



Le Métis



"We must seek to preserve the existence of our own people. We must not by our own act allow ourselves to be swamped. If the day comes when that is done, it must be by no act of ours."

"Pray that God may preserve the little Métis Nation and cause it to grow . . . and remain faithful to its mission. During the five years that I must pass in exile, I have only this to say to the Métis: Remain Métis, become more Métis than ever."

— Louis Riel

From the days of Cuthbert Grant and Louis Riel to today, the Manitoba Métis, also known as the Red River Métis, have fought vigorously to preserve and protect our identity and independence, earning the name Otipemisiwak – the people who own themselves. It's who we are and what we stand for. We have always known we can accomplish anything, as long as we remain united.

When John Bruce as our President, and Louis Riel as then Secretary, informed Prime Minister John A. Macdonald's Lieutenant Governor designate William McDougall that he could not enter the Northwest – our Homeland – without their special permission in October of 1869, they made the declaration as the National Committee of the Red River Métis. This was our people's government. Our declaration led to the creation of Manitoba.

Today, the Manitoba Métis Federation is the democratic government and national voice of the Red River Métis, which is the origin, root, and core of the Métis Nation. Our Ancestors negotiated Canada's entry into the Northwest, and Manitoba's entry into Confederation. We remain committed to advancing our work to meet the needs of your family and your community, while we advance our Nation.

As many will be aware, your Métis government here in Manitoba has been working toward a

President's Message

meeting with Pope Francis for nearly two years. It is unfortunate that this meeting has been postponed, but we all know that this pandemic has caused many disruptions over the last several years, and this is just another example. I know, in my heart, that this meeting will take place and that Pope Francis will deliver an apology to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada when he visits our soil.

Acknowledging the harms done

The importance of this dialogue with the Catholic Church and within our own community cannot be underestimated. It is critical to healing. There is a lot of pain and anger in many Citizens' hearts and minds due to the harms committed under the residential and day school system, and there's no doubt in my mind that some of these harms include outright murder. While the great majority of the victims were First Nations children, there were also Red River Métis children and families who suffered forms of abuse.

During the years I was taught by nuns, there were some who tried to take or drive the Métis out of my classmates and me. It was as natural as breathing to speak Saulteaux amongst my friends and family. I grew up speaking it, and it was the only language my mother ever spoke. But speaking Saulteaux was strictly forbidden in school. I was repeatedly whipped on the soft part of my wrists by a rubber-encased metal rod for speaking it in class. When that didn't work, I was forced onto my tiptoes with my nose in a circle on the chalkboard, and my calves were whipped anytime my tired muscles tried to give out on me.

Humiliation was also used in an effort to take the spirit out of me. I still remember clearly the time the nun who taught us decided my hair was too long. She put many, many elastic bands in my hair until it felt as stiff as a stick and stood up on top of my head. She then forced me to sit in front of the class the whole day, bearing the shame and embarrassment as my classmates smirked. I ran all the way home along the shore, to avoid being seen by anyone else. My mother, who was a devout Catholic, simply cut the bands out of my hair and told me "Mano, mano," which means let it go, or leave it alone. She wouldn't fight against the Church, even if she was able to speak English.

Still, the fact remains that those who tried to take the spirit out of me failed in their purpose. They could not take my identity away from me, and they did not succeed in taking the identity of others. Every one of us who still stands proud in our culture and language today are victors, and I pray that all survivors feel that victory in their hearts.

Still, these truths need to be heard and acknowledged, along with the pain and grief of the

survivors. But it also needs to be recognized that these harms were not done by God, or through instructions contained in the Bible. These harms were committed by people – by clergy, oblates and nuns – human beings with human failings. I have no doubt these individuals will face a reckoning for the atrocities committed upon children, either in this life or the next.

An apology from Pope Francis is just one step on the pathway to healing, and it's an important one. But we also need to think of the future and the road to healing. This is important to all Red River Métis who continue in the faith today, as many rely on the Church to deliver hope and healing when they have loved ones suffering from health or mental health conditions or are involved in substance abuse or victims of physical abuse. It's also important for our communities that rely on the Church to provide comfort, guidance, and support, to say nothing of the funerals, weddings, and baptisms that are part of the fabric of life.

Understanding more of our shared history

As much as there were great harms done to our people and to other Indigenous peoples in Canada by the Catholic Church, there are also many examples of great partnership and mutual support.

Since many Citizens are invested in the critical, ongoing work of defending and protecting our identity, I want to be sure you have the information you need to help keep you informed. It is important to understand that our relationship with the Catholic Church goes back to the inception of our identity as a Nation.

As our Citizens will know, we won the *Victory of Frog Plain* in 1816 and declared ourselves *la nouvelle nation*. But what many Citizens don't know is that one year later, in 1817, the inhabitants of the Red River, many of whom were Métis, sent a petition to Archbishop Plessis requesting the services of priests. Our Nation even brought priests with us on our buffalo hunts to pray for our safety and success.

Our first president, Louis Riel, was a devout Catholic. During the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870, he entrusted none other than a priest, Father Ritchot, to negotiate with Canada on behalf of the Métis people of the Red River. For his persistence in securing rights and freedoms for the Métis as directed by Riel and his provisional government, Ritchot earned the description of an "obdurate priest" by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald.

Even within Louis Riel's final statement at his trial in Regina in 1885, he gave significant credit to the Catholic Church for their years of comfort and support. He referred to both Archbishop Taché and Bishop Grandin as "great benefactors"

whom he loved and saw as father figures. He also acknowledged the support of Archbishop Bourget and Father Jean Baptiste Bruno, who he said understood his intentions and his vision, and supported his work to defend the Red River Métis. He also recognized two priests who helped him when he, as a poor man who earned no income from his efforts on behalf of his Nation, needed flour to feed his family.

These are just a few examples that show we have walked side by side with the Catholic Church throughout our Nation’s history.

Staying true to our history

In recent weeks, the Métis National Council (MNC) has been making comments in the national media, saying the Catholic Church took away the spirituality of the Métis, robbing us of sweat lodges and drums. I would like to say I’m surprised by these comments, but I am not. Remarks like this are uninformed and only serve to highlight the dangers of identity shifting.

We have always respected First Nations spirituality and ceremony. Some of our Citizens not only respect

this spirituality and ceremony, they also attend pow wows and sweat lodges. There is nothing wrong with respecting and appreciating these traditions that go back thousands of years. Part of this respect is understanding that that these are not our traditions – they are not Red River Métis practices and never have been.

Anyone claiming they represent the Métis while also claiming drums and sweat lodges as our heritage is doing more than just distorting our identity as Métis, they are undermining the identity of our First Nations relatives. They also feed into the misconception that Indigenous peoples in Canada are one group with interchangeable customs. We know this is not the case. The Algonquins have different traditions from the Tlingit, who have different practices than the Inuit and the Mi’kmaq. The Red River Métis are also different and have our own roots, traditions, practices, and ceremonies.

Seeing these comments coming out of the MNC, I am again grateful for you, the Citizens of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), who gave us your guidance and wisdom on this matter. You saw what the future of the MNC would bring and gave us, your Métis government, a mandate to leave the MNC to prevent

us from being part of the identity distortion we’re seeing today.

The MMF Cabinet will continue to follow your guidance and remain the guardian of our identity. We will also protect and promote our accurate history, including our longstanding relationship with the Church. We will continue working on a pathway forward that acknowledges both the harms and the good done by the Church and seek opportunities to continue developing a good and positive future together. That is what the MMF, as the national government of the Red River Métis, will be focused on as we continue to plan for our meeting with Pope Francis.

In the meantime, I offer my prayers to all our Citizens, friends, and neighbours, and my deepest condolences to those who have been caused to grieve. I also wish a safe and merry Christmas to all Citizens, and hope that the season gives you comfort and peace, along with joy and time with loved ones.

Meeqwetch,

President David Chartrand. LL.D. hon. D.M. ∞

MMF lights up Portage and Main with \$50,000 donation to Christmas Cheer Board



Left to right: MMF Minister Will Goodon, MMF President David Chartrand, his granddaughter Martha Chartrand, and Christmas Cheer Board Executive Director Shawna Bell hold the MMF’s \$50,000 cheque to the charity.

On December 3, the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) lit up the future Métis Nation Heritage Centre at the corner of Portage and Main, to kick off the holiday season and to honour a good cause. A longtime supporter of the Christmas Cheer Board, MMF President David Chartrand presented the charity’s Executive Director, Shawna Bell, with a cheque for \$50,000 on behalf of the MMF.

Emceed by Will Goodon, MMF Minister of Housing and Property Management, the first annual tree lighting ceremony heard prayers from Elder Linda St. Cyr-Saric, with remarks from President Chartrand, Executive Director Bell, and Manitoba Premier Heather Stefanson. MMF Cabinet Ministers Alfred Anderson and David Beaudin were in attendance, along with Cliff Cullen, provincial Minister of Education.

It was a fitting location for the lighting ceremony to take place, in the heart of the Red River Métis Homeland, at the historic intersection. The BMO building, which the MMF purchased from the Bank of Montreal last year, is at the centre of the Red River Settlement and the joining of two major historic Red River cart trails.



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“Métis presence here at Portage and Main is very symbolic,” said Minister Goodon. “Not only to Métis Citizens, but to all Manitobans, and we’re very, very excited to be able to share who we are with all Manitobans, because we are all Manitobans.”

Construction begins next year on the Métis Nation Heritage Centre, which will educate the public on Métis culture and heritage.

“This is where thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people will come to visit,” said President Chartrand.

The lighting ceremony also included a donation to the Christmas Cheer Board. For over 20 years, the MMF has provided support to the Christmas Cheer Board, which has offered hampers and toys to families in need for over 100 years. Last year, the MMF increased its typical annual donation to \$50,000.

“I grew up very, very poor. I know what poverty is,” said President Chartrand. “And we got lucky – we had one present growing up, and that’s all my mom could afford. But we had oranges, and we had candies, and we had a meal,” he said, adding that it was his mother’s way of ensuring the family enjoyed Christmas.

President Chartrand spoke about the importance of the Christmas Cheer Board to families in need.

“Imagine a child waking up without Santa Claus. Imagine a child not being able to open a Christmas present,” he said.

The charity’s longtime Executive Director, Kai Madsen, passed away this year, and worked tirelessly to ensure every child would experience Christmas.

“That’s what Kai gave for 50 years of his life and more. That’s something that he’s honoured



MMF President David Chartrand spoke about the monumental impact of the Christmas Cheer Board.

– ensuring that every family had a chance to have Christmas. And so it’s important to us, the Federation, we’ve been sponsoring and supporting the Christmas Cheer Board for many years now,” said President Chartrand.

Executive Director Bell, who took on her role earlier this year, expressed her gratitude for the donation.

“The Cheer Board’s been doing this for 100 years, but we couldn’t do it without the very generous support of the Manitoba Métis Federation, so thank you so very much to President Chartrand and your team. This is amazing, and it will do so much to help brighten the lives of families and individuals here in the city, especially in the second year of what has been a really great need, so I can’t thank you enough for everything you do.”



CITIZEN SPOTLIGHT

STORIES HIGHLIGHTING RED RIVER MÉTIS CITIZENS

TO READ MORE, VISIT: MMF.MB.CA



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Seasons Greetings

From your Red River Métis Government

With Christmas around the corner, we want to highlight Métis traditions and family gatherings.
Submit your photos to communications@mmf.mb.ca to be featured in
upcoming Le Metis publications as well as the MMF social media pages.