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## Card. Collins (Toronto): “The Catholic Church in Canada must continue to atone”

Identifying the name of each child, their stories and, above all, their cause of death, is bound to be extremely difficult. The graves uncovered in the premises of residential schools where the children of indigenous Canadians had been forcibly taken are shrouded in silence, with no official records and utter anonymity. These are the findings of a [Document](#) drafted by the Archdiocese of Toronto and personally emailed to journalists on July 9 by Archbishop Cardinal **Thomas Collins**. “A recent poll suggested that only 10% of Canadians have a thorough understanding of the history of residential schools – writes the Archbishop - We also know that many Catholics have asked for additional information.” To this end, the Archdiocese of Toronto has drafted a document which provides answers to eight frequently asked questions. The archbishop encourages everyone to carefully read the Report, with a preliminary remark:



Immagine non disponibile

**It is undeniable that some Catholic teachers (priests, religious men and women and lay staff) entrusted to care for children at residential schools assaulted the dignity of the students through mistreatment, neglect and abuse.** Archbishop Collins pointed out that a delegation of the Indigenous people of Canada will meet with Pope Francis from December 17-20 at the Vatican. The Archbishop made known that dioceses across the country, including the Archdiocese of Toronto, are in discussions to determine how to best engage in a renewed financial effort to meet the goal of the \$CAN 25 million “best efforts” campaign. **The number of residential schools run by the Catholic Church and their purpose.** The federal residential school system began around 1883. It is estimated that 150,000 children between the ages of three and 16 were forced to attend federal residential schools, operated in Canada between 1883 and 1996. Of the 139 residential schools identified in the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), 46% (64 schools) were operated by Catholic entities; approximately 16 out of 70 Catholic dioceses in Canada were associated with the former residential schools, in addition to about three dozen Catholic religious communities. For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct entities in Canada. *The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy. Even at the cost of forcibly take the child from his or her parents and to be “culturally and linguistically reconstructed.”*

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has identified 3,200 deaths, but the number of deceased children has most recently been updated to at least 4,100. Due to poor record keeping by the churches and the federal government – reads the Document released by the Archdiocese of Toronto - we may never know the total loss of life. The government and the schools did not record the name of the student who died. *In cases where the cause of death was reported, tuberculosis was the dominant cause of death, representing 48.7% or 896 of residential school deaths. The next highest were influenza (including the influenza pandemic of 1918–19) and pneumonia. Moreover, owing to widespread undernourishment and malnutrition children were particularly vulnerable to diseases. The document analysis identified that at least 33 students died while running away. **Do secret files exist?** For many years already, the Document states, religious orders and dioceses who ran the schools at the local level have handed over records to the government. Cardinal Thomas Collins, along with other Canadian bishops, has stated publicly that any Catholic entity with records relating to residential schools that have not yet been shared should do so. *There is no evidence that secret files are hidden at the Vatican relating to residential schools.* Unfortunately, re-establishing the truth today is hampered by the fact that some records were lost over time and could have been destroyed. Between 1936 and 1944, the federal government destroyed 200,000 Indian Affairs files (as the ministry was then called).*

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