



**WALKING  
TOGETHER**  
POPE FRANCIS CANADA 2022



## **Oblates of Mary Immaculate Welcome Pope Francis on Historic Pilgrimage to Support Healing and Reconciliation**

July 25, 2022, OTTAWA – In response to Pope Francis’ arrival on Canadian soil yesterday morning, Fr. Ken Thorson and Fr. Luc Tardif, Oblate Provincial of the two provinces which operated 48 Residential Schools, issued the following statement on behalf of OMI Lacombe Canada and Notre Dame du Cap Provinces:

“The Oblates of Mary Immaculate are pleased to welcome the Holy Father to Turtle Island on an historic pilgrimage of healing and reconciliation. We are grateful for Pope Francis’ compassion and leadership in listening residential school survivors, and guiding all Catholics on the journey forward.

In light of the Oblates’ role in the residential school system, we hope the Holy Father’s visit will bring healing and solace to all Indigenous people who continue to experience the harm and trauma of the tragic residential schools legacy.

After years of prayer, reflection and building friendships with Indigenous people, we understand the legacy of pain and suffering that was caused by the residential school system, and the Oblates who ran many of the institutions. We recognize that our vision of evangelization hurt the people we aspired to serve, and we have apologized not only for the abuse that took place within the schools, but the colonial attitudes that underpinned their operation.

The first Oblate apology took place in 1991, on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our arrival in Canada, on the eve of the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Europeans to the Americas. The moment warranted reflection, and we believe provided Indigenous people with a firm acknowledgement that we regret our role in this system and understand the damage that it inflicted on survivors and intergenerational survivors.

We believe that as Pope Francis embarks on this pilgrimage, he will be guided not only by the stories he heard from Indigenous delegates this past spring, but by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which calls on him to apologize for the Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools.

As a Congregation, we know that an apology is only the beginning of a journey that must be accompanied by meaningful action. To that end, we remain committed to our efforts to help Indigenous researchers, survivors and other partners to memorialize the legacy of those who never returned from residential schools. We believe we have made meaningful progress on this journey, with over 50,000 records transferred to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, while knowing there is much more to do.

Accompanying this work, many Oblate pastors have sought to incorporate Indigenous traditions into Catholic liturgy, including the addition of smudging ceremonies to Catholic Mass. Another proud example of this work is the Oblates’ continued presence at the Lac Ste. Anne Pilgrimage, which is believed to be the largest spiritual gathering of Indigenous people in North America. It

was the site of the Oblates' apology in 1991 and will be one of the destinations that the Holy Father visits on July 26<sup>th</sup>.

While we are inspired by the Holy Father's presence, we recognize that many Indigenous people, particularly residential school survivors, remain traumatized by their experiences and may have a complicated reaction to this event. As Oblates, we will listen to those voices with humility and an openness to growing as we continue our work towards truth, justice, healing and reconciliation.

We believe the Holy Father's presence will strengthen our resolve on this journey and we are thankful for his attendance and commitment. As we celebrate this milestone, we will continue to walk with our Indigenous brothers and sisters while building upon the traditions of friendship and affection shared with so many Indigenous communities. We wish to continue this journey so that every day brings new opportunities for gestures of reconciliation and healing. We are committed to learning together to live the Gospel."

### **About the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate**

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate were founded in 1816 by St. Eugene de Mazenod in Aix en Provence, France. The community arrived in Canada in 1841. After their arrival, Oblate priests and brothers worked across Canada and throughout the far north in a variety of areas, including residential schools, parish and retreat ministry, and hospital and prison chaplaincies. OMI Lacombe Canada Province is based in Ottawa, ON, and Notre-Dame-du-Cap Province is based in Richelieu, QC.