

## President's Message

March 22, 2017

Balance is defined by the dictionary as 'an even distribution of weight enabling someone or something to remain upright and steady.' Achieving balance in life, work and service is very important for success.

I have said it often, but it bears repeating, there are a lot of good things happening and coming to the Métis Nation. We must maintain our balance as we move forward through these exciting times. This has not always been an easy task through our collective history.

Ever since the Métis Nation began to express national identity over 200 years ago, we have had to struggle and fight for recognition, acceptance and respect of our inherent rights as Aboriginal people. We have often had to assert ourselves from a position of defense. Rarely have we enjoyed the opportunity to meet with others on level ground. However, when we have found ourselves on such ground, we have been able to advance our goals and objectives clearly and effectively.

In 1816, Cuthbert Grant defended the Métis in free trade and recognition of our rights to support our families. This led to a newer relationship with the Hudson Bay and North West companies. In 1869-1870 Louis Riel and his Métis Provisional Government created the Métis List of Rights that helped form the *Manitoba Act, 1870*, the Métis Nation's treaty with Canada. At that time, we were negotiating partners in Confederation with Canada. Our efforts led to the acceptance of both French and English as official languages in the judicial and legal systems of Canada, and to the establishment of treaties with other Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Between those times in which we were able to accomplish much, we were thrown off balance by Canada and those who sought to diminish and control the Métis. Despite being partners with Canada in creating this great country of ours, we found ourselves being falsely accused, swindled and driven from our lands. During these dark times, our partner either turned a blind eye to our troubles or actively participated in oppressing us.

For nearly one hundred years after we signed our treaty of Canada, we found ourselves scattered to the wind, made impotent by poverty and disassociation. Then in 1967 we decided we had enough. We came together and determined we would no longer be ignored and cast aside. We would again make our ground level.

During the next 50 years, we progressively moved forward step by little step. We asserted our treaty rights and started our collective land claim for the broken constitutional promise made in the *Manitoba Act, 1870*. Through Harry Daniels, in 1982, we successfully gained constitutional recognition and protection of our inherent section 35 rights as one of Canada's three Aboriginal peoples. In 2003, our Aboriginal right to hunt for food was affirmed in the Supreme Court of Canada Powley case. Then in 2013 our hard-fought collective land claim against Canada was won.

In late 2015, our fortunes really begin to turn and we are finding ourselves finally back on more solid and even ground. First, we elected a friendly federal government, one that recognizes the errors of former governments and one that made it quite clear they would make things different and better. Prime Minister Trudeau stated at the beginning of his mandate, and many times since, that no relationship is more important to his government and to Canada than the one with Indigenous peoples.

These favourable changes continued in 2016. The Supreme Court of Canada in its April 14 decision on the Daniels case, ruled that for the purposes of interpreting the *Constitution Act, 1867*, the term 'Indian' also includes the Métis Nation. This decision establishes the fact the Métis Nation can approach the federal government about issues relating to their citizens, and the government has a positive responsibility to acknowledge, discuss, and negotiate issues brought forward by the Métis Nation.

Then in late May 2016, I was proud to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Canada to advance reconciliation on our collective land claim. Less than six months later, I was equally pleased and proud to sign our Framework Agreement with Canada that will lead to a modern-day treaty with Canada and see the settling of our land claim. Friends, things are moving quickly. Now that we find ourselves back on level ground, facing friendly foes, we must remain vigilant and not lose our balance. In the same manner that sailors feel off-balance once they get to solid ground after being tossed about on the ocean, we too must find our 'shore legs'. We must find that equilibrium lest we stumble and fall. We cannot afford a misstep now.

To help gain that important balance as we stand on this new and level ground, we will be looking to you to help guide your Métis government forward. Just recently we met with more than 150 Métis delegates from all across Manitoba to discuss the challenges and opportunities of self-government. The discussions were recorded in detail, allowing your Métis government to gain perspectives, ideas, and insights from Métis leaders and Citizens of varying experience levels from across the province. The valued input, observations, and suggestions gained during the Summit will be instrumental as the MMF Government refines its approaches to self-government and further develops plans for the future.

As we achieve this balance, we will also be looking to build capacity so we can confidently face and handle the challenges of self-government. Remember to keep an eye on our website and social media channels for information pertaining to employment opportunities within your Métis Government. Together we can build a strong, unified Métis Nation.

Friends, these are exciting times for the Métis. Let us remain vigilant. Let us not allow petty differences and short-sighted gains cloud our judgement as we work to finally secure the lasting place in Canada that was promised to us and our children so very long ago.

In closing, I offer prayers for those who are shut-in, sick or grieving. May you find strength, peace and comfort in your relationships with family, friends and community. As we look forward to the warmer days of Spring, may your hearts also be warmed and renewed.

Meeqwetch,