



THAT WE MAY WALK TOGETHER

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE MÉTIS

WALKING TOGETHER ON THE PATH OF TRUTH, JUSTICE, HEALING, RECONCILIATION, AND HOPE.

By the gift of God, our Creator, a series of historic encounters took place this spring when Pope Francis met with representatives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit at the Vatican. These were moments of deep listening and truth which highlighted not only the painful dimensions of Métis history, but also your resiliency as a people and the beauty of your culture. Rooted in both European and First Nations values, traditions, and spirituality, your unique culture is a gift and a call to seek ever wider circles of reconciliation.

As he promised in Rome, Pope Francis travelled to Canada in July on a “penitential pilgrimage” where he reiterated his heartfelt apology for Catholic involvement in residential schools and again joined with the Canadian Bishops in asking pardon. Closely linked to the figure of Saint Anne, this visit was an opportunity to reflect on the importance of women, family, and care for youth in Indigenous communities.

Continuing the sharing of stories and genuine encounter begun in Rome, Pope Francis concluded his pilgrimage with a strong statement of his closeness to the Indigenous Peoples in Canada: “I bear in my heart the incomparable treasure of all those individuals and peoples who have left a mark on me; ... I can truly say that, while I came to be with you,



WALKING MARCHER
TOGETHER ENSEMBLE

Image: Papal Visit 2022, Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta
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it was your life and experiences, the indigenous realities of these lands, that have touched me, remained with me, and will always be a part of me. I dare say, if you will allow me, that now, in a certain sense, I also feel a part of your family, and for this, I am honoured." (Quebec, July 29, 2022)

These encounters with Pope Francis were but a moment in a very long journey. They are, however, key moments which offer the possibility of a new beginning, an invitation to reset and renew our relationships, mindful also that in many cases the Métis peoples have a long history with the Catholic Church in Canada. In friendship and respect, we, the Bishops of Canada, ask you to continue to walk side by side with us along this path of hope. We seek to listen and to learn from you how to walk together in a new way which is truly a good way. We want to be united with you as ambassadors of reconciliation, reaching out not only to members of the Métis community, but to all who share our common home.

In communion with Pope Francis and his summons to the Church in Canada to continue the journey, each of us, as leaders of our dioceses and eparchies, pledges to walk with you into a new era of reconciliation, particularly at the local level. Over the past several months, our dialogue with you has moved us to undertake these specific commitments, and even to go beyond them wherever possible:

- Ongoing dialogue: In addition to formal structures to ensure open communication at the national level, regular meetings between Métis leadership and diocesan Bishops will not only help maintain relationships of mutual respect and friendship, but also promote solidarity in projects to foster the well-being of your communities. It is, of course, in the parish context that many of you will have direct contact with your non-Métis brothers and sisters. This would be an ideal place for the gifts and wisdom of your culture and spiritual traditions to be more fully integrated into our communal life of faith.

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POPE FRANCIS



Image: Papal Visit 2022, Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta
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- Opportunities to make Métis history known: You have spoken clearly of the need to tell your stories, to make your history, spiritual, and cultural traditions more widely known. Catholic educational institutions, seminaries and religious houses, as well as programs of pastoral formation will be invited to provide resources to partner with you in this endeavour.
- Strengthening relationships: We are ready to work with you and other Christian churches to foster healthy and supportive relationships in the communities.
- Concern for the spiritual well-being of the young people in your communities: We hope to collaborate with you in developing materials for youth, mindful of Métis cultural realities, and to support young people in their faith journey.
- Celebrating the great role that women play in your faith communities: We commit ourselves to working with you to understand better your specific concerns and to identify concrete actions to address them.
- Appreciating your respect for the spiritual wisdom of your Elders: We will encourage new forms of responsibilities within the Church to which those among you, especially Elders, might be called and mandated, in keeping with the *Brief to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, which stated the intention "to call Aboriginal Peoples to leadership in their Church communities."

- Recognizing your relationship with the land as the ground of your spiritual traditions: We commit ourselves to standing in solidarity with you in your stewardship of the land, a key element in proclaiming the Gospel today, as taught by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*.
- Material support: We are committed to fulfilling the pledge made by all of Canada's Bishops in 2021 to provide funding in support of local initiatives discerned and led by Indigenous partners through the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund (IRF) over a five-year period.

Moved by the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and under the guidance and protection of both Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the Catholic Bishops of Canada gathered in plenary session desired to make these thoughts known to you in this letter, so that you may be assured of our individual and collective commitment to continue walking with you on the path of truth, justice, healing, reconciliation, and hope. The journey towards reconciliation is underway and many positive steps have already been taken. It is a path which can only be travelled together.

8 February 2023

