

*Jim "Jimmy D" Durocher is a Red River Métis Veteran and Elder. Born and raised in Île-à-la-Crosse, the 82-year-old is a survivor of the Île-à-la-Crosse residential and day school, having spent nine years attending the facility. Despite his negative experiences at the day school, he has remained an active member of St John the Baptist Catholic Church, where he attends services every Sunday, playing guitar and singing in praise. He hopes the Holy Father, as the head of the Catholic Church, will hear and understand the importance of coming to Canada to personally deliver an apology to the Indigenous peoples for the atrocities committed by clergy, and for the children found in unmarked graves. He lost his wife Leona six years ago, following a three-year battle with cancer. Over their fifty-plus year marriage, they had seven children and today have 10 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.*


*Statement to His Holiness by Elder Jim Durocher:*

*Holy Father, I come to you bringing a message from my church back home in Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan and as a representative of the Red River Métis students who attended the Île-à-la-Crosse Métis residential school, which was established by the missionaries in 1860, and closed in the mid-1970s. Our Métis residential school was widely attended by Métis students from throughout northwest Saskatchewan.*

*Unfortunately, our residential school was excluded from the 2006 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement by the government of Canada, and we are still looking for an apology and a just settlement. This is the reason why so many of the harms and the suffering of Métis children in this residential school and others like it are not as well recognized or understood as the experiences of the First Nations and Inuit people.*

*What did remain consistent was that the school was run by members of Catholic orders, including the Sisters of Charity. The residential school separated boys and girls, which meant that many family members grew up in the same facility, but did not grow up together. Along with the well-documented abuse and shame brought upon the students at the hands of cruel individuals, this approach of dividing families, along with other methods designed to do away with the culture, language, and traditions of our families caused harm that many did not recover from.*





*It is this trauma that is still felt in our northwest Saskatchewan Métis community today. Much of our hurt stems from the experiences we had at the hands of evildoers who hid behind faith. However, an additional source of pain for many people in our Nation is the fact that our hurts as Red River Métis were not recognized as survivors of the same trauma as the First Nations and Inuit students. This racism continues to this very day as our experiences are dismissed and we are not included in the settlement between the federal government and survivors.*

*Today, I ask the church to act as the moral compass and work with us to get Canada to recognize the hurt and suffering that was brought to my community and the other communities affected by this crisis.*


*Like the other delegates here today who experienced harm, I recognize that these harms were committed by individuals who do not properly represent God's purpose and God's love. I also have many positive stories about the experiences I had at school, interacting with true servants of the Lord, who were kind to me and helped me grow my relationship with God.*

*Because of their influence and the gift of faith from my family, I have lived my life trying to do God's will and fulfill his purpose for me. While I lost my beloved wife Leona to cancer several years ago, I am proud that we raised our children to know God and to be active participants in the Catholic Church.*

*I know that when we suffer a loss, or experience the joy of a new birth, the church is central to every Red River Métis village. Church helps us draw the necessary comfort to heal from our sadness or expressing our celebration of new life. When my time in this world comes to an end, I know that I will rely on the presence of a shepherd of God to ease my passing.*

*My faith, and the comfort and joy I have drawn from it in my lifetime, are the reasons why I would like to share my thoughts with you, Most Holy Father, on the importance of a renewed relationship with the Catholic Church for our community. Reconciliation is important, of course, but renewal of our relationship to God and to the Catholic Church, are of equal*



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*importance to me and to our Nation. It is my strong belief that Elders within our Nation must be part of the solution to the loss of faith we are seeing in our Youth today.*

*I ask you for your blessing, on this item, that I will bring back to my church community, so they can cherish it and feel your closeness to your flock. I also ask, Holy Father, that you bless me so that, as an Elder, I can find the words to help more people discover or renew their faith, and to work with others to find new pathways to bring God and the church to our youth. It is my hope that you might also pray on behalf of those who continue to discriminate against the Red River Métis, so that they might see our truths and hold us as equal, as all children are equal in God's eyes.*