



**The United
Church of Canada
L'Église Unie
du Canada**

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To the Communities of Faith

Chinook Winds Regional Council & Northern Spirit Regional Council

Via:

Treena Duncan - Executive Minister, Chinook Winds Regional Council

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Shannon McCarthy -Executive Minister, Northern Spirit Regional Council

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Dear Family in Christ,

Re: The upcoming referendum in Alberta

Friends in Chinook Winds and Northern Spirit regional councils and communities of faith, you have been on my mind so much this year. As I listen to news stories about the drive for signatures and the resulting upcoming question about separatism on a referendum in Alberta, I know I can do little for you but offer comfort and encouragement.

I know I am not alone in this. Faithful people in all the provinces and territories hold you, your communities and your province in prayer.

While issues and facts get muddled in the debate around separatism, and while many people feel strongly for one side of the argument or the other, the nuance is lost in the rhetoric. But some things are plain and clear:

As people of faith, we are called to challenge injustice and oppression so everyone can live life abundantly.

I believe that God is at work in the lives of all humanity – immigrants, refugees, migrants, transgender persons and people of other faiths. As a church that was, and continues to be, involved in nation-building and uniting across differences, we have a sacred responsibility to love our neighbours, near and far. We do this by building respectful mutual relationships in our communities. By engaging in dialogue and action. And by calling out any form of racism.

And therein lies perhaps the crux of the referendum: of the ten questions, five are about immigration and immigrants, a thinly veiled attempt to enshrine and justify a racist political agenda. Most of the remaining questions are crafted to raise Alberta's provincial rights above the common, collective and national good.

We uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples and the importance and requirement to consult with the Indigenous groups on the treaty land known as Alberta. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which Canada has endorsed, details the rights of Indigenous peoples in international law and policy, containing minimum standards for recognizing, protecting and promoting these rights.

Importantly, it also prohibits discrimination against Indigenous peoples and promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them.

As people of The United Church of Canada, we have been consistent in our commitment to faithful work on justice, reconciliation, repair, building systems of equity and fairness and right relations with all peoples and the planet. We won't stop now. Division and separation from those with whom we disagree has always been the easier road than walking the path of unity amidst diversity and difference.

In a time of increasing division around the world, my hope and prayer are that, as followers of Jesus, we will work in our communities, provinces, country towards peace and understanding. As the old hymn goes "and they'll know we are Christians by our love."

Part of my heart will always be in Alberta; I so appreciate the uniqueness of this *wild rose country*. I pray for strength and clarity as you organize to educate and mobilize the community around you.

I pray for courage as you lift up your commitment to the Common Good, where all can thrive and experience a sense of belonging.

I pray for you, for your own sense of belonging to a place you call “home,” where you can experience the fullness that life in community offers, and where your faith is the foundation of how you live in this community.

We stand together with you as you discern your answers to the referenda questions. As you consider what a better community and a better Canada looks like for you, I pray, as 1 Peter 3:8 says, “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”

In solidarity and prayer,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Heath', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Right Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath
Moderator
The United Church of Canada

cc. Rev. Taylor Croissant, Presider, Chinook Winds Regional Council
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