



## Message from David T. Barnard, President and Vice-Chancellor

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We are humbled and honoured by this announcement on National Aboriginal Day that the University of Manitoba will host the National Research Centre for Residential Schools.

I want to thank the Truth and Reconciliation commissioners for showing confidence in us that we will be responsible keepers of the stories you have gathered and the conclusions you will make that will help us move forward from this dark period of Canadian history.

We believe this national research centre will help our country advance on a path of reconciliation and healing.

The University of Manitoba offers a strong commitment to Indigenous students, a powerful educational role in challenging settler attitudes to facilitate reconciliation and a central geographic location.

The university has world-class research and archival expertise and formal partnership agreements with national Aboriginal organizations, academic institutions and other important organizations including:

- University of British Columbia
- Legacy of Hope Foundation
- University of Winnipeg
- Lakehead University
- Red River College
- University College of the North
- Université de Saint-Boniface
- National Association of Friendship Centres
- Archives Manitoba
- Canadian Museum for Human Rights

I want to thank our remarkable committee of scholars and staff from across the university who developed an excellent proposal that enabled us to become the permanent home for this centre: co-chairs Dr. Laara Fitznor and Dr. Jean Friesen, Dr. Marlene Atleo, Dr. Greg Bak, Professor Karen Busby, Camille Callison, Helen Fallding, Dr. Rainey Gaywish, Dr. Kiera Ladner, Dr. Tom Nesmith, Dr. Janice Ristock, Kali Storm and Dr. Shelley Sweeney. I would also like to recognize the contributions of Dr. Gary Glavin, Greg Juliano and Deborah Young who have worked with the Commission to make today a reality, and I would like to acknowledge Elder Garry Robson and Elder Florence Paynter for the wisdom and guidance they have shared with our team.

At the heart of the national research centre will be the statements of former residential school students. Their testimony, along with government, church and family records, will form a unique participatory archive managed through professional stewardship.

Innovative digital technologies will allow survivors, scholars and others to use the records to tell many stories: the story of residential school survivors, of families, of communities, of schools, of regions and of the country.

The collection of archives and testimonies truly belongs to survivors, their families and their communities. We will strive to ensure accessibility to all users but especially to survivors and their families, so they can learn about their history and the history of their communities.

This National Research Centre will be made available to scholars from our university, our province, our country and around the world. Our goal is to ensure this centre is used by as many people as possible. We want teachers to share these stories with students and parents to share stories with their children. Since many of our most important and poignant lessons come from our children, I believe all of us can learn from the unique insight they will gain and share from accessing this National Research Centre.

During Truth and Reconciliation Commission national and regional events, we have heard the heartbreaking accounts from survivors about the devastating impact that the Indian Residential School System had on their lives.

We all have a responsibility to acknowledge that our national government devised a system that took children from their families and attempted to rob First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples of their languages, their cultures and their communities.

This action resulted in the governments of Canada and Manitoba issuing statements of apology, as well as churches that operated schools, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United.

In October 2011, the University of Manitoba was the first post-secondary education institution in Canada to offer its statement of apology and reconciliation.

We failed to recognize or challenge the forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples and the subsequent loss of their language, culture and traditions. We apologize and it remains our intention, having said the words of apology, to move to reconciliation.

As part of our role in achieving reconciliation, the University of Manitoba is working with a variety of partners to make Manitoba the national centre for Indigenous education and research. Schools need to be places where First Nations, Metis and Inuit students are safe and feel accepted and welcome. For reconciliation to occur, it is our shared responsibility to make that happen.

Together we can ensure Indigenous students are prepared for and can achieve educational success in the full range of academic programs we offer.

It is my sincere hope that we can enable the final chapter of our national story, yet to be written, to be one that is inspiring, positive and full of hope – one where Indigenous peoples are full participants in all schools, universities, workplaces and public institutions.