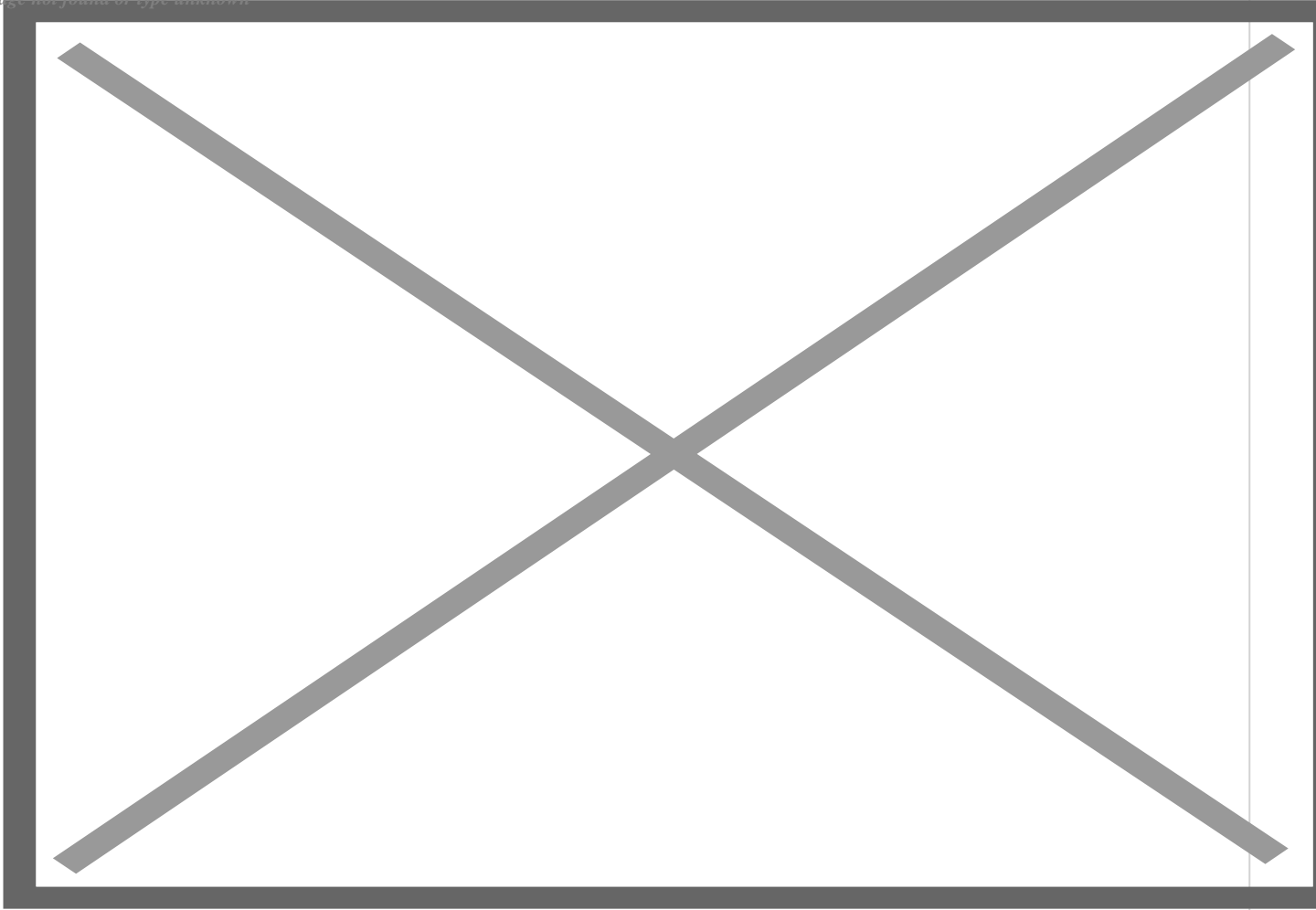


Pope to visit Canada in July to meet residential school survivors

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Pope Francis speaks in the “Ambassadors’ Chamber” of the Grand Master’s Palace in Valletta, Malta

Vatican City, May 14 (RHC)-- Pope Francis will travel to Canada at the end of July, the Vatican has announced, as the leader of the Roman Catholic Church is expected to meet Indigenous survivors of abuse committed at so-called residential schools.

The 85-year-old Pontiff will travel to Edmonton, Quebec City and Iqaluit, the Vatican said on Friday, adding that more details on the July 24 to 30 visit will be published in the coming weeks.

The announcement comes after the Pope last month apologised for abuses that members of the church committed against Indigenous children at residential schools.

Speaking to Indigenous delegates at the Vatican, Pope Francis said he felt “sorrow and shame” for the role Catholics played in the many harms that Indigenous children suffered while attending the forced-assimilation institutions.

“For the deplorable conduct of these members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God’s forgiveness and I want to say to you with all my heart, I am very sorry. And I join my brothers, Canadian bishops, in asking your pardon,” he said.

Canada forced more than 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Metis children to attend residential schools between the late 1800s and 1990s. The children were stripped of their languages and culture, separated from siblings, and subjected to psychological, physical and sexual abuse.

Thousands are believed to have died while attending the institutions, most of which were run by the Roman Catholic Church. A federal commission of inquiry into Canada’s residential schools, known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), concluded in 2015 that the system amounted to “cultural genocide”.

The discoveries of unmarked graves at former residential school sites across Canada over the past year spurred renewed calls for accountability – and an apology from the Catholic Church in particular.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday that “a formal in-person apology” from the head of the Roman Catholic Church to survivors and their families would be an important step “to advance meaningful reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples in our country”.

Edmonton is home to the second-largest number of Indigenous people living in urban Canadian centers, and approximately 25 residential schools were located in Alberta, the most of any province or territory in Canada, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said.

Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith, who is coordinating the papal visit on behalf of the Canadian bishops, said the pontiff will visit a former residential school site “and other locations of significance.”

Quebec is home to Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupre, one of the oldest and most popular pilgrimage sites in North America, while Iqaluit, on vast Baffin Island, is the capital of the Nunavut territory, home to many Inuit.

Bishop Raymond Poisson said Canada’s bishops were “immensely grateful” the pope will visit to “continue the journey of healing and reconciliation”.

Francis is expected to repeat his apology to school abuse survivors and relatives of victims.

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