

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER IN SOLIDARITY WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
2019
Year of Indigenous Languages

In this International Year of Indigenous Languages, as declared by the United Nations, the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council offers a prayer calling for the global protection and revitalization of Indigenous languages.

We all like to be addressed in our mother tongue. So too in the faith, we like to be addressed in our “mother culture”, our native language (cf. 2 Maccabees 7:21,27), and as a result our hearts become better disposed to hear the Word of God. This was also the case in 1531 when Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Mother of God, appeared as an Aztec Princess to Saint Juan Diego, whose Indigenous name was Cuauhtatoatzin (“Eagle Who Speaks”), and spoke to him in his Indigenous language of Nahuatl.

Colonization has contributed to a hastened deterioration of Indigenous languages. This has resulted in a tragic loss of peoples’ culture, identity and language which are important means to understanding the world view of another people. Many Indigenous languages today co-exist with other languages. While such co-existence is important for progress and social development, it can push Indigenous languages to the peripheries, resulting in a serious impact on the sense of communal and personal self-worth, spirituality and mental health of Indigenous peoples.

The necessity to preserve Indigenous languages and to transfer knowledge of these languages to the younger generations is an important step towards respecting and revitalizing Indigenous cultures. Recognition and support from world organizations helps to restore and strengthen populations wishing to revitalize their cultural language. Local organizations working with universities continue to bring about positive effects for the preservation and promotion of Indigenous languages. Both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹ and the Commission for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry² have identified the restoration of Indigenous languages as a key element necessary to foster reconciliation. Indigenization is a process of cultural adaption currently being practiced where the fundamental meaning of a diverse culture and identity is retained but expressed in a symbolic manner and in other forms. A number of missionaries set an example of appreciation of Indigenous languages and culture by having adapted to the local heritage and showing genuine interest in Indigenous cultures, thus making significant contributions to the fields of anthropology and ethnology, as well as to the written preservation of Indigenous languages.

During his Apostolic Journey to the United States and Canada, Saint John Paul II said to Indigenous peoples: “I encourage you, as native people belonging to the different tribes and nations in the East,

¹ http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

² https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls_for_Justice.pdf

South, West and North, *to preserve and keep alive your cultures, your languages, the values and customs* which have served you well in the past and which provide a solid foundation for the future.”³

Underlying popular piety, as a fruit of the enculturated Gospel, is an active evangelizing power which we must not underestimate. To do so would be to fail to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit - work we are called to promote and strengthen.

** To read the complete message and prayer please visit: www.cccb.ca **

³ Monday, 14 September, 1987 Memorial Coliseum, Phoenix. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19870914_amerindi-phoenix.html