

Plenary Assembly 2008
Presentation of Father Yvon Pomerleau, o.p.
President of the Canadian Religious Conference

As I happen to be the Canadian Religious Conference spokesperson at this assembly, today, I cannot help but refer to the fact that this year is dedicated to Saint Paul. As we all know, Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles. Could we not say that, in a certain way, the mission of Religious Life within our Church can be compared with that of Paul's, which situated him at the frontiers? Should we rather see in the pursuit of dialogue that was begun between our two conferences a reference to the debates (arguments or contention) that kept arising between Peter and Paul, in the primitive Church, where these two apostles had such different roles to play in the proclamation of the Good News? On behalf of the Canadian Religious Conference, I wish to thank you for this invitation to address your General Assembly. This morning, all I want to do is share some pieces of good news with you.

At the beginning of June, the CRC held its General Assembly in Quebec City. In keeping with the 400th anniversary celebration of that City, our theme was "*Remembering for the Future.*" Over 400 women and men religious – major superiors or members of their Councils – came from all over Canada to participate in that event. I wish to thank the President and the General Secretary of the CCCB as well as the President of the Assemblée des Évêques du Québec who honoured us with their presence at our assembly. Our main speaker was our brother Timothy Radcliffe who gave us two keynote presentations on Religious Life that fostered our reflection and exchanges. Brother Radcliffe's two presentations: *the Future of Religious Life* and *Role and Challenges of Leadership* as well as the entire program of the General Assembly can be found on the CRC website (www.crc-canada.org).

In reference to the foundation (beginning) of Religious Life in North America close to 400 years ago, a celebration of Religious Life took place at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Basilica, where over 2000 women and men religious of all ages, belonging to religious congregations as well as to newer communities gathered together. Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Archbishop of Quebec and Primate of the Canadian Church presided over solemn vespers while Brother Timothy Radcliffe delivered the homily. As a symbolic gesture and a sign of respect for Creation, a tree representing our profound religious roots was planted in the Basilica's garden.

At that same General Assembly, CRC members elected the nine members who now form the new Administrative Council. Our amended Statutes, which received the members' unanimous approval, were sent to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life for final approbation.

At its first meeting, the new Administrative Council finalized the General Assembly Declaration, which is now available on the CRC website. This Declaration is what inspired the Administrative Council to establish a certain number of objectives: develop an integrated vision of Religious Life; pursue dialogue within the Church and with society; collaborate with various networks; pay special attention to young women and men religious and to newer communities; take stands on behalf of all religious; maintain our commitment with regard to human trafficking and ecology; ensure the ongoing formation of superiors of our communities... The field is vast so these objectives will have to be refined in the months to come.

We had hardly finished with our last General Assembly that already we are thinking of the next one. Our next General Assembly will take place in Montreal at the end of May, 2010. It seems likely that our religious vows will be at the heart of our exchanges: how to re-image and live our religious vows today.

Many of the challenges that we must take up as religious are similar to those of the entire Canadian Church. We are women and men religious – at the service of our Church and of our society, here and now. With our limited resources, we wish to consecrate our lives, with you, to this great work of evangelization. As far as we are concerned this is challenge NUMBER ONE (our greatest challenge). We know that it is through consultation, dialogue and collaboration that our impact will be the greatest. The dialogue already in progress among us should be pursued through attentive listening to various groups within our Church and global society.

With Saint Paul, we can say: “*Woe to me (to us) if I (we) preach not the gospel!*”

Father Yvon Pomerleau, o.p.

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