



**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT
CCCB 2018 Plenary Assembly**

Dear brother Bishops, distinguished guests, and CCCB staff,

It is a pleasure to be with all of you today.

Introduction

This year marks the 75th anniversary of our Episcopal Conference, established as a permanent body in 1943 when it was called the Canadian Catholic Conference. Many things have changed since that time – not only the Conference’s name. Nonetheless, just as we are reminded by the author of Ecclesiastes that “there is nothing new under the sun,”¹ so we hear echoes in our present-day deliberations which in some way also preoccupied the Bishops in Canada 75 years ago. In beginning this week of discernment and prayer united in our common ministry as Bishops, we do well to reflect on those concerns – perennial and new – both to evaluate the lessons and achievements of the past year and to prepare us in charting the course ahead.

1. Families and Young People

The evangelization and catechesis of families and young people was already a priority of the Conference in 1943 when considerable discussion was devoted to the involvement of young Catholics in organizations such as Catholic Action and the Scouts as well as to broader questions of Catholic education, including moral and religious instruction and what they referred to as “sex education.” Today, we notice that many of these same issues persist. Many youth, for instance, are finding their connection with the Church through new movements; we also notice that secularism and evolving attitudes in Canadian society around sexual morality continue to remind us that we must treasure the opportunities we have for teaching the faith to younger generations and mentoring them in the cultivation of the virtues, both formally and informally.

The Conference continues to seek new, more effective ways of assisting Bishops in engaging and accompanying families and youth. In collaboration with the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF), the *National Week for Life and Family* has been and continues to be an important venue each year for providing families with spiritual nourishment as they face contemporary challenges.

Over this past year, the Conference has reiterated in various ways the Church’s teachings on marriage, highlighting the life-giving and unitive dimension of conjugal love, both in relation to the anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, through the statement issued by the Commission for Doctrine in collaboration with COLF, as well as in the webcasts on the Post-Synodal

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:9.



Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* produced by the Commission for Evangelization and Catechesis together with COLF.

We as Bishops can always learn more about the challenges and opportunities facing families and young people. Three Bishop-delegates have recently returned from the *World Meeting of Families* and four (plus two youth) will shortly be on their way to the *Synod on Youth, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*. Their participation in these events nourishes the life of the Conference and will bring important insights to the fore, just as the witness, later on this week, of some of our brother Bishops who have implemented the pastoral approach of *Amoris Laetitia* in their dioceses, has the capacity to inspire all of us.

In reflecting on family and youth, we can sometimes overlook the fact that an increasing segment of the population in many of our dioceses and eparchies is represented by new arrivals to Canada (in addition to more established immigrants). The experience of the Maronite Church in Canada opens a unique window onto the question of how a Catholic immigrant community integrates into secular Canadian society and the challenges faced by younger generations down the road. His Beatitude Cardinal Rai, Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites has graciously accepted our invitation to address us this week on the challenges faced by the Maronite Church in Canada, particularly families and young people. His presentation is an invitation for us to reflect more broadly on how we can better serve immigrant members of our flock, perhaps with special care for those coming from destabilized and underdeveloped countries, knowing that the faith of the next generation depends on how well we care for those who are before us now.

2. Palliative Care

The need for quality palliative care has been an issue in Canada for some time, but was given singular urgency in 2015 with the legalization of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, also misleadingly referred to as “Medical Aid in Dying” (MAiD). It may surprise you to know that 75 years ago, the Bishops in Plenary had discussed and condemned the practice of euthanasia in response to a motion brought forward by The Most Rev. William Duke, the then Archbishop of Vancouver. It is perhaps ironic that the path to the legalization of euthanasia also began in Vancouver with a Supreme Court challenge from one of its citizen.

The interest of the Conference in promoting palliative care is consonant with the Church’s longstanding defence of life from conception to natural death, and indeed with its unique and foundational contributions to healthcare in Canada stretching back to New France. The complementarity and inseparability of healthcare and palliative care are perhaps personified in Mother Élisabeth Bruyère, whom Pope Francis declared Venerable this past April. She was the foundress of Ottawa’s first hospital and today is memorialized in Ottawa’s leading palliative care unit at the Élisabeth Bruyère Hospital.



Given our awareness of the need to promote, improve and expand palliative care in all provinces, our Conference has formed a working group with a number of key community partners, the CCCB Palliative Care Working Group. We will hear more about the activities of the Working Group tomorrow morning in a series of special presentations, particularly current efforts to produce educational resources for parishes.

3. Interventions on Questions of Law and Public Policy

There are many examples of the CCCB's robust participation in civil society throughout its history, from the stance it took against the government 75 years ago in defending the reunification of new immigrants with their families (at that time, mainly Chinese), to marking the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation last year in a letter to the Catholic faithful and through the momentous consecration of Canada to Our Lady. The wisdom of Scripture teaches us that there will never be an age in which we as Bishops are not called to stand up for what is just and right or in the interest of advancing a society which is more humane and in which God can be known, worshiped and loved. The past year was no exception:

- We gathered in an interfaith coalition to protest the federal government's new criteria for applicants to the Canada Summer Jobs Program, whereby applicants would be required to attest to their support for a "right" to abortion in order to apply for funding. We called on the Prime Minister to rescind this requirement, which violates the *Charter*.
- We intervened before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights concerning Bill C-51, which would have removed a section of the Criminal Code of Canada protecting the right of Canadians to worship without disturbance. Again, we worked with an interfaith coalition, and the government eventually agreed to amend the proposed legislation.
- We had previously intervened in the Trinity Western University case, regarding the requirement of a community covenant at that university's proposed law school. This year, the Supreme Court decided against Trinity Western, and we issued a public statement expressing disappointment at the verdict which imposes limits on freedom of religion and of expression.
- We also issued statements on various topics of public interest, including on the 30th anniversary of the Morgentaler decision that struck down Canada's abortion law; a statement on the legalization of cannabis/marijuana for recreational use; and a statement from our Commission on Justice and Peace on the right to safe drinking water.

4. Indigenous Peoples

The Church's relationship with the Indigenous Peoples of Canada has been a perennial concern for Canada's Bishops. In our Conference's founding meeting 75 years ago, our predecessors "condemned" a government proposal to restrict Indigenous Catholics' access to hospitals, declaring that they should have "free choice of hospital as well as free choice of



school.” In recent years, thanks to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* and its Calls to Action, Indigenous Peoples have become a national concern and a renewed priority for all members of the Church in Canada. During the past year, I issued a short letter to Indigenous Catholics, reiterating the commitment of the Bishops of Canada to a renewed relationship based on meaningful events of reconciliation at the local level. As part of this reconciliation, we held eight listening circles across the country over the past year. These sessions have been a true moment of grace and have provided a clearer picture of the hopes, joys, and sorrows of the Indigenous Peoples of the different regions of Canada.

This year, 2018, also marks the 20th anniversary of the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council, formerly the Canadian Catholic Aboriginal Council, which has served us and continues to be an important advisory body to our Conference. In response to a resolution at last year’s Plenary, the Council has undergone a considerable makeover. In addition to a broader mandate and a new name in English which reflects the current practice of using the term “Indigenous,” the Council now includes a greater number of Indigenous Catholics in order to reflect better the Indigenous cultural and linguistic diversity which exists across our country, as well as an increased number of Bishops in order to ensure a closer relationship with the Conference. During the week, we will hear from the Indigenous Council, and we will also have time to discuss the importance of the Church’s mission to and with Indigenous Peoples.

5. Charity and International Development

The Church’s mission of charity is at the heart of Catholic Social Doctrine.² This mission has been manifested by the Bishops of Canada through concern for the least of our sisters and brothers in our own country, and through international development assistance. Seventy-five years ago, our Conference was chiefly occupied by the social problems, both at home and abroad, brought about by the Second World War. In 1967, the Bishops of Canada established Development and Peace to assist the poor around the world. Last year, we celebrated that organization’s 50th anniversary. In order to strengthen the organization’s mission of charity in truth, the Conference has been working with Development and Peace throughout the past year in a thorough joint review of all the organization’s overseas partners. This joint review is ongoing and its results will be provided to all Bishops once complete. In the meantime, we will have time later this week to discuss more broadly the importance of the work of international development and the mission of Development and Peace.

6. The Protection of Minors and the State of the Church Today

This week, in a spirit of prayer for the victims of sexual abuse, including a votive Mass for healing and the forgiveness of sins on Thursday, we will receive an update on the expanded guidelines which will later be issued to assist us locally in our efforts to prevent sexual abuse, to respond to complaints, and to promote the healing of victims. Entitled *Protecting Minors*

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* n. 2



from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation, this reference work has been in production since 2011 when the *Ad hoc* Committee on the Protection of Minors was established. The final product is the result of immense work, widespread consultation, careful self-reflection, and current research. While we may take consolation in knowing this critical reference work will be shortly available, we simultaneously feel shame at the recent revelations regarding the sins of commission and of omission on the part of certain of our brothers in the episcopate. The Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, released last month, was shocking not only with respect to the horrific accounts of the abuses perpetrated against so many of Christ's little ones, but with respect to the culture of secrecy, clerical privilege, and misplaced concern for the Church's public image over the well-being of those whom Christ commands us to protect. It does not appear that the failures are restricted to the dioceses of Pennsylvania, nor to the United States.

The fire burning in the Church today may appear to be out of our control and in some cases consuming that which we hold dear. But as it blazes with brightness, it is cleansing and purifying, and thereby casting light on things until now been hidden in darkness. Perhaps in the tumult caused by this inferno, we are experiencing what the author of the Hebrews understood when he wrote that "indeed our God is a consuming fire."³ For if God has chosen this time to purify his Church, we must recognize with the prophet Malachi that "he is like a refiner's fire . . . and he will purify the descendants of Levi . . . until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness."⁴

When there is a fire, our first instinct is often to try to put it out to prevent damage. In this case, however, we may need to allow this fire to keep burning. Saint Paul tells us that it is better to expose works of darkness and bring them to light.⁵

All the members of Christ's Body are tasked with building up the Church. But as Saint Paul tells us, "the work of each builder will become visible . . . because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done."⁶ The work of building up the sacred edifice is now being tested, and where it has been laid on a foundation other than Jesus Christ, it will rightfully be found wanting and will require rebuilding.

The promulgation of *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* will be an important milestone and a necessary step forward in our mission as pastors. Yet this document is not the endpoint; it does not mean that we are finished our work in this area, nor that we will not discern further steps to take. As we have seen in recent events, new concerns will require ongoing consideration and resolute action. We will hear testimonials this week related to sexual

³ Hebrews 12:29.

⁴ Malachi 3:2-3.

⁵ Cf. Ephesians 5:11-13 "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible."

⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:13.



abuse. We have learned much in the Canadian experience of sexual abuse, but our work of protecting minors is not over.

As missionary disciples and successors of the Apostles, responsible for Christ's sheep, we must stand with those of our flock who are wounded. We must also stand with those who are scandalized and disheartened. And we must stand up unflinchingly for the truth, which alone can set us free.⁷

Just as the disciples found themselves caught in a storm and their boat swamped by the waves (Mark 4:37-41), sometimes throughout history the whole Barque of Peter is rocked by a great tempest. This impression certainly presents itself to us now. This is why we must pray for the Holy Father, tasked with piloting the Church through these stormy seas. Let us pray that Christ strengthen him with *parrhesia* as he discerns with us and all of Christ's faithful how to set the course required. We have sent the Holy Father a message conveying our prayers and closeness, and we will continue to join him in prayer and action for the victims of sexual abuse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us call on the Holy Spirit, source of our episcopal ministry and mission.⁸ We have just prayed the *Veni Creator Spiritus*. In the days to come, and indeed when we return to our flock, we will need the creativity and, as that hymn states, the "fire" which is the Holy Spirit⁹ who must not be quenched.¹⁰

I assure each of you, my brother Bishops, of my prayers. I ask that you pray for me and that we pray for each other, both throughout this week and always. To our guests, including our sisters and brothers in Christ, as well as those who may be present of other faiths: please pray for us, that we remain faithful to the ministry given us by Christ, that we be holy shepherds of the flocks entrusted to our care, both in the decisions we make this week and in the actions which follow from them when we return to our dioceses and eparchies.

Thank you.

⁷ Cf. John 8:32.

⁸ *Christus Dominus*, n. 2. "The bishops themselves, however, having been appointed by the Holy Spirit, are successors of the Apostles as pastors of souls. . . . Bishops, therefore, have been made true and authentic teachers of the faith, pontiffs, and pastors through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to them."

⁹ From the second verse of the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*. "*Qui diceris Paraclitus, donum Dei altissimi, fons vivus, ignis, caritas, et spiritalis unctio.*"

¹⁰ Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:19.