



21 September 2020

His Holiness Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
Vatican City State

Most Holy Father,

Filial and cordial greetings in Jesus' Name.

As we, the members of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, gather for our annual plenary meeting, we do so in profound communion with you and with great filial sentiment. One of the unusual particularities of our gathering this year is that it takes place via videoconference, owing to the restrictions still in force due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Though not an ideal way of sharing, discussing, discerning and deciding, we will endeavour, nevertheless, to make this moment one which will contribute to the affective and effective dimensions of episcopal collegiality. We greet you most sincerely as Pastor of the Universal Church and as head of the College of Bishops, and promise throughout this week of deliberations to keep in mind and heart your person and petrine ministry as the “perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity” in the Church (*Lumen gentium*, n. 23). Christ, the Good Shepherd, “who forms the pastor’s heart in closeness to the people of God” (theme of your homily of 24 April 2020) will be our focus and model as we turn our gaze to him daily and seek his guidance and inspiration through the action of the Holy Spirit.

There are a number of different topics which will require our focused attention and communal prayer throughout the Plenary Assembly. Each affects the life of the Church in Canada and indeed all persons in this vast country. The following topics, in particular, stand out: the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults; family and life-related matters; reconciliation and relationship-building with the Indigenous Peoples; formation for and within the presbyterate; charitable and development initiatives in the Global South through our national *Caritas* agency; the impact of the COVID-19 reality upon our faith communities and the different ways the latter are responding to new challenges; questions related to proposed federal legislation concerning ethical matters and Catholic social teaching. These topics, and many others, will occupy our time and prayer during this plenary meeting, where we gather as shepherds who strive to accompany our wounded world into the abundant life of Jesus Christ.

Besides the many challenges that beset this country and our Church within it, we would like to underscore, nonetheless, some of the blessings and graced moments we have experienced throughout the year. Your Holiness’ ecclesial leadership, words, and actions throughout this difficult time of pandemic have brought great spiritual consolation to us, the Bishops, and to all Christ’s faithful. You have inspired us to bring the Lord’s solace and hope to the Church and the world with greater fervour. As we look to the future with its uncertainties, we draw strength from

the video message you delivered for the Pentecost Vigil: “*When we come out of this pandemic, we will no longer be able to do what we have been doing, how we have been doing it. No, everything will be different. All the suffering will have been pointless if we do not build together a more just, more equitable, more Christian society, not in name, but in reality, a reality that leads us to Christian behaviour. If we do not work to end the pandemic of poverty in the world, the pandemic of poverty in the country of each one of us, in the city where each of us lives, this time will have been in vain. From the great trials of humanity, including the pandemic, we emerge either better or worse. We do not come out the same.*”

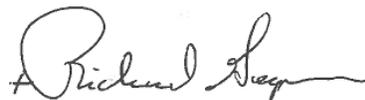
In this same spirit of learning to do things in a new way, it gives us delight to relate to your Holiness that the response in Canada to the Season of Creation, in which we now find ourselves, has been both widespread and encouraging. In celebrating the joy of God’s creation, we are all learning the challenging but paramount importance of being conscientious stewards of the land and its climate, inspired, as always, by the magisterial teachings found in *Laudato Si’*.

The gestures and words which Your Holiness has brought to the world concerning universal brotherhood, peace, and harmony touch our hearts. This is ever more crucial as the world, most regrettably, still bears witness to atrocious acts of racism, discrimination, violence, hatred and evils of every form. Your service and leadership have likewise shed light on our own ministries as we earnestly try to be agents of communion and solidarity with all people in our fragile and wounded world. We look forward to reflecting soon with open heart and mind upon your forthcoming Encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*.

Finally, in consecrating our dioceses and eparchies on 1 May 2020 to Mary, Mother of the Church, we as Bishops did so calling to mind your own personal, ministerial and compassionate outreach to the suffering as you too commended the victims of the pandemic and those who care for them to the powerful maternal intercession of the Mother of Jesus.

Holy Father, know that we will hold you in sincere prayer throughout this week as we meet in plenary. We humbly ask that you bestow your paternal and apostolic blessing upon our fraternal assembly and the work that lies before it.

Yours devotedly in Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Gagnon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

+Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops