

November 29, 2021

Your Holiness, Pope Francis

My name is Chantel Jeannette Sparklingeyes, maiden name Chantel Jeannette Boucher, and I am a proud 33-year-old Metis woman from Alberta Canada. I am a mother to three beautiful First Nations and Metis blood children. I am a member of Region One of the Metis Nation of Alberta and come from a long line of strong Metis peoples. My Kokum, Grandmother in Cree, comes from the Cardinal clan of Metis people and my Mosum, Grandfather in Cree, comes from the Boucher clan of Metis people. In my family, we have a long line of Residential School History that has devastated and harmed us for many generations. Although I was not in a school of torture that we, as Indigenous people, know as the Indian Residential School System, I still live and feel the legacy of deep harmful impacts that these schools left in Canada.

Although there are hundreds of deep impacts that I am working to break free from, I have chosen to only write to you about the biggest impact, the disruption and destruction of Love for Metis and all Indigenous peoples in Canada. This has, without a doubt been the biggest impact that I can see and feel within my family, and this is the one thing that I am proud to say is that I am breaking this negative cycle that Residential Schools has given my family, and hundreds of thousands of other Metis and Indigenous families.

To begin my story of changing the history that I was born into, I must go back to the beginning of what I know as my family history in the shameful time in Canadian History. I know that on my Kokum's side of my family there are many generations who were raised in and victims of residential schools. My great-great Grandmother was raised in residential school, so she was raised with corporal punishment, physical abuse, slave labour, malnutrition, and so much more. She then raised her children and grandchildren in that manner. My great grandmother died in child labour when my Kokum was 8 years old, so she was raised by her grandmother. My Kokum did not ever have loving parent in her life and was raised in a very strict cold way because this is all her grandmother knew. My Kokum attended a day school in Owl River Alberta but only ever received a grade 3 education because she was being hit from the nuns who taught her. Her Grandfather never let her go back after she left the school and walked home alone after being strapped.

Physical punishment was a typical way to correct children for many generations in our family but no love in the form of hugs, kisses, security, positive reinforcement, words of love was typical. And this is a direct result of many generations being raised in the cold and cruel environments that Residential schools were. How can my and my mothers' generations of Metis women know how to love if we were never shown how from the generations before us? How can those generations know how to love if they were ripped away from their families and parents for years to be raised with all forms of abuse and lack of love or healthy affection in anyway? How can abused and broken children grow into healthy adults and good parents if they were never taught that? And that is the legacy I inherited because of residential schools. This is a deep shame for all parties involved in this dark history, including the Catholic Church.



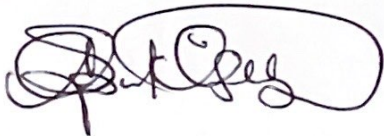
My Kokum did not know how to be sensitive or show emotions for a very long time which disrupts the way mothers' bond with their children. This disruption of attachment and love trickled down to my mother and then down to me. I also must point out that all the best professionals in the fields of child development and attachment in the world today say that children MUST get this to give this later in life. Everything we go through as children directly relate to the adults and parents we grow to be until we learn different. I am learning different, but I should never have had to.

My mother did not have a good secure attachment with my Kokum for many years which led to her and I not having the connection and attachment that I needed as a child. I was not raised in a home where we hugged, kissed, shared good words, gave acknowledgement when I was learning new things, and I was not told I love you everyday. I know that my mother and my Kokum loved me, but they did not know how to express it in any way until I was a young woman. This is how I began to parent my own children when I became a mother. I am ashamed of this. It was when I began learning the dark and hurtful history that my family carries did I then make the connection of why I felt uncomfortable being affectionate to my children, or why it felt awkward when my mother tried to hug me, or why it was weird to see my mother and Kokum expressing love to each other. As I began to recognize the Intergenerational impact of residential schools within my own family, I was able to identify it in MANY Metis and Indigenous families that I know.

Today, I am the first-generation cycle breaker of many different cycles of dysfunction that residential schools have stained Canada and its Indigenous peoples with. This includes the most important cycle to break and that is the disconnection to love. Metis and Indigenous people are the embodiment of love. Our culture and way of being in life is centered in love. This is what religion is supposed to represent also, but how can what was done to babies and children be anything of love when it literally ripped love from the hearts of children and their families? I am bringing that love back. Everyday I tell my children I love them, I kiss them, I hug them, I support them, I share everything that I am as love with them. Will you help bring this back by acknowledging the hurt? Will you support the love that I have in my heart for all children by owning this history that we inherited? We did not create this, but we can fix it together with love in the center of it. In the true spirit of reconciliation, I pray that you find this love in your heart as I have in mine, and I pray for the love and wellbeing for all humans as I know you do too.

All my best to you in good faith, Your Holiness.

Chantel Sparklingeyes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chantel Sparklingeyes', enclosed within a large, loopy, hand-drawn oval shape.

Metis Intergenerational Residential School Survivor