



**Message of the President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of Confederation**

1. Every year, when we celebrate Canada Day, we rejoice in our nation's achievements, both past and present, and look expectantly to the future with hope. This year, in particular, as we mark the sesquicentennial of Confederation – one of the great moments of unification in our history – we may be especially conscious of (or perhaps even curious about) what it is that unites us as a people. We are invited, in other words, to bring to mind and to ask ourselves about the values we hold in common. Such values are by nature collective, not private, just as the goods which they reference are held in common. To celebrate what Canadians value most is to locate our private interests within the common good; to situate each individual “I” in the context of a collective “we.”
2. For the Catholic faithful, the goods which are connected directly to human dignity are preeminent among those goods held in common and cherished by Canadians. As Pope Saint John Paul II recognized during his Papal visit to Canada in 1984, Canada's commitment to human dignity is seen best in our nation's tradition of respect for and promotion of human rights, the foundation of which ought always and unequivocally to be “the human person and his or her dignity viewed in all their dimensions” (John Paul II, [*Address to Members of Government and Diplomatic Corps, Ottawa, September 19, 1984*](#)). Family, education, health, coexistence, security, even life itself are among these foundational goods. They are, as Pope Francis has underscored, the non-material goods that constitute the common good and on the basis of which good government is founded:

There is neither real promotion of the common good nor real human development when there is ignorance of the fundamental pillars that govern a nation, its non-material goods: life, which is a gift of God, a value always to be protected and promoted; the family, the foundation of coexistence and a remedy against social fragmentation; integral education, which cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of information for purposes of generating profit; health, which must seek the integral well-being of the person, including the spiritual dimension, essential for human balance and healthy coexistence; security, in the conviction that violence can be overcome only by changing human hearts.

(Pope Francis, [*Address to the Community of Varginha, Rio de Janeiro, July 25, 2013*](#))

In a Scriptural sense, our country's greatness should only be measured in accordance with our collective love for God and neighbour (cf. Matthew 22:35-40 and Mark 12:28-34). Our land is called to be a place where the inherent dignity of the person in all its aspects continues to shape our collective conscience. To the extent that everyone in our country shares in this freely and generously, there is reason to rejoice. Where this is not the case, however, we must not be deterred by the inconvenience of the truth that confronts us.

3. Our achievements today build on the vision and sacrifices of those who came before us. In the celebrations that will take place on July 1, 2017, we will commemorate the occasion when four former colonies joined to form one country. Since then, Canada has grown into ten provinces and three territories, and now extends from sea to sea as proclaimed in the motto of our Coat of Arms ("*A MARI USQUE AD MARE*"). This land is also God's gift and blessing, and is not only of our own making. It is not inappropriate, therefore, that our motto should quote directly from Psalm 72: "May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."
4. The seas and rivers of this country, which teem with life and call forth wonder and praise, elicit our care and respect. They are but two of the countless blessings and endowments on which our prosperity as a people stands. This prosperity, however, is not an end in itself. From a Christian perspective, the abundance enjoyed by so many Canadians ought to make us wary of any temptation to complacency, challenging us to embrace those among us who are estranged and deprived of life's basic necessities (cf. Zechariah 7:10). God's gifts not only invite stewardship toward the environment and in our use of the blessings of Creation; they call forth new initiatives for social interaction and reciprocity: "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (cf. 1 Peter 4:10). Our input into society and our willingness to serve in community, as expressions of our gratitude, orient us towards God's plans and not merely our own.
5. The openness of our country to newcomers, immigrants and refugees is a genuine expression of our gratitude to God for the blessings he has bestowed on this land. The work of so many among us on behalf of the poor and abandoned, both at home and abroad, continues to define who we are as a people. The remarkable innovation of so many Canadians – painters and architects, sculptors and musicians, filmmakers and writers, scholars and poets, scientists and diplomats, researchers of every discipline and social activists – must continue to radiate beauty and truth especially where darkness looms. Nor should we forget Canada's soldiers, police officers, firefighters, paramedics, and ordinary citizens whose self-sacrifice, bravery, valour, and commitment to duty are at the core of serving the common good and protecting society.

6. The cultural and linguistic diversity of those who first settled the “True North” – Indigenous Peoples, followed by the French and the English – has become an important feature of our collective history and identity. Newcomers from virtually every part of the world have sought to make Canada their home and to invest in its future with their own creativity and hard work. The aspiration to unity found in Canada’s vast cultural mosaic speaks profoundly of our humanity, supposing as it does the natural desire for community and communication. Canadians have earned an international reputation as being welcoming, compassionate, and respectful – traits which are taught and shared by all religions. This reputation is not merely something to celebrate; it is a standard by which to measure the past and to deliberate about the future. Our past failures, particularly in instances involving Indigenous peoples, must not remain failures as we go forward.

7. Our common care for one another and its centrality in our country’s story is paradigmatically exemplified in universal health care. We do well to recall that among the great pioneers of this vision were Saint Marguerite D’Youville, Blessed Catherine de Saint-Augustin, and the Venerable Jeanne Mance. In the 17th and 18th centuries, they and their companions in New France dedicated themselves to caring for the most vulnerable, inspired by the healing ministry of Jesus (cf. Matthew 8:1-16). Then as now, the vulnerability and limitations that mark every period of human life, especially early childhood and old age, highlight our dependence on each other. When we fail to consider what is necessary to protect the common good, to protect all of us as vulnerable persons by upholding respect for life, and to acknowledge God as the author of life, we fail as a society. The fact that all Canadians have access to basic medical care, that we led the world in being one of the first countries to abolish capital punishment, that we have promoted and contributed to the advancement of medical science, and that palliative care was pioneered in large part by Canada’s medical professionals, testifies to the greatness that we can achieve when motivated by humility and selflessness (cf. Philippians 2:8).

8. Canada’s future is infinitely more than an echo of the past. Between where we have come from and where we are going, is the exigency to bear responsibility for the present. One of the greatest responsibilities now is toward our children and youth, on whose shoulders the future stands. For all the current emphasis on equipping them with knowledge and skills, we must not forget that they also need to be educated in virtue. This was something that Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys, one of Canada’s earliest pioneers of education, understood well, along with her companions and the many other religious communities, including Jesuits and Ursulines, which dedicated themselves to the work of education. If our young people are ever to reach their God-given potential, faced as they are with so many challenges, parents and educators alike must continue to invest in them through mentoring relationships, both individually and as a community, and to ensure that the future they inherit is born of the generosity and integrity of our decisions today.

9. In closing, I wish to recall the French lyrics of our National Anthem, composed in 1880 by Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier, in which we rejoice in the present and look to the future, knowing that what we value as a nation hinges on what we love in common: “Land of our forefathers, your brow is wreathed with a glorious garland of flowers... your valour steeped in faith will protect our homes and our rights.” The Bishops of Canada are delighted to offer all who live in this land their best wishes and prayers as Canada marks its 150th anniversary of Confederation. As the festivities of Canada Day draw near, we, and all the Catholic faithful of this nation, rejoice. It is our prayer that God will continue to keep our home and native land glorious and free, and that Canadians, including the Indigenous Peoples whose lands we share, will continue to work toward a better country and a better world.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Douglas Crosby". The signature is written in a cursive style.

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, O.M.I.
Bishop of Hamilton
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank Leo". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Msgr. Frank Leo, Jr.
General Secretary of the Canadian
Conference of Catholic Bishops

17 April 2017
Memorial of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha,
Protectress of Canada