(CCCB-Ottawa)... At the close of their 2008 Plenary Assembly which met in Cornwall, 22-26 September, the Bishops of Canada issued a pastoral letter, titled “Liberating Potential”, which invites all the faithful “to discover or rediscover,” the message of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae, issued by Pope Paul VI in 1968.

The Plenary Assembly described the encyclical as a “prophetic document,” especially in view of “the troubling evolution of two fundamental human institutions, marriage and the family.” The message of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) goes on to say that the family and marriage “continue to be affected by the contraceptive mentality feared and rejected in the encyclical of Pope Paul VI.”

“Nevertheless, Humanae Vitae is much more than a ‘no to contraception,’” the Bishops insist. Citing the encyclical, they point out that “It proposes a vision of the whole person and the whole mission to which each person is called.” The CCCB message describes the encyclical as “an invitation to be open to the grandeur, beauty and dignity of the Creator’s call to the vocation of marriage.”

The Bishops of Canada point out what they say is an important link between Humanae Vitae and the “theology of the body,” developed by Pope John Paul II between 1979 and 1984. These reflections of John Paul II are a “pedagogy” to help appreciate the theological and pastoral significance of Humanae Vitae, they say. The Bishops observe that in marriage, the “act of flesh, the gift of bodies,” expresses “the totality of the gift of the persons, the one to the other,” by which “the man and the woman are, in the flesh, the image of the divine Trinity.” The CCCB pastoral letter points out that in the words of Pope John Paul II, “by means of its visible masculinity and femininity, the body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine.”

In their message, the Bishops of Canada also call for a more profound reflection on married life and on the meaning of sexual intercourse. “Catholics and all men and women of good will” are encouraged to reflect on both in the light of Humanae Vitae and the “theology of the body.” “Sexuality is a friend, a gift of God,” they state. “It is revealed to us by the Trinitarian God” who invites Christians and others “to reveal it in turn in all its grandeur and dignity to our contemporaries at this start of the third millennium.”
Appointments

The CCCB Plenary Assembly also appointed a number of Bishops to commissions, committees and other organizations. A new French Sector episcopal representative was named to the National Council of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. Auxiliary Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I, of Halifax replaces Bishop Luc Cyr of Valleyfield, who had completed his second three-year term on the Development and Peace National Council.

Members and chairmen of the three CCCB Sectoral Commissions were also appointed. Auxiliary Bishop Louis Dicaire of St-Jean-Longueuil was named Chairman of the French Sector liturgy commission, and Bishop Albert LeGatt of Saskatoon, Chairman of the English Sector liturgy commission, while Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton was reappointed Chairman of the English Sector religious education commission.

Following three years of reflections on restructuring, the CCCB has decided to retain only three national Episcopal Commissions. These are Social Affairs, Doctrine (formerly Theology), and Christian Unity / Religious Relations with the Jews / Interfaith Dialogue. The respective Chairmen of these three Commissions are Archbishop Brendan M. O’Brien of Kingston, Coadjutor Archbishop J. Michael Miller, C.S.B., of Vancouver, and Bishop Martin Veillette of Trois-Rivières.

Four new Standing Committees were also established, with two Bishops appointed to each. These are Canon Law, with Archbishop André Gaumond of Sherbrooke and Auxiliary Bishop Peter Hundt of Toronto; Relations with Associations and Movements, with Bishop Vernon Fougere of Charlottetown and Archbishop-elect Pierre-André Fournier of Rimouski; Communications, with CCCB Vice President Bishop Pierre Morissette of Saint-Jérôme and Archbishop Anthony Mancini of Halifax, who is also Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Yarmouth; and finally Government Relations, with CCCB President Archbishop V. James Weisgerber of Winnipeg and Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte, Archbishop of Montreal. Each Standing Committee can now recommend the names of additional members to be appointed later, including experts who are not Bishops.

In addition, the Plenary Assembly appointed two Bishops to the Catholic Aboriginal Council
(formerly the Council for Reconciliation, Communion and Solidarity with Aboriginal Peoples): Auxiliary Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I., of Halifax and Bishop Murray Chatlain of Mackenzie-Fort Smith.

In PDF version: Pastoral Message on the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*.