



Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross  
September 14, 2015

His Holiness Pope Francis  
Vatican City

Most Holy Father,

Greetings in Jesus Christ from the Catholic Bishops of Canada!

Our Assembly today begins its annual five-day meeting in Cornwall, Ontario, on the banks of the Saint Lawrence River, along which so many of our country's missionaries and first Bishops travelled over past centuries. Its natural beauty brings to mind the major themes from your widely acclaimed Encyclical *Laudato Si'*: “*dialogue with all people about our common home*” (3); “*concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace*” (10); and bringing “*the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral human development*” (13).

Later this morning, our Commission for Doctrine, in a reflection on assisted suicide and euthanasia, will invite our Assembly to consider those “*elements of an integral ecology ... which clearly respects its human and social dimensions*” (LS, 137), rejecting a “*throwaway culture*” (LS, 16) so characterized by “*indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions*” (LS, 14).

The river here is also the home of the Mohawk people of Akwesasne, one of the First Nations peoples spread throughout this land. This afternoon, our Commission for Justice and Peace, together with the Canadian Catholic Aboriginal Council, will invite our Bishops and guests to reflect on the Calls to Action issued earlier this year by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. This is one way our Commission is following up on its recent publication, *A Church Seeking Justice: The Challenge of Pope Francis to the Church in Canada*, which also deals with human dignity and labour, war and peace, and the economics of exclusion and isolation. In the words of *Laudato Si'*, “*If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crises of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships*” (119).

The “*healing of relationships*”, the *common good*, humanity’s “*great motivations*” with its “*spiritual and ethical treasures*”, together with the “*path of dialogue*” (LS, 199-201) mark other key moments on our Plenary agenda. There will be ecumenical greetings brought to us by our brother Bishop, His Eminence Yuriy, Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, which is under the *omophorion* of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Moreover, our Commission for Christian Unity, Religious Relations with the Jews, and Interfaith Dialogue will highlight the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, with panelists who include a Jewish Rabbi, a Muslim leader, and a Hindu professor, each involved in interfaith dialogue with our Church.

Our Plenary will also discuss an outline of an upcoming new resource by our Conference on protecting minors and safeguarding pastoral environments. In part, this eventual publication will address the concerns in your letter this past February to Conferences of Bishops, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on how the Church needs to continue responding to the problem and challenges of the abuse of minors.

This Thursday, the Bishops at our meeting will travel by bus to Saint Joseph’s Oratory, Montreal, for a Mass of Thanksgiving as part of the Year of Consecrated Life that you inaugurated last November. Our celebration, co-hosted with the Canadian Religious Conference, will welcome representatives from religious communities together with secular institutes, new ecclesial communities and the Order of Consecrated Virgins, as well as clergy and laity.

At the same time our Plenary will celebrate key moments from the past and present, it will also anticipate upcoming events. Our episcopal delegates and substitute delegates to the Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World* will outline their thoughts in preparing for the Synod and welcome the insights of their brother Bishops in this regard. In a similar vein, a presentation by the Canadian Appeal Tribunal is expected to lead into a discussion on your *motu proprio Judex Mitis* and how we as Bishops can prepare ourselves for our renewed responsibilities and changing roles in bringing mercy, peace and healing to those whose marriages have failed.

We also expect that the annual report on the activities of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace will lead into a reflection on how the Church in Canada can continue assisting refugees from Syria, the Middle East and other regions of the world.

Finally, we will participate in the launching of a video celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. This will give us pause to consider the Council’s continuing pertinence and importance for the Church and the world today.

Holy Father, as we turn our gaze once again to the Saint Lawrence River, we cannot help but be aware of the United States of America on the opposite shore and notice the Adirondack Mountains rising in the distance. Beyond them lie Washington, New York City, Philadelphia and, much further south, Cuba. We look forward to your pastoral visitation to our neighbours next week and want to assure you of our solidarity and prayer in this noble and important undertaking. As your brother Bishops, and sharing with you in your pastoral concern for the

entire world, we welcome your leadership, and your constant reminders that ours is a ministry and mission of hope and mercy. We thank you for your clear teaching and persuasive gestures that challenge all the Church and continue to invite each of us to new life and renewed vision.

In assuring you of our prayers for you and your ministry as universal Pastor and bridge-builder, we in turn ask for your prayers and your blessing that together, with all the People of God, we may be faithful and effective witnesses and teachers of God's love for the world and, through the gifts of his beloved Son and the Holy Spirit, the possibility of eternal life for all humanity. (*cf.* John 3.13-17, Gospel for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross).

Fraternally and affectionately in Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Paul-André Durocher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a cross at the beginning.

+Paul-André Durocher  
Archbishop of Gatineau  
President  
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops