



Reflecting on the challenge and opportunity of the COVID-19 pandemic

Easter greetings!

As co-chairs of Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle we would like to offer a few reflections on how, in this period marked by COVID-19, we may be faithful and vigilant in our efforts of renewing and fostering relationships between the Catholic Church and Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Above all let us encourage one another and pray for an outpouring of compassion and kindness so that this period of physical isolation brought on by the pandemic may be also a time of social cohesion and solidarity. May we stay open to the many ways that the Risen One is walking with us, making all things new and turning all things to the good.

We would like to add our voices to those who have expressed gratitude for the many loving actions that are manifestations of care and compassion. We raise our hands and hearts in thanks for Indigenous leaders, health care professionals and community care workers who continue to tend to the sick and to care for the elders and vulnerable community members. As faith leaders we want to express a special thanks for the spiritual leaders, knowledge-keepers, ministers and healers from the many different traditions who have worked together to help individuals and communities stay healthy in mind, body and spirit. May Our Creator bring their courageous work to fulfillment.

This time of isolation is ironically a time that has sensitized many of us to our common humanity and called us to a deeper unity and solidarity. However, the COVID-19 crisis has also shone light into the darkness of what has been tolerated and accepted for too long. It has highlighted the oppressive vulnerability of many Indigenous communities: Communities that suffer from inadequate and over-crowded housing; those that lack clean water; under-funded and inadequate health and community services as well as unreliable infrastructure that are at greater risk and result in communities living with heightened fears. While some places in Canada may be sensing the threat is receding, that is not so among those who have been often abandoned. As Paul Coehlo writes in *Warrior of Light*: "Those people who look on other's misery with indifference are the most miserable of all." These are days that call for a deeper commitment and firmer resolve.

As co-chairs of Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle we encourage people during this crisis to be particularly mindful of the vulnerability of Indigenous women and children. We must not forget the truth revealed by the National Inquiry on murdered and missing Indigenous women and children. Those who have lived under threat of violence are experiencing increased vulnerability during this time of isolation.

We encourage an increased vigilance on behalf of those who are incarcerated. The Indigenization of Canada's prison population has been identified rightly as a national travesty. It is imperative for federal, provincial, municipal and Indigenous governments to develop a decarceration plan that will relieve the dangerous conditions in prisons and provide care for the health and safety of inmates.


Now, at the beginning of spring, Mother Earth is bursting forth with sure signs of her own resilience. Each new morning, we are reminded that as night gives way to day, death will give way to new life. This pandemic will pass. As we look forward to recovery let us take as our guide this Easter message of the Holy Father:

I hope that this time of danger will free us from operating on automatic pilot, shake our sleepy consciences and allow a humanist and ecological conversion that puts an end to the idolatry of money and places human life and dignity at the centre. (Pope Francis, Letter to the Popular Movements, 12 April 2020)

While there are already competing visions of recovery surfacing, Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle, in the words of Pope Francis, is called to be watchful and ready to stand alongside those Indigenous and non-Indigenous "*builders of this change that can no longer be put off*", so that our recovery will not be a return to the normal, which was already in crisis, but the creation of a renewed and reconciled unity.

May the Lord lift up your hearts during this Easter Season and always.

Yours in the Risen Christ,



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