



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MEDIA ADVISORY:**

**Cardinal Thomas Collins Invites Catholics to Pray for Peace in Syria, Middle East**

TORONTO (September 3, 2013) Cardinal Thomas Collins, spiritual leader of close to two million Catholics in the Archdiocese of Toronto, announced today that St. Michael's Cathedral will offer Mass and a special Holy Hour this Saturday for peace in the Middle East, and most notably in Syria.

Cardinal Collins will preside and preach at the 5 p.m. Mass on Saturday, September 7, which will include special intentions for a peaceful resolution to the current conflict. Following Mass, there will be a Holy Hour, including exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, recitation of the rosary led by His Eminence and an opportunity for silent prayer.

In an address to the faithful in St. Peter's Square September 1, Pope Francis remarked: "I have decided to proclaim for the whole Church on 7 September next, the vigil of the birth of Mary, Queen of Peace, a day of fasting and prayer for peace in Syria, the Middle East, and throughout the world, and I also invite each person, including our fellow Christians, followers of other religions and all men of good will, to participate, in whatever way they can, in this initiative."

Cardinal Collins spoke of the importance of this global initiative: "The Middle East holds a special place in the heart of Christians around the world. We have watched in anguish as violence has taken the lives of so many innocent people. In this time of crisis, especially as it relates to Syria, we join together in solidarity to pray for peace, for an end to conflict and for a transformation from violence to compassion, dialogue and care for our neighbours."

Catholics are encouraged to join in prayer and fasting wherever they may be on September 7. The Archdiocese of Toronto's 225 Catholic churches will offer special prayers for peace at all weekend Masses, with some churches organizing additional initiatives to support the global efforts.

The Archdiocese of Toronto is Canada's largest diocese, stretching from Toronto north to Georgian Bay and from Oshawa to Mississauga. It is home to 1.9 million Catholics and 225 churches, with Mass celebrated in more than 30 languages each week.

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