



Archevêque de Montréal

In the Name of Jesus

Pastoral Letter for the 375th Anniversary of the Founding of Montreal

*to priests, deacons, women and men of consecrated life,
lay faithful, families and all people of goodwill*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It was *in the Name of Jesus* that men and women set out to found the city of Montreal on May 17, 1642. The actual vision that led to the founding was motivated by the profound desire to proclaim Jesus Christ and to offer a model of community life and of educational and health care services.

This God-inspired undertaking began in 1635 with Jérôme Le Royer, a man of faith, a husband and a father. Driven by a desire to evangelize, he founded the Société Notre-Dame to support the establishment of a Catholic community on the Island of Montreal. At the same time, this community would serve as a missionary centre, bringing together the French settlers and First Nations people in an atmosphere of respect and mutual enrichment. On May 17, 1642, Paul de Chomedey, sieur de Maisonneuve, and Jeanne Mance, now Venerable, two lay people brimming with faith and missionary zeal, arrived on the island and founded Ville-Marie in honour of the Virgin Mary. Mass was celebrated upon their arrival, thereby affirming the spiritual dimension of this new settlement.

We can believe, without a doubt, that the founding of our city was the result of a great mystical force that sustained these young people's devotion to prayer, trust in the presence of God, and strength of courage. We focus on this heroic past to give thanks to the Lord, not only for the city's beginnings but for its entire history up to now. In fact, over the years, several religious communities of men and of women bore witness to God's eternally gracious love. And a faith-filled people arose.

Numerous people, members of these various religious communities, were wonderful models of Christ's charity toward the littlest, the poorest and the most vulnerable. Men and women of prayer dedicated their lives to serve the Gospel and their brothers and sisters. Among these witnesses to the faith, we recognize, as does the entire Church, the sanctity of the founders whose heroism and virtues challenge us today, who have left us an eloquent legacy of our Christian and social history, and to whom we can pray.

Parishes were established with the help of men and women of various vocations who devoted their lives to forming and building parish communities centered on Jesus, so that they serve as houses of prayer, schools of faith, a supportive family, a means of proclaiming God's closeness and of being of service to those most in need.

The City of Montreal became the metropolis we know today, a francophone city with rich anglophone and allophone components, where all cultures meet. Great Montreal itself has evolved into a pluralistic society, welcoming immigrants from every continent, reflecting a religious and denominational diversity through a variety of beliefs and convictions. In an era that tends to exclude God from fashioning a better world and where peace is fragile, the challenge of a new evangelization guided by the Holy Spirit sends out a resounding call to reach out to all people in their unique life situations and to acknowledge the dignity of every human being. We are called to overcome the hurts of the past and the fears of today through forgiveness, trust, dialogue and reconciliation.

With Ville-Marie as the hub, towns were established and developed in the surrounding countryside. For this reason, the anniversary of Montreal's founding is of import to all the cities within the archdiocese. It is a fitting time to recall our origins and to reconnect with the missionary, spiritual, community and social momentum that motivated these men and women. These pioneers, who left everything behind *in the Name of Jesus*, are an example for us and for our local Church. They call us to revive our faith in Jesus and to build welcoming communities where we treasure living together in harmony. It is a wonderful opportunity to give thanks to God for the journey traveled thus far, to strengthen our commitment to the Lord, and to renew our vision of hope for the Church in Montreal.

As witnesses to God's love in the city, we, as Catholics and parishes, are called to renew our loving concern for every citizen, in the very name of our faith. Indeed, we are all human beings created by God, created in his image, and called to enter into a Covenant with him.

This anniversary presents a unique opportunity to highlight the spiritual dimension of our city's origins and its history, the desire to live together that has been present since the beginning, and our rich tradition of solidarity with the poor and the sick. It is a time of thanksgiving for bringing together the People of God who reside in Montreal with the living and ever-new strength that comes from the Joy of the Gospel.

Wishing you all a happy anniversary, I pray that God blesses Montreal and the entire archdiocese, so that in his Mercy, he may shine his Love and his Truth on us, † in the name of the Father † the Son † and the Holy Spirit.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine

Archbishop,

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal

December 8, 2016, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception