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President's Message

Christmas and New Year's are almost upon us. For many, it is a time of frantic shopping, gift-wrapping and gift-giving, and office parties. Of course these are important, but often in the rush it is forgotten that these holidays are also occasions to reflect on our experiences over the past year, to spend time with family and friends, and to help others who are in need both here at home and abroad.

The MMF was created to help our people – and to promote our political, social and economic interests. This is a very broad mandate. Over the years we have developed a variety of initiatives towards meeting the needs and supporting the aspirations of our citizens. For instance, we established the Elders Firewood Program, and as announced at our recent Annual General Assembly, we will soon roll out our first-ever Elders Eyeglass Program.

Other examples of the Metis people working together for the benefit of our community include setting up the Louis Riel Endowment Fund to help students get through university. We have also sponsored the Bereavement Fund to assist families grieved with the loss of a loved one who also face financial hardship in covering funeral and service-related costs. For building Metis businesses we have established the Metis Economic Development Fund and the Metis Generation Fund,

Our Manitoba Metis Community is part of a larger community, locally and globally. Each year, the MMF holds a Christmas Cheer Board Concert in Winnipeg. This concert brings together families and friends to raise monies for the gift of giving. This is a longstanding commitment towards achieving the dream of every child from across the province to be part of a Merry Christmas with gifts under the tree.

I want to show my appreciation for our MMF elected representatives, staff, entertainers and attendees who made this year another great success. We are pleased that this year we were able to present a four thousand dollar cheque to the Christmas Cheer Board. I also thank the Christmas Cheer Board Executive Director, Kai Madsen, for attending and for being our partner in celebrating and supporting this important initiative.

This tradition of helping others is long and deep in our history. The Metis welcomed many of the immigrants who came from outside Canada and assisted them in their settlement here in Manitoba. Transporting the Mennonites by Red River Cart from their boats to their first homes is but one example. Our welcome of the Icelanders to the shores of Lake Winnipeg in the mid to late 1800s is also well known.

And, we must never forget the Metis who heard the call of service from their country and humanity, and made personal sacrifices, and for many the ultimate sacrifice, during World Wars I and II, Korea, Afghanistan, other conflicts, and our peacekeeping missions. We thank our veterans for standing strong, keeping the

peace, defending democracy, and protecting families, here and overseas, against many evils.

This past October when I was in Windhoek, Namibia, for the World Indigenous Business Forum, I had the opportunity to visit the community of Okahandja. This is a small town in the center of a developing country facing inequality, poverty and high unemployment. Its citizens were warm and kind to me. They are a proud, vibrant, and hardworking people. Unfortunately jobs and business opportunities are few.

The Indigenous Herero and Nama Peoples founded this town. Much like the Metis here in Canada, the Herero and Nama resisted colonial rule by European powers. They resisted the expropriation of their traditional lands by settlers, faced legal discrimination, and had disputes over rightful access to their natural resources. This resulted in conflicts between themselves and the colonial occupiers.

I was encouraged by my experience in Okahandja. When I asked the children what they wanted if I were to bring gifts, not one of them asked for a toy, a soccer ball, or any gadget that we might expect from a child. They all said they wanted pencils and scribblers. They recognized these tools as key to their future. I was surprised that at such a young age they well understood the importance of getting an education.

I was moved by this experience to “adopt” Okahandja’s children on behalf of our Manitoba Metis Community. Currently, we at the MMF are collecting pencils and paper, books and binders, shoes and clothes, and other items to send for the children. We will be having a drive in the near future, and I ask that you see what you might have to donate. So please keep a lookout in Le Metis and our MMF website, and listen to Metis Hour x 2 for information on what you can do to help.

The magic and meaning of Christmas is of course in the celebration of Jesus Christ. It is also about love, peace, and helping others. I do hope that you are able to spend this special time with your family, friends and neighbours. My wish is that we are able to bring the gift of joy, now and into the future, to all those who have touched our lives over this past year.

I offer my best wishes for those who are sick or shut-in. May you be blessed with healing, health, and peace. I pray and share my heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathies for all our neighbours, friends, and families who have lost loved ones. On behalf our MMF Board of Directors, staff, and citizens, I wish everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and Wonderful Holiday Season.

Meeqwetch,