

# **President's Report**

## **2007 Plenary Assembly**

### **Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

Dear brother Bishops, guests and members of the staff:

1. With my term ending as CCCB President, the moment has arrived for a retrospective look at our undertakings.
2. When I began as President, our Conference was facing a very difficult financial situation. We had to rectify the situation, and in many ways this has changed how the CCCB functions. We succeeded in balancing the budget, while also maintaining the quality of service. My thanks to the General Secretary and all his team for their efforts in this.
3. The review and revision of *From Pain to Hope* and other work on finding the means to prevent sexual abuse were among the most important areas of study over the past years. For more than 15 years now, policies and approaches to prevent sexual abuse have been developed by the dioceses of Canada, with these being applied according to their particular resources and circumstances. The review of *From Pain to Hope* has presented the Bishops of Canada and their diocesan collaborators an occasion to look again at their respective policies and update them. We will have an opportunity during this meeting to note further suggestions for managing and preventing cases of sexual abuse.
4. Another preoccupation has been the renewal of the indult from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Although this may seem a technicality, it is important as it involves our support for the dioceses of the North. Following meetings in Rome with the authorities of the Congregation, it was possible to settle this question for the next seven years. These funds will assist mission projects in the Canadian North.
5. Over the past two years, our collective reflections on restructuring our Episcopal Conference have been the background to much of our work. Our difficult financial situation, and also the need to adjust our activities according to our resources, has required extensive work toward restructuring. This has been a moment to look at the global reality of the Church today and to identify our priorities accordingly. An *ad hoc* episcopal committee – composed of Archbishop James Weisgerber, Bishop Martin Veillette, Archbishop Brendan O'Brien and Bishop Paul-André Durocher – has worked on an overall review of Commission activities and prepared a series of options for us to consider during this Plenary. It will be important for us to be clear about identifying what

we wish to accomplish as a national Episcopal Conference. The means that we choose will depend on the objectives we set.

6. Canada is at war and its presence in Afghanistan cannot leave us indifferent. The Permanent Council and the Social Affairs Commission have been involved in in-depth discussions on Canada's role in Afghanistan. One thing is becoming clearer: there will not be peace in Afghanistan without a true peace process which involves all the parties. This is what Canada especially needs to promote.
7. The CCCB has been giving particular attention to relations with religious communities in Canada, in view of the message published by the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) on the occasion of the 2006 *ad limina* visits. A working group has been established to maintain good dialogue. It comprises three CCCB and three CRC representatives. The CCCB representatives are Bishop Jacques Berthelet, C.S.V., and Archbishop Daniel Bohan, together with Msgr. Mario Paquette, P.H.; the CRC is represented by Sister Donna Geernaert, S.C., Father Yvon Pomerleau, O.P., and Sister Annette Noël, S.P.
8. Conference involvement in faith education has been at the centre of considerable work by our English Sector confreres. The development of a Syllabus, as a basic reference for future catechetical resources, will be key to CCCB undertakings in this area.
9. The Canadian Appeal Tribunal is confronting a problematic financial situation; its circumstances make it difficult for it to fulfill the procedures required by Church norms. This question will be discussed during our Plenary Assembly.
10. Since the publication of the Apostolic Letter *motu proprio Misericordia Dei* on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we have been seriously considering how this sacrament is practised in our respective communities. The process so far has required numerous discussions and in-depth reflections regarding our pastoral practices; we are now at a new stage with the imminent adoption of our decree on the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
11. As you know, during the year Amnesty International adopted a policy on access to abortion. This is a movement that defends the rights of the oppressed as well as freedom of conscience and expression. What a paradox that the smallest of human beings – unborn children – are now being put at risk by those who should be their defenders. There have been conversations with its Canadian leadership, but their position, at least until now, remains unchanged. Since many Catholics have supported this movement, we are being invited to discuss this question in view of clarifying our position.
12. Another movement has been of continuing pastoral attention for many years, but unfortunately it has now broken with the Church. Since the publication in 2001 of the Doctrinal Note on the Army of Mary, and repeated efforts by the Archbishop of Quebec City and the Pontifical Commissioner for the Sons of Mary, the members and affiliated groups of the Army of Mary have grown further away from the Church and the Catholic

faith, to the point of excluding themselves completely. The 11 July 2007 declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith confirms this rupture.

13. While these questions are preoccupying, they do not represent all there is to say about our Conference's mission. There are also projects on our agenda that mobilize enthusiasm and hope. Among these are the various preparations for the 2008 International Eucharistic Congress. The organizing committee in Quebec City continues its work under the capable direction of Cardinal Marc Ouellet. There is every sign this international meeting will be an historic moment in the life of the Catholic Church in Canada. The first national collection was held in our parishes this past June; the results appear most encouraging. Another collection will be held next year on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, and there is reason to hope it will provide an important contribution toward the Congress budget.
14. Internationally, I had the privilege this past February of participating in an official mission to Indonesia, under the auspices of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. Archbishop James Weisgerber and Msgr. Mario Paquette, P.H., were also part of this six-person delegation which witnessed on site the success of the reconstruction program following the December 2004 tsunami. I wish to remind you that more than \$32 million was collected to help those who had been afflicted. The purpose of the mission was to hand over the management of the reconstruction project to local agencies and to the Indonesian partners of Development and Peace.
15. As I had mentioned at the beginning of this report, our Church has lots to do in order to reawaken the spiritual forces of our world. Changes in thinking, the large number of immigrants, and various decisions by our political leaders – all these make it necessary for us to continue reviewing our pastoral approaches. The late Pope John Paul II in his solicitude invited the Church in America to a new evangelization. More than ever, this is a challenge to, and a mission for, all our particular Churches – but also for our Episcopal Conference. Given the size of the task, it is fortunate we can unite our forces, our experiences and our efforts under the CCCB banner.
16. Over this past year, I have had occasion to note the common will of all the Bishops of Canada to continue the work of our Conference, which began almost 65 years ago. Thank you for the trust that you have shown me and the untiring support you have given me!

+André Gaumond  
Archbishop of Sherbrooke  
President  
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

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