

## THE CRC WELCOMES POPE FRANCIS, FOR HIS ENCOUNTERS WITH THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CANADA

Montreal/Tiohtià:ke, July 24, 2022 – The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is pleased to welcome Pope Francis for this long-awaited visit, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s [Calls to Action](#). Specifically, call to action no. 58 asked that the Pope “issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools,” and that the apology “be delivered by the Pope in Canada.”

The religious congregations and the institutes of consecrated life of Canada are keenly aware of the importance of this visit, of the significance of the meetings between the Indigenous delegations and Pope Francis, and of the weight the words of his apology will carry. On July 17<sup>th</sup>, during the prayer of the Angelus, the Holy Father declared this to be a penitential pilgrimage: “Unfortunately, in Canada, many Christians, including some members of religious institutes, have contributed to the policies of cultural assimilation that, in the past, have severely harmed native communities in various ways.”

Several Catholic religious congregations in this country were heavily involved in the administration and day-to-day running of the residential school system set up by the Canadian government. We have known since at least the late 1980s how much the children of residential schools suffered from the loss of their cultures, their languages, and their spiritual traditions. Those traumatic experiences continue to affect the Survivors and their families. Moreover, the Canadian religious congregations recognize that many consecrated persons committed physical, sexual, and psychological abuse on generations of Indigenous children. This is a shameful legacy for anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Since the month of May 2021, the search for and discovery of thousands of unmarked graves on former residential school sites reminds us that the suffering endures, and that we still have a responsibility to shed light on the past.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its Calls to Action have led religious congregations – including those not associated with residential schools – to become aware of the meaning of *reconciliation* as desired between First Peoples, political and religious institutions, and a society of settlers and newcomers. Significant resources have been leveraged for the sake of reparation and education. In addition, initiatives for meeting and dialogue have allowed us to journey, these past years, by getting to know the Indigenous Peoples in our regions, by rediscovering their history, and by deepening our understanding of the harm caused by colonialism. We have much to unlearn so we can better learn

from each other. Under the leadership of Pope Francis, Catholics have been encouraged to work for an *integral ecology*, that is a world where climate justice goes hand in hand with human rights and solidarity. The mobilization of First Nations, Metis and Inuit for the protection of lands and waters is a major source of inspiration for this.

The theme of this papal visit, *Walking Together*, simply expresses what the Spirit of the Creator God invites humanity to live by, though it is often challenging: learning to welcome each other with our differences, respecting and valuing each other, living in solidarity, and working for justice. In other words, *walking together* so communion and friendship may lead us to sit at the same table, and to share from “the Dish With One Spoon”.

The Canadian Religious Conference joins Pope Francis in prayer, with the hope that this visit will give new impetus to our Catholic Church and religious institutes and inspire our commitments to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. This papal visit is not just the result of a call to action. May it be above all a new beginning.



**Sr. Francine Landreville, CND**  
**President of the CRC**

#### **About the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC)**

The Canadian Religious Conference is a network that brings together the leaders of 240 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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