

Between 1986 and 1998, all four Settlement Agreement churches offered apologies or statements of regret, in one form or another, for their attempts to destroy Indigenous cultures, languages, spirituality, and ways of life, and, more specifically, for their involvement in residential schools. The United, Anglican, and Presbyterian churches followed similar pathways: individuals or committees at the national level of each church became aware that there might be a need to apologize, a decision-making process was established at the highest levels of the church, and the apology was subsequently issued through the moderator or primate who spoke for the whole church.

Unlike the three Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic Church in Canada does not have a single spokesperson with authority to represent all of its many dioceses and distinct religious orders. The issuing of apologies or statements of regret was left up to each of them individually. The result has been a patchwork of apologies or statements of regret that few Survivors or church members may even know exist. Roman Catholics in Canada and across the globe look to the Pope as their spiritual and moral leader. Therefore, it has been disappointing to Survivors and others that the Pope has not yet made a clear and emphatic public apology in Canada for the abuses perpetrated in Catholic-run residential schools throughout the country.

On April 29, 2009, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Phil Fontaine, four other Aboriginal leaders, and five leaders from the Roman Catholic community in Canada travelled to Rome for a private audience with Pope Benedict XVI. No recording of the private meeting was permitted, but the Vatican issued a communiqué describing what the Pope had said.

Given the sufferings that some indigenous children experienced in the Canadian Residential School system, the Holy Father expressed his sorrow at the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some members of the Church and he offered his sympathy and prayerful solidarity. His Holiness emphasized that acts of abuse cannot be tolerated in society. He prayed that all those affected would experience healing, and he encouraged First Nations people to continue to move forward with renewed hope.⁷¹

The media reported that National Chief Fontaine and other Aboriginal leaders who had met with the Pope said that the statement was significant for all Survivors. Fontaine told *CBC News* that although it was not an official apology, he hoped that the Pope's statement of regret would bring closure to the issue for residential school survivors. "The fact that the word 'apology' was not used does not diminish this moment in any way," he said. "This experience gives me great comfort."⁷²

The Pope's statement of regret was significant to those who were present, and was reported widely in the media, but it is unclear what, if any, impact it had on Survivors, and their families and communities, who were not able to hear the Pope's words themselves. Many Survivors raised the lack of a clear Catholic apology from the Vatican as evidence that the Catholic Church still has not come to terms with its own wrongdoing in residential