



24 September 2018

His Holiness Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
Vatican City State

Most Holy Father,

Seventy-five years ago next month, with the encouragement and blessing of the Venerable Pope Pius XII of happy memory, our predecessors founded this Episcopal Conference, anticipating in a modest way what the Second Vatican Council would later recognize, namely, that Conferences of Bishops are an expression of the “*communion of fraternal charity and zeal for the universal mission entrusted to the Apostles*”, and enable the pooling of “*abilities and ... wills for the common good and for the welfare of the individual churches*” (*Christus Dominus*, 36).

Assembled in that common spirit of charity and zeal, it is our custom at the beginning of our annual meeting to greet the head of the College of Bishops and to share some of the highlights of our discernment and deliberations this week, in the hope of your encouragement as Successor of Saint Peter, whom Our Lord prayed would strengthen his brethren (cf. Luke 22:32).

In preparation for launching our Conference’s revised guidelines for protecting minors and vulnerable adults, our Plenary Assembly will listen to testimonies about the exploitation and suffering caused by sexual abuse. As you recalled in your 20 August 2018 *Letter to the People of God*, when one member of the Church suffers, all suffer. Throughout this week and in union with you, we will acknowledge in prayer, repentance and reflection that “*as an ecclesial community ... we were not where we should have been*”, that we did not always “*act in a timely manner, realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives,*” and that, through what we have done and what we failed to do, too often we “*showed no care for the little ones; we abandoned them.*”

These failures are in stark contrast to the reassurance we want to give our young people. In your *video message* of 22 October 2017 to the Canadian Youth Forum on faith and discernment, you invited young people not to let their youth “*be stolen*” from them. Instead, you invited them to “*build bridges*”, open their souls to joy, and be courageous in responding to the “*cry for help*” from so many in our world. Our example and leadership as Bishops needs to empower and support the young in being witnesses in the Church and society. We

are grateful that you have recognized this and convened next month's Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, at which a number of us will gather with you, along with other Bishops from around the world and young people, to discuss how best to go about this important aspect of our ecclesial mission and ministry.

On 29 June 2018, you named our brother Bishop, Cardinal Gérald Cyprien Lacroix, as your special envoy to the celebrations in Saint-Boniface marking 200 years of evangelization in Northern and Western Canada. In your letter of appointment, you pointed out the intimate relationship between the missionary mandate of the Church, and the appreciation and marvel for the wonders of nature and creation that should fill the human spirit.

During this Plenary Assembly, we will give special attention to the relationship of the Church with the Indigenous Peoples across our land. We recognize that any efforts for reconciliation, healing, and evangelizing involve learning their traditions and customs, including their reverence for nature. As you pointed out in your June letter, citing *Laudato Sí*, the Indigenous Peoples can be an example of how to pursue an “*integral ecology*” that includes “*taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator ... whose presence ‘must ... be found, uncovered’*” (*Laudato Sí*, 225, citing *Evangelii Gaudium*, 71).

Our renewed collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, as you have urged us to do, begins by renewing our pastoral responsibility of accompanying them. Inspired by your address this past 21 June 2018 to the World Council of Churches, and through the benefit of the lights and shadows of journeying with our Indigenous sisters and brothers over the past four centuries, we acknowledge with you that “*walking ... demands constant conversion*” and “*the humility to be prepared at times, when necessary, to retrace our steps. It also involves being concerned for our travelling companions...*,” and “*means opting for a mindset of service and ... forgiveness.*”

Earlier this year, in your Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, On the Call to Holiness in Today's World, you proposed “*five great expressions of love for God and neighbour*” which you consider “*of particular importance*” in today's world. The signs of holiness you named (nos. 110-157) – 1) *perseverance, patience and meekness*; 2) *joy and a sense of humour*; 3) *boldness and passion*, 4) journeying “*in community*”; and 5) “*in constant prayer*” – constitute truly a life-giving call, a perennial challenge, and heartfelt commitment which we receive and embrace with the utmost gratitude. At the same time, we are immensely appreciative of this timely message on the vital importance of and unequivocal pledge to pursuing the Gospel call to authentic holiness of life. Your constant

missionary focus and zeal, your personal example of openness, mercy, collaboration, detachment and prayerfulness, and especially your desire to journey with us “*side by side*”, are of great consolation to us and we are truly grateful. Furthermore, we acknowledge and welcome in the figure of Mary, Mother of the Church, the highest expression of such holiness lived out in unreserved devotedness to Christ – her Son, her Lord and her Saviour.

We pray that Our Lord Jesus continue to support Your Holiness in your petrine ministry and mission, blessing you with true joy and good health. In turn, we ask you to pray that the Holy Spirit strengthen us and give us wisdom in our vocation as missionary disciples and shepherds of God’s People, so that to the flock entrusted to our pastoral care – our sisters and brothers in the faith – we may be trustworthy guides and loving examples so as to accompany them sincerely along the common journey to the Father of all mercies. For this and upon all of us, Holy Father, we ask that you impart your Apostolic Blessing.

Fraternally in Christ the Good Shepherd,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+Lionel Gendron, P.S.S.". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

+Lionel Gendron, P.S.S.
Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops