentation that may shed light on the Métis Residential School experience.
- ∞ Documenting the stories of Métis Residential School Survivors and their families, so that the Métis Nation, Canada, and members of the Catholic Church fully understand and never forget the harmful legacy of the Residential School system.
- ∞ Identifying the resting places of all Métis children who were lost at Residential Schools, so that the Métis Nation can appropriately honour them and work with their families to bring them home for good.
- ∞ Compiling and publishing a distinctions-based Métis National Report on Residential Schools, articulating the Métis Residential School experience and additional actions that are needed to support lasting truth, justice, and healing.
- ∞ Erecting a permanent Métis Residential School Memorial, following meaningful consultation with Métis Residential School Survivors and their families.

Reconciliation means accepting responsibility for the incomprehensible pain that the Church has inflicted upon the Métis people through the Residential School system and then humbly joining the Métis Nation along its pathway of truth, justice, and healing. Reconciliation must include:

- ∞ A formal apology by the Pope, delivered in Canada, that is written alongside Métis Survivors and their families, recognizing that while harm was done by individuals, it was only made possible because of an evil system that was sanctioned by the Church.
- ∞ The establishment of a Métis Reconciliation Trust to fund Métis-specific truth, reconciliation, justice, and healing initiatives, that is directed by Métis people
- ∞ An annual Summit between representatives of the Métis Nation, Holy See, and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to review ongoing truth, reconciliation, justice, and healing initiatives, and develop an action plan for the upcoming year.
- ∞ The creation of permanent Indigenous Relations offices at the Holy See and Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as a permanent Métis Nation envoy to the Holy See, based in Rome.
- ∞ The return of lands belonging to Catholic dioceses in historic Métis communities, such as the Catholic parish at Batoche, to the Métis Nation.
- ∞ The return of “artifacts” and other items taken from Métis people and communities, which are now stored in the Vatican and other Church-run institutions.
- ∞ The co-development of educational materials for Catholic clergy and parishioners to better understand the intergenerational impacts of Residential Schools on Métis people, as well as the Church’s role within that system.

Justice means demanding accountability of the individuals and collectives who committed crimes and abuses within Residential Schools, as well as those responsible for the creation and perpetuation of the systems in which those crimes and abuses occurred. Justice must include:

- ∞ The appointment of an independent investigator to review Residential School records and Survivor testimony, and refer evidence of potential criminality to relevant law enforcement authorities.
- ∞ A commitment from the Church to not shield alleged perpetrators of crimes within the Residential School system, or prevent their extradition to Canada for prosecution, regardless of their age.
- ∞ Considering it a crime within Canon Law to deny or diminish the malicious intent behind or abuses, crimes, and intergenerational trauma that occurred as a result of the Residential School system.

Healing means building resiliency so that all Métis Survivors, families, communities and generations to come can live happy and healthy lives, as proud Métis people and Otipemisiwak—the ones who own themselves. Healing will be an intergenerational pursuit, just as the colonization and Residential Schools which caused the hurt were. Healing must include:

- ∞ Substantive and direct compensation for Métis Survivors and their families, many of whom live in poverty as a result of their experiences in Residential Schools.
- ∞ Funding for community-based restorative justice programs that seek to provide lasting healing for all parties, when direct or intergenerational trauma from Residential Schools may have been a contributing factor.
- ∞ Funding for community-based healing and reconciliation projects, including collaborative initiatives to heal the earth and Métis relationships with it, which were fundamentally disrupted by forced removal from the land and attendance at Residential Schools.
- ∞ Funding for Métis community-led housing and homelessness supports.
- ∞ Funding for Métis community-led trauma supports and healing centres, including addictions and mental health treatment.
- ∞ Funding for Métis community-led culture and language revitalization projects.
- ∞ Funding for Métis community-led education and relationship building projects.
- ∞ Funding for regional dialogues between Métis Survivors, leaders, and youth to discuss Métis self-determination, reconciliation, and the pathway forward.

