

## President's Message

February 22, 2017

This past Monday we celebrated the 10th year since the children of our province voted to name February's Manitoba Family Day to Louis Riel Day. This day is a provincial holiday and does not replace the November 16th Riel Day when the Métis Nation mark the death and celebrate the life of our Métis leader. This February saw the Manitoba Metis Federation and the St. Boniface Museum welcome all Manitobans to a free day of entertainment and cultural programming at the museum – a location that is arguably one of the most ideal settings to celebrate Louis Riel and his life's work.

The Manitoba Metis Federation has many artifacts such as Riel's sash, field telescope and beard hair on loan to the Museum. People who visited the museum on Louis Riel Day had excellent opportunities to discover interesting facts about the life of Louis Riel and recognize his contributions to Manitoba and Canada. His life's work led to the creation of the Province of Manitoba, as well as the establishment of constitutional protection for language, rights, and equality in government.

During the day, the Louis Riel Institute hosted bilingual historic bus tours built around the life and legacy of Louis Riel. Stops included the Upper Fort Garry site where Riel and his Métis provisional government drafted the Métis List of Rights that became the framework for the *Manitoba Act, 1870*. The Métis, as Canada's negotiating partners, created the province of Manitoba and brought it into Confederation. The tour concluded at the resting place of Louis Riel located at St. Boniface Cathedral.

During this time of celebration of Louis Riel, the question of whether or not Canada should pardon or exonerate him was again raised. Some think he should be pardon. Others are calling for him to be exonerated. Pardon and exoneration, while different, will lead to a similar result: an excusing of what happened in 1885. A pardon would admit a traitor's guilt on behalf of Riel – which the Métis Nation will never allow to happen. He was only guilty of protecting his people, their lands and their rights. On the other hand, an exoneration would simply hide the guilt of Canada and excuse them for murdering Riel. Both are a dishonour to the man, his legacy, the work he did and the sacrifices he made.

Just this past week the Manitoba Metis Federation participated in a round table to discuss the question of exonerating Louis Riel. CBC French radio hosted the discussion "2017, le 150e anniversaire de la Confédération est-il l'occasion d'innocenter le chef métis Louis Riel?" and broadcasted it live in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It was also made live in Alberta online through the CBC Radio Facebook page "ICI Manitoba". Mona Buors, MMF Associated Minister of Heritage, Culture, Sports and Youth, represented the Métis Nation.

During the discussions, Minister Buors stated the Métis Nation is not interested in exoneration – in excusing Canada for their actions against Louis Riel. An exoneration would simply mean that Canada is exonerated. It fixes nothing for Riel. He is still dead. It does not recognize his important work or the sacrifices he made. Canada cannot escape the judgement of history. If Canada wants

to reconcile and make things right, there are better and more important way this can be done. Exoneration is NOT one of those ways.

One way Canada can help reconcile this grievous wrong is to finally recognize Louis Riel for who he was – a Father of Confederation. Place a statue of him on Parliament Hill with the other Fathers of Confederation. Then, follow this up with an admission of guilt on behalf of Canada and make an apology to the Métis Nation for murdering this great man and Métis visionary.

Finally, address the important issues facing the Métis Nation today – ignore them no longer. These issues include, but are not limited to, keeping the constitutional promise made in 1870, the ongoing health crisis Métis face in Manitoba as revealed in a joint study the MMF did with the University of Manitoba in 2013, provide supports for the advancement of the Métis culture including language, and invest in economic development initiatives for the Métis.

It is time for all levels of governments to stop treating the Métis like third class citizens. It is time for the federal government in particular to keep to the words of our Prime Minister when he has repeatedly stated that his government's relationship with the Métis is of prime importance and to fulfill their campaign promise for a renewed nation-to-nation and government-to-government relationship with the Métis Nation.

In closing, I offer my thoughts and prayers for those who are shut-in or are having difficult times through failing health, sickness or loss. May you find company, encouragement, and help through your connections with family, friends and community. I wish you the best as we head into the brighter and warmer days of Spring.

Meeqwetch,