



12 October 2021

Dear Fathers and Parishioners,

It has been several months since I last wrote a monthly letter. With Kyle Greenham, our Communications Officer, doing so well at passing along information coming from the Chancery Office, I was feeling that anything more from me might be redundant. My staff feel otherwise. So I will write a letter from time to time with some personal news and reflections on a variety of topics, to keep you informed on matters that touch us all.

### **Truth and Reconciliation**

With the discovery of unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in May 2021, Canadians of all stripes have been angered, humiliated and disgusted by the history of these schools and the lasting effects on Indigenous families and communities. Despite all the publicity and activity of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) between 2007 and 2015, it is as if Canadians awoke from a long sleep and heard for the first time what some of us have been dealing with for many years. The Catholic Church in Canada has been especially targeted; I and all other bishops have received numerous letters and emails, most from faithful and devout Catholics, calling on us to take some meaningful actions to address this.

This was thoroughly discussed at the Bishops' plenary meeting from September 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>. By the end of that week, we were ready to make three commitments:

1. A statement of apology for the part played by the Catholic Church in Canada in the operation of these schools. This was not the first or only such apology in Canada, but it is the first to be endorsed by all Canadian Catholic bishops together.
2. A commitment to encourage Pope Francis to come to Canada and offer his own such statement of apology, as called for in TRC Calls to Action #58.
3. A commitment to raise \$30M across the country, over a 5-year period, which funds will support programs of healing and reconciliation. This also received overwhelming support from the Bishops. Some things to realize about this fundraising:
  - (a) It has no relationship to the \$25M fundraising effort back in 2015. This is a new initiative.
  - (b) This is not for compensation to individual survivors of Indian Residential Schools. All compensation has already been paid by the Federal Government under the terms of IRSSA (the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement).
  - (c) Money will be committed by all Canadian dioceses and eparchies.
  - (d) The programs supported by this cash will be suggested by local Indigenous leadership. In other words, this program will be operated regionally, not nationally.

You might recall how deeply I was engaged in IRSSA from the time of my ordination as a bishop until the summer of 2015, when the TRC completed its mandate and all Church parties were granted release for having fulfilled our commitments under IRSSA.

The process of healing and reconciliation is a long and rocky road in Canadian society. It is not all about Residential Schools ... the schools now only exist in their effects. It is about racism that is rooted in the human psyche. I pray that we all show the humility and the courage that this journey demands.

### **Synod on Synodality**

Since the time of the apostles, the Christian Church has sought to fulfill its mission by listening to the Holy Spirit's promptings in the community of faith. Beginning with the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the Church's leaders (bishops) have met in synod to pray over and discern where the Lord is leading. Over time, this particular practice was largely abandoned in the Western (Latin) Church, while being still practiced in the Eastern Churches. After Vatican Council II, the practice has been renewed in the universal Catholic Church. Popes have convoked Synods of Bishops in Rome to discuss and deliberate on several matters. Pope Francis has called for the next such gathering of bishop representatives from around the world in October 2023. A significant difference this time is that he wants this Synod to begin locally, this month of October, in every diocese and eparchy in the world. We have only until April 2022 to meet and submit our report to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB). We must begin soon.

In our own Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan, the synodal process will be launched with a prayer service at **St. Joseph's Church in Grande Prairie on Sunday 17 October 2021, at 3:00 pm.** This is not a Mass; it is a prayer service. You are all invited.

The process of the diocesan synod calls on the bishop to appoint a Diocesan Contact Person or Persons. I have asked three people of our archdiocese to exercise this function as a team: Father Ed Eherer, Lauri Friesen, and Kevin Walker. To develop a diocesan synod will see the whole diocese and its many parishes -- the priests and parishioners and even non-Catholics -- coming together and expressing where we feel the Holy Spirit is leading us. It will be a process of listening, understanding and discernment. As our Diocesan Contact Persons begin to work with us in putting together the process of a diocesan synod, I ask you all to offer your heartfelt cooperation. It will seek to engage all of our people and priests. I have already begun to pray earnestly for this initiative in the universal and the local Church.

### **COVID19**

We are all very aware of the continuing impact of the COVID19 pandemic on our lives and our communities. These are realities over which we don't have ultimate control. Each of us is called upon to do our part to prevent the spread of this virus. I hold all of you in my prayers during this very trying period. The challenges of this age call for a depth of virtue in the souls of each of us.

Yours sincerely in Christ the Redeemer,



Most Rev. Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.  
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan