

2014 National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples

The National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples has been celebrated since 2002 on December 12 by the Church in Canada. This year and next, as we join our Bishops in reflecting on the pastoral challenges for the family and its needs and role in evangelization, the members of the Canadian Catholic Aboriginal Council wish to honour elders who helped them develop their own faith:

- ❖ “My father was a spiritual leader, both traditionally and in the Church. His strong faith played a great role in building my personal faith. He provided foundation and preparation for ‘earth walk’, teaching a way of life following the seven grandfather teachings. Although these were never mentioned by name, I later learned their English names: **Respect, Humility, Honesty, Compassion (Courage), Truth, Wisdom and Unconditional Love**. The teachings shared by elders can help to discover a pathway for healing. It is in integrating them into our daily living that we can achieve balance, harmony and well-being. We can learn to use the gifts that will nourish, strengthen, give us direction, and help us find the meaning of the circle of life. This will enrich our spiritual life, leading to a deeper understanding, appreciation and respect for the richness of our native culture, and greatly enhance and strengthen our special relationship with God the Creator.” -- Rosella Kinoshameg, Anishnabe, Wikwemikong First Nation
- ❖ “I was greatly influenced in my younger days by elders who served our Lord at St. Paul's Church in my community. I witnessed them serving the Lord in God's House in many ways. There were those who greeted people coming into the church, with a big smile and warm handshake; those working at church fundraisers; and those who assisted at wake services and funerals, working to comfort families in difficult times. When I returned to the Church, I was encouraged by an elder to read at the lectern. There was no talk of residential schools from them. I only knew they loved their work in the Church and I wanted to be like them. Now I am studying to become a deacon in the Catholic Church.” --Rennie Nahanee, Squamish Nation
- ❖ “My grandmothers were so very spiritual, both led by example in meaningful, yet different, ways. One was very quiet and soft spoken, she never ‘preached’ to us about being Catholic and spiritual. The other was more visible and involved; she led the church choir and we prayed at her house with her. I worshipped the ground they both walked on. To this day, whenever I think of them, the Blessed Virgin Mary comes immediately to me and I know they are watching over me. I owe much of who and what I am to their spirituality and to their humbling belief in Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and how we needed to live our lives so as to walk always with both. Everything else just falls into place for me after that.” -- Melody McLeod, Métis, Northwest Territories
- ❖ “I have been influenced by an Anishnabe Elder from Key First Nation in Saskatchewan. He provides an annual vision quest ceremony in the spring and leads a cultural camp in August of each year. I have been attending one or both of these events annually since 1994. If I were to capture the essence of his many teachings and talks over the years in a single sentence, it would be his statement, ‘Our ancestors left us a beautiful cultural and spiritual legacy’. His songs, prayers, ceremonies and stories all provide evidence of the truth of this statement, and provide us with the moral and ethical guidance to live our lives in a way consistent with Jesus’ life and direction.” -- Dennis Whitford, Peace River

Together let us pray: Thank you, God our Creator, for our elders, who through strong faith, spirituality, humility, teachings, and serving ways, gave us foundation and a deeper appreciation of our cultural richness, leaving us a spiritual legacy to help us be who we are today. We thank you through Jesus and with Mary. Amen.