



50 Years of Understanding Families in Canada

NORA SPINKS

Anniversaries are a special time. They are milestones that provide us with an opportunity to pause and reflect, to respect and celebrate the past, to understand and appreciate the present, and to anticipate and prepare for the future. Milestones allow us to look at how far we've come, to think about our expectations and aspirations, to assess our current experience and to chart our future.

The Vanier Institute of the Family celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2015. In 1964, Governor General Georges P. Vanier and his wife, Pauline Vanier, convened the Canadian Conference on the Family at Rideau Hall, bringing together academics, social workers, students and medical professionals to mobilize existing knowledge and identify gaps in our collective understanding of families in Canada. From this conference, the Vanier Institute of the Family was created one year later to act as a "Royal Commission that *should never be discharged*." Their Excellencies believed families deserved focused attention into the future.

As part of respecting and commemorating the past, the Institute's Board of Directors held a visioning session in early 2014, in which we modernized our mission, vision and values. In recognition of our 50th anniversary, we commissioned a medallion, designed by Mark Stephens and created by Aitkens Pewter, to be circulated to our partners and contributors.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, we have been engaging people across Canada in conversation about family life in

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our *Families in Canada Listening Tour*. At these events, we gather the stories *behind* the statistics – accounts of family life and family experiences, expectations and aspirations that will guide our future research.

In June, the *Families in Canada Conference 2015* will explore our present knowledge of families and family life. As in 1964, a group of researchers, family service professionals, government officials, and labour and faith leaders will focus on enhancing our collective understanding of families in Canada. Finally, in the fall, we will hold a Board of Directors meeting in Quebec City, where Their Excellencies were laid to rest.

This is an exciting time for us – a time to rejuvenate and refresh. We are proud of the work we have done and the legacy that the Vaniers left for us. Our 50th anniversary is a milestone that acts as a tribute to our history and a source of inspiration for the future. Now, it is time for us to envision the *next* 50 years. We invite everyone with an interest in families and family life to join us as we engage in conversation to understand families in Canada.♥