



## WHAT IT MEANS FOR CANADA'S REMAINING SIX MISSION DIOCESES TO BE TRANSFERRED TO THE COMMON LAW OF THE CHURCH

**Statement by the Most Reverend Douglas Crosby, O.M.I.,  
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

The Holy See announced today that Pope Francis has transferred Canada's remaining six mission dioceses to the common law of the Church. In celebrating and welcoming this historic moment for the Church in our country, we also need to ask what it means for us.

The Holy Father has previously reminded all Catholics that *The Church, which is missionary by her nature, carries out the service of charity to all as a fundamental prerogative. Universal fraternity and solidarity are connatural to her life and to her mission in the world and for the world* (Address to the Pontifical Mission Societies, 9 May 2014). The centrality and importance of mission in the life of the Church was also emphasized by the Second Vatican Council: *The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father (Ad Gentes, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, no. 2).*

Thus the Holy See has always had a central missionary role, and an abiding interest in the missions of the Church. This is evident in Canada with the encouragement given to the Franciscan Recollets, the Augustinian Hospitaller and Ursuline Sisters in Quebec City, and the Jesuit missionaries in Acadia as well as in what became the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. We also see the importance the Canadian missions have had for the Holy See with the appointment of Saint François de Laval, the first Bishop of Québec, and over most of the past two centuries by confiding so much of the mission work in Canada's West and North to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Having served in our Northern missions both as a priest and a Bishop, I know firsthand the selfless and lifelong service given by so many over so many years.

In helping to direct and support the mission territories of our country, the Holy See has encouraged missionaries from other countries to assist our communities, and provided the Church in Canada with a share of the Canadian contributions to the annual Mission Sunday Collection which is administered by the Pontifical Mission Societies. Over time, dioceses across our country have become more self-supporting and capable of sustaining their own pastoral efforts, even providing numerous missionaries to serve in other countries.

With the transfer of the remaining dioceses in the North to the common law of the Church, their six Bishops, with the help of all the Bishops and the Catholic faithful of Canada, are now fully responsible for the pastoral life of each of their diocesan Churches. Today's decision follows almost a quarter of a century of planning by the Northern dioceses, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, dioceses in Southern Canada, and the Holy See.

The announcement comes on the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, Apostle, the Church's first great missionary, whom Our Lord after his Resurrection sent to preach the Good News to the Gentiles. The proclamation of the Gospel is always characterized by three essential qualities – joyful thanksgiving, wholehearted collaboration, and mutual service – all characteristics of the mission work in our country. With the grace of God and the determination of pastors, those in consecrated life and the laity, the life of the Church in the North and throughout our country will continue to be marked by joy, appreciation, generous collaboration, and mutual service.

As Catholics, we have entered a new phase in our history and development, the seeds of which were sown many years ago. The Bishops of Canada are most grateful to the Indigenous People for having shared their cultural and spiritual gifts with the Church and with all Canadian society, and for those communities and many individuals among the First Nations, Metis and Inuit who are living witnesses of Our Lord's call to mercy, healing and forgiveness. We likewise are thankful for the generous help of Catholic Missions in Canada and Mission chez nous in helping to support the needs of the Church in our country, particularly Northern Canada. We deeply appreciate the generous and heroic collaboration of so many clergy, religious and laity over the years toward the Church's pastoral, educational and social work in the North.

Now, however, all of us, together, need to continue in our common effort to find new ways to sustain and extend our presence and service in Northern Canada. As agreed at the 2015 Plenary Assembly of the Bishops of Canada, a working group of Bishops has been set up to bring forward recommendations on pastoral and financial collaboration, so that all Canadian dioceses and eparchies in our country can take greater responsibility in assisting the Church in the North. Filled with gratitude for the work of the past, and having learned both from best practices as well as past errors, we now look forward to future forms of evangelization and cooperation as *fellow workers for God*, working together *in his field, his building* (1 Corinthians, 3.9).

As Saint Paul has taught us, we together are *the body of Christ and individually members of it*. As we exercise our roles, responsibilities and charisms – *apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, speakers* – let us in love *strive to excel in building up the Church* (1 Corinthians, 12.27-28, 14.12).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Crosby".

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI  
Bishop of Hamilton  
President of the Canadian Conference  
of Catholic Bishops

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