

Native Painting Accepted By Vatican

Sept 7

ESPANOLA, Ont. (CP) — Dreams have come true for Jim Simon, a 38-year-old native artist from Manitoulin Island.

His painting *Togetherness*, symbolizing international unity and harmony, has been accepted by the Vatican.

Simon, a member of the Wikwemikong band on the eastern tip of Manitoulin Island, offered the painting to the Vatican's collection when he completed it four years ago. He got a call a few days ago that it had finally been accepted.

"I'm on Cloud Nine," Simon said in a telephone interview from his Manitoulin Island home about 50 kilometres south of this Northern Ontario community. "I never expected this to happen."

He said the 1.2-by-2.4 metre acrylic on canvas — which looks like a stained glass window — was inspired by a dream and the encouragement of an Indian medicine man. It portrays a man and woman exchanging wedding vows, a symbol of unity and love among all people.

"When I did this painting Russia, Canada and the United States weren't talking," said Simon, a practising Roman Catholic. "It must have been an omen because now those countries are talking. But I want all people of the world to be on talking terms."

The formal presentation of Simon's painting to the Pope's representative, Jean-Louis Plouffe, has been made and it will later be presented to Pope John Paul at the Vatican.