

**A look back at the ICCI
conference in New Zealand**

**“The
Corner
Stone”**



Bishop Tremblay
shares his recent experience in
New Zealand with us

From 2 to 8 March, I took part in the second International Conference of Catholic Indigenous Peoples (ICCI), held in Auckland, New Zealand.

There were around thirty of us delegates, including five bishops, from four countries — Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada — as well as a representative from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. The Canadian delegation comprised five members, including two Indigenous people and two bishops, Bishop Richard Smith and myself.

After a remarkable welcome from the Diocese of Auckland, we took part in a Maori welcome ceremony at the University of Auckland. The beauty and solemnity of the words and gestures ushered us into a space of respectful and profound sharing. Over four days, each country presented the situation of Indigenous peoples, highlighting issues and challenges.

What struck me most was the striking similarity of the stories and experiences. Colonisation, the loss of languages and cultures, broken treaties, poverty, injustices, violence, sometimes massacres, as well as social challenges such as addiction, domestic violence and health issues. These realities are similar. There is suffering, but also resilience.

The role of the Church appears both enlightening and ambiguous. It brought the Gospel, supported education, health and social services, but also participated in certain aspects of colonialism, notably through the devaluation of Indigenous spiritualities and the residential schools.

The Indigenous participants, themselves Catholics, demonstrated a living faith, lucid in the face of tensions, grad-

ually coming to terms with their dual identity. Grateful, they remained aware of the long road to healing and reconciliation.

The Canadian delegation presented the history of the treaties and current challenges. We also discussed the recent work of the CCCB: the 2021 apology, visits to Rome, Pope Francis’s visit, reflection on the Doctrine of Discovery, the repatriation of artefacts and the Reconciliation Fund. Our presentation was well received and met with encouragement.

Finally, we undertook a pilgrimage to the sites marking the beginnings of Christianity in New Zealand. The emphasis on the ‘genealogy’ of evangelisation, from Bishop Pompallier back to Jesus Christ, touched me deeply.

At the closing Mass, Bishop Steve Lowe commented on Matthew 21:42: rejected by the builders, the indigenous peoples, like Christ, are chosen by God as the cornerstone. This sums up the heart of the gathering: God acts amongst the most suffering and marginalised.

In short, this experience was memorable and a source of hope. It invites us to continue, with humility and courage, the work undertaken with Indigenous peoples, by fostering listening, justice and collaboration. It also reminds us that the Church is called to walk with them, in truth and reconciliation, so that their voices may be fully recognised and valued. May we continue together on this path of faith, healing and fraternity, trusting in God’s action at the heart of our shared history. We move forward with hope, guided by the Gospel and sustained by the Lord’s grace even today.

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