Oct. 4, 2026 - for Bulletin. 1998 Apology

The 1998 Apology

To former students of United Church Indian Residential Schools, and to their families and communities:

From the deepest reaches of your memories, you have shared with us your stories of suffering from our church's involvement in the operation of Indian Residential Schools You have shared the personal and historic pain that you still bear, and you have been vulnerable yet again You have also shared with us your strength and wisdom born of the life-giving dignity of your communities and traditions and your stories of survival

In response to our church's commitment to repentance, The Right Rev Bill Phipps spoke these words of apology on behalf of the General Council Executive on Tuesday, October 27, 1998:

"As Moderator of The United Church of Canada, I wish to speak the words that many people have wanted to hear for a very long time On behalf of The United Church of Canada, I apologize for the pain and suffering that our church's involvement in the Indian Residential School system has caused We are aware of some of the damage that this cruel and ill-conceived system of assimilation has perpetrated on Canada's First Nations peoples For this we are truly and most humbly sorry

"To those individuals who were physically, sexually, and mentally abused as students of the Indian Residential Schools in which The United Church of Canada was involved, I offer you our most sincere apology You did nothing wrong You were and are the victims of evil acts that cannot under any circumstances be justified or excused

"We know that many within our church will still not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the blame for this horrendous period in Canadian history But the truth is, we are the bearers of
many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore, we must also bear their burdens

"Our burdens include dishonouring the depths of the struggles of First Nations peoples and the richness of your gifts We seek God's forgiveness and healing grace as we take steps toward building respectful, compassionate, and loving relationships with First Nations peoples

"We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that we did not or would not hear, and how we have behaved as a church As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority

"We pray that you will hear the sincerity of our words today and that you will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future"

—The Right Rev. Bill Phipps General Council Executive 1998, - United Church of Canada

O Great Spirit, Create a Pure Heart in me and renew my spirit
that keeps me looking at you. (Psalm 51:10 FNV - First Nations Version)