

The Churches and the Residential Schools: *National Angus Reid Poll Findings*

Angus Reid Group Inc.
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Introduction

The following report summarizes a general population survey regarding the awareness of the issue of Residential Schools within Canada and the law suits facing churches involved in running them. The questions test the level of knowledge and concern about the issue itself, compensation to the victims, potential church bankruptcy, and impressions of the public of the churches.

Methodology

The survey was posed to 1,500 Canadians on the National Angus Reid Poll. Survey data was collected between January 12th and 18th, 2000. The survey results are considered accurate to within ± 2.5 percentage points, nineteen times out of twenty, but the margin of error is larger for subsets of the total sample. Where significant, differences by demographic segment (age, region, income, education and gender) have been noted.

Key Findings

- 80 percent of all Canadians are aware of the issues currently before the Church involving abused students at residential schools.
- The majority (66%) of Canadians believe that the individuals who committed the abuses should compensate the victims. They place significant but secondary responsibility on the Churches (45%), federal government (32%) and provincial government (22%). Fully 60% believe that "we all" bear a responsibility to help the victims.
- While many believe initially that the Anglican (44%) and Catholic Churches (63%) can pay hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation claims, most (59%) believe the Churches when they say these payments will cause bankruptcies.
- Few Canadians (18%) support forcing the Churches into bankruptcy, but most feel that the churches should be required to do as much as possible to raise money. Once that is done, the majority of Canadians (58%) support government intervention to pay the rest.
- Forced to choose between making Churches pay claims regardless of consequences or protecting them from bankruptcy, fully 80% of Canadians believe the Churches should be protected from bankruptcy.
- Regardless of the legal relationship between different parts of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches in Canada, very few Canadians (13%) believe that unaffected parts of these Churches should refuse to pay compensation awarded to abuse victims if the affected parts of the Church go bankrupt. They clearly believe there is a moral obligation of all parts of each Church to contribute to paying settlements.
- Additionally, 60% of Canadians agree that "we are all responsible for helping Aboriginal Canadians who suffered abuse as children in the residential schools.
- Only 22% of Canadians say they are indifferent to whether the Anglican Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches in Canada survive.

Detailed Findings

Eighty percent of Canadians say that they are aware of the residential schools issue currently affecting Churches in Canada.

The majority (66%) of Canadians believe that the "individuals who actually committed the abuses" should be required to pay compensation, followed by 45 percent who believe that the "churches involved in running some of the schools for the government" should also be a compensator. Almost one-third (32%) believe that the federal government should compensate the victims, and one-fifth also believe the provincial governments should compensate victims.

Canadians accept a degree of collective responsibility for the abuses which occurred at residential schools. Sixty percent believe that "we are all responsible for helping Aboriginal Canadians who suffered abuse as children within the residential schools."

Views regarding responsibility for compensation are similar regardless of religious denomination or frequency of church attendance.

Informed that the settlements related to abuse at residential schools may total in the hundreds of millions of dollars, Canadians are split (45% agree, 47% disagree) on whether or not the Anglican Church can afford to pay the claims. However, the majority (63%) believe that the Roman Catholic Church can afford to pay.

However, the majority of Canadians (59%) believe the Churches' statement that that the settlements for abuse cases may bankrupt them.

Regular church attendees (71%) are more likely than non-regular attendees (53%) to believe that the settlements would bankrupt the Churches. However, both groups clearly feel that bankruptcy is a 'real' possibility.

Asked to respond to a number of options, very few Canadians (18%) support "forcing the churches to declare bankruptcy" in order to repay the enforced claims. This view is similar regardless of church attendance or religious denomination.

However, a small majority of Canadians (53%) believe that if necessary, the churches should sell a portion of their assets, including property and buildings, to pay compensation awards to victims. Forty-five percent oppose this option.

A larger majority of Canadians (58%) believe the Churches should pay all they can short of bankruptcy and that the government should pay the rest of the settlements. Forty percent are opposed to this option.

Taken together, these findings suggest a real reluctance on the part of Canadians to endorse the bankruptcy (or significant dismantling) of the Churches in order to pay settlements, and some significant support for government intervention to prevent this eventuality.

When those who oppose forcing bankruptcy are asked why 20% indicate that "we need the church [and] don't want them shut down [or] forced into bankruptcy".

Forced to choose between the view that the Churches should pay all the claims regardless of the consequences and the view that forcing bankruptcy would be wrong, 80% of Canadians believe that the churches should *not* be forced into bankruptcy.

Respondents were informed that the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches are not single legal entities, meaning that only parts of each Church would be threatened with bankruptcy by the settlements. They were then asked what the unaffected parts of each Church should do if other parts of each Church went bankrupt. When asked to *choose* between a number of specific options, pluralities

of Canadians believe that the unaffected parts of the Anglican (53%) and Roman Catholic (49%) Churches should pay as much as they can without going bankrupt. Other options receive less support.

Thus, Canadians expect all parts of each Church to play their part in compensating victims, regardless of the actual legal responsibilities they may or may not have. These views are similar regardless of religious denomination or frequency of church attendance.

A large majority (77%) of all Canadians say they do care whether or not the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches survive the legal claims against them. Although church goes, regardless of frequency, express concern over the Churches' survival, concern is higher among those who attend regularly (89%) than among those who do not (71%).

Concern about the survival of the Churches may stem from the fact that 78% of all Canadians believe that the "Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian Churches do valuable work in [their] community". When asked to identify in their own words the valuable work these Churches do, these respondents mention helping the poor and homeless (51%), promoting Christianity/religion (19%), counseling (17%), and advocating for the disadvantaged (10%).

The Churches and the Residential Schools Top Line Results -- National Angus Reid Poll N=1,500

January 2000

As you may know, both governments and churches in Canada were involved in running residential schools until the 1960's. The federal government paid entirely to run the schools, while the churches were involved in staffing them. Hundreds of aboriginal Canadian children were placed in these schools over the years. A number of former students claim to have suffered physical and/or sexual abuse at the hands of the people who ran the residential schools, and they are suing the governments or churches which ran them.

1. Were you aware of this issue before I explained it?

- 80% Yes
- 19% No

2. If the courts rule that abuses did take place at a residential school, which of the following groups do you believe should be required to pay compensation? (READ AND ROTATE LIST. CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

- 32% - The federal government, which is responsible for the welfare of aboriginal people.
- 22% - The provincial government, which is responsible for education.
- 45% - The churches which were involved in running some of the schools for the government
- 66% - The individuals who actually committed the abuses.
- 2% - None of the above (VOLUNTEERED)
- 1% - Don't know

The Anglican Church of Canada, Roman Catholics and Presbyterian Church were involved in running some of the residential schools, and have indicated that they want to help people who were victims of abuse at those schools.

3. Based on the settlements reached in abuse cases so far, the cost to the Anglican Church of compensating all the victims has been estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars. In your view, can the Anglican Church afford to pay this amount? Would you say they definitely can, probably can, probably cannot or definitely cannot raise this amount of money to compensate victims of abuse?

- 11% - Definitely can
- 34% - Probably can
- 34% - Probably cannot
- 13% - Definitely cannot
- 8% - Don't know

4. Based on the settlements reached in abuse cases so far, the cost to the Catholic Church of compensating all the victims has been estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars. In your view, can the Catholic Church afford to pay this amount? Would you say they definitely can, probably can, probably cannot or definitely cannot raise this amount of money to compensate victims of abuse?

- 30% - Definitely can
- 33% - Probably can
- 24% - Probably cannot
- 9% - Definitely cannot
- 4% - Don't know

5. The Churches say they want to help compensate victims, but that forcing them to pay all the claims may require some Churches to declare bankruptcy. Do you find this statement very believable, somewhat believable, not very believable, or not believable at all?

- 19% - Very believable
- 40% - Somewhat believable
- 23% - Not very believable
- 16% - Not believable at all
- 2% - Don't know

6. I'm going to read you a number of options regarding how to deal with the cost of court-ordered compensation for victims of abuse at residential schools run by these Churches. I would like you to tell me whether you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose each option. How about...? (DO NOT RANDOMIZE)

	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose
Have the Churches pay the most they can without going bankrupt, and have the government pay the rest.	20%	38%	19%	21%
Force the Churches to sell some of their assets, including buildings and property to pay compensation claims.	26%	27%	21%	24%
Force the Churches to declare bankruptcy.	7%	11%	28%	51%

7. Why would you [support/oppose] forcing the Churches to declare bankruptcy? (OPEN END)

Support bankruptcy:

- 11% They should be responsible for their actions/ they get away with too much
- 9% They can afford it/ churches are very rich/ they have assets/ no taxes
- 5% Churches should help pay/ they should pay
- 3% What they did was not right/ supposed to help these people/ not abuse them

Oppose Bankruptcy:

- 21% We need the church/ don't want them shut down/ forced into bankruptcy
- 9% Declaring bankruptcy will not solve the problem/ money is not the answer
- 8% The individuals should be held responsible
- 6% Gives people a place to worship/ where will they go/ don't want to be uprooted
- 4% Don't see why they have to declare bankruptcy/ there are other ways to pay

8. (DO NOT ROTATE) Some people say that if the Churches are found responsible for abuses against children in residential schools, they should be required to pay all compensation, even if this means the Church organisations would collapse and go bankrupt.

Other people say that as long as the Churches make a serious effort to raise as much money as possible to compensate victims, the Churches' liability should be limited so they can continue to exist.

Which comes closest to your own view?

- 18% - Pay regardless of consequences
- 80% - No point in forcing bankruptcy
- 2% - Don't know

9. (ASK ½ OF SAMPLE) As you may know, there is no legal link between different parts of the Anglican Church in Canada. So if the Church in one place is forced into bankruptcy by one of these court cases, Churches in other places would not be legally responsible to help compensate victims. I'm going to read you a number of options regarding how the rest of the Anglican Church in Canada might react if one part of the Church went bankrupt due to a court case. I would like you to tell me which option you think the rest of the Church should choose. Do you think...? (READ AND ROTATE LIST.)

- 13% - The rest of the Church should refuse to help compensate the victims
- 53% - The rest of the Church should pay the most it can without selling its basic assets like buildings and land.
- 31% - If necessary, the rest of the Church should sell some of its assets, including buildings and property to pay the compensation claims.

10. (ASK OTHER ½ OF SAMPLE) As you may know, there is no legal link between different parts of the Catholic Church in Canada. So if the Church in one place is forced into bankruptcy by one of these court cases, Churches in other places would not be legally responsible to help compensate victims. I'm going to read you a number of options regarding how the rest of the Catholic Church in Canada might react if one part of the Church went bankrupt due to a court case. I would like you to tell me which option you think the rest of the Church should choose. Do you think...? (READ AND ROTATE LIST.)

- 13% - The rest of the Church should refuse to help compensate the victims
- 49% - The rest of the Church should pay the most it can without selling its basic assets like buildings and land.
- 34% - If necessary, the rest of the Church should sell some of its assets, including buildings and property to pay the compensation claims.

11. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements? How about...?

(RANDOMIZE)

	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose
The Anglican Church, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches do valuable work in my community	38%	40%	9%	4%
We are all responsible for helping aboriginal Canadians who suffered abuse as children in the residential schools.	28%	32%	17%	22%
I don't care whether the Anglican, Roman Catholic or Presbyterian Churches survive or not.	9%	13%	25%	53%
The settlements awarded to victims of abuse these days are far too high.	27%	29%	20%	17%

12. (IF AGREE TO ITEM 1, QUESTION 11) When you say you agree that these Churches do good work in the community, what specific types of work are you thinking of? (OPEN END. DO NOT READ LIST.)

- 51% - Helping poor/homeless
- 9% - Visiting sick
- 7% - Assisting bereaved/Grieving
- 17% - Counselling
- 10% - Advocating for disadvantaged
- 19% - Promoting Christianity/Religion
- 58% - Other (NO SPECIFY)

13. What is your religion, that is in what religion were you raised? (If "Christian" Probe: What specific denomination of Christianity?) (DO NOT READ LIST)

- 47% - Christianity -- Roman Catholic
- 11% - Christianity -- Anglican/ Church of England
- 10% - Christianity -- United Church

- 4% - Christianity -- Presbyterian
- 9% - Christianity -- Protestant (General)
- 7% - Christianity (Other)
- 1% - Judaism/ Jew
- 0% - Hindu
- 0% - Islam/ Muslim
- 0% - Buddhism/ Buddhist
- 8% - Other (NO SPECIFY)
- 0% - Don't know
- 4% - Refused

14. How often do you attend formal religious services? Is it..? (READ LIST.)

- 10% - Less than once a year
- 13% - Once a year
- 19% - Once every six months
- 13% - Once a month
- 23% - Once a week or more
- 0% - Don't know
- 22% - Never