



12 January 2012

Dear brother Bishops,

Last month Archbishop Paul-André Durocher, Vice President of our Conference, and I were part of a solidarity visit to Haiti. In light of that experience, and in view of the continuing challenges and opportunities in that country, I am forwarding to you the enclosed observations intended for the reflection and discussion of all Canadian Catholics. The observations note that the earthquake which struck Haiti two years ago today was met with an outpouring of national coherence and with a swell of international solidarity and concern, all of which are slowly but evidently changing the country.

As Christians, we now have a unique and urgent opportunity to follow through. To use the words of Pope Benedict XVI from his 1 January 2012 Message for the World Day of Peace,

In order to be true peacemakers, we must educate ourselves in compassion, solidarity, working together, fraternity, in being active within the community and concerned to raise awareness about national and international issues and the importance of seeking adequate mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth, the promotion of growth, cooperation for development and conflict resolution.

At the same time that our Executive Committee and Permanent Council will be discussing what follow-up our Conference might do to assist Haiti, I invite you, and through you all Catholics in our country, also to reflect on what more can be done.

Reconstruction in Haiti means building up individual hearts and spirits, rejuvenating communities and municipalities, repairing its social fabric, transforming society and renewing the State, including educating its citizens in their responsibilities and rights. There are any number of major projects there that Canadian Catholics can and should support: the immediate urgency of permanent housing needed to resettle 600,000 people still living in tents and make-shift shelters; current and long-term needs for education and health care, job creation and agricultural renewal; continued support for the ongoing efforts of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace in collaboration with the other members of Caritas Internationalis.

Most of all, however, we can all use this moment to learn from Haitians themselves. As solidarity visitors, we came home so encouraged, enriched and inspired by the vision, hope and determination we witnessed day after day. Taking up again the words and insights of the Holy Father in his Message for the World Day of Peace, we can say our experience showed us how solidarity and peace are not merely “a task to be undertaken” but “a gift to be received”.

I would invite you to find ways to convey to Catholics and all Canadians deep appreciation for responding in an outpouring of love toward Haiti. The enclosed observations are intended in part to show how their prayers, volunteer work and donations are making a tremendous difference. Haitians told us again and again of their gratitude to Canadians for such generosity and friendship. As one said so eloquently, "Canadians are walking with us."

Fraternally in Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

+ Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton
President
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops