

University of Manitoba Statement of Apology and Reconciliation to Indian Residential School Survivors

The University of Manitoba wishes to take a leadership role in helping expose the national shame of the Indian Residential Schools system and the consequences of such a system.

The University of Manitoba is committed to listening to, acknowledging and affirming Aboriginal voices within the fabric of the university.

It is of fundamental importance at our university that we advance all aspects of Indigenous education, including conducting research in and increasing public awareness of one of the darker chapters of Canadian history.

We are committed to working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other key partners to advance research efforts related to Canada's Indian Residential Schools, as well as supporting the commission in its truth telling and reconciliation efforts.

The next logical step in healing is telling our own story.

For over 130 years, the University of Manitoba has worked to create, preserve and communicate knowledge. Moreover, our academic institution has a long history of encouraging debate, building excellence and fostering innovation.

In spite of this we have failed Aboriginal peoples.

When we examine the University of Manitoba's role in the residential schools system, it is clear that we did not live up to our goals, our ideals, our hard-earned reputation or our mandate.

Our institution failed to recognize or challenge the forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples and the subsequent loss of their language, culture and traditions.

That was a grave mistake. It is our responsibility. We are sorry.

The University of Manitoba has a responsibility to acknowledge the harm inflicted on First Nations, Métis and Inuit survivors, their families and their communities.

Seventeen federally funded Indian Residential Schools operated throughout Manitoba, including in Winnipeg and in rural and northern Manitoba. In Manitoba, the first Indian Residential School opened in 1888 and the last school closed its doors in 1988. During this time, thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from their communities and placed into full-time residency.

Those children who did not attend Indian Residential Schools were placed in day schools that followed the same principles of assimilation as the Indian Residential Schools.

While at these schools, Aboriginal children were not allowed to practice traditional Indigenous ceremonies or speak in their own languages.

Instead of being positive influences on Aboriginal peoples, education and religion became tools of assimilation, thus undermining the rich diversities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, communities and families.

Residential schools were often located hundreds of miles away from the home communities of Aboriginal children, which made regular contact with families impossible.

Tragically, many children never returned. Those who did return were often strangers in their own homes and communities.

Physical, sexual and emotional abuses that occurred at residential schools were among the most deplorable acts committed against any people at any time in Canada's history.

Many institutions had a direct or indirect hand in perpetuating the misguided and failed system of assimilation that was at the heart of the Indian Residential School system.

The University of Manitoba educated and mentored individuals who became clergy, teachers, social workers, civil servants and politicians. They carried out assimilation policies aimed at the Aboriginal peoples of Manitoba.

The acceptance by many Manitoba institutions of this assimilative practice did not end with the Indian Residential Schools system. It also led to the forced and unwilling mass adoption of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children which was initiated in the 1960s, but extended into the mid-1980s. This practice was known as the "60s Scoop" because, in many instances, children were taken from their homes, often without the consent of their biological families.

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

The next day, then Manitoba Premier Gary Doer, along with Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Minister Eric Robison, a former Indian Residential School survivor, formally acknowledged our province's role in this system of forced assimilation.

Churches that operated schools – Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United – have also issued statements of apology and reconciliation.

The Indian Residential School survivors, leaders and Elders of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities accepted and embraced all of these apologies.

Today the University of Manitoba adds our voice to the apologies expressed by political and religious leaders and so graciously accepted by survivors, Aboriginal leaders and Elders. We hope our words will be accepted in the spirit of generosity and reconciliation that has been the hallmark of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process.

We apologize to our students. They are the survivors and they are the children, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Indian Residential School survivors.

We apologize to our Indigenous faculty and staff. They have also been directly or indirectly harmed by the Indian Residential School system.

We apologize to First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders and Elders. We recognize that we need to build trust and fulfill our role as an open and welcoming community of learning, discovery and outreach.

We apologize to the people and the communities who were the victims of this misguided policy.

At the University of Manitoba, we have a positive story to share about Indigenous achievement.

The University of Manitoba believes that education has a transformative power for students, their families and communities.

We will work to ensure that the values of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures and communities are included in scholarship and research across the university. In order to take the next step in advancing Indigenous scholarship and the success of Indigenous people, collectively as well as individually, we must acknowledge our mistakes, learn from them, apologize and move forward in a spirit of reconciliation.

The late Rita Joe was a poet laureate from the Mi'kmaq Nation. Her experience in Indian Residential Schools is a constant reminder of why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and our apology are necessary. By understanding her pain and the pain inflicted on others, as well as acknowledging our role in that pain, we can begin the process of restoring trust and nurturing long-lasting healing and reconciliation.

These are her words:

*I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl at Shubenacadie school.*

*You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my word.*

*Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.*

*So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.*

It is our intention, having said the words of this apology, to move to reconciliation.

Thank you
Miigwetch
Ékosi
Munsi
Marsee
Matna
Wopida
Wela'lioq



David T. Barnard, President and Vice-Chancellor

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
Atlantic National Event

Halifax, Nova Scotia
October 27, 2011



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