



May 2014

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On behalf of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Canadian Catholic Aboriginal Council, we welcome your participation in this year's Aboriginal Pastoral Ministry Leadership Program. We acknowledge the many contributions that make this initiative possible: the blessing and encouragement of the Archdiocese of Ottawa; the organizational leadership of the Kateri Native Ministry of Ottawa; the administrative services of Saint Paul University; and the generous contributions of its School of Practical Theology, in collaboration with the Centre for Contextual Learning and Spirituality and the Centre for Religious Education and Catechetics. Now in its third year, the Aboriginal Pastoral Ministry Leadership Program has been developed to help form Aboriginal people for pastoral ministry within their own communities.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis reminds us that “Evangelization is the task of the Church ... a joyful response to God's love which summons us to mission and makes us fulfilled and productive.” We applaud each of you for responding to this call.

The retreat which launched your program this week was designed to help each of you deepen your own spirituality and work toward community building. We pray this retreat and your week of formation will enable you to fulfill what you have been called to do: proclaim the good news of the Risen Lord to your brothers and sisters in your communities.

It gives us particular pleasure that members of the Canadian Catholic Aboriginal Council will be participating in parts of this year's program. The Catholic Bishops of Canada founded the Aboriginal Council more than 15 years ago, to advise the Conference on Aboriginal questions and priorities. Both the Aboriginal Council and the Conference of Bishops are united with you in prayer and solidarity, during this week of your formation and throughout your pastoral ministry.

The past months have been important moments for Indigenous Peoples in Canada. All of us, Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, have celebrated the canonizations of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, whom many of us refer to affectionately as the “Protectress of Canada”; Saint François de Laval, the first Bishop of New France who struggled to defend Indigenous People from exploitation; Saint Marie of the Incarnation, who learned three Aboriginal languages to help educate Indigenous children; and Saint John Paul II, who made a special trip to Canada in 1987 to visit with Indigenous People. It was Saint John Paul II who in 1999 named Our Lady of Guadalupe Patroness of the Americas. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of the Americas, and our mother, appeared as an Aztec woman – reminding us that God has entered human history, and that his Church embraces all people and all cultures.

Calling upon the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary and all the saints and angels, we ask God our heavenly Father, Jesus our Brother and Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, to bless your program of formation, the time you share together, and your service to your families and communities.

United with you in Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul-André Durocher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+ Paul-André Durocher
Archbishop of Gatineau and
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Melody McLeod". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Mrs. Melody McLeod
Chair
Canadian Catholic Aboriginal Council