



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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April 21, 2025

Dear Friends,

It was with some surprise and sadness that I heard of Pope Francis' passing this morning, Monday, April 21, at 7:35 am local time in Rome. He had just blessed many, many pilgrims the previous day, and it seemed like he was on the mend. How appropriate that after 88 years of service of the Lord he is making his final journey the day after Jesus himself rose from the dead.

We celebrate his life. I was privileged twice to shake Pope Francis' hand and to meet with him; once in 2013 and again a few years later when the Bishops of Canada made their regular visit to the Vatican. I was struck by his taking time with all of us, his simplicity, and his effort at really listening to what we had to say.

Pope Francis, before it was recognized by most of the world, drew our attention to care for Mother Earth. He challenged all of us to think about how we are using the limited resources of our planet and to bring a spirit of respect and long-term thinking to the decisions we are making as individuals, corporations and governments. His voice was prophetic and a wake-up call to recognize how we are all interconnected.

Pope Francis drew our attention to the migrant issues that leave so many people vulnerable and suffering. He reminded us of the Scripture's call to welcome the stranger. He helped to bring to the world's attention the issues of overflowing refugee camps, trafficking and exploitation. While some politicians used migrants as scapegoats, Pope Francis continually reminded us of our responsibility in welcoming and accompanying our displaced brothers and sisters.

I was with Pope Francis when he visited Maskwacis and Lac St. Anne and made his formal apology to our people affected by the legacy of Residential Schools. I watched as Wilton Littlechild, the former Chief and one of three listeners in the TRC process, presented a precious gift to Francis in response to his apology. Wilton gave one of his most prized possessions, not his own, but his grandfather's headdress or warbonnet. The encounters of Pope Francis with many of our elders across Canada were powerful, generous, and healing for so many involved on both sides of the history. It led the way for the rest of the Catholic Church in Canada to continue in the challenging work of Reconciliation.

Pope Francis walked the talk. He lived a simplicity and poverty remarkable for one in such a high position of leadership. He lived an option for the poor from visiting correctional centres, to visiting countries struggling with poverty and division, to simply greeting door holders along with dignitaries. I think this contributed to him beginning his leadership talking about the joy of the Gospel and then living it right up to yesterday with a spirit of joy and enthusiasm.

The Archdiocese of Winnipeg gives thanks God for the gift of Pope Francis. We will celebrate a Memorial Mass honouring his life and praying for him on Wednesday, April 23, 2025, at 7:30 pm at St. Mary's Cathedral. A reception will follow in the Cathedral Hall. All are welcome. We will also pray for the discernment of the new Pope to come, that the Holy Spirit may provide us with yet another wonderful Pope.

Well done, good and faithful servant.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and the initials 'M. Chatlain'.

Most Reverend Murray Chatlain
Archbishop of Winnipeg