

Canada's faith leaders unite in the face of coronavirus

More than 80 Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist leaders have issued a common message stressing the need for 'hope, gratitude and solidarity'

Claire Lesegretain, Canada, *La Croix International*, 1 April 2020



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, March 29, 2020. (Photo by JUSTIN TANG/AP)

"Hope, gratitude and solidarity".

That's the title of a new message that some 80 religious leaders in Canada issued on March 30 as a joint response of faith to issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Representatives of almost all of the North American country's religious faith traditions signed the document.

They included the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCC) and the Canadian Rabbinical Caucus (CRC).

Also signing were the heads of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) — which represents 26 churches of Anglican, Protestant, Eastern Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox denominations -- and the Canadian Interfaith Conversation (CIC) — which represents 41 religious communities, such as Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs.

The religious leaders say the "rapid evolution" of the coronavirus crisis is producing "devastating effects" that provoke "feelings of anxiety, apprehension and fear".

They remind Canadians that their country has already gone through "difficult and painful experiences in its history" and ensure them that "the flames of hope cannot be extinguished".

"Hope assures us that this affliction too shall pass," they insist, pointing out that people can draw hope from different sources, such as their religious beliefs, love of family, friendships or work.

The religious leaders say they are praying "sincerely for healing, for efforts to alleviate human suffering and for perseverance in these difficult times". They are also praying that all Canadians "respond with an abundance of hope, gratitude and solidarity, trusting in the loving and ever merciful God, the source of all hope".

They invite their compatriots to "continue to seek out the common good in spite of individual difficulties" and to make "acts of kindness that can bring us closer in spirit, despite the demands of physical distance".

Political differences set aside

The religious authorities note that Canada's political leaders "bear heavy responsibilities" and thank them "that at such a demanding time, political differences (are) set aside to better serve the common good".

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's wife Sophie tested positive for the coronavirus on March 12 and is in quarantine "indefinitely", while the head of government is in isolation "for two weeks".

The religious leaders promise that they will "lead by example" in implementing the instructions of public authorities.

They express their gratitude to health professionals who "provide for us a powerful witness of care, expertise and service".

They also thank the people who work in grocery stores, pharmacies and factories, saying they carry out "a variety of essential front-line jobs in the supply chain, ensuring that stores remain open, shelves remain stocked, and goods are delivered so that others can have food, medicines and other essentials for their families and communities".

The ecumenical and interfaith message comes on the heels of a statement on the coronavirus that the Canada's Catholic bishops issued on March 13, titled: "**A unique and special time for prayer, hope and care.**"

The new text urges Canadians to "not forget those in our society who, prior to COVID-19, were already vulnerable to health and social ailments" and calls for "greater attention to the needs of the homeless, the incarcerated, the elderly and those already suffering from social isolation".

They specifically mention "women and children who face abuse and violence, who are not safe at home and may suffer additional abuse and violence as stress increases".