



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

November 24, 2021

Dear Faithful People in Christ,

Re: Special Delegation of Indigenous Peoples to Encounter Pope Francis in Rome

As you may be aware, a delegation of First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples from across Canada will travel to the Vatican next month for a special meeting with the Holy Father. Given the historic significance of this event, I write to offer what I hope will be helpful information and to ask for your prayerful support.

Over the past three years, a small group of Canadian Bishops, including myself, has been in dialogue with national Indigenous leadership to consider how relationships between the Catholic Church and the First Peoples of our land might be healed and strengthened. Right relationships with Indigenous Peoples have long been among the primary concerns of the Bishops of Canada. The news this year of unmarked graves at sites of former Indian Residential Schools has strengthened our determination to pursue reconciliation, even as it awakened our entire populace to the responsibility we all share in this endeavour, and underscored the urgency of forging a new path along which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples can walk together toward a future of healing and hope.

Early in the process of interaction between the Bishops and the leadership of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Metis National Council (MNC) and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatimi (ITK), the idea arose of forming from among these three Peoples a special delegation of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Survivors of residential schools, and youth to meet with the Holy Father in Rome. Since reconciliation with the Church involves by necessity a meaningful engagement with the Pope, the aim of the delegation is to afford the participants an occasion to speak from their hearts with His Holiness about the experiences of the past, the challenges of the present, and their hopes for the future. They will also offer him counsel with regard to his future visit to Canada. Pope Francis, who recently announced his willingness to come to our country on a pilgrimage of healing and reconciliation, is eager to welcome the delegates, and will listen carefully with what we know is his own deeply compassionate heart.

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In my estimation, the importance of this meeting in Rome cannot be overstated. It will serve as an extremely important moment in the advancement of healing and reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and the Catholic Church. As such, it will also serve, I believe, as a beacon of hope to our country generally, and, indeed, to the world at large. We live in a time of deep division and wide polarization among peoples and nations. Everyone is searching for the way back to one another. By walking together with our Indigenous Peoples along the path of real healing and renewed relationships, we can demonstrate clearly that reconciliation is not only possible but also can become a reality in our very day.

As a member of the group of Bishops that has been collaborating in this endeavour with national Indigenous leadership, I shall accompany the delegation, as will Bishop William McGrattan of Calgary. Three of the official delegates are from Alberta: Chief Wilton Littlechild of Maskwacis, Angie Crerar of Grande Prairie and Gary Gagnon of St. Albert. We are all keenly aware of the historical importance of this gathering with Pope Francis, and rely heavily upon your prayerful support.

Opportunities for you to offer prayer to support this delegation and implore God's blessing of success upon it includes a mass of commissioning on Sunday, Dec. 12<sup>th</sup> at St. Joseph's Basilica at 10:30 a.m. I invite you to join with me in this celebration, either in person (restrictions permitting) or via livestream.

Additional events will be announced in the coming days.

The delegation departs from Canada on December 14<sup>th</sup>, and will return on the 21<sup>st</sup>. While in Rome, the Pope will grant three distinct one-hour private audiences with the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit delegates respectively. These will be followed by a fourth encounter with the entire group, at which other Indigenous people from Canada will be present. With the assistance in Rome of two members of our Archdiocesan communications team, I hope to provide you with daily updates throughout the course of these special days.

Thank you for your prayerful accompaniment. This meeting with the Holy Father, as I know you can well appreciate, is of immense significance in the history of our Indigenous Peoples, our Church, and our country. May the abundance of God's grace be poured out upon us as He leads us back to one another and enlightens our common path into the future.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



✠Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton