



**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT
CCCB 2017 Plenary Assembly**

Brother Bishops, distinguished guests and members of staff,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2017 Plenary Assembly of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. In this report, I wish to reflect briefly on some of the highlights that have marked the life of our Episcopal Conference over the past year as well as to introduce a few of the items and themes that will be the subject of further conversation over the coming days.

1. Spiritual Highlights

Various events and initiatives of the past year have reminded us of God's profound and unfailing love for his people. You will recall that the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, called by Pope Francis, was a prominent feature of our communal prayers at last year's Plenary which included Vespers with Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction at Sainte Croix Parish in Cornwall. With the closing of the Year of Mercy in November, after it had been celebrated in different ways in dioceses and eparchies across the country, the entire Church was filled with renewed trust in the inexhaustible mercy of God who, as Pope Francis is fond of saying, never tires of forgiving.

Many of you have also commented on how our *Ad limina* visits to the Holy See were a privileged time of spiritual grace and renewal. There can be no question that for each one of us, for our respective Episcopal Regions, and for the Conference as a whole, our visits with Pope Francis and the Roman Curia were a privileged time of fraternity and communion. Eager to hear about the pastoral concerns and realities facing the Church in Canada, the Holy Father listened to us with open heart and engaged us in candid and fruitful discussion. Together with him and united in our love for the Church, we reflected on our shared episcopal experience as Bishops and grew in insight and understanding. With the support of his encouragement, prayers and blessing, we returned to our respective dioceses and eparchies with renewed hope, pastoral vigour and purpose.

Our present gathering in plenary takes on unique significance this year because 2017 also marks the 150th anniversary of Confederation. We are all looking forward to tomorrow, the liturgical feast of the Canadian Martyrs, when we will make a unique spiritual contribution to the national celebrations that have been underway all year. Gathering at the Cathedral Basilica of Notre Dame in Ottawa, we will celebrate a Solemn Mass, at the end of which we, along with the faithful assembled there, will consecrate Canada to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Many of us have already prayed the Act of Consecration to Our Lady with the faithful in our own dioceses and eparchies. As an episcopal body, collectively placing Canada under the protective mantle of Our Lady, we will be witnessing our fraternal unity in Christ and our common concern for the spiritual and moral wellbeing of the people of this land, both now



and for the future. This witness of unity with each other and concern for our flock is also why we are gathered here this week.

2. Interreligious and Ecumenical Events

Canada is a country made up of peoples who hail from many different backgrounds and religious traditions. As the mass shooting at a Quebec mosque in January demonstrated, the ideal of peaceful coexistence which undergirds Canada's openness should not be taken for granted. Canadian culture is still in need of deep transformation if it is to live up to the ideal it professes. It remains a priority of the Conference to engage this reality through intercultural, interreligious and ecumenical dialogue.

The advancement of ecumenical dialogue is built on reciprocal trust and friendship, mutual understanding and sharing on the spiritual level, joint action, as well as common prayer. Much as Pope Francis marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation with an Apostolic Journey to Sweden, where he prayed alongside the leaders of the country's Lutheran Church, so we have invited the Rev. Susan Johnson, National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, both to offer ecumenical greetings and to co-preside this evening's ecumenical prayer service.

In the months leading up to the Protestant Quincentenary, our Commission for Christian Unity, Religious Relations with the Jews, and Interfaith Dialogue worked with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada on the joint resource *Together in Christ – Lutherans and Catholics Commemorating the Reformation*. Released last December, it contains excellent tools for parishes, study groups and ecumenical gatherings which will be utilized undoubtedly well beyond this year's commemorative events. In addition, our Conference continues its theological dialogue with the Lutheran Church – Canada.

Other recent highlights of the Commission include the publication of the resource *Our Evangelical Neighbours*, intended to help Catholics better understand the Evangelical tradition in the Canadian context, as well as a meeting in which the Commission explored avenues of collaboration with the Canadian Council of Imams. During this Plenary, we will be given the opportunity to discuss further some of the possibilities with regards to our ongoing dialogue with Muslims.

Finally, as you are aware, the Tomb of Christ inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was urgently in need of repair. Notably, for the first time in 200 years the Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Churches agreed to work together on the extensive restoration. On behalf of our Conference, I was pleased to sign a joint ecumenical statement on the restoration work along with Metropolitan Sotirios Athanassoulas of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto, and with His Grace Bishop Abgar Hovakimian, Primate of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church Diocese of Canada. It is at moments such as these that we recognize the true nature of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. In addition to



fostering mutual understanding and friendly relations, it calls everyone involved to “seek the face of God” (cf. Ps. 27:8).

3. Social Justice

How can we not be struck and saddened when we encounter or hear about men, women and children crushed by poverty and wounded by injustice? Indeed, the poor will always be with us (cf. Mark 14:7), as Our Lord tells us; however, he likewise teaches that the relief of suffering and the redress of injustice is a duty. To quote Pope Francis, “it is the ‘protocol’ on which we will be judged...the one we read [about] in chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel: I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was in prison, I was sick, I was naked, and you helped me, clothed me, visited me, took care of me.” In 2017 there was no shortage of opportunity for the Conference to heed this call.

The famines in South Sudan and the extreme food shortages in Yemen, northeast Nigeria and Somalia continue to worsen. Nor is there any end in sight to the political instability and hostility which is their cause. To this end, on behalf of the Conference, I co-signed a joint letter with ecumenical partners urging the Prime Minister to use Canada’s diplomatic channels in the region to help bring an end to the conflict. Together with the *Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace – Caritas Canada, Aid to the Church in Need Canada*, and *Canadian Jesuits International*, the CCCB launched a fundraising campaign in response to the ecumenical and interfaith appeal “Pray-Give-Speak Out.” Thanks to the generosity of the Catholic faithful across the country, it generated \$3.5 million. An additional \$2 million will be added to this sum by the Federal Government as part of its 1:1 matching campaign.

Human suffering caused by division and conflict is also all too familiar a reality among the inhabitants of the Middle East, not least the Christians who in some regions have been the target of deadly attacks. Vice President Bishop Lionel Gendron, P.S.S., became more acquainted with some of these situations during the annual meeting of the *Coordination of Episcopal Conferences in Support of the Church in the Holy Land*, just as Bishops Raymond Poisson and Ken Nowakowski did when accompanied by our Advisor for Ecclesial and Interfaith Relations, Mr. Kyle Ferguson, on a trip to Lebanon and Syria guided by Development and Peace. Their stories and insights on the present plight of Christians in the Middle East will be shared in a presentation by the Commission for Justice and Peace later this week.

One final note on the Middle East – On behalf of the Conference, last October I signed an ecumenical letter addressed to the Minister for International Development and La Francophonie, the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, asking the Government of Canada to restore funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East since it had been discontinued in 2010. I am pleased to report that within a month



of sending the letter, funding to this UN agency was restored. I would like to think that the Conference played some modest role in reversing the Government's decision.

As common as division and conflict are in causing human suffering, we do well to recognize the less direct, but equally devastating, consequences of our exploitation of the natural environment. For some time, climatologists have pointed to the correlation between rising temperatures in the oceans and highly unusual and even violent weather events. We need look no further than Ontario and Quebec where record rainfalls this spring and summer caused unprecedented flooding or to British Columbia and parts of Alberta where tinder dry weather, high winds and lightening caused the worst wildfires since 1958. Beyond our borders, hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, by virtue of their size, force and destructive power, should remind all of us, as Pope Francis taught in *Laudato Sí*, that changes in lifestyles and energy consumption will be needed to avert the "unprecedented destruction of the ecosystem, with serious consequences for all of us" (n. 24).

4. Indigenous Peoples

Over the past years, all Canadians, including the Bishops of Canada, have grown in their awareness and appreciation of Indigenous Peoples. As with many other sectors of society, as well as with different Catholic institutions and organizations in Canada, the Conference continues to seek ways to renew its relationship with Indigenous Peoples and to share with them their deep and justified concerns about the future of their younger generations.

In March 2016, the Conference spearheaded the formation of a group of Catholic institutions to bring a common Catholic voice to some of the important Indigenous issues of our times and to foster more collaborative relations with Indigenous Peoples, both because of the Gospel's core message of unconditional love and in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In December, the initial members of this group agreed to form a more formal coalition which is now known as *Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle*. In May, the Circle assisted the Conference in discerning how to cooperate with the project of identifying residential school burial sites as well as with the ongoing *Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. The Conference's role in initiating the Circle and its subsequent participation have certainly been worthwhile. At the same time, as I have served as the Circle's first Chairperson, Archbishop Murray Chatlain, as the current Chair of the Circle's Working Group, has been instrumental in bringing the work of the Circle forward with the help of CCCB staff and other collaborators. We look forward to his progress report this afternoon. In addition, important moments have been set aside this week for us to reflect more deeply on how Indigenous peoples engage all of us and invite far-reaching commitments in our own episcopal ministry, together with renewed discernment on a pastoral response that will draw us even closer to them in friendship and solidarity. Part of this discernment will involve us in exploring possibilities of expanding the mandate and membership of our Aboriginal Council.



5. Public and Government Engagement

Letters addressed to political representatives as well as official statements and resources shared with them and the wider public remain an important responsibility and priority of the Conference. These texts address both profound human issues in a manner which hopefully informs political and public discourse and assists the Catholic faithful in forming their consciences on important moral questions facing society. The following are a few of the key letters and statements of the past year which relate to Catholic moral and social teaching:

- A letter to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, thanking the Government for its refugee resettlement efforts but asking it to shorten wait times and to allow for greater private sponsorship;
- A letter to the Prime Minister concerning Canada's mining operations in Latin America and their detrimental effects on the environment and local populations, including Indigenous peoples, and calling for the appointment of an ombudsperson to ensure that justice is served;
- A joint ecumenical letter to the Canadian delegates at COP22 in Marrakech, Morocco, encouraging them to implement the Paris climate accord "in a way that is effective, just, and attentive to the poor";
- A statement on Canada's opioid crisis and drug addiction, making several policy recommendations as well as calling on Christians to support and accompany those struggling with drug addiction;
- A letter to the Prime Minister objecting to his government's decision to direct \$650 million in foreign aid to promote "sexual and reproductive health rights," including advocacy against "anti-abortion laws in many counties"; and,
- A letter to Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland expressing deep concern and disagreement with her speech to Parliament in which she placed sexual and reproductive rights at the core of Canadian foreign policy, claiming they were Canadian "values".

6. Development and Peace

The recent wave of Haitian migrants entering Canada, many of whom have been processed in tents right here in Cornwall, not to mention the historic number of refugees and migrants that continue their desperate attempts to enter Europe, as well as the victims of the recent natural disasters in the Caribbean and Mexico, beckon us to recall that charity is key to the Christian understanding of social justice.

Fifty years ago, taking inspiration from Blessed Pope Paul VI's social Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, the Bishops of Canada established what is known today as the *Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace – Caritas Canada*. At tomorrow's Solemn Mass, we will highlight this milestone, praying for the staff and volunteers who work on D&P's team, for the poor and marginalized whom they serve, and for the many Canadians who give generously in the name of Christian charity and solidarity.



7. Religious Freedom

With the increasing moral complexification of Canadian society and the political aspiration to accommodate any and all lifestyles, pressure continues to be exerted on religious freedom. It is most unfortunate that religion is often portrayed or seen as the antagonist of truth and freedom in such cases. This summer, the CCCB announced its intention to intervene in two Supreme Court appeals involving Trinity Western Law School. The Court will examine the attempt of three Canadian law societies to deny recognition of the academic credentials of future graduates of the proposed law school. The central question involves opposition to the University's "Community Covenant," an agreement that requires students in part to abstain from sexual intimacy "that violates the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman." In this instance, as in the 2001 case involving Trinity Western's School of Education in which the CCCB also intervened, we continue to be reminded that the stakes remain high for faith-based schools and other religious institutions offering public services in Canada – the majority of which are Catholic – and that we cannot sit idly by while the forces against them continue to sideline the pertinence and importance of religious freedom and the place of religion in the public square.

8. Issues regarding life, sexuality, and family

The interconnected areas of human life, sexuality, and the family remain a central preoccupation of the Conference. With gratitude, I wish to acknowledge the work of COLF (the *Catholic Organization for Life and the Family*) in assisting the Conference in its efforts to propose a moral alternative to the dominant culture. The materials COLF prepared for this year's National Week for Life and the Family, the 2017 Conference on Life and Family with its impressive roster of national and international speakers, and the new efforts being made to seek innovative ways of supporting dioceses and eparchies in implementing programs are important and appreciated.

Last year's Plenary Assembly included a presentation on gender ideology and its social implications. This summer saw the passage of Bill C-16, *An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code*, adding "gender identity" and "gender expression" as prohibited grounds of discrimination. In a statement released in July, our position as Bishops and pastors of the Catholic faithful in Canada was stated with charity but clearly: While the Conference supports Bill C-16's intention to protect Canadians from harm, some of the principles behind the legislation – even if widely accepted in our society – cannot be endorsed by Catholics.

The pastoral care of married persons and families remains an urgent and top priority for us. We will be privileged this week to hear from Cardinal Marc Ouellet who will share his insights on the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. We will also be given the opportunity, thanks to the work of the Commission on Doctrine, to reflect and share our insights on the concept of pastoral accompaniment as presented in *Amoris Laetitia*.



9. Palliative Care

Now that euthanasia and assisted suicide have regrettably been legalized in Canada, despite vigorous opposition from many sectors of Canadian society, including the CCCB, our efforts on the home front have mainly turned to defending the conscience rights of healthcare practitioners and to promoting palliative care. It is estimated that 80% of Canadians cannot access quality palliative care, making the need urgent. We have taken steps toward crafting and implementing a national palliative care strategy. As in the past, we will continue to work with other faith traditions in advancing these important causes, and at the same time urging our Catholic parishes, schools and healthcare institutions to promote and support palliative care in their local communities.

10. Recent Publications

Last but not least, I would like to draw your attention to a selection of the Conference's most recent publications:

- *The National Directory for the Ministry, Formation and Life of Permanent Deacons in Canada*, which will be presented later today by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, C.S.B.;
- *The Ratio Formationis Nationalis for French-speaking seminaries*, which will be presented by Bishop Raymond Poisson later this week; and
- The resource *Living Out Laudato Sí*, produced by the Commission for Justice and Peace, released on September 1st, Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which not only presents Catholic social teaching in a practical way, but raises many of the moral challenges of environmental stewardship in Canada today.
- As well, the resource on human sexuality and the family by the Commission on Doctrine entitled *The Unity of Life and Love* was released just last week; and
- Since promulgating the Canadian edition of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* last September (the only marriage ritual of the Roman Rite approved for use in Canada), the Conference published the accompanying *Liturgy Planning Guide*. We are all well aware of the ancient dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi*, and how the liturgy of the Church in its various forms has for centuries helped sustain and nourish the spiritual and indeed Christian life of the faithful. To better equip our Conference to handle our needs in the future, over the coming weeks, the Permanent Council will be studying the implications of Pope Francis' recent Motu Proprio *Magnum Principium* on the role and responsibilities of Episcopal Conferences concerning vernacular translations of liturgical texts of the Roman Rite.

To conclude, I should like to thank each of you for your support and prayers through the year and also to thank the dedicated staff at the CCCB who carry forward our projects with diligence, fidelity and care for the Church.



PLENARY ASSEMBLY
25-29 September 2017

Addendum 4

Dear brothers in Christ, distinguished guests and members of staff, please join me in asking the Lord to grant us a fruitful week of discussion, deliberation, prayer, celebration, common discernment and communion in the Holy Spirit.

25 September 2017

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President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops