



ANNUAL REPORT 2006-2007

**OF THE CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION FOR LIFE AND FAMILY
presented to
the Plenary Assembly
of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
and the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus**

The Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) pursues its mission at the heart of the Church and of Canadian society, with the hope of concretely contributing to the advent of a culture of life and a civilization of love. Its educative, pastoral and cultural action aims to promote respect for human life and dignity, as well as for the essential and fundamental role of the family.

This report is a summary of the work achieved by COLF – its projects and publications – between 30 June 2006 and 30 June 2007.

PUBLICATIONS

"The Media: A fascinating challenge for the family"

COLF's 2006 Message to Families received a particularly strong reception in English-speaking Canada and had to be reprinted. It aims to guide the reader into understanding the real impact and the immense power that the media have to shape our values and mentality. It encourages parents and children to become selective consumers of the media and it challenges them to become well informed about the media. The disciples of Christ have never had more powerful and effective instruments in their hands for the promotion of truth, justice and the common good. We need to learn once more to witness about what gives us life! This very colorful leaflet proposes concrete ways of acquiring media competence and of putting it into action — a "Media Workshop 101"!

"Living, suffering, dying...what for?"

Launched on the eve of the World Day of the Sick, this new leaflet had unanticipated success (more than 55,000 English copies and about 20,000 French copies were distributed within three months). In a society where some are claiming the "right to die" when life seems too heavy a burden, this small document reminds us of the Christian vision of life and suffering. It offers to the sick and the healthy an opportunity to learn about or to deepen the unexpected significance that Christ has given to our lives and to our suffering. This reflection participates in the debate on euthanasia and assisted suicide that is taking place in Canadian society. The simple and accessible tone of this

leaflet involves the reader in a contemplation of one of the great mysteries of life: pain and suffering. It reveals their deep Christian meaning while offering a renewed sense of hope, courage and peace.

"Stem Cells: Astonishing promises...but at what cost?"

The media do not cease to report on promises of quasi-miraculous cures using embryonic stem cells. In reality, the scientific and therapeutic successes obtained to date have utilized adult stem cells. COLF presents a new brochure (the second in the *Life Matters* series), using a question-answer format, which attempts to eliminate the confusion and to clarify the moral issues related to stem cell research.

"Life in the Balance" - Workshop Guide on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

A new document has been added to the file started by COLF to help families and the defenders of life to reflect on the difficult questions of euthanasia and assisted suicide, so they would be more likely to intervene on this subject with their families, friends and work colleagues, as well as in the public square. This document is a Workshop Guide (downloadable in PDF format at www.colf.ca) entitled *Life in the Balance*, which enables discussions on this subject in parishes, homes, and in other places.

In Preparation

COLF's Message to Families 2007 addresses the great challenge of passing on the faith in the family, and is entitled "*Families, where are the saints of the third millennium?*" It is inspired by the teachings offered at the World Meeting of Families in Valencia (summer 2006), by the preparatory document for the 2008 International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec City, and by the Second Vatican Council's call to the laity. This message will be launched at the end of August 2007, just in time for the new pastoral year.

The next Bioethics Seminar will be held on 28 and 29 February 2008. Since the year 2008 marks the anniversary of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, that will be the theme for this event, which will again bring together a multidisciplinary group of experts in Ottawa.

Reprinting

Almost 10 years after its first publication, and on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, our very popular leaflet on natural family planning was slightly updated and reprinted. Entitled *In the Name of Love*, it places an emphasis on the ecology of the body and presents in a positive tone the advantages of natural methods of family planning, as well as the Christian dimensions of sexuality.

SEMINAR ON THE FAMILY

Faced with the legal redefinition of marriage – a situation of extreme concern for the family as an institution in Canada – COLF chose to hold its first Seminar on the Family on the theme “The Family: Identity and Challenges”, a reflection which was to a large extent focused on the identity of the family in connection with the needs of children. On 22 and 23 March 2007, the participants met in Ottawa. Among them were 19 experts in the fields of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, law, social sciences, education and family life.

The experts discussed the following topics: *The Family Through the Centuries... The Family, Civil Society and the State... The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child: theory and practice... Why Does the Erosion of Marriage Hurt Children?... Reckoning with the Revolution... The Child: an Identity in Becoming... The Intersection of Family, School and Popular Culture... Parenting Styles and Child Outcomes... Parenting: the Great Adventure!*

Question periods and small-group discussions also allowed COLF to gather pertinent information for the pursuit of its work on behalf of the family. Soon, our website will contain a summary of the presentations and the discussions that took place at the Seminar. Year by year from now on, we will alternate between a Seminar on Bioethics and a Seminar on the Family.

SYMPOSIUM ON THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

Canadian law has redefined marriage and little by little is redefining parenthood and the family. In addition, our culture often offers an incomplete vision of love and sexuality. There is a great urgency to propose the Catholic vision of love, sexuality, marriage and family to upcoming generations. This is why COLF decided to organize a National Symposium on the Theology of the Body in Edmonton on 15 and 16 June 2007. Around 200 people discovered or deepened their understanding of the prophetic teachings of Pope John Paul II through the presentations of five speakers: Bill Donaghy of the *Theology of the Body Institute*; Dr. Hanna Klaus, founder and teacher, *TeenSTAR*; Paul and Carol Quist, Directors of the Office of Marriage and Family Life with the Archdiocese of Edmonton; and Teresa Harnett, Program Director with the Office for Family Ministry of the Diocese of Hamilton.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Letter to Members of Parliament on the reopening of the marriage debate

Since Prime Minister Stephen Harper had promised a free vote in the House of Commons on the possible reopening of the debate on civil marriage, COLF wrote to all the Members of Parliament 18 September 2006, to ask them to vote in favor of the eventual motion on this topic. The letter appealed to their sense of democracy.

"Saving Marriage: A Second Chance!"

In July 2006, COLF produced a parish bulletin insert aimed at informing Catholics of their responsibility as citizens and encouraging them to contact their MPs to ask them to vote in favor of a motion to reopen the debate on marriage. Emphasis was placed on the needs of children, on marriage as a natural institution and on the conclusions of a report from the French National Assembly which said "no" to "same-sex marriage" out of concern for the wellbeing of the child. COLF also created a petition which was available on its website.

Letter to the Minister of Health, the Honorable Tony Clement, concerning the decision to reduce funding for palliative care

Shortly after the budget cuts announced by the federal government in the area of palliative care, COLF Chairman Bishop Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B., wrote to the Health Minister to express his concern and to ask for clarification. He wrote: "Canadian families need assistance in order to provide sufficient attention and care to their members who are suffering and who have reached the end of their journey.... This is why we hope to see the government seriously devote itself to the task of encouraging a true solidarity among Canadians in caring for their most vulnerable co-citizens, a solidarity and compassion that are founded on a sense of responsibility, and which include a solid system of home care and palliative care."

News release on restoring the traditional definition of marriage

On 5 December 2006, COLF issued a news release stating its support for a motion made by the Harper government for the reopening of the marriage debate. Appealing strongly to the needs of children, the motion called on the government to follow the example of France.

Letter to the Ottawa Health Research Institute

In a letter addressed to the Board of Directors of the Ottawa Health Research Institute, Bishop Fabbro congratulated them upon the recent opening of the Sprott Centre for Stem Cell Research, saying: "We thus commend the Sprott Centre for avoiding embryonic stem cell research in its initial projects, and we strongly urge you to continue on that path which respects the first of all human rights, the right to life."

News release – "Three parents for one child? Time has come to pause and reflect"

Following the 2 January 2007 decision of the Ontario Court of Appeals recognizing three legal parents for the same child, COLF rang the alarm by asking that governments slow the accelerated rate of transformation being imposed on our most fundamental social institutions: "Rather than allowing courts to define social policies, governments need to ensure that their laws continue to promote the natural two-parent family model." We called for a public commission that would evaluate the impact of the redefinition of motherhood, fatherhood and the family on children and on society itself.

Reaction to the recommendation of the SOGC on genetic screening – "A Disturbing Step Towards Eugenics"

In February 2007, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC) recommended that all pregnant Canadian women should be offered the possibility of non-invasive genetic testing during their pregnancy. COLF reacted by recalling that there does not exist any prenatal remedy or therapy for most of the genetic disorders that are identifiable; genetic screening is thus generally the equivalent of a death sentence for the unborn infant that has been identified as having an anomaly. COLF called for Canadians to recognize and protect the rights of disabled people, starting with their first and most fundamental right, the right to life.

Message on the occasion of the National March for Life – "The Right to Life: A Question of Justice"

On the 25th anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, COLF called on Canadians to reconsider the inconceivable juridical void which, for 36 years, has allowed the elimination through abortion of some 3 million Canadian children. In its message on 10 May 2007, COLF stated the hope that our country will extend to its unborn citizens the protections of the Charter and that laws will recognize the right to life from conception: "As a civilized country, considering the knowledge that we now have about prenatal development, we cannot continue to deny the evidence: to destroy a human fetus or embryo is to prevent the birth of a unique and irreplaceable human being."

COOPERATION WITH THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Vth World Meeting of Families

Ms. Sharron McKeever, Member of the Board of Directors of COLF, participated together with her husband at the Vth World Meeting of Families in Valencia (1-9 July 2006) as a delegate of the CCCB and COLF. Upon her return, she submitted a report on the Theological-Pastoral Congress, as well as on the activities of the World Meeting. Ms. Andrée Leboeuf and her husband also attended the World Meeting as delegates of COLF.

Joint Declaration on Marriage

COLF commented and proposed some slight changes to a draft of the declaration which was signed by some 40 representatives of religious groups on 9 November 2006.

Reopening of the Marriage Debate

COLF was called on to offer commentary on the letters and declarations prepared by the CCCB before and after the vote on the motion on reopening the marriage debate.

CCCB 2006 Forum for Catholic Associations and Movements

As the COLF delegate to participate in this forum, the Director of COLF also aided in moderating this meeting.

Family and Media

At the end of its Message to Families 2006, entitled *The Media: A Fascinating Challenge for the Family*, COLF refers its readers to five parish bulletin inserts produced by the English Sector Episcopal Commission for Social Communications. These documents are entitled *Families and Advertising... Families and the Internet... Families and Movies... Families and the News... Families and Television...* The Commission also directed families to the COLF website and to its message on the media.

Pastoral statement on the upcoming elections

COLF submitted some elements for reflection to the CCCB in preparation for a pastoral statement preceding possible elections.

Memorandum on section 43 of the Criminal Code

COLF addressed a memorandum to the CCCB regarding section 43 of the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Section 43 is sometimes referred to as the “spanking law”. It allows schoolteachers, parents and persons standing in the place of parents to use reasonable force as a means of correction toward a pupil or child under their care, for educational or disciplinary purposes, without being subject to a criminal assault charge. Senate Bill S-207, entitled *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children)*, aims at removing section 43 from the Criminal Code. COLF recommended that the CCCB may wish to refrain from supporting the repeal of this section pending further research and developments. According to the principle of subsidiarity, the Canadian government would not have the moral authority to interfere with parental rights to educate their children in a reasonable manner.

Memorandum on religious liberty

In view of the increasing attacks upon religious freedom, freedom of conscience and freedom of education, COLF submitted a memorandum to the CCCB to describe the situation in this regard and to recommend possible action.

Meeting with representatives of UNICEF and Amnesty International

COLF participated at the meetings involving representatives of the CCCB and of UNICEF and Amnesty International.

OTHER NEWS AND ACTIVITIES

Website — Launched in October 2006, the new COLF website (www.colf.ca) has received an extremely enthusiastic reception. Internet surfers appreciate its joyous and family-friendly appearance; they affirm it is much more easy to navigate. The different sections of the site (*In Action... Promoting Life... Promoting Family... 2000 Years of Wisdom... etc.*) enable them to discover our new and old publications, our public statements on various current events, and Church documents on subjects linked to life and the family. The welcome page has numerous links, and places special emphasis on two important files: one on marriage and the other on euthanasia and assisted suicide. An entire section now serves as the “store” where visitors may order leaflets and brochures. COLF continues not to sell its publications, but to encourage individuals and groups who order our documents to provide donations which allow us to multiply the number of our publications.

OCCB Focus Group on euthanasia and assisted suicide — COLF is taking part in the reflections initiated by the OCCB in preparation for an eventual bill on euthanasia and assisted suicide. More particularly, COLF is also taking part in the subcommittee on communications.

Working with the missalette *Prions en Église* — At the invitation of the editorial director, COLF's Director prepared an article on the theme of the Message to Families 2007, the transmission of faith in the family. This text will also be published in August in the English version of the missalette *Living with Christ*.

Participation in conferences — The members of the Board of Directors and staff participated in several conferences during the course of the year and had the opportunity to speak on various subjects connected to life and family.

Interviews and letters — Several members of the Board and staff had the opportunity to give interviews to newspapers, radio and television stations, and to write letters to the media on a variety of questions: "right to die," genetic screening, assisted suicide, freedom of conscience, natural family planning, marriage, family, and parenting. An interview with Michèle Boulva, published by the French newswire of the news agency Zenit following the publication of the document *Living, suffering and dying...what for?* generated much interest in COLF and was translated into several languages (Spanish, German and English) as well as made available in India.

Links with dioceses — COLF continues to maintain links with diocesan contact persons and appreciates their essential cooperation for the promotion of its activities and publications – the same can be said of our contacts with the national executive of the Catholic Women's League, the State Deputies of the Knights of Columbus, the members of the *Table provinciale de pastorale familiale* (TPPF) and other individuals and groups who are part of our database.

This report is respectfully submitted by the members of the Board of Directors and the staff of COLF:

Board of Directors

- Mr. Mickey Casavant, St. Albert, AB – Retired social worker and a Knight of Columbus
- Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B. – Bishop of London, ON
- Most. Rev. Jean Gagnon – Bishop of Gaspé, QC
- Ms. Andrée Leboeuf, St. Augustin-de-Desmaures, QC – Graduate nurse
- Ms. Sharron McKeever, Oshawa, ON – Retired religious and family life consultant
- Dr. Marie Peeters-Ney, Victoria, BC – Director of medical research for the International Foundation of Genetic Research "The Michael Fund" in Pittsburg, USA, and scientific advisor with the Down Syndrome Research Foundation in London
- Mr. Dennis A. Savoie, New Haven, CT – Deputy Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus and President of the Canadian Association of the Knights of Columbus

- Father Noël Simard, D. Th., Ottawa, ON – Moral theologian, specialist in bioethics

Staff

- Ms. Michèle Boulva (Director)
- Ms. Lea Z. Singh (Assistant Director)
- Ms. Jocelyne Pagé (Administrative Assistant)

September 2007