

LISTEN, LEARN AND ACT: TOGETHER ELIMINATING SYSTEMIC RACISM

A message against racism from the Canadian Religious Conference

Montreal, June 19, 2020 – George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Chantel Moore, Rodney Levi and Regis Korchinski-Paquet died violent deaths in the past three months in incidents involving police. George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor were members of Black communities in the United States. Chantel Moore, Rodney Levi and Regis Korchinski-Paquet come from Indigenous and Black communities in Canada. “My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.” With these words, [Pope Francis condemns “the sin of racism”](#) which is at the root of these and many other tragic deaths.

The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) joins Pope Francis and the chorus of voices around the world lamenting these deaths. These laments are making starkly visible the systemic racism present in social institutions and structures, policies and practices, in almost every country on earth and in many places where we would expect safety and protection. Our country, our political bodies, our health and education systems, our police and justice systems, our financial institutions, our Church, our religious congregations and our places of ministry are not exempt from this tragic reality.

The CRC fully supports the denunciation of racism. However, as an organization of leaders of Canadian religious congregations, the CRC recognizes that condemnation does not suffice. Individuals, societies, governments and institutions must be accountable for racism and work to identify its roots in their histories, their educational perspectives and their policies against discrimination and in favour of inclusion.

Only this course of action can untie the knots of the problem of racism. This is especially true for the Church and our religious institutions, since our Christian faith commands: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). The dignity and the value of

our sisters and brothers in humanity must never be questioned because of their origins, skin colour, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. We believe each person is a child of God. We know that we are stronger and richer thanks to our diversity.

Listen, learn, act: these three commitments must direct our work against racism. In our Catholic Church and religious congregations, we promise to listen to the Black community, to people of colour and to Indigenous peoples. The journey to ending racism is one of reconciliation. We commit to intensifying our educational efforts concerning all forms of exploitation, acknowledging [our responsibility for slavery in Canada](#) and in the [abuse inflicted on Indigenous peoples](#) throughout our history. In our country, over the past decades, there has been no resolution to the tragedy of so many missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Therefore, we renew our eight commitments made in 2016 in "[A Catholic Response to Call to Action 48 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.](#)" We also promise to learn from Pope Francis and the *Synod on the Amazon* that the defence of "[indigenous peoples' rights is an evangelical principle](#)" (no. 47) and that this pastoral conversion will lead us to a new vision of our Church with an Indigenous face.

We reaffirm that our faith and its sacred Scriptures must never be misused to dominate, exploit or discriminate against any person or people. With prayerful hearts, we express our desire to move forward with many allies in anti-racism. This solidarity is the key to forging new alliances for real change.

To seek communion, we promise to engage in ongoing intercultural dialogue within our communities and in our Church. To enrich our living and our ministry, we welcome women and men religious from outside Canada who come to support our mission here. To enlighten us, we will listen attentively to the voices of theologians and biblical scholars from the Black community, people of colour and Indigenous people. They will help us journey to open our Church to renewed visions of mission and evangelization.

"I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." These words from Jesus' parable in the gospel of Matthew (25:35) resound in our hearts as we truly listen to one another, humbly learn the depths of our personal and communal prejudices, and intentionally strengthen our responses in respect, inclusion and love. Let us together listen, learn, and act.

About CRC

The Canadian Religious Conference is a network that brings together the leaders of 250 Catholic congregations of women and men religious in Canada. The CRC's mission is to encourage its

members to live fully their vocation in following Christ and to support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace in a Canadian context.

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