



Le Métis



It was a historic week for our Nation, and we are now back in our Homeland after an unforgettable pilgrimage to meet His Holiness in Rome. I am tremendously proud of how our delegates represented our Nation with dignity, pride, heart, and faith. I know all our Citizens will be equally proud of them as we return to our communities and begin sharing the important story of our journey and the messages we carry in our hearts and minds from the Holy Father.

I wish I could share the memories in my mind with each and every one of you, so you could feel what your delegation felt in the presence of His Holiness. I can only begin to tell you about our interactions with him in this message, but I look forward to sharing more with Citizens in the coming weeks and months.

I can tell you that our delegates took their responsibilities seriously, as they represented the many voices of our people who could not be with us in person. Each spoke of their experiences, including the pain and harm caused by predators, evil doers who hid behind the Catholic Church and created such lasting hurt within our Nation. These individuals created lasting intergenerational trauma that is still felt in many of our families today. I know our speakers draw comfort from the fact that if these people have not already faced the consequences of their deeds in this world, they will face them in the next.

The Holy Father listened carefully and closely to each one of the speakers, at times looking at them with emotional expressions while they spoke and at others, seeming to pray as he heard their words. There were many feelings expressed in the room that day, and many tears shed by our people as we presented our truths to Pope Francis.

I can tell you with great confidence that his response to our interaction, including his apology to our people, was heartfelt, and that his facial expression and words showed the deep shame and sadness he felt for what these priests and nuns did to us. He took full responsibility for these actions as the leader of the Catholic Church, and we accepted his apology on behalf of our Nation.

I personally spoke with His Holiness about our history and our relationship with the Catholic Church, including how we worked to protect religious freedoms in Canada and helped bring the Northwest into Canadian Confederation. I also talked about the role priests and missionaries played in helping our Nation do this important work.

We shared a scroll with His Holiness that highlights our historic relationship with the Church. We had it translated into Spanish, which is his first language. From the Battle of Seven Oaks, also known as the Victory of Frog Plain, where we first proclaimed our nationhood, to the 1817 petition sent to the Church asking them to send priests to build churches in our community. This cooperation was ongoing to the days of Father Ritchot, who was a strong supporter of Louis Riel and the Métis families, and acted as our negotiator when we joined Canada's Confederation, all the way to the apology we received. We wanted to make sure His Holiness, Pope Francis, knew our history and our people.

While it was difficult to share all of our history in a one-hour meeting, we certainly gave him a sense of who we are and how we worked with the Church in the past, as well as the role faith played in Louis Riel's life and leadership.

We made the request to the Holy Father that, if he was able, it would be a highly meaningful act of reconciliation for all Red River Métis if he could make his way to the heart of our Homeland to bless Riel's grave and Father Ritchot's grave. We won't know for some time if he can come to Manitoba, given his health, his trip, his being limited; but if he can't, I promised that we would come to him wherever he goes in Canada.

As is traditional in our culture, we also brought gifts of cultural significance, including a red cross beaded by master artist Jennine Krauchi. This cross included a small pair of beaded slippers to help him remember that we are on a journey together, walking side by side. We also presented a larger black beaded cross by Prairie Owl Beads, along with a pair of authentic Métis slippers of the Red River with prairie flowers and a cross on the vamp. We encouraged him to wear the slippers, for comfort and to help him

remember us as we walk the path to the future together. We also presented him with a Louis Riel coin designed by Métis artist David Garneau, which was officially launched at a special celebration in Winnipeg on the 175th anniversary of Louis Riel's birth.

It was clear to us all that he took the time to understand us in advance of our visit. He referenced the fact that we are a maternal nation, and talked about the connection between our Youth and Elders, along with our values around sharing as an expression of caring. He also made the personal choice to greet each and every delegate, shake their hand and gift them with a blessed rosary, along with the beautiful olive branch for our Nation, which will make its way to our new Heritage Centre at Portage and Main. We also brought copies of our self-government agreement, signed July 6 of 2021. It is now signed and blessed by His Holiness and will join the olive branch in your new Heritage Centre at Portage and Main, to mark this historic event for our Nation.

Every delegate who was there felt his effort to connect with us, and the honour he was paying our culture.

His apology, his actions in our encounter, and the time and energy he took to understand our traditions, showed us all that he is truly a Pope of God first, and the Vatican second. We now have a clear pathway for our journey forward with the Catholic Church, renewing our relationship that stems back to the very beginning of our Nation. I look forward to seeing where this journey takes us.

I will also say that it has been a number of years since we have been able to travel together in a delegation of this size. I know it did all of our hearts good to be able to come together as a community and practice our traditional ways, including taking care of each other and working together for the well-being of our group. I want to extend a special thanks to our Youth for supporting our Elders and indeed, all delegates. Whether it was providing help with navigating all the digital and health requirements for travel in a post-COVID world, or making sure everyone was fed, hydrated, safe, and comfortable, our Youth showed all the values that make our Nation strong. I congratulate Kyra De La Ronde, our elected Youth representative, for her leadership and endless energy. She is truly an inspiration for all our Youth. The days were very long, many starting at 6:30 am.

Along with our time with the Holy Father, we visited the Basilica Santa Maria Maggiore, which was built in 437 AD for the Blessed Virgin Mary and contains

Jesus' baby crib along with pieces of the cross that Jesus was crucified on. We attended mass at the Basilica before and after our visit with Pope Francis. We also went to a town called Anzio to visit the resting places of our Canadian war veterans, and pay tribute to our fallen Canadian heroes, who gave their lives in defence of democracy. I know that dying on foreign soil and being forgotten was one of the biggest fears of many of our soldiers, so it is important that we take the time to honour them. This beautifully maintained and peaceful site is cared for with pride by the groundskeepers, and we paid tribute to the 68 Canadians, including four

Manitobans who rest there. We were very pleased that Archbishop Gagnon chose to stay with us and lead the prayers at the gravesites of our fallen heroes. You will find these pictures on our MMF website.

I thank the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, including Archbishop Gagnon and Archbishop LeGatt, for providing spiritual guidance and leading our mass and prayers on this pilgrimage of faith and hope.

Again, there is so much more to share, and I can't wait to see our Citizens and share these stories with

you all. Until we can gather again, I offer my prayers to all our Citizens, friends, and neighbours, and my deepest condolences to those who have been caused to grieve.

Meeqwetch,

President David Chartrand. LL.D. (hon). O.M. ∞

Red River Métis and the Catholic Church: *Journal*



Red River Métis delegation finds path to renewed relationship in meeting with Pope Francis



The delegation presented Pope Francis with a scroll indicating a timeline of the relationship between the Red River Métis and the Catholic Church.

The Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) sent a delegation of Elders and Knowledge Keepers, residential school survivors, and Youth from the Red River Métis Homeland, accompanied by a small group of bishops, to Rome last week to meet with Pope Francis on April 21.

The historic meeting – the first with one of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada since His Holiness issued an apology for the harms done by the residential and day school systems – focused on the relationship between the Red River Métis and the Catholic Church. With a theme of *Journey Forward: Reconciliation to Renewal*, the meeting featured discussions of hope, healing, and revitalization. Delegates spoke on their own experiences, while also sharing the Nation’s collective message of a desire to renew the longstanding relationship.

“We talked about our history of over 200 years with the Catholic Church, and as people reflect on the history in Canada, it was the Red River Métis who actually drew the churches into Western Canada,” MMF President David Chartrand said in a press conference following the historic meeting.




The delegation presented Pope Francis with a scroll indicating a timeline of the relationship between the Red River Métis and the Catholic Church, as well as beaded slippers, beaded crosses, and a Louis Riel coin.

“It was important to recognize how the Church worked hand in hand with the Métis in the establishment of not only Manitoba but of Western Canada,” President Chartrand said. “It was to me an important message to show him that our connection then is still connected today, but that Riel not only protected the Métis – he protected French language, he protected religion, he protected the people of the West.”

President Chartrand invited Pope Francis to come to the heart of the National Homeland of the Red River Métis and bless Louis Riel’s grave. He said Pope Francis demonstrated a good understanding of the Red River Métis, even shaking all 55 delegates’ hands.

“This is something we will cherish as the Métis people forever,” President Chartrand said.

Journey Forward – Reconciliation to Renewal



A Papal blessing


Pope John Paul II met with leaders of the Métis Nation and blessed the Prayer that would be read into the record of the 1986 Constitutional Rights Conference between Canada’s Prime Minister, provincial Premiers and Indigenous leaders. He would subsequently have a special meeting with the Métis and other Indigenous peoples in Canada.

1885

Father André

In his final hours Louis Riel was accompanied by his confessor, Father André, who later stated that Riel “was a fervent Catholic, attending church and attending to his religious duties frequently.”


1984




More than two-thirds of Métis are Christians, and their **strongest connection is to Catholicism**

More than **40%** of Métis in Prairie provinces are Catholic

Source: 2011 National Household Survey




Renewing the Relationship



Pope Francis Angelus Message


Pope Francis emphasized the importance of “walking side by side in dialogue and in mutual respect in the recognition of the rights and cultural values of all the sons and daughters of Canada”.

2021




Self-Government Recognition Agreement

Red River Métis Sign Manitoba Métis Self-Government Recognition and Implementation Agreement with Canada, recognizing the Manitoba Métis Federation as the National Government of the Red River Métis – beyond borders.



634 Catholic Schools delivering quality education


Source: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops



A Papal Apology


Pope Francis apologizes to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada for harms caused: “For the deplorable conduct of these members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God’s forgiveness and I want to say to you with all my heart, I am very sorry. And I join my brothers, the Canadian bishops, in asking your pardon.”

2022



Revitalizing our Historic Relationship

We are taking critical steps toward true reconciliation and renewal of our historic relationship with the Catholic Church through our faith-based pilgrimage to meet with His Holiness, followed by sharing our experiences with the Red River Métis when we return to our Homeland.



835 Parishes and Missions serving communities



Prayer of the Red River Métis

Our Heavenly Father, we give thanks to you for the formation of your Red River Métis people and for guiding us as we developed our ways, our culture, our language, and our communities.

We give thanks to you Lord for providing your Red River Métis people with the strength to protect our culture and community and for your guidance from among your priesthood to ensure that we protected our religion, language, and land rights in the Manitoba Act.

We give thanks to you Lord for giving your Red River Métis people the hope and courage to protect our very existence and identity in the long dark days that followed our loss on the Plains at Batoche - our resilience continues to this day as we journey forward.

We give thanks to you Lord for guiding your Red River Métis people on our journey of self-determination and self-government and for giving our past, present, and future leaders the strength and vision to work for the betterment and growth of God’s people, Louis Riel’s little Métis Nation.

We give thanks to you Lord for the ongoing enlightenment in our faith in you, the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible, so that we can not only move toward reconciliation and forgiveness for past wrongs done to our people, but that we can embrace the revitalization and renewal of our relationship with the Holy Father and the Catholic Church.

We give heartfelt thanks to you Lord for your presence in our thoughts and minds, for the wisdom and knowledge of our Elders, our Red River Métis President and Cabinet, and our Youth as future leaders, as we move forward in the years to come.

Amen.



JOURNEY FORWARD

RECONCILIATION TO RENEWAL



Pope Francis gifted the Red River Métis delegation with a brass olive branch.



A delegation of Elders and Knowledge Keepers, residential school survivors, and Youth from the Red River Métis Homeland, accompanied by a small group of bishops, met with Pope Francis on April 21.



With a theme of *Journey Forward: Reconciliation to Renewal*, the historic meeting featured discussions of hope, healing, and revitalization.

Andrew Carrier, Minister Responsible for Residential Schools, shared his own story of abuse at a St. Vital day school, and said the meeting gave the delegation a chance to rebuild our connection with the Church.

"I felt delighted to be able to share with the Pope my personal experiences at the school, and it gave me an opportunity to tell the world how important it is that we do a better job in protecting our children," he said. "Regardless of my experience and all experiences of the children that were denied the right to be loved and who suffered, we need to overcome this pain and move forward."

Pope Francis asked the delegates for forgiveness, and expressed shame for the residential school abuse.

"When you hear the Pope himself asking to pray for him, it shows you that there's a message being sent there from the Pope," President Chartrand said. "Even the Church needs prayers too. But they understand the mistakes that were made. They understand the mistakes that caused so much damage and harm. And it's going to take generations to overcome that. But many of us are now leading the new pathway, getting beyond that."

The slippers gifted to Pope Francis represent the path forward together.

"We cannot change history, but we can change the future," President Chartrand said. "How do we go forward is a question I think all of us have to ask. Do we go forward alone, or do we go forward together? My story, and my message for my people is: let's walk together."

Pope Francis presented the delegation with a brass olive branch, which will be placed at our Heritage Centre when it opens. President Chartrand said the olive branch signifies a hand extended to the Red River Métis "as we walk together to reconciliation, revitalization, and build hope again."

Richard Gagnon – the Archbishop of Winnipeg who travelled with the delegation along with St. Boniface Archbishop Albert LeGatt – reflected on the historic encounter.

"One of the things he said in his remarks was that we have to learn to walk in other people's shoes," Archbishop Gagnon said of Pope Francis, adding that we should walk in other people's moccasins as well. "All of us, if we can learn to appreciate other people's journeys more, then the future does have a lot of hope."



CITIZEN SPOTLIGHT
STORIES HIGHLIGHTING RED RIVER MÉTIS CITIZENS

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