



**LETTER OF THE CCCB PRESIDENT
TO THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CANADA**

Dear Indigenous Brothers and Sisters,

As Catholic Bishops of Canada, we see our relationship with Indigenous Peoples as a major pastoral priority. In recent years, we have seen many examples of healing and reconciliation and we are committed to building on these efforts, working in close partnership with one another and learning to walk together. We also wish to reflect on our relationships with you, some of which go back centuries, and our responsibilities to foster long-term constructive engagement. We look forward to a future where systemic injustices are meaningfully addressed, where we all discover new ways of living together through which the First Peoples of this land are honoured and respected.

Pope Francis, in fulfilling his mission as Universal Pastor, has spoken often and passionately about the plight of Indigenous peoples around the world and the wisdom they offer, not shying away from acknowledging those injustices that have failed to conform to the Gospel and expressing regret for past wrongs. He has pointed to Indigenous Peoples as critical dialogue partners to whom the Church needs to listen.

The Catholic Bishops of Canada have been in dialogue with the Pope and the Holy See concerning the legacy of suffering you have experienced. The Holy Father is aware of the findings of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, which he takes seriously. As far as *Call to Action #58* is concerned, after carefully considering the request and extensive dialogue with the Bishops of Canada, he felt that he could not personally respond. At the same time, sharing your pain, he has encouraged the Bishops to continue to engage in an intensive pastoral work of reconciliation, healing and solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples and to collaborate in concrete projects aimed at improving the condition of the First Peoples. With respect to their culture and values, the Pope encourages the young to gather the wealth of traditions, experience and wisdom that comes from the Elders, whilst inviting the Elders to make this patrimony available to the young, so that they might carry it forward while facing the challenges that life presents.

In this context, a future Papal visit to Canada may be considered, taking into account all circumstances, and including an encounter with the Indigenous Peoples as a top priority.

For our part, through the participation of Catholic Bishops and faithful in the TRC process and from our ongoing relations with Indigenous Peoples, we have heard your invitation to engage honestly and courageously with the past, to acknowledge the failings of members of the Catholic Church, and to take active steps of solidarity with Indigenous Peoples towards a better future. To this, with the strong encouragement of Pope Francis, we pledge our commitment.

Inspired by our exchanges with the Holy Father, we wish to dedicate ourselves with you to reconciliation at the local level through concrete pastoral initiatives. Such initiatives need to be grounded in authentic encounters. These encounters have already begun across the country. Through our conversations, we wish to deepen our understanding of what it means to walk in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in different parts of the country, mindful that our shared history, as well as your needs and aspirations, differ significantly from one place to the next. All of these ongoing conversations and actions – and many more that need to be initiated – are vital to reconciliation and the vision of a future full of hope. In the near future, we Bishops wish to share with you what we are learning from our encounters, and with you, to take further steps towards reconciliation.

As the Church enters the Paschal Mystery this Easter, I wish to renew with all the Bishops of Canada the promise to accompany you in prayer, and to work with you in striving for respectful relations and building a just society.

Sincerely in Christ the Good Shepherd,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+Lionel Gendron, P.S.S.". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

+Lionel Gendron, P.S.S.
Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil and
President of the Canadian Conference of
Catholic Bishops

27 March 2018