



# THAT WE MAY WALK TOGETHER

## PASTORAL LETTER TO THE INUIT IN CANADA

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

By the gift of God, our Creator, the year 2022 was witness to two historic encounters between Indigenous Peoples and Pope Francis. In March, Inuit, First Nations, and Métis delegations were invited by His Holiness to meet with him at the Vatican. The Inuit survivors, Elders, and leaders blessed this encounter by lighting the Qulliq which, together with their testimony, shone a light onto the painful dimensions of Inuit history and, in a particular way, on the pain of residential schools. The lighting of the Qulliq also illuminated your resiliency as a people and the beauty of your language and culture. This was a moment of true encounter and deep respect, the memory of which, we pray,

will help us envision a new future together. In his address, the Holy Father said from his heart: “Listening to your voices, I was able to enter into and be deeply grieved by the stories of the suffering, hardship, discrimination and various forms of abuse that some of you experienced, particularly in the residential schools... I ask for God’s forgiveness and I want to say to you with all of my heart: I am very sorry. And I join my brothers, the Canadian bishops, in asking your pardon.”

The second historic recent encounter took place when Pope Francis came to Canada in July 2022 to undertake a “penitential pilgrimage.” The Apostolic Visit was planned on a very compressed timeline, which meant the planning process placed intense demands on staff, volunteers, and partners, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. We recognize that



WALKING TOGETHER MARCHER ENSEMBLE

Image: Papal Visit 2022, Iqaluit  
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the breadth and depth of consultation with Inuit leaders fell short of what many desired and expected, but we appreciate the patience, collaboration, and dialogue of the many Indigenous partners who supported the planning of this historic visit. The many hours of encounter and dialogue with Pope Francis remain of enormous significance in our shared pilgrimage towards healing and reconciliation.

On the last day of his Apostolic Visit, the Holy Father met with survivors and others in Iqaluit. In his address, he reiterated in Inuit Nunangat the apology he had made at the Vatican. He spoke of the grief carried by many because of the residential schools which wounded many families, saying: "I was reminded of the testimony of an elder, who spoke of the beautiful spirit that reigned in Indigenous families before the advent of the residential school system. He compared those days, when grandparents, parents, and children were harmoniously together, to springtime, when young birds chirp happily around their mother. But suddenly - he said - the singing stopped: families were broken up, and the little ones were taken away far from home. Winter fell over everything."

We have heard about and been moved by the grief carried by parents and children because of the residential school system and other actions which dislocated, separated, and otherwise wounded families and communities. As the assembly of Catholic Bishops in Canada, with profound remorse for the suffering endured by many Inuit, we renew the apology we made in 2021 during our plenary meeting. Emboldened by your welcome of Pope Francis in July 2022 and your generosity, we ask you to continue walking side by side with us along a path of healing. In friendship and respect, hopeful that we may be united as ambassadors of reconciliation, we wish to continue, with you, to reach out to all Inuit in ever wider circles of mutual understanding, reciprocal trust, and ready support.

During his pilgrimage, Pope Francis reminded us of the responsibility each of us has in our own land when he said at Sacred Heart Parish in Edmonton, "gestures and visits can be important, but most words and deeds of reconciliation take place at the local level...where individuals and families travel side by side, day by day. To pray together, to help one another, to share life stories, common joys and common struggles: this is what opens the door to the reconciling work of God." We have also heard clearly from you that reconciliation takes place locally and is intergenerational. The path to reconciliation is one which can only be travelled together.





As leaders of Catholic dioceses and eparchies in Canada, we pledge to make this journey with you. We are committed to the following initiatives, and even to going beyond them wherever possible, particularly at the local level:

- Fulfilling the pledge we made during the CCCB Plenary Assembly meeting in 2021, to fundraise in each region of the country over a five-year period so as to support initiatives through the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund (IRF) and to discern the allocation of funds with Inuit and other Indigenous partners.
- Deepening our dialogue with Inuit leadership and community members through a variety of means to promote deeper mutual understanding and respect.
- Working diligently at the local level for unity across denominations and healing what has been wounded by denominational rivalry.
- Working together with local community leaders to address social challenges, including addictions, suicide, violence, poverty, and incarceration.
- Seeking to support Inuit concern for the spiritual well-being of young Inuit, we commit ourselves to collaborating with you in the development of resources for youth, mindful of Inuit cultural realities, and to supporting one another in integral human development.

- Encouraging 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 spoke of calling “Aboriginal Peoples to leadership in their Church communities.”
- Supporting Catholic educational institutions, seminaries and religious houses, as well as programs of pastoral formation in their efforts to foster a greater understanding of Inuit cultural, linguistic, and spiritual traditions and to include opportunities for encounters with Inuit communities as part of their programs. As part of these efforts, we hope to learn more from you about Inuit Land Claims Agreements, in terms of their development and implementation, as well as their abiding relevance as a basis of strengthened relationships.
- Celebrating and supporting the long-term sustainability of the use of Inuktitut, which has had a central role in keeping the Inuit community among the most culturally resilient in North America.
- Recognizing your relationship with the land, water, and ice as an integral dimension of your spiritual traditions, we are committed to standing in solidarity with you in the stewardship of Creation, our common home.

May we all take courage from the many steps on the journey that have already been taken. Under the guidance and protection of the Creator who walks with us and shows us his face in Jesus Christ, and assisted by the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Catholic Bishops of Canada gathered during their plenary meeting in 2022 desired to make these thoughts known to you in this letter, so that you may know of our individual and collective commitment to continue walking with you on the path of truth, justice, healing, reconciliation, and hope.

8 February 2023

