



20 September 2021

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. Given the circumstances surrounding the Coronavirus pandemic, the restrictions and the threat of certain variants, again this year, our gathering takes place via videoconference. Though not being an ideal means of sharing, discussing, discerning and deciding, we will endeavour, nevertheless, to make this ecclesial encounter 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).

There are a number of different topics which will require our focused attention and communal prayer throughout the Plenary Assembly. Each of them affects the life of the Church in Canada and indeed all persons in this vast country of ours. The following topics, in particular, stand out: our pastoral accompaniment of Indigenous Peoples and communities and the former Indian Residential Schools legacy; related to this, reconciliation and relationship-building with the Indigenous people; the 2023 Synod of Bishops on synodality; the protection of minors and vulnerable persons; family and life-related matters; formation for and within the presbyterate; charitable and development initiatives 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; the implications of recent federal legislation regarding euthanasia and assisted suicide as well as the CCCB's efforts in promoting palliative care. These questions, and many others, will occupy our time and prayer during this plenary meeting, where we gather as shepherds, cum Petro et sub Petro, who strive to pastorally accompany individuals in our wounded world that they may have abundant life of Jesus Christ.

In a special way, we will reflect upon the legacy of the former Indian Residential Schools, which afflicts Indigenous people and communities and us and considerably undermines the credibility of the Church. We thank you, Most Holy Father, for your unyielding solidarity on behalf of Indigenous Peoples across the globe. Moreover, in generously accepting to engage in personal encounters with a delegation of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit in December, you manifest your commitment to hearing their stories directly, to express your heartfelt closeness to them, and to share in their suffering with compassion. We are deeply appreciative of your spirit of openness and we assure you that our pastoral efforts for healing and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is of paramount importance to the Church in Canada is committed to standing in solidarity with the

Indigenous communities of this country and to walk with them on the common path towards a brighter future.

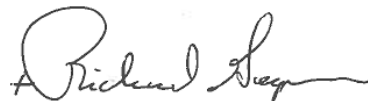
Besides the many challenges that beset this country and our Church within it, we would like to underscore, nonetheless, some of the blessings and graced moments we have experienced thanks to your pastoral leadership. The Year of St. Joseph and the *Amoris Laetitia* Year fills us with hope and challenges us to labour even more intently and with greater creativity for the proclamation of the Gospel. The forthcoming opening of the Synod likewise provides us with a unique opportunity to engage the entire People of God and those on the peripheries in a life-giving process of listening, dialoguing, encountering, discerning, praying and acting in a synodal fashion.

Your words, and actions throughout this difficult time of pandemic have brought great spiritual consolation to us. We draw strength and hope from your words of wisdom especially in your Encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, where you challenge us by underscoring the importance of building a universal fraternity in which every human being is treated with dignity: *“It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together. Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.”*

As Bishops we too want to dream together, in community, *in Ecclesia*, and journey forward with our flocks notwithstanding the brokenness and woundedness of our world, the temptations, evils and trappings that surround us. We rely, with Gospel boldness, on the enduring promises of Christ and the continual assistance of the Holy Spirit who makes all things new.

Holy Father, know that we will hold you up in prayer throughout this week as we meet in plenary. As we invoke the intercessions of Mary Mother of the Church and of St. Joseph we humbly ask that you bestow your paternal and apostolic blessing upon our fraternal gathering and upon 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