

DIOCESE OF SAULT STE. MARIE



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SHOCK, GRIEF AND COMPASSION

Dear friends in and of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie,

Since the discovery of the remains of 215 children on the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School I have been struggling to find the words to address the tragedy and the shock, confusion and anger felt by so many, including myself.

And then, just yesterday, I learned that people have been leaving small pairs of shoes on the steps of our diocesan Pro-Cathedral in North Bay.



Things hit people differently. For me, the fact of the deaths at the residential school was bad enough, but even worse was the lack of respect paid to those who died. Honestly, why on earth would ground penetrating radar have to be used to locate the remains of these children? The dead are not meant to be anonymous, or forgotten.

So with regards to the placing of these shoes, I for one welcome this gesture. These shoes on these steps are a sign of remembrance and create a place for people

to grieve. They also call us all to compassion, to have hearts ready to suffer with those who suffer at the enormity of the loss the shoes represent. Jesus himself invited us to be compassionate as God is compassionate. In that sense, these shoes represent something deeply holy.

Jesus also offered this teaching: "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known." I hear this as a divine warning to anyone who hopes that these sorts of stories will all be forgotten one day or just fade away. Simply put, that is just not what God wants.

I invite my fellow Catholics to receive the recent news from Kamloops not just as a discovery, but as a revelation and even as a prophecy. We can be sure that more revelations like those from Kamloops will come, from all across Canada, and when they do we must be ready with hearts full of sorrow and compassion.

As for me, I want to offer my deepest sympathies to the families and communities of those deceased children buried at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, and to offer my sincere apology to all our Indigenous peoples, particularly those in this diocese whose culture and heritage I am now discovering. Honestly, I am not sure what that apology is worth, given that I am only one man and only recently arrived here, but no matter what you have my pledge to learn from you, to listen to you, and to walk with you.



Bishop Thomas Dowd