

“In a Moment of Reflection:”¹
**Report on the *Archivum Generale O.M.I. Romae (AG)* – Oblate General
Administration Archives, Rome**

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Introduction:

i. *Archives and Impunity:*

Until recently, settler society knew relatively little of the history of the residential school system in Canada. This is despite the fact most Indigenous peoples continue to experience the legacy of this program every day.² This cognitive dissonance is a result of a colonial policy of social assimilation and legal dominance. Statist programs of erasure (residential schools), control and surveillance (Indian Act) produced a dismissively undervalued recorded history that is now viewed as scattered and almost inaccessible. To study this issue, one must piece together a very fragmented group of private and public resources available through a variety of often restrictive policies and procedures. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* identified this problem in its *Final Report* in 1997.³ The Commission

¹ “In a Moment of Reflection” is a phrase repeated twice (pages 19 and 194) in the Oblate text, *Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Administrative Directory*, General House, Rome 2017. In both cases, an almost identical paragraph follows. The paragraph suggests the Order rejects impunity for members and leaders of the Order who may have committed crimes against children, violated the trust of Indigenous communities, and perverted the goals of the missionary order. With the goal of “upholding the rights of every human person,” the phrase makes a guarded reference to assisting ‘victims’ and ‘harmed communities:’

the Congregation also wishes to indicate the attitudes it would hope that Units adopt in the event of a clear case of misconduct by any of its members and of its commitment to provide pastoral and professional assistance to all those affected by such alleged misconduct including to the victims, the accused, their families and their respective communities. p. 19

² Interview with Giizih-Inini Elder Harry Bone, NCTR Spiritual Guide 14 April 2022; see also the NCTR’s collection of Survivor statements: <https://archives.nctr.ca/actor/browse?sortDir=asc&sort=alphabetic&entityType=841>

³ J.S. Milloy, “Suffer the Little Children: The Aboriginal Residential School System, 1830-1992.” Paper submitted to Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), Ottawa: RCAP, 1996, NCTR Archives, RCAP-126, <https://archives.nctr.ca/rcap-126>.

noted that a good faith settler/Indigenous dialogue, healing, commemoration, and Indigenous revitalization was impossible without a common understanding of the history and legacy of the residential school program.⁴ Public access to these records are a public good; they form a vital component of our national documentary heritage. A complete and reliable set of records of the residential school system should be used to heal, understand, reconcile and reset the relationship of Indigenous and Settler societies on principles of human dignity, equal rights, and mutual respect.

To address the need for resources documenting residential schools, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in 2007 created an Indigenous directed research centre designed to preserve research resources for the history and legacy of the residential school system. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) Archives is now working with this mandate. It is responsible to assemble a comprehensive set of materials for the purpose of studying, teaching, and researching the history and legacy of the residential school system in Canada.⁵ The NCTR is also responsible to build a decolonizing archive: a social memory infrastructure that supports Indigenous cognitive practices, Indigenous knowledge methods and social protocols; a holistic centre of social memory, recognizing the spiritual and environmental in the context of local social sanction; a safe and accessible space for Indigenous peoples to learn of and freely express their views on the legacy of the RS experience, and for a settler society to listen, encounter, acknowledge and reconcile.⁶

Access to documentation of the residential school experience addresses issues of education, reconciliation, and healing. But these resources also inform accountability for human rights and justice. Human rights violations were endemic to this system; the NCTR's collection of statements of Survivors of residential school are filled with first person observations of human rights violations.⁷ We necessarily address the crimes committed in the residential school system when the

⁴ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Final Report*, vol. 1, "Looking Forward; Looking Back: Chapter 10, Residential Schools," 1996 Ottawa.

⁵ See *The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Act* (SM 2015, c. 2), *Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Administrative Agreement*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the University of Manitoba, 21 June, 2013; *Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Trust Deed*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the University of Manitoba, 21 June, 2013; *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*, Canada, 2007.

Champagne, Claude, *Les débuts de la mission dans la Nord-Ouest canadien*. Mission et

⁶ See Schedule N of the IRSSA, and the *Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Administrative Agreement*,

⁷ For a collection of almost 7,000 Indigenous Survivor statements the TRC gathered from across the country please see Survivor statements from TRC "Sharing Circles":

<https://archives.nctr.ca/informationobject/browse?genres=105650&sortDir=asc&sort=identifier&view=table&ancestor=1504527&topLod=0&onlyMedia=1> For TRC "Sharing Panels" recording Survivor statements please see:

<https://archives.nctr.ca/informationobject/browse?genres=10489&sortDir=asc&sort=identifier&view=table&ancestor=1504527&topLod=0&onlyMedia=1>

documentary history of the programme is preserved and made available. The United Nations' Joinet-Orentlicher principles (JOP, 2007) outlines the need for appropriate knowledge management when investigating collective human rights violations.⁸ The JOP maintains an accountable and accessible archival record challenges the impunity of states and organizations that have violated collective human rights. The JOP observes the need for an accessible archival record is founded on a universal right to know.

The right to know: is not simply the right of any individual victim or closely related persons to know what happened, a right to the truth. The right to know is also a collective right, drawing upon history to prevent violations from recurring in the future. Its corollary is a “duty to remember”, which the State must assume, in order to guard against the perversions of history that go under the names of revisionism or negationism; the knowledge of the oppression it has lived through is part of a people's national heritage and as such must be preserved. These, then, are the main objectives of the right to know as a collective right.⁹

In prescribing a “duty to remember” the JOP outlines the important archival processes that must be respected:

- (a) Protective and punitive measures against the removal, destruction or misuse of archives;
- (b) Establishment of an inventory of available archives, including those kept by third countries, in order to ensure that they may be transferred with those countries' consent and, where applicable, returned;
- (c) Adaptation to the new situation of regulations governing access to and consultation of archives, in particular by allowing anyone they implicate to add a right of reply to the file.¹⁰

The JOP concludes, “the principle that States must preserve archives that enable societies to exercise their right to know the truth about past repression has universal relevance.”¹¹ An accessible and accountable archives addresses “the need

⁸ Orentlicher, Diane, “Promotion and Protection of Human Rights: Impunity – Report of the Independent expert to update the Set of Principles to Combat Impunity,” Commission on Human Rights, 64th Session, Item 17, Economic and Social Council, United Nations, E/CN.4/2005/102, 18 February, 2005, Joinet/Orentlicher Principles, p. 8.

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/543366?ln=en>

⁹ JOP, p 5.

¹⁰ JOP, p. 7. Included in the right to know is the right to learn the fate of a disappeared relative which is recognized in international humanitarian law and is embodied in article 32 of Additional Protocol No. I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

for a comprehensive approach towards combating impunity.” Over time the UN has observed that to be successful, the JOP must be applied through policies for combating impunity which are themselves rooted in processes that ensure public accountability.

Finally, extensive global experience with truth commissions in the period since the JOP were developed has shown that the “participation of victims and other citizens” has special importance for deliberations concerning the collective dimension of the right to know.¹² Giving voice to the children who experienced the assimilating character of residential schools is a fundamental mission of the IRRSA and its accountable mechanisms. This has become particularly vital since recently several Indigenous communities have made unsettling discoveries of mass burial sites near the residential schools their children attended. The discoveries include:

- May 27, 2021: the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced discovery of 215 sets of human remains near the site of the former Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia.
- June 24, 2021: the Cowessess First Nation announced the discovery of 751 unmarked graves near the location of the former Marieval Residential School, in Saskatchewan.
- June 30, 2021: the Ktunaxa Nation announced the discovery of 182 unmarked burial sites near the location of the former St. Eugene Mission School in British Columbia.
- July 12, 2021: the Penelakut Tribe announced the discovery of 160 unmarked graves near the residential school site (Kuper Island Residential School) on Penelakut Island in British Columbia.

There are several more communities who will soon make similar announcements. Public protests, occasionally violent, quickly followed these discoveries. This was also followed by considerable international media. One result of the discoveries: Chiefs and representatives of Indigenous communities were invited to visit Rome for an audience with the Pope. During their visit to the Vatican his Holiness offered an apology for the relevant Catholic Orders’ treatment of children at residential schools. This was followed by a papal visit to Canada where again the Pope expressed his concern for Catholic atonement, asked for forgiveness, and apologized for the “evil” of Catholic personnel at residential schools and the

¹² JOP p. 8.

“catastrophic” legacy of schools on Indigenous families.¹³ Suddenly the state and social memory of residential schools is a central topic of popular media and conscience. There is now a publicly acknowledged moral imperative to supplying access to residential school records.

ii. The Road to Rome:

The Oblates recognize this imperative. For more than a year the Oblates of O.M.I. Lacombe have been in discussion with the NCTR to provide greater access to the Oblates’ records of residential schools.¹⁴ As a private organization, until recently, the Oblate Order was reluctant to fully open their archives for researchers investigating residential schools. But there is a sense that the Oblates’ relationship with Indigenous peoples is evolving.

In the light of these events, the Oblates of O.M.I. Lacombe struck a Memorandum of Agreement to make the NCTR the principal research institution for the historical documentation of the Oblates relationship to residential schools. The Oblates of O.M.I. Lacombe intend to have the NCTR “acquire from the Oblates as complete as possible set of the Records,” from all Oblate records sets currently stored at multiple repositories across the country and abroad and be the principal archival repository for all access requests for Oblate records related to residential schools. The Agreement also offered to open all Oblate records for research save for a portion of Personnel files whose access remains in negotiation. The records will be selected, digitized, and housed at the NCTR where they will be made available to researchers.¹⁵ During these negotiations, the NCTR was formally invited to Rome to review the records in the *Archivum Generale O.M.I. Romae* (AG), the Oblate General Administration Archives. This offer completes the NCTR’s access to all the prominent records repositories. There remains the possibility that small amounts of relevant records might still be located at parishes and diocese offices.

What follows is an impressionistic report based on a five-day review of the *Archivum Generale O.M.I. Romae* (AG) records. The review occurred between July 4th and 8th, 2022.

B. The *Archivum Generale O.M.I. Romae* (AG)

¹³ <https://www.papalvisit.ca/>; “Pope Francis apologizes for forced assimilation of Indigenous children at residential schools,” CBC, July 25, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/edmonton-pope-alberta-apology-1.6530947>

¹⁴ The Oblates province of O.M.I. Lacombe was created in 2003. It is the successor organization to the Oblate Missionary Order responsible for running more than 48 schools in Canada.

¹⁵ *Memorandum of Agreement between The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, OMI Lacombe Canada (Oblates) and The University of Manitoba on behalf of The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR)*, March 25, 2022.

The *Archivum Generale O.M.I. Romae* (AG) is divided into five archival series. These groupings are designed around the function and, in the case of the AV materials, genre of documents:

Extent: 87 m. textual material; 20 filing cabinets of photos and 100 photo albums

Outside Dates: [ca. 1830 - 2020]

Scope and Content:

1. Manuscripts
2. Audio/Visual
3. Provinces
4. Administration
5. Personnel

1. Manuscripts (Title based on Beaudoin description¹⁶)

Extent: 50 m.; ca. 2000 titles

Outside Dates: [ca. 1875-2010]

Scope and content:

This series consists of handwritten and typed works including academic studies, published literature, sermons, necrologies, liturgical books, directories, textbooks, language studies, and manuscripts by members of the Oblate Order. There are also written works not intended for public viewing: codices historicus, council meetings, financial records, diaries, and other personal observations. Most of these types of records are centred on European Oblates writing on their responsibilities in Europe. Since the headquarters was in France for much of its history, a large portion of the records, predominantly in French, describe the activities in the context of the Catholic Church in France.

Access to the manuscript collection is managed through an item level inventory of the works. There does not seem to have been an explicit acquisition policy for the collection. As part of the manuscript collection, the Archives also holds a random list of published and unpublished academic graduate theses and dissertations critically examining the Oblate mission from various perspectives. There was no clear organizing perspective on the academic works; they are arranged in alphabetical order by author.

There is a recognized genre of literature: memoirs from Oblate Missionaries' experiences in Canada. Many of these writers played formative roles in

¹⁶ Yvon Beaudoin, O.M.I. "Oblate Archives at the General House in Rome." Rome, N.D., p. 3.

establishing residential schools, particularly in Western Canada. These manuscripts can provide valuable insight into the Oblate mission and how Indigenous communities received this mission. However, there were no works in the AG manuscript collection that dealt explicitly with residential schools in Canada, related Indigenous communities, or the children who were sent to the schools. Specifically, I asked for any records – correspondence, printing, editing – concerning the following significant Canadian Oblate works in any edition:

Name	Notable Work(s)	Manuscript(s)
Taché, Alexander-Antonin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Vingt années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique</i> (1866) <i>Esquisse sur le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique</i> (1869). 	None
Leduc, Hippolyte	<i>Personal Notes</i>	None
Lacombe, Albert	<i>Personal Notes</i>	None
Vegreville, Vanlentin	<i>Personal Notes</i>	None
Legal, Émile-Joseph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Short sketches of the history of the Catholic churches and missions in central Alberta;</i> <i>Personal Notes</i> 	Yes
Grandin, Vital-Justin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Écrits de Grandin,”</i> <i>Personal Notes</i> 	Yes
Petitot, Émile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Les grands Esquimaux</i> <i>Among the Chiglit Eskimos</i> <i>Personal Notes</i> 	None
Charlebois, Ovide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Vicariat du Keewatin: Mgr Charlebois, O.M.I., en tournée pastorale</i> <i>Chez les Esquimaux: notes de voyage, visite pastorale, ordination, etc</i> <i>Débuts d'un évêque missionnaire: Mgr Ovide Charlebois, O.M.I., évêque de Bérénice, vicaire apostolique du Keewatin: prise de possession, installation, première visite pastorale des missions sauvages</i> <i>Personal Notes</i> 	None
d'Herbomez, Louis-Joseph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Letter from his lordship the bishop of Miletopolis and vicar apostolic of British Columbia . . . ,”</i> 	None
Decorby, Jules	<i>Personal Notes</i>	None
Faraud, Henri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Petite histoire sainte, en montagnais et en caractères syllabiques</i> <i>Dix-huit ans chez les sauvages: voyages et missions . . . dans l'extrême nord de l'Amérique britannique d'après les documents de Mgr l'évêque d'Anemour,</i> 	None
Chirouse, Eugène-Casimir-	<i>Personal Notes</i>	None
Demers, Alfred	<i>Personal Notes</i>	None
J.T. McNally	<i>Personal Notes</i>	None
J. P. Magnan	<i>Personal Notes</i>	None
Grouard, Emile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Souvenirs de mes soixante ans d'apostolat dans l'Athabasca-Mackenzie, 1922</i> 	None
Breynat, Gabriel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Cinquante ans au pays de neiges, 1945-48</i> 	None

Adrien-Gabriel Morice, OMI,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Souvenirs d'un missionnaire en Colombie Britannique, 1933</i> 	None
Durieu, Paul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Chinook Bible history</i> • <i>Practical Chinook vocabulary, comprising all & the only usual words of that wonderful language</i> • <i>Chinook vocabulary: Chinook-English</i> 	None

Most of these works are not in the Archivum Generale. In particular one would expect Rome's administrative archive to acquire Taché's writing since he published to promote the Oblate Mission in Western Canada by request of the Superior General of the Congregation. His work was serialized and distributed to Oblate missionaries and general parishioners. As a spokesperson he promoted the mission of running residential schools in the West and he generated support in the French pastoral community in Québec. The most complete and reliable versions of these works are found, not in Western Canada or the Archivum Generale O.M.I. Romae, but rather in Library and Archives Canada and the Bibliothèque et Archives Nationale de Québec.

Although the manuscripts series held very little on Oblate Missionaries in Canada; nevertheless, it is important to recognize there was a thorough, three-step Oblate approach to publications.¹⁷

- *Nihil obstat*- official recognition a work is not objectionable on grounds moral or doctrinal
- *Imprimatur* – authorization of ecclesiastical authority
- *Imprimi potest* – assurance by author's immediate religious superior.

This suggests the Oblates devoted care and attention to their published message. Huel suggests the careful pastoral message of Oblate missionary work in Canada was ultramontane and included protection of Québécoise cultural matters,

An important and unique characteristic of the early Oblate apostolate in the prairie provinces is that it was the work of French speaking clergymen. Consequently, the Oblates reinforced the ultramontane Catholicism of Québec and zealously guarded the prerogatives of the Catholic Church and the rights of the French language. In establishing the Catholic Church in the

¹⁷ Raymond Huel

West the Oblates were promoting a cultural and religious extension of Québec.¹⁸

The Oblate publication model, when discussing Indigenous communities, was intended for a Catholic audience with the missionary goal of promoting a kind of Catholicism. Elder Florence Paynter, Indigenous spiritual leader for the NCTR, explained how even the study of language was done in a strategic manner. Priests were advised to gain fluency in local languages to gain entrée into local communities to proselytize,¹⁹ not for survival of linguistic culture of a community. For this reason, Survivors' view with suspicion even the Oblates' early efforts to learn and preserve Indigenous languages.²⁰

There is a gap in the manuscript collection concerning Oblate writers who documented their missionary work in Canada, often with a focus on Indigenous communities and residential schools. The randomness that characterizes the manuscript collection concerning Canada indicates this topic was not of high value for the Oblate authorities.

Recommendations:

1. **Manuscript research:** As a manuscript collection, based on my review, the *Archivum Generale O.M.I. Romae* does not offer any significant content on the history and legacy of residential schools, Indigenous communities, or the children from those communities. Such works are more appropriately located at repositories in Canada. The NCTR should acquire copies of these valuable resources to better interrogate the planning, goals, and process of Oblates as managers of residential schools. They are also a resource on the Indigenous reception of residential schools. These materials can be found at Library and Archives Canada as well as Bibliothèque et Archives Nationale de Québec.
2. **Academic Works:** Copies of graduate studies – M.A. Theses and PhD. Dissertations – are easily available through academic libraries across Canada. There is no need to consult the General Archives for such work.
3. **Indigenous Literature:** There is a growing list of talented Indigenous writers who address issues of Indigenous identity and the legacy of

¹⁸ Raymond Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis*, p. xix.

¹⁹ Interview with Ozhoshko Binesi Kwe Florence Paynter, Spiritual Advisor to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, June 23, 2022.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Huel, p. ??

residential schools. The NCTR would do better to concentrate its resources to recognize and promote Indigenous writers.

4. **Writer In Residence / Indigenous Press:** The publication process of the works of the Oblate order does not provide much material to study the Indigenous experience of residential schools. But the process can serve as a publication model in the sense that it supports the goals and ambitions of the Oblate Order in Canada. One could offer support for Indigenous creative expression through an artist in residence programme where an artist would create works on the themes of Indigenous identity. The NCTR could also support an Indigenous press that would publish manuscripts concerning Indigenous culture and identity.

2. Audio-Visual (Title based on Beaudoin description)

Extent: 20 filing cabinets, 100 albums.

Outside Dates: [ca. 1816-2020]

Scope and Content:

Series consists of several thousand photographs, primarily black and white, that document Oblate missions around the world. The photos are arranged by geographic location of missions, followed by subject headings based on Oblate missionary activities. Many of the photos have handwritten descriptions on the back of the images. These are obscured because most of the original photos have been glued to letter sized paper, presumably to augment the structural strength of the print.

There are three filing cabinet drawers, comprising approximately 700 to 1,000 images. These photos document residential schools in Canada in the early 20th century. Oblate missionary priests sent these original photos to Rome as part of the reports on their work in the various Oblate missions and residential schools in Canada. There does not seem to be a formal reporting program that included photos. Although it is likely these photos came from missionary reports, there is no clear indication of the reports from which these photos were removed. The contents of the photos include lands surrounding the residential schools, images of the schools, school activities, and images of the teachers and students. There are handwritten descriptions on the back of many of these images. The descriptions offer location of the image, the name of the priest who took the photo, and often the year of the photo. It is presumed the priests who took the photos wrote the

descriptions. There was no attempt supply the names of the children or describe the children in any way. The custodial history of the photos is not documented. In the words of the Head of Archives, Father Jerome Velichor, “we do not have any written clues to say how these photos reached Rome.”²¹ Commercial photo services printed the images, but it is not known if multiple copies were printed. A review of Oblate photo records at the Dêschatelets archives and the Royal BC Museum (Archives) indicates there are similar collections of photos sent from priests teaching at Oblate run archives. It is possible these types of photos were distributed and preserved without formal acquisition programmes or documentation. It is also possible that copies of a photo may be found at both the Rome General Administration archives and Oblate archival repositories in Canada. This comparison could be done most effectively once the images have been digitized. None of the images have been digitized.

Photographs: Drawer 1 St. Joseph, Baie James, Labrador, St. Rosaire, St. Peter's, Manitoba, Alberta-Saskatchewan						
Archival Location	Folder Title	Dates	Extent and Medium	Name of Creator	Archival history	Scope and content
	Canada: British Columbia - (Kamloops: Indian School)	[ca. 1930]	8 photos	Unknown	unknown	8 photos: b&w, includes captions, Kamloops School
	Canada: (B.C) - Indian's School	[ca. 1940]	44 photos	Unknown	unknown	44 Photos: b&w, some annotation including "Tofino," and "Banfield" suggesting these are Christie IRS. Includes one photo from St. Joseph.
	Canada: Residential School	[ca. 1930]		Unknown	unknown	2 photos: b&w, some annotation on verso indicating Assumption IRS.
	Canada: Varia	[ca. 1920]	21 photos	Unknown	unknown	22 photos: b&w, no identified location in Canadian north.
	St. Joseph: Exhibits of the different Missions of the Oblates	[ca. 1920]	29 photos	Unknown	unknown	29 Photos: b&w, not description, photos of curated exhibition of Oblate missions in Canada
	St. Joseph	[ca. 1940]	8 photos	Unknown	unknown	8 photos: b&w, no captions.

²¹ Correspondence with Father Jerome Velichor, 2022.08.26.

	Canada: St. Joseph Varia	[ca. 1920]	22 photos; one photo	Unknown	unknown	22 photos, one photo: 22 b&w photos of a child's gravesite; one photo of Grouard cabins. Grouard photo includes a caption.
	Canada: St. Joseph: St. Marc-de-Figuery (Amos) Pensionnat Indien	{ca. 1940}	14 photos,	Unknown	unknown	14 photos: b&w, no descriptions, teachers and students.
	Canada: St. Joseph: Ville-Marie (Autrefois St. -Claude et Temiskamingue)	[ca 1900-1950]	17 photos	Unknown	unknown	17 photos: b&w, no description, cityscapes, church, students and missionaries.
	Canada: Baie James (James' Bay): Various Photos	[ca. 1920]			unknown	
	Baie James: (James' Bay): Albany	[ca. 1910]	15 photos	Unknown	Unknown	15 Photos: b&w, handwritten descriptions verso, photos of children, Elders, families of local Indigenous communities, note: "envoi de R.P. Martel", pasted to paper
	Baie James: (James' Bay): Albany (Lac Ste.-Anne)	[ca, 1950]	7 photos	Unknown	Unknown	7 photos: b&w, brief descriptions verso, pasted to paper, includes construction of school.
	Baie James: (James' Bay): Albany (Lac Ste.-Anne) Boarding School	[ca. 1950]	10 photos	unknown	Unknown	10 photos: b&w, images of church, exterior and interior, construction of school
	Baie James (James' Bay) Albany (O.M.I.)	[ca. 1910]	5 photos	Unknown	Unknown	5 photos: b&w, handwritten descriptions verso, O.M.I. staff
	Baie James (James' Bay): Albany (Mission)	[ca. 1920-1950]	43 photos	Unknown	Created at the Mission Catholique. Sent by Jules Leguerrier on request of Mg. H. Belleau, O.M.I.	43 photos: b&w, handwritten descriptions verso, mounted on paper. Includes typed letter from Jules Leguerrier, O.M.I. Dir. To the Rev. Pere Archiviste, Maison Denerale, Rome
	Baie James (James; Bay): Fort George	[ca. 1920 - 1950]	47 photos	Unknown	Created at Fort George Catholic residential school	47 photos: b&w, handwritten descriptions verso, includes photos of O.M.I. missionaries, Indigenous communities, and school with chapel
	Baie James (James Bay): Fort Hope	[ca. 1955]	3 photos	Unknown		3 photos: b&w, photos of Fort Hope Mission chapel

	Baie James (James Bay): Moose Factory	[ca. 1920-1950]	6 photos	Unknown	photos sent by father Bilodeau, O.M.I.	6 photos: b&w, photos of Moose Factory including Teepees near the Bay, handwritten descriptions verso
	Baie James (James Bay): Various Photos	[ca. 1920]	12 photos	Unknown		12 photos: b&w, various photos of northern missions and communities .
	Baie James (James Bay): Weenisk	[ca. 1900-1950]	21 photos	Unknown		21 Photos: b&w, Missionaries and Indigenous community of Weenisk - Moosonee, includes construction of church
Photographs Drawer 2	S.M. Regina - Assumption; Grouard - Mackenzie			Unknown		
	St. Peter's: Alkali Lake, B.C.	1930	7 photos	Unknown		7 Photos: b&w, handwritten descriptions verso, photos of St. Joseph's school, Williams Lake.
	St. Peter's: Babine B.C.	[cal. 1915]	9 photos	Unknown		9 photos: b&w, handwritten description verso, stamp of Rome Archives.
	St. Peter's: Bonaparte, B.C.	[ca. 1910]	4 photos	Unknown		4 photos: handwritten description verso, church and unidentified Indigenous parishioners.
	St. Peter's Canoe Creek, B.C.	[ca. 1910]	6 photos	Unknown		6 Photos: b&w, handwritten version, Church, school house, Indigenous community members.
	St. Peter's Canoe Creek, B.C.	[ca. 1940]	5 photos	Unknown		6 Photos: b&w, handwritten version, Church, school house, Indigenous community members, includes scene from passion play.
	St. Peter's Canbrook. B.C. (St. Eugene)	[ca. 1920]	27 photos	Unknown		27 Photos: b&w, handwritten description on version, Church, school house, Indigenous community members.
	St. Peter's Canbrook. B.C. (School of the Indian)	[ca. 1910]	4 photos	Unknown		4 photos: handwritten description verso, church and unidentified Indigenous parishioners.
	St. Peter's Esquimalt, B.C.	[ca. 1910]	7 photos	Unknown		7 photos: handwritten description verso, church and unidentified Indigenous parishioners.

Recommendations:

1. **Digitization:** For both preservation and access, the Oblate Archives would benefit greatly from a digitization project for their photos. First, digitization provides Indigenous communities simple access to the photos promoting a reciprocal relationship with Indigenous communities. Second, communities would have an online option to supply descriptions and identify the children in the images. Third,

digitization would include conservation measures such as limiting handling of original images. Finally, digitization supports replevin (see item #4).

2. **Selection and Appraisal:** The fact that Oblates chose certain photos to send to Rome is a kind of appraisal. There is an unspoken message in the selection; there is no doubt the decisions contained a degree of self-promotion, as well as a campaign to raise support from the central administration for the mission. But as Head of Archives, Father Jerome Velichor, has observed, “we do not have any written clues to say how these photos reached Rome.”²² This suggests there was no formal policy for the creation and management of the photos. The photos represent the only records in the administrative archives that directly document the lives of individual children at residential schools. The photos may hold additional information on the lives and final destiny of children who never returned to their families and home communities. This makes these photos particularly valuable for Indigenous communities and families who were left to deal with a lost relative. The handwritten descriptions on the back of many of the photos never identify the children in the photos. Most often it details the date and location. It is likely that the home communities of these children would be able to make this identification. This makes it vitally important that the photos are digitized and made accessible to the communities for identification.
3. **Scholasticates:** Some Oblate representatives have suggested that the only photos of value for residential school Survivors and the NCTR directly document children and their activities on the grounds of a residential school. This is to take the children out of the context of the schools’ functions. There are many photos of priests who taught in the residential school system, but they are not directly in the context of residential schools daily operations. They are photos of priests in scholasticates, training sessions, religious gatherings, meetings and conferences. They are the photographic documentation of the lives of priest as they live out their lives as missionaries working in Indigenous communities. These photos complete the residential school story. At the moment, with its understandable focus on children, the documentation held at the NCTR is asymmetrical. If the mandate of the NCTR as a resource centre is to document the complete history of the residential school system, then photos of priest and their activities in the localities of schools and missionary provinces is important. Otherwise, the history remains

²² Correspondence with Father Jerome Velichor, O.M.I. 2022.08.26.

asymmetrical, guarded, incomplete, and not transparent. A full understanding of the residential school experience includes an understanding of the nuns and priests who operated these schools on a daily basis.

4. **Replevin:** Providing access to the Oblate Administrative Archives in Rome is one step to rebuild the relationship between the Oblate order and Indigenous peoples. A new order built on principles of respect, equality, and human dignity. To further reset the relationship, the Oblates should offer to return the photos that document children at residential school. Or in the spirit of the IRSSA, all the photos that somehow document the operations of the schools – scholasticates, teacher training, school activities. This gesture would account for photos as materials that the Oblate order acquired from local communities during their work at residential schools. It would provide a sense of reciprocity to a relationship that has until now seemed irresponsibly one sided. This would also address the Vatican argument that the Indigenous items held in their cultural repositories were gifts. In Indigenous philosophy (i.e. Potlatch philosophy) gifts are commonly given to create a relationship of reciprocity.²³ Providing original photos of residential schools would be an appropriate Oblate gesture to building such a relationship and redress this reciprocity. This photo replevin is also responsive to the First Nations OCAP Principles, it is a recognition there is an Indigenous provenance to the photos as much as an Oblate provenance. Finally, as much as Indigenous concerns should lead the replevin discussion, recent archival statements on the principles of ownership, possession and provenance, also support the idea that items that possess an Indigenous provenance should be returned to the originating community.²⁴ If the Oblate Archive in Rome implements a digitization program, it can keep a digital copy. The difference would be minimal for a set of records the Oblates rarely if ever consulted or used.

3. Provinces

Extent: 24 filing cabinets, [ca. 12 – 15 m.]

Outside Dates: [ca. 1850 – 2010]

Scope and Content:

²³ Interview with Elder Harry Bone, NCTR Spiritual Guide, 2022.08.19. Mary Annette Pember, “Indigenous peoples want sacred Items returned from Catholic museums,” *Indian Country Today*, July 29, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3SnUYfY>. For an early European view on Indigenous gift philosophies see Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Cansfield Center: Martino Publishing, 2011.

²⁴ Association of Canadian Archivists, “Reconciliation Framework,” <https://bit.ly/3POhqNP>. International Council of Archives, Tandanya/Adelaide Declaration <https://www.ica.org/en/creating-tandanya-the-adelaide-declaration>

Series consists of records that document the administration of Oblate provinces in missions around the globe. Beaudoin summarizes typical documentation in a provincial file in Rome as: Calls to Vows, circular letters, congresses, council meetings, finances, canonical visitations, and general administration. Annual reports, with a statistical breakdown of the activities in the province, are a featured document in each Province file. The only mention of children in these files is in the form of data on the number of children attending a residential school. The records are kept in filing cabinets arranged by geographic region. Within those groupings the files are arranged in alphabetical order by the function documented. The administrative focus of the Provinces records leaves out any recorded evidence of individual children in this series of records.

The purpose of the files is to provide an administrative record of the work of the provinces. As noted in the *Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, “The Congregation is divided into Provinces to establish closer bonds among local communities and to ensure the stability of the apostolic works.”²⁵ Accordingly, each province will set up its own goals reflective of local context. Expanding on this goal, the Constitution and Rules states,

Each Province is in its own way a true apostolic community with its priorities and goals which, to be attained, require the participation of all. Local communities and their members will seek to be in solidarity with one another and mutually responsible for the common mission.²⁶

The content of the Provincial records in the Oblate General Archives is directly affected by this approach. “As part of the provincial services, each province should have a provincial archive and a complete set of records on the various ministries and members of the province. There should be a policy governing access to provincial records.”²⁷ As Oblate administration notes in its contemporary guide, “We have as our goal to establish Christian communities and Churches deeply rooted in the local culture and fully responsible for their own development and growth.”²⁸ Unfortunately, most Christian organizations coming from Europe like the Oblates, could not enlarge the embrace of their concept of community to

²⁵ *Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome 2018, p.93.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, *Administrative Directory*, Rome, General House, 2017, p. 84

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

include Indigenous peoples as equals. Rather, as the Oblates state in their policy, they were in “in service of the evangelization of the poor and most abandoned.”²⁹

Recommendation

1. **Recordkeeping Programme:** The administrative focus of the Province files leaves out the possibility these records hold evidence of children’s lives at residential school. An Oblate Province archives, where the predominant documentation of the Order’s local activities reside, requires a complete set of records schedules within a comprehensive recordkeeping program. Such schedules produce accountability and trustworthy records. It would also provide a custodial history adding to the records’ reliability and authenticity. As Father Jerome has observed, “the archives does not have any custodial history of the documents in the archives.”³⁰ There is some speculation that in the early 20th century the Oblate Scholasticate in Ottawa, acted as a sort of administrative chancellery receiving records from various Oblate Provinces and selecting those records appropriate to send back to Rome. Father Jerome’s observation suggests more research is required on the operation of the Ottawa Scholasticate whose records are now in Longueuil, Québec in the Dêschâtelets Archives. Building on this transparency, the Archives require a more complete arrangement and description of the records including accurate file lists. Such access tools should form part of the archives program; it could confirm a trustworthy archival repository
2. **Dispersed Recordkeeping:** The Oblates’ history of dispersed recordkeeping is one of the principal difficulties for researchers trying to locate records related to residential schools. For residential schools Survivors and their communities the complexities and idiosyncrasies of this poorly documented dispersal seem impenetrable.³¹ This promotes poor communication across Indigenous and Oblate communities. It also provides fuel for conspiracy theory.³² To provide a

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4

³⁰ Correspondence with Father Jerome, 2022.08.26

³¹ For the single Oblate province of O.M.I. Lacombe, there are five main repositories: Keewatin/The Pas, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Royal BC Museum, Deschâtelets, Centre Patrimoine de St. Boniface – and that does not account for diocesan and parish offices that still hold some records.

³² Gilliland, A. J., & Caswell, M. (2016). “Records and their imaginaries: imagining the impossible, making possible the imagined”. *Archival Science*, 16(1), 53-75; Caswell, M., & Gilliland, A. (2015). “False promise and new hope: dead perpetrators, imagined documents and emergent archival evidence.” *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 19(5), 615-627; Lowry, J. (2019). “Radical empathy, the imaginary and affect in (post) colonial records: how to break out of international stalemates on displaced archives.” *Archival Science*, 19(2), 185-203.

more transparent and accountable access to these records, the NCTR should become the comprehensive resource centre for researchers investigating the history of the relationship between residential schools and the Oblate Order. The Oblates have struck an agreement with the NCTR to amalgamate the digital copies of all Oblate records documenting the residential school experience. This project is ongoing and should be prioritized.

4. Administration (Title based on Beaudoin description)

Extent: 11 Filing cabinets [ca. 22 m.]

Outside Dates: [ca. 1850- 2010]

Scope and content:

Series concerns the administrative operations of the Secretariat Office in Rome. Records also include operations of committees and various offices and bureaus concerned with the administrative work of the Order around the world. Topics include Scholasticate, Novitiate, Juniorate (formation houses); material procurement; retreats, investments; constitutional rules; general chapter administration; records of Congresses; general meetings; canonical correspondence. There are in addition treasury and financial records, canonical visit records, interactions with the Holy See, and work with various secretariates and provinces in missions around the world. There is also a set of files on the various Departments of the OMI General House including: the General Secretariate, the General Treasurer's Office, the Office of the Postulator General, the Office of the Procurator General to the Holy See; and the General Secretariat for Information. Files are arranged in alphabetical order by activity and subject and within these topics, by chronological order. There is no subject list. Given the limited time the researcher had to investigate records, and the enormity of the administrative record, the recommendations are necessarily impressionistic. The recommendations reference what is logically expected to be found in the administrative and what is expected to be made available.

Recommendations:

1. **Records of “delicts of sexual abuse”³³:** The TRC conducted a “victim centred” truth commission. The truths prioritized were not the typical research narratives of whiggish history or the case evidence collected to resolve Common Law torts. As one TRC Commissioner noted, “the TRCs mandate is... primarily focused on the experiences of children. To build a

³³ This phrase is not uncommon on Oblate policy. In Roman Law a delict is a civil wrong that implies compensation.

greater understanding of the ... experiences of those who have lived under the oppressive weight of their memories for decades.”³⁴ Foremost in all the events and investigations was the residential school students. This concern is even greater as communities have launched unmarked gravesites investigations. This inverts the work of the residential schools which aimed to remove the Indigenous identity of the children sent to schools. For this reason, when considering the records of the Oblate Order, the NCTR’s focus is on records illuminating the experience of children. A significant motivating question remains the records of victims of abuse.

Renkin notes the Catholic Church began to formally address “delicts of “sexual abuse” with the 1983 Code of Canon Law.”³⁵ He cites an ongoing list of canonical pronouncements which increasingly acknowledge the damage done beyond the Oblate community in an international perspective. Renkin argues the Catholic church has constantly moved forward to address “the threat and trauma of sexual abuse of minors...”³⁶ He cites seven points of “legislation and praxis” to prove his point including a commitment “to cooperate with civil authorities, including by reporting alleged incidents of sexual abuse” and “frees from any obligation of pontifical secrecy persons involved in reporting, investigating, judging allegations of sexual abuse...”³⁷ Issues of human dignity and human rights continue to gain recognition in mechanisms of civil society and international law. There must be an administrative set of files setting out the official response to these “delicts” in the administrative files of the Oblates. Policy papers, committee meetings, procedures and guidelines – the records of Oblate response to their delicts could be made available for transparency and dialogue. It may also create a platform for engagement with Indigenous communities.

Wages of Sin: Morrissey conceptualizes the Oblate priority for privacy and confidentiality as a question of how to “deal... with sin,” something, he argues, secular society does not fully understand:

³⁴ “Presentation to the Senate of Canada Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples by the Honourable Murray Sinclair, September 28, 2010.

³⁵ Stanley Renkin, “The Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Persons in the Catholic Church: A Study of Recent Canonical Developments in Establishing New Delicts of Sexual Abuse and in Requiring Transparency in Addressing Them,” unpublished paper, N.D. based on Université St. Paul/St. Paul University webinar, November 21, 2021: <https://bit.ly/3QCS0TV>. p. 2.

³⁶ Renkin, p. 28.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

It is a known fact that the Church has been very sensitive about confidentiality. But, in the secular world this is often described as a “cover up”. One of the reasons for this approach is that so many of our issues also deal, in one way or another, with sin, and thus have an impact of peoples’ consciences or reputation. Not surprisingly, then, there are many canons in the *Code of Canon Law* which speak of secrecy, confidentiality, and related issues. While it would be difficult to arrange them in order of importance (since the Code itself doesn’t foresee such a listing), nevertheless, we can realize that there is a certain gradation in the obligation of preserving secrecy³⁸

This gradation Morrissey discusses is also a question in freedom of information and protection of privacy (F.I.P.P.A.) legislation. There is no formal sliding scale of harms in F.I.P.P.A. . As a solution, Morrissey’s presentation lists a variety of cases where Canon law addresses the privacy of archives and the confidentiality of the sinner. He cites Canon law on the confidentiality of the Catholic ritualized confession as one of many examples.³⁹ In such an acknowledgement of sin the private seal of the confession is inviolable. Giizih-Inini, Elder Harry Bone, notes this perspective is the inversion of Indigenous philosophy dealing with such “delicts”. He notes that there is no equivalent to the concept of confidentiality. To gain forgiveness you must confess what you have done, but such communication and corresponding recognition must come from the community. Edmund Metatawabin, former Chief of the Fort Albany First Nation, supports Giizih-Inini’s comments by observing the Nêhiyawak translation of the word justice, *Kintohtpatatin*, is “you have been heard.”

The administrative policy of the Oblate order on dealing with ecclesiastical delicts recognizes its obligation to respond to civil law. But nowhere in the writings of Canon scholars is any recognition of Indigenous views of justice, sin, and forgiveness. As noted in its most recent Administrative Directory:

Oblate Units exist not only within the context of the Church and its governing law (Code of Canon Law, OMI Constitutions and Rules, local or general Directories) but also within civil society. Some Units reside in more

³⁸ Morrissey, p. 2

³⁹ Morrissey writes,

According to canon 983, the confessional seal is inviolable. Failure to observe this provision can lead to the most serious canonical penalties. Indeed, canon 1388 provides that a person who directly violates the sacramental seal incurs an automatic excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See (through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). Morrissey, “Confidentiality, Archives and Records Management: Canon Law Provisions,” p. 2.

than one country. The Oblate Unit within civil society generally exists through a governing structure that is defined by the legal code of the applicable country. Care must be taken in establishing the civil presence that the legal structure(s) adopted enable the Oblate mission and presence and do not result in the *de facto* alienation of Oblate patrimony, property, and/or financial assets. It may be appropriate to adopt more than one legal structure or several independent legal structures to safeguard the Oblate material resources and safeguard its mission.⁴⁰

There are doubtless internal administrative policies on how to deal with wayward priests. This would include policies on public responses, legal matters, and the health of the priests. There should equally be administrative policy on reconciliation and atonement with the victims and the victims' communities. As noted by Giizih-Inini, Elder Harry Bone, NCTR Spiritual Guide, "the Oblate Order clearly has a different conceptualization of sin." This is the time to address these worldviews to find a complimentary path. "To sit together as friends – reconciliation must go both ways – first and foremost reconcile with our traditions and ways of life. There are two sides to reconciliation: within Indigenous communities; within the Oblate Order."⁴¹

2. Administering Education: operating with such a limited research window, it is difficult to determine what was the Oblate's administrative position on developing an education curriculum. Combined the Federal and provincial governments and Church organizations badly mishandled education for Indigenous communities, a responsibility enshrined in many of the colonial era treaties.⁴² In the spirit of reciprocity, to return identities so determinedly removed, the Oblate Order could atone for their misuse of education by supporting Indigenous guided education programs such as Oblate resourced Indigenous language programs and programs to revitalize the use of important Indigenous ceremonies. As the Honourable Murray Sinclair has observed, "education got us into this situation; education can lead us out."

3. Recordkeeping: As a private archives, the Oblate General Administration Archives is not legally required to provide public access to their records. This

⁴⁰ Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, *Administrative Directory*, "Interrelationship of civil law and canon," pp.81-82.

⁴¹ Interview with Giizih-Inini, Elder Harry Bone, 2022.08.19.

⁴² See "The Educational Record of Residential Schools, 1867-1939." Ch. 13 Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939, The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Vol. 1, Ottawa: 2015.

would explain in part why there is no project plan to digitize holdings. The repository adequately serves its community of principal concern, the missionaries of the Order. But good recordkeeping practices would be a response to critics who claim the Order is hiding records. It is the only way to prove transparency and authenticity of the evidence.

5. Personnel Files

Extent: [ca. 16.1 m., 50 filing cabinets, 40,000 files]

Outside Dates: [ca. 1850 – 2020]

Scope and Content:

Series consists of records documenting the spiritual evolution of an Oblate as he fulfils his Formation and completes his obligations during his career as an Oblate missionary. The Oblate Administration defines the Formation as follows:

Formation is a process which aims at the integral growth of a person and lasts a lifetime. It enables us to accept ourselves as we are and develop into the persons we are called to be. Formation involves us in an ever-renewed conversion to the Gospel and a readiness to learn and to change in response to new demands.⁴³

Translation of the Formation into documents is not direct. A member of clerical authority, a “Provincial,” “Superior, and other members of the clerical hierarchy oversees the missionary’s spiritual progress in the context of his Province of service.” Ultimately a Superior General of a Province will oversee the roles and duties of a Formation. Over time the Formation administration has become more organized with “a formation committee [that] helps the Provincial” in the arrangement of the Formation requirements.⁴⁴ Reports on the various milestones in a Priest’s Formation are the predominant source of documentation in the personnel file of a Priest.⁴⁵ In recognition of the Formation, each file has a unique “oblation” number.

According to the General Administration of the Secretariate, a complete personnel file should contain the following documents:

⁴³ “Formation,” Oblates, O.M.I., *Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Rome 2018 p. 45.

⁴⁴ “Formation,” p. 48.

⁴⁵ “Formation,” pp. 45-69.

- 1 After First Vows, the complete dossier of the newly professed together with the profession formula
- 2 Petitions of individuals for renewal of annual vows and notes submitted by the local Superior for formation personnel; also the formulae of annual vows.
- 3 Formulae of perpetual oblation (professional assignment)
- 4 Notes for admission to ministries; notification of ministries received.
- 5 Petitions of Oblates requesting diaconate and priesthood, notice of diaconal ordination, and the certificate of priestly ordination; the notice and the certificate should include the date, place and name of the ordaining bishop
- 6 New obediences given within the province and changes of address
- 7 decrees of appointment and certificates of promulgation of all superiors - local, district, delegation
- 8 certificate of promulgation of the decree of appointment or confirmation of election of the provincial and other decrees of the Superior General or Vicar General
- 9 Notification of death of any Oblate by surface mail, email, or telephone
- 10 Decrees of establishment of houses, residences, districts, delegations
- 11 decrees of suppression of residences, districts, delegations
- 12 decrees of dismissal ⁴⁶

The personnel files also confirm the Oblate has completed all the required academic, social, and service obligations to qualify as an Oblate Missionary. For this reason, the file contains not only the fulfillment of obligations but also a list of all the Obediences an Oblate missionary receives in his career.

Beaudoin estimates approximately 8,000 Oblates have served the mission in its global existence.⁴⁷ In a Canadian context, Mgr. Bourget, Bishop of Montréal, invited the Oblate Order to Canada in 1845. The number of priests progressed slowly across the Prairies as missionary activity grew. The Order's presence in the region began with two priests – Pierre Aubert and Alex Taché – at St. Boniface in 1845.⁴⁸ By 1861 the number, divided across several “vicariats,” totaled 238.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Baudoin, p.

⁴⁸ Donat Levasseur, *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée: essai de synthèse*, I (1815-1898), Montréal, Maison Provinciale, 1983, p. 121-123; p. 132-133. See also Alexandre Taché, *Vingt Années de Missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique*, Montréal, Librairie Saint-Joseph, 1888.

⁴⁹ Champagne, C. (1989). « La formation des oblats, missionnaires dans le Nord-Ouest canadien. » *Sessions d'étude - Société canadienne d'histoire de l'Église catholique*, 56, 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1006953ar>

By 1947 in the combined provinces of western Canada - Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Saint Peter (British Columbia) - there were 151 Oblates devoted to the mission of education for Indigenous peoples. In addition, there were “vicariats apolstoliques (Grouard, Mackenzie, Whitehorse, Prince Rupert, Keewatin et Baie d’Hudson)” that counted 354 Oblates.⁵⁰

Given the scope of the archives and limited time, I focused on a particular school, Marieval, and the related Indigenous community, Cowessess. Some additional names were searched to ensure the information was not affected by recordkeeping unique to Marieval and the Cowessess First Nation. The documentation of two priests is examined to understand what is typically stored about in a personnel file in the [Roman Archives]. Given the five-day research period this was a necessary, impressionistic research compromise.

Below is a list of files consulted. In addition, an Excel spreadsheet is attached identifying all of the missionaries and priests associated with Marieval.

Please NOTE:

The following section discusses individual records of Oblate Missionaries. It has been redacted pending an MOA with the Oblate O.M.I. Lacombe Order concerning the access and use of Oblate Personnel files.

Recommendations:

1. Personnel files are archival case files: The Oblates’ personnel files are a type of case file. In current archival thinking cases files are understood as

records, maintained as a unit, which have been aggregated in the development of a “case” – that is, by a transaction, event, person, thing, place or subject regarded as a particular instance of a general, recurring type (eg. loan applications, patient files).⁵¹

The common archival challenges of case files include privacy, unmanageable bulk, selection for preservation, and proof of accountability for public officials. But these are not universal problems. To understand the content and policies surrounding specific case files one must answer two questions: what is the event

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 22.

⁵¹ Dancy, “Case Files: Theory, History, Practice,” p. 2.

or activity that constitutes the case; and how has the documentation of the case been managed. One must distinguish the life of the priest from the life of his documentation.

- a) *Oblate “case”*: Unlike legal case files which are assembled to argue/resolve a case (ie dispute), or medical case files assembled to diagnose a case (ie patient’s health), Oblate case files document fulfillment of the Oblates’ formation, the fulfilment of his vows and responsibilities as a priest. The documentation of the Oblate’s case file is therefore unique. This is a private organization that strictly controls membership with special events, ceremonies and religious milestones that a priest must formally observe with approval of Superiors. Importantly, in such a “case,” the lives of children at residential schools form a marginal role. This is an important reason why the Rome Administrative case files document very little on the lives of children.
 - b) *Recordkeeping of the “case”*: These case files are not created by comprehensive state social programs such as health or employment. Therefore, they are not vulnerable to problems of excessive bulk or massive information management challenges. It also follows there is no need to statistically sample or cull the files. Although routine, the files are not a voluminous collection.⁵² As a private organization, public access is not a concern. This would most likely explain the limited access tools such as detailed file lists, accession files, and arrangement and description by any archival standards. Such standardization would also assist digitization.
- 2. Selected memory:** The personnel files hold a selected memory of the Priest’s. As Morrissey notes, the records are selected with a recognition that the records may be used in court. The _____ case file demonstrates, the files must be counterbalanced with the social memory of the communities who saw their children forcibly removed and sent to residential schools. We must acknowledge what Oblate authorities have chosen to remember; and also what they have chosen to forget. All truth is relative, and the truth the personnel files captures must be made complete with a fuller social, Indigenous, context.
- As Professor on Canonical law and legal counsel to the Oblate order has written:

⁵² There are an estimated [ca. 40,000] files documenting 8,000 priests around the world over 200 years. Archival writer Terry Cook calls case files “the most voluminous and routine documents produced by modern bureaucracies” (Cook 1991b, 25).

“We are going to have to find some way to protect the documents (and the reputations of all concerned), and, yet, at the same time, observe the applicable civil legislation. We can see as an offshoot of this new situation that dioceses and religious institutes are going to be very careful about what documents they retain in their archives for the future.”⁵³

3. **A history of Priests:** There is now a very detailed memory of children who attended residential schools. There is precious little to document the history of the priests, administrators and other teachers who operated and administered the schools. This asymmetrical, unbalanced history should be addressed. The NCTR should undertake a project in collaboration with Indigenous communities and the Oblate Order, to include a fuller, more complete and transparent history of the priests responsible for the schools’ operations. Such a transparent and accountable history of Oblates who served at residential schools would be a significant contribution to the history and legacy of residential schools. It would also make clear that the school system is a challenge for all Canadians not simply Indigenous peoples. It would provide a greater understanding of the contribution of Oblates, both malevolent and benevolent, and the mentality of Canada who participated and or supported the schools’ operations. At the time of their development in the early 20th century, many thought these schools were highly advanced social policy. The Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF), social democrats who at the time actively supported universal social programs for general improvement of society, supported both the residential schools and eugenics programs much to the horror of Indigenous peoples. Finally, it could contribute to modern questions of homeland, community, belonging, and identity that currently defeat our cultural institutions and inhibit any Indigenous efforts at self-determination.
4. **A new model school programme:** it has been said that in the residential school system education was weaponized to eradicate the Indigenous identity of the children who were brought to the schools. Residential schools served as a solvent to dissolve the community bonds across generations. As a gesture to reconcile the difficult relationship between the Catholic church and Indigenous Peoples, it would be appropriate to make available, in as transparent a manner as possible, the records that document the Oblates activities as the Catholic order that operated more residential school than any other. Taking this gesture a

⁵³ Frank Morissey, “Confidentiality, Archives, and Records Management: Canon Law Provisions,” Catholic Archivist Group Conference, Pierrefonds, September 27, 2012, p.3.

step further, the Oblate order could offer material support for a new education program, led by Indigenous communities for communities. This time education could be used to support the dignity of Indigenous communities. Community driven education programs could revitalize the spiritual and cultural values of Indigenous peoples and address the needs of communities as articulated by their community representatives. This gesture could begin with the history of priests in point three. It could then move on to support a community guided education program. It could offer support for communities to self-determine, revitalize, and reset an education model so badly managed in the first effort.

Conclusion:

On July 24th 1991, in front of media and an audience of almost 20,000 Indigenous peoples attending the Lac St. Anne Annual Pilgrimage, the President of the Oblate Superiors of the Canada Region, The Reverend Douglas Crosby, O.M.I., expressed a formal apology now preserved in the NCTR Archives.⁵⁴ Without citing it by name, Father Crosby apologized for the mentality of superiority engrained in the Doctrine of Discovery, how “deep, unchallenged, and damaging was the naïve cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious superiority complex of Christian Europe....” He apologized for the existence of the schools, the cultural erasure, and the attempted assimilation. He also wished to

publicly acknowledge that there were instances of individual physical and sexual abuse....We wish to state publicly that we acknowledge that they were inexcusable, intolerable, and a betrayal of trust in one of its most serious form. We deeply, and very specially, apologize to every victim of such abuse and we seek help in searching for means to bring about healing.⁵⁵

Father Crosby closed his four-page apology with a promise to “support an effective process of disclosure vis-à-vis Residential Schools. We offer to collaborate in any way we can so that the full story of the Indian Residential Schools may be written, that ... an effective healing process might take place.”

Over twenty years later, we continue to struggle to create “an effective process of disclosure” for the memory of Oblate residential school operations.

⁵⁴ “An Apology to the First Nations of Canada by the Oblate Conference of Canada,” July 24, 1991, <https://archives.nctr.ca/BB-0252-003>. For an update Oblate statement on Residential Schools and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, see: <https://omilacombe.ca/indian-residential-schools-missionary-oblates-mary-immaculate-q/>

⁵⁵ “An Apology to the First Nations of Canada by the Oblate Conference of Canada,” p. 4.

Ozhoshko Binesi Kwe, Elder Florence Paynter, has often explained the Anishinaabeg community tradition to honour the Spirit of a lost loved one. She describes a four-day ceremony. During this time, she speaks with the Spirit to aid their journey to the Spirit World: “Talking to the spirit, what they will experience in the next four days, they must be counseled for their journey. The spirit will then travel on.” There are many spirits that have not made it to the spirit world. Without a proper service, the spirits are lost. They must be released. Elder Jerry Saddleback of Masckwacis, the former spiritual advisor to Grand Chief and TRC Commissioner Wilton Littlechild, teaches a similar four-day ceremony in Nehiyawak cultural tradition. This is the reason why access to the records of the Oblates residential schools operations is a crucial public good: a greater understanding of the residential school experience promotes the renewal of ceremony; revitalizes identity and tradition; and brings an understanding of the final destiny of children lost so they may be appropriately honoured and allowed to rest as guided by an Indigenous spiritual leaders. It implements the UNDRIP article #43 call to offer “the minimum standard for Communities to live as Indigenous peoples.”⁵⁶

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⁵⁶ This also speaks to UNDRIP Article 12.1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

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