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TO BE SHARED WIDELY

Bishop's Pastoral Response to Rising Denialism in BC and Canada

This letter is in response to the rising and most disturbing movement promoting the denial of the impact of the Indian Residential School system and its ongoing and continuing impact on individuals, families and communities across this country. This movements' purpose is to twist and distort what happened in and through the Indian Residential School system. The result of this kind of minimizing of what truly happened serves only to re-traumatize those who were grievously harmed in a wide variety of ways including: physical, sexual, spiritual, and emotional abuse, deprivation of the use of language, cultural practices, ceremony and the harm of being removed from family and home, many of whom never returned. We cannot deny what happened, nor can we be silent when some try to ignore or minimize this tragic part of our shared history.

The Anglican Church in Canada has been on long journey of facing its own story and participation in the government-led policy to eradicate the Indian from the Indian. The mainline churches who came alongside the government, embraced this model with a missional zeal. Sadly, we know that the premise of the Residential School system was flawed, and it completely ignored the dignity and value of Indigenous, Metis and Inuit peoples, assuming that our own culture and ways were superior. We were wrong.

We in the Territory of the People, formerly known as the Diocese of Cariboo, ran and operated an Indian Residential School called St. George's on the Lytton First Nation reserve. The building, while empty and dilapidated remains as a reminder of that grim history in the life of our church. Many of us have sat and listened to the stories of those who experienced Residential Schools. They are stories that are both hard to hear and yet necessary if we are to learn from our mistakes. We cannot afford to allow doubt and denialism to shape our path forward on the journey of healing and reconciliation.

As a part of the re-imagining of ourselves after we surrendered our right to be a diocese as a result of the historical harms by Anglican leaders in our church, we carefully and prayerfully engaged with Indigenous Anglicans in our area to create a new model of governance that would ensure Indigenous representatives were always a part of our organization working together. We promised that we would not simply go back to being a diocese as if nothing had happened. That is still our commitment today. We dedicate approximately 20% of our budget to provide financial support to parishes serving in Indigenous communities.

We gratefully honour our Pastoral Elders who offer spiritual support and ceremony alongside Anglican clergy who serve in their communities so that language, ceremony and cultural practices can be given their rightful place and value as a part of the pastoral ministry that we offer. We will continue to learn and grow in our knowledge and understanding of our shared history and the role that our church had in Canada's story. We will look for opportunities to support and encourage healing and the rebuilding of communities and families.

As your bishop, I am asking you both personally and as communities to take the opportunity to learn our story and to actively seek ways to better understand how we might move forward allowing everyone the same rights and privileges that we who are non-Indigenous take for granted.

One of our former Chancellors, Canon Bud Smith recently shared some of the history of where we came from as the former Diocese of Cariboo to where we are today. We were able to record his presentation, and it is one that I highly recommend to every parish for your education and discussion. This video will be made available shortly and will be on the Territory website as one way of educating ourselves and others of where we have been and how we are trying to move forward together.

There are endless possibilities to educate ourselves. Consider doing a book study by an Indigenous author, take a course at a local college or university who offer a wide variety of indigenous courses. Reach out to the local band office and find out what kind of community events are being offered.

The best way we can come against denialism is through relationships, by being well-educated about our story and history, and speaking up when the opportunity presents itself.

I know that there is more work to be done as we unravel our own biases and assumptions as we heal our wounds. It can feel daunting, yet as Christians we are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation, healers and restorers of what has been broken. Our witness is vital in a world where chaos and distortion try to undermine what is right and good.

May we be courageous and willing to walk this good road together.

In Christ's service,



The Rt. Rev. Clara Plamondon
Bishop – Territory of the People Anglican Church