



**2018 National Week for Life and the Family:
Letter to Catholic Families from
The President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

May 2018

Dear Catholic families,

Each year the Church in Canada sets aside one week to celebrate Life and the Family. This gives us all an opportunity to reflect on the importance of the family and to renew our commitment, as Christians, to upholding the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, and at every stage in between. Could anything be more important in today's culture? This year's Week for Life and the Family will be observed from May 13 (Ascension of the Lord & Mother's Day) to May 20 (Pentecost), with the theme, "*Love: Encountering the Other*".

Love is first meant to be discovered and experienced in the family. According to the divine plan for humanity, the family is the sacred place where, through loving encounters with *others*—parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles—the child makes room in his or her heart for an encounter with *the Other* who is Love (see *1 Jn* 4:8). For many of our contemporaries, however, day-to-day life has become a relentless cycle of work and activities which allows little time for anything beyond the most routine interaction between family members. How often do our times spent "together" actually find us isolated from each other, engrossed in our phones or I-pads? Today, even within families, there seems to be less authentic communication and more loneliness than at any point in the past. Everywhere we look we see the results of impersonal living: failures of love in families, in nations and among peoples.

Some would suggest that Christian expectations of life are unreasonable and unattainable; that the Gospel law of love is a fantasy. The truth is that, humanly speaking, the demands of the Gospel *are* impossible. Yet, in the words of one eminent Scripture scholar: "Ours is not to reduce the demands of the Gospel; but, rather, to empower people to live them."

Have we been empowered? The loving, selfless, human encounters which the Gospel envisions are possible only in union with Christ who is both our model and our way. To "encounter" another truly is to look at him or her attentively, to be present to, the other, with undivided attention, to see with the eyes of love—as Christ does—recognizing that the deepest desires of the human heart—for love, acceptance and affirmation—are common to us all. Living our daily lives as Christ would have us live, in a spirit of forgiveness—avoiding the accumulation of resentment—requires effort, commitment and attention. Pope Francis reminds us that "time is greater than space". Let us take time to encounter the others in our lives who are most important to us. Every day presents opportunities to pray together: before sharing a common meal, en route to Sunday Mass, on the way to a child's activities, or at bedtime.

The time has come to ask ourselves what role we can play in creating a world where others are encountered as God intends: as God's beloved children. As Pope Francis observes in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, "The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church." Let us allow ourselves to be empowered by Christ and moved by his Spirit; then—beginning with the members of our own families—let us encounter each other with love!

With my brother Bishops, it is my prayer that during this year's Week for Life and the Family, you and your family will draw inspiration from Our Lady, Spouse and Temple of the Holy Spirit, who in her humble "yes" to the Father's will, brought forth Christ—the Saviour of the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Lionel Gendron, P.S.S." The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

+ Lionel Gendron, P.S.S.
Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops