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News Release

For Immediate Release

Canadian Bishops Invite Residential School Survivors, Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Youth to meet with Pope Francis in December

OTTAWA, November 10, 2021 – The Catholic Bishops of Canada are pleased to announce that 25-30 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Elders, knowledge keepers, residential school survivors, and youth will meet with Pope Francis at the Vatican from December 17-20, 2021, accompanied by a small group of Canadian Bishops.

“The journey towards healing and reconciliation is a long one, but we believe this will be a significant milestone in the Catholic Church’s commitment to renewing, strengthening and reconciling relationships with Indigenous Peoples across the land,” said CCCB President, the Most Rev. Raymond Poisson. “With this delegation, we hope to walk together in a new way, to listen with humility, and to discern the next steps that the Church can take to support residential school survivors, their families, and their communities.”

The delegation has been planned through ongoing dialogue with the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and other Indigenous leaders. While specific travel plans and itineraries are being coordinated with the delegates directly, representatives from the Vatican have confirmed that the Holy Father will participate in private meetings with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis delegates respectively to hear their personal stories of the lasting legacy of residential schools. Delegates will also have the opportunity to speak with the Holy Father about their hopes and expectations for his eventual pilgrimage to Canada.

In addition to this group of delegates, additional Indigenous Peoples have been invited to participate in the journey, including for a final audience with the Holy Father. Centred around the principles of mutual trust, respect, and a shared desire to move forward for a more hopeful future, the Canadian Bishops and Indigenous Partners have agreed upon the theme, “*Indigenous Peoples and the Church: Walking Together Toward Healing and Reconciliation*”.

Collectively, the delegation includes participants from across the country, representing multiple faith and linguistic backgrounds. Every delegate brings their own perspective on the history of colonialism and residential schools.

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Travel and hospitality costs for the delegation will be covered by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Mental health workers will travel with the group, in recognition of the painful sentiments that may be experienced by many delegates.

Additional information on media accreditation and availabilities will be communicated in short order. Information about the delegates themselves will also be shared in the coming weeks, subject to their consent.

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About the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) is the national assembly of the Bishops of Canada. It was founded in 1943 and officially recognized by the Holy See in 1948.