

Bishop shares experience of Papal visit

On Saturday, July 30, Bishop Christian Riesbeck, CC, Bishop of the Diocese of Saint John, having just returned from a pilgrimage to Quebec City for the Papal Visit, took the opportunity to share a bit about his experience of the trip. He began by expressing his thanks to you the parishioners of St. Mary Magdalene parish for their generous support of indigenous peoples and issues over the years. “Thanks to your generosity in large part as a parish and many parishioners and other diocesan faithful contributed to offset the costs of the trip to Quebec City*, we were able to send a diocesan delegation of survivors, elders and support workers to Quebec City from Indigenous communities around the diocese.”

The diocesan delegation was led by Fr Bill Brennan, pastor, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish (and former pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish”, who shared with Bishop Riesbeck that for the most part, everyone was very positive about the trip. including those who attended the Mass at Saint Anne-de-Beaupré. Bishop Riesbeck encouraged people to look at the Holy Father’s remarks from the lens of the entire visit, the apologies that he that he made in the west and then reiterated throughout his trip. “I think that the survivors and the indigenous peoples who participated, were very positive about it as well in general at least from our delegation and were very grateful for the connections that were made amongst each other, but also hopeful for some future conversations that we would like to continue to have, maybe through talking circles, to further the work of healing and reconciliation,” he said. “I’m also thankful to you for your generous financial support of the indigenous reconciliation Fund, which will be part of our action plan, moving forward to support various initiatives for healing and reconciliation involving our indigenous brothers and sisters.”

Bishop Riesbeck said that for most, this Papal visit had a tremendous impact looking at it as a whole from beginning to end. “His words, his actions and just his presence on Canadian soil was an important step to further the long road to healing and reconciliation. Despite his physical limitations he came on Canadian soil fulfilling the TRC call to action in this regard to apologize for the tragic participation of local Catholic institutions in the policies of assimilation and marginalization of Indigenous peoples especially through the system of residential that led to the denigration and suppression of Indigenous languages and cultures, the suffering of physical, sexual, verbal, psychological and spiritual abuse.” He recalled words of Pope Francis during his first stop at Maskwacis in Alberta, “I express my deep shame and sorrow and, together with the bishops of this country, I renew by request for forgiveness for the wrong done by so many Christians to the Indigenous peoples. It is tragic when some believers, as happened in that period of history, conform themselves to the conventions of the world rather than to the Gospel.”

Noting that the Holy Father renewed his apology at various times throughout the trip especially in the presence of Indigenous leaders and residential school survivors, including those who continue to suffer the trauma of the residential school system, he said, “He was even late in departing for Rome from Iqaluit because he took the time – several hours in fact – to listen to testimonies of residential school survivors which had a deep and profound impact on him personally.”

During Vespers on Thursday evening Bishop Riesbeck shared that Pope Francis told the Bishops, Priests and Religious assembled that, “the Gospel is preached effectively when life itself speaks and reveals the freedom that sets others free, the compassion that asks nothing in return, the mercy that silently speaks

of Christ...Together with you, I would like once more to ask forgiveness of all the victims (of sexual abuse). The pain and the shame we must feel must become an occasion for conversion: never again!"

In response to this Bishop Riesbeck told the congregation, "I as your bishop and together with the Bishops of Canada have been profoundly inspired and encouraged by Pope Francis' words and presence. In a press release the Canadian bishops wrote: "We have heard this call and will be renewing an updated action plan during our National Plenary Assembly this fall. It is our hope that the relationships forged in this planning process, particularly with Indigenous partners at both the national and local levels, will grow well beyond this visit and serve as a foundation for the work that lies ahead. In conversations with our Indigenous sisters and brothers we have heard:

- Calls for greater transparency with the preservation and disclosure of residential school records;
- Asks for support to address the issue of Indigenous artifacts housed at the Vatican Museum;
- A desire to affirm the inherent rights of Indigenous people and to clarify the historical policies and principles often referred to as the "Doctrine of Discovery";
- An invitation to walk with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in addressing systemic injustices which continue today; and
- And to financially support initiatives that advance healing and reconciliation.

This guidance will be instrumental to our next steps as we seek to walk together in a new way."

The Bishop concluded saying that, "this entire apostolic journey is a new beginning for the Church in Canada, one in which we confront the mistakes of the past and move forward with the hope that Christ can renew all things. I trust in the collaboration of your new pastor and of all of you in advancing the cause of healing and reconciliation for our Indigenous sisters and brothers."

To contribute to the costs of the Diocesan delegation, please contact Saint Mary Magdalene parish office at 506 444-6001 or office@stmarymagdaleneparish.ca. To contribute to the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund visit <https://dioceseofsaintjohn.org/donations>.