



Press release

**The Holy Father's Apostolic Visit to Canada:
Looking Back One Year Later**

Ottawa - July 26, 2023 – Today, on the liturgical Solemnity of Saints Anne and Joachim, we remember that a year ago, in July 2022, His Holiness Pope Francis came among us in Canada (his 37th apostolic journey) to undertake what he referred to as a “[penitential pilgrimage](#).” A very important pastoral visit for the Holy Father, which he made in communion with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, it marked an important step towards “walking together” in the Church’s relationship with Indigenous Peoples, both in Canada and abroad. Travelling over 8,000 km to reach Canada, [Pope Francis then travelled 5,700 km within Canada, with stops in Edmonton, Quebec City, and Iqaluit, where he attended seven events](#) in total.

During the [Address of His Holiness at Maskwacis](#), Pope Francis stated: “I am here because the first step of my penitential pilgrimage among you is that of again asking forgiveness, of telling you once more that I am deeply sorry. Sorry for the ways in which, regrettably, many Christians supported the colonizing mentality of the powers that oppressed the indigenous peoples. I am sorry. I ask forgiveness, in particular, for the ways in which many members of the Church and of religious communities cooperated, not least through their indifference, in projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation promoted by the governments of that time, which culminated in the system of residential schools.”

Looking back upon the apostolic visit, Bishop Raymond Poisson, President of the CCCB, remarks on its momentousness: “During those days with Pope Francis in Canada, we recognized in him the Lord's mercy, which he offered to us. We realized that the Holy Father’s presence had involved great personal and physical effort on his part, but we also knew how much his encounters with Indigenous Peoples represented, and still represent a living expression of a mutual effort – the Holy Father with the Church in Canada – to “walk together” and to open up new horizons of hope within our communities.”

Since the Holy Father's visit, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has published [four pastoral letters](#) on reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: to the First Nations, to the Inuit, to the Métis and to the People of God. Conceived as a reference point for local engagement with Indigenous Peoples, these letters emerged from several months of numerous encounters with Indigenous Peoples at the diocesan or regional levels, notably through the [Listening Circles](#) held across Canada, as well as through the [Indigenous Delegation to the Vatican in April 2022](#) and Pope Francis' apostolic visit to Canada in July of the same year.

Moreover, the CCCB established the [Indigenous Reconciliation Fund \(IRF\)](#) to accept donations from 73 Catholic dioceses and eparchies across the country in fulfillment of its [\\$30 million pledge over 5 years](#). So far, the Fund has raised over one-third of the initial pledge (\$11,264,838) and is on track to meet its goal. To date, over 50 projects have been awarded grants by the IRF to advance healing and reconciliation initiatives. The Fund aims to support projects at the local level, determined in collaboration with First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners.

Last March, the Dicastery for Culture and Education and the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development published a Joint Note on the concept of the “Doctrine of Discovery.” The [Joint Note](#),

which the [CCCB welcomed in its own statement](#), repudiates any concepts that fail to recognize the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples and expresses support for the principles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, specifically in terms of improving the living conditions of Indigenous Peoples, protecting their rights, and supporting their self-development in line with their identity, language, history and culture. A symposium on the subject is currently under consideration.

In June 2023, the CCCB Permanent Council issued guidelines to help dioceses develop their own diocesan policies related to any Indigenous-related records they may hold. As pledged at the [2022 Plenary Assembly](#), these guidelines attempt, with transparency and simplicity, to address the sometimes cumbersome processes for identifying and requesting records.

Looking to the future, while remaining anchored in Pope Francis' rich pastoral discourses during his historic visit to Canada, a [video, *Papal Visit to Canada, One Year Later*](#), has been produced by the Archdiocese of Edmonton with reflections from Cardinal Gérald Cyprien Lacroix, Archbishop Anthony Wieslaw Krotki, Archbishop Richard Smith, and Maskwacis Chief Victor Buffalo. The video highlights Pope Francis' visit as a significant step on the road to healing and reconciliation, noting that the work and commitment will continue. It demonstrates that the Holy Father's visit also made not only the idea, but the reality of reconciliation possible.

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Relive the highlights of Pope Francis' penitential pilgrimage to Canada thanks to a [commemorative booklet](#) containing all the speeches and homilies of his apostolic visit. For a limited time, enjoy a 40% discount from CCCB Publications to mark this first anniversary (~~\$37.95~~ \$22.75).