



6 September 2018

Dear current and past members of the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council,

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council. This important milestone, occurring at a significant moment in the history of our country and in the relationship of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) with Indigenous peoples, is an occasion to acknowledge with gratitude the work, vision, and generosity of all current and past members of the Indigenous Council.

Since its beginnings in 1998, to coordinate and manage requests then being received by the CCCB Fund for Reconciliation, Solidarity and Communion (a fund that at the time provided project grants to advance education and healing within Indigenous communities), the role and responsibilities of the Indigenous Council in service to the CCCB have grown considerably. Today, the Council comprises a significant number of Bishops and Indigenous Catholics. Through research and community engagement, the Council provides the CCCB and its members with information and recommendations on understanding and appreciating Indigenous needs and fostering and furthering relationships with Indigenous Peoples across the land.

The Indigenous Council has been instrumental in helping the CCCB further reconciliation and renewal involving the Catholic Church and Indigenous Peoples. Among its more notable contributions, the Council has helped promote and financially support the *Returning to Spirit* program, recognizing its unique importance in healing the impact from the former Residential Schools and as well as bringing about reconciliation from other painful experiences. When the Indigenous Council participated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) national event in Saskatoon in 2012, Mrs. Melody McLeod, the Council's then Chair, expressed its commitment to the call for healing, presenting the TRC with a print of the Baptism of Christ by the late First Nations artist and ambassador Mr. Tony Hunt Sr. (Broken Copper). Members of the Indigenous Council also participated alongside thousands of others in the Walk for Reconciliation during the TRC closing ceremonies in 2015.

The Council has contributed greatly to raising awareness about Indigenous history and cultures, including inter-relationships with Catholic faith and spirituality. Through its statements on significant Catholic events and national historical moments, the Indigenous Council has helped cast greater light on the concerns, dreams and aspirations of Indigenous Catholics. Each year, for instance, it marks the **National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples** on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (12 December) with a message that is distributed in dioceses and eparchies, as well as published on the CCCB website as well as in *Living with Christ* and *Prions en Église*.

Community engagement remains central to building collaborative relationships with Indigenous Peoples. In view of enhancing pastoral outreach to Indigenous Peoples through a wide range of initiatives on many levels, the Indigenous Council undertook a statistical study which helped locate Indigenous populations and identified social, educational and spiritual needs at the local diocesan/eparchial level. The Council has also linked with the Catholic Women's League and the Native Women's Association of Canada, as they jointly seek to support families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. This is yet another example of the Council's commitment to Indigenous Peoples through community engagement.

At this critical time, when Catholic dioceses/eparchies and other Church organizations in Canada seek to deepen their relationships with Indigenous Peoples, it is vital that the Indigenous voices on the Council continue to serve as a source of wisdom, solidarity and communion between Canada's Catholic Bishops and Indigenous Peoples. Its active and precious participation in Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle highlights in a particular way the importance of the Indigenous Council's contributions as well as the unwavering priority which the Bishops of Canada have discerned in their relationships with Indigenous Peoples across this land.

On behalf of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, I extend to you, the current members of the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council, and to your past members, sincere gratitude for your leadership, generosity and counsel. The Council remains a vital conduit through which the Catholic Bishops of Canada and Indigenous Catholics work together toward a better future. May Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Kateri Tekakwitha intercede for you, and Our Lord bless you abundantly, as you continue to further the Indigenous Council's mission and mandate in service of the Church and God's Kingdom.

Sincerely in Christ the Good Shepherd,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Lionel Gendron, P.S.S." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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