



RELIGION

# Pope Francis issues an historic apology for 'devastating' school abuses in Canada

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By The Associated Press



Pope Francis arrives for a meeting with indigenous communities, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit, at Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Catholic Church in Maskwacis, near Edmonton, Canada, on Monday.

*Gregorio Borgia/AP*

MASKWACIS, Alberta — Pope Francis issued a historic apology Monday for the Catholic Church's cooperation with Canada's "catastrophic" policy of Indigenous

residential schools, saying the forced assimilation of Native peoples into Christian society destroyed their cultures, severed families and marginalized generations in ways still being felt today.

"I am sorry," Francis said, to applause from school survivors and Indigenous community members gathered at a former residential school south of Edmonton, Alberta, the first event of Francis' weeklong "penitential pilgrimage" to Canada.

The morning after he arrived in the country, Francis traveled to the lands of four Cree nations to pray at a cemetery. Four chiefs then escorted the pontiff in his wheelchair to powwow ceremonial grounds where he delivered the long-sought apology and was given a feathered headdress.



Pope Francis prays in front of Indigenous chiefs at the Ermineskin Cree Nation Cemetery in Maskwacis, Alberta, on Monday during his papal visit across Canada.

*Nathan Denette/The Canadian Press via AP*



"I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous peoples," Francis said near the site of the former Ermineskin Indian Residential School, now largely torn down.

His words went beyond his earlier apology for the "deplorable" acts of missionaries and instead took responsibility for the church's institutional cooperation with the "catastrophic" assimilation policy, which Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission said amounted to a "cultural genocide."



## WORLD

### Canada pledges \$40 billion in talks over rampant abuses of Indigenous children

More than 150,000 native children in Canada were forced to attend state-funded Christian schools from the 19th century until the 1970s in an effort to isolate them from the influence of their homes and culture. The aim was to Christianize and assimilate them into mainstream society, which previous Canadian governments considered superior.

The Canadian government has admitted that physical and sexual abuse was rampant at the schools, with students beaten for speaking their native languages. That legacy of that abuse and isolation from family has been cited by Indigenous leaders as a root cause of the epidemic rates of alcohol and drug addiction now on Canadian reservations.



## WORLD

### Communities plan to search for more Indigenous children's remains in Canada

The discoveries of hundreds of potential burial sites at former schools in the past year drew international attention to the legacy of the schools in Canada and their counterparts in the United States. The discoveries prompted Francis to comply with the truth commission's call for him to apologize on Canadian soil for the

Catholic Church's role; Catholic religious orders operated 66 of the 139 schools in Canada.



NATIONAL

## Haaland seeks healing for Native American boarding school survivors

Many in the crowd Monday wore traditional dress, including colorful ribbon skirts and vests with Native motifs. Others donned orange shirts, which have become a symbol of residential school survivors, recalling the story of one woman whose favorite orange shirt, a gift from her grandmother, was confiscated when she arrived at a school and replaced with a uniform.

Despite the solemnity of the event, the atmosphere seemed at times joyful: Chiefs processed into the site venue to a hypnotic drumbeat, elders danced and the crowd cheered and chanted war songs, victory songs and finally a healing song.

One of the hosts of the event, Chief Randy Ermineskin of the Ermineskin Cree Nation, said some had chosen to stay away — and that that was understandable. But he said it was nevertheless a historic, important day for his people.

"My late family members are not here with us anymore, my parents went to residential school, I went to residential school," he told The Associated Press as he waited for Francis to arrive. "I know they're with me, they're listening, they're watching."





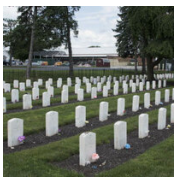
Indigenous people gather to see Pope Francis on his visit to Maskwacis, Alberta, on Monday during his papal visit across Canada.

*Jason Franson/The Canadian Press via AP*

Felisha Crier Hosein traveled from Florida to attend in the place of her mother, who helped create the museum for the nearby Samson Cree Nation and had planned to attend, but died in May.

"I came here to represent her and to be here for the elders and the community," said Hosein, who wore one of her mother's colorful ribbon skirts.

"Sorry is not going to make what happened go away," she said. "But it means a lot to the elders."



## CODE SWITCH

### Indian boarding schools' traumatic legacy, and the fight to get Native ancestors back

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who last year voiced an apology for the "incredibly harmful government policy" in organizing the residential school system, was also attending along with the governor general and other officials.

As part of a lawsuit settlement involving the government, churches and approximately 90,000 survivors, Canada paid reparations that amounted to billions of dollars being transferred to Indigenous communities. Canada's Catholic



Church says its dioceses and religious orders have provided more than \$50 million in cash and in-kind contributions and hope to add \$30 million more over the next five years.



## WORLD

**She struggled to reclaim her Indigenous name. She hopes others have it easier**

While the pope acknowledged institutional blame, he also made clear that Catholic missionaries were merely cooperating with and implementing the government policy of assimilation, which he termed the "colonizing mentality of the powers."

"I ask forgiveness, in particular, for the ways in which many members of the Church and of religious communities cooperated, not least through their indifference, in projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation promoted by the governments of that time, which culminated in the system of residential schools," he said.

He said the policy marginalized generations, suppressed Indigenous languages, severed families, led to physical, verbal, psychological and spiritual abuse and "indelibly affected relationships between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren." He called for further investigation, a possible reference to Indigenous demands for further access to church records and personnel files of the priests and nuns to identify who was responsible for the abuses.

"Although Christian charity was not absent, and there were many outstanding instances of devotion and care for children, the overall effects of the policies linked to the residential schools were catastrophic," Francis said. "What our Christian faith tells us is that this was a disastrous error, incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

The first pope from the Americas was determined to make this trip, even though torn knee ligaments forced him to cancel a visit to Africa earlier this month.



Pope Francis meets the Canadian Indigenous people as he arrives at Edmonton's International airport, Canada, on Sunday.

*Gregorio Borgia/AP*

The six-day visit — which will also include other former school sites in Alberta, Quebec City and Iqaluit, Nunavut, in the far north — follows meetings Francis held in the spring at the Vatican with delegations from the First Nations, Metis and Inuit. Those meetings culminated with an April 1 apology for the "deplorable" abuses committed by some Catholic missionaries in residential schools and Francis' promise to deliver an apology in person on Canadian soil.

Francis recalled that during in April, one of the delegations gave him a set of beaded moccasins as a symbol of the children who never returned from the schools, and asked him to return them in Canada. Francis said in these months they had "kept alive my sense of sorrow, indignation and shame" but that in returning them he hoped they could also represent a path to walk together.

**WORLD****More than 160 additional Indigenous graves have been found in Canada**

Event organizers said they would do everything possible to make sure survivors could attend the event, busing them in and offering mental health counselors to be on hand knowing that the event could be traumatic for some.

Francis acknowledged that the memories could trigger old wounds, and that even his mere presence there could be traumatic, but he said remembering was important to prevent indifference.

"It is necessary to remember how the policies of assimilation and enfranchisement, which also included the residential school system, were devastating for the people of these lands," he said.

Later Monday, Francis was scheduled to visit Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples, a Catholic parish in Edmonton oriented toward Indigenous people and culture. The church, whose sanctuary was dedicated last week after being restored from a fire, incorporates Indigenous language and customs in liturgy.

canada   pope francis   indigenous people   first nations



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