



**THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT  
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops  
2021 Plenary Assembly**

Brother Bishops, distinguished guests and members of staff,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2021 meeting of the Plenary Assembly of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. As is customary, with this report I wish to relate some of the CCCB's main accomplishments and areas of pastoral engagement since our last plenary meeting.

**1. COVID-19**

While efforts continue to be made throughout Canada to curb the spread of COVID-19, the persistence of the virus in various forms and the limitations it continues to impose on travel, accommodations, and large gatherings, requires us yet again to meet via videoconference. Heeding Pope Francis' encouragement to deepen our spirit of solidarity and subsidiarity, we embrace the call, throughout this week's proceedings, to envision and work towards a more just and fraternal future, even as COVID-19 continues to raise many uncertainties. We will have the unique opportunity to hear this week from Cardinal Peter Turkson and Sister Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A., from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on this very topic. If this pandemic has taught us new lessons about caring for the elderly, supporting individuals with mental health challenges, and leveraging virtual technologies to further the Church's mission, it has also resulted in some quite unexpected blessings. Above all, many of the faithful have expressed how the temporary suspension of public liturgical celebrations in our parishes has led them to a deeper appreciation and longing for the holy Eucharist, specifically in the context of a gathered community. This insight was likewise echoed recently at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Eucharistic Congress in Hungary.

**2. *Amoris Laetitia* Family Year and World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly**

The experience of the pandemic also served to highlight the central role of the family as the domestic Church and the importance of community ties between families. On March 19, 2021, the Church celebrated the fifth anniversary of the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, on the beauty and joy of love in the family. On the same day, Pope Francis launched the "*Amoris Laetitia* Family Year," which will conclude on June 26, 2022 at the X World Meeting of Families in Rome. The "*Amoris Laetitia* Family Year" aims to reach every Catholic family through spiritual, pastoral and cultural proposals in an effort to highlight the call to live and spread the Gospel message in and through our dioceses, parishes, educational and healthcare institutions, and movements and associations. Certainly, in light of the scope of this wonderful initiative, the inauguration this past year of the new CCCB Standing Committee for Family and Life and of the new CCCB Office for Family and Life can easily be seen as truly providential.



As an initiative within this *Amoris Laetitia* Family Year, Pope Francis instituted the first Church-wide celebration of World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, to be held annually on the fourth Sunday of July, close to the liturgical memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus. The CCCB Standing Committee and Office for Family and Life marked this occasion with a short video message, which gives thanks to God for the gift of grandparents and the elderly.

### **3. Indigenous Peoples**

This summer, Canadians were poignantly reminded that many Indigenous children had died while attending Indian Residential Schools and had been interred in graves. Both the Kamloops and Cowessess “recoveries” resulted in an outpouring of emotion across the nation, rekindled trauma in many residential school survivors, and profoundly affected all Indigenous Peoples. As Shepherds, we must continue to do everything within our means to advance healing and reconciliation. In this spirit, over the past few years, regional and diocesan listening circles have provided many of us with unique and invaluable opportunities to hear the stories of Indigenous Peoples and to become more acquainted with their realities, to share in their pain, to validate their experiences, and to assure them of our commitment to reconciliation. In addition, through the hard work and efforts of the Bishops’ Working Group on Indigenous Initiatives, the CCCB has endeavoured to foster a cooperative working relationship with the leaders of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit national organizations.

We have also heard from many that reconciliation with the Catholic Church will require a meaningful encounter with Pope Francis. It was for this reason that some time ago the CCCB had asked the Holy Father to meet with a delegation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit survivors, elders/knowledge keepers, and youth. COVID-19 significantly delayed this initiative, but recently the Holy See confirmed Pope Francis’s availability for such a meeting this December. The deliberations of this week’s Plenary Assembly will undoubtedly help clarify and solidify many important aspects of the planning around the Indigenous delegation this December, as well as other important pastoral questions related to healing and reconciliation.

### **4. Year of St. Joseph**

On December 8, 2020, the 150th anniversary of the declaration of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, Pope Francis proclaimed a Year of Saint Joseph. To celebrate this special year, the CCCB Office for Evangelization and Catechesis collaborated with the two National Liturgy Offices in the development of a new webpage featuring prayers and devotions to Saint Joseph as well as catechetical resources. Additionally, in tandem with Canada Day, many among us prayed the Novena and Act of Entrustment to Saint Joseph, likewise using the occasion to pray for reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.



## **5. Launching of the Synod on synodality**

The Church as Body of Christ is called to gather in Synod. The journey entitled “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*” will solemnly open on the 9 and 10 October 2021, in Rome, and on the 17 October, in each of our local Churches. One important milestone will be the celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October 2023, which will be followed by the implementation phase. With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission, since, as he adds, “*it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.*” We wholeheartedly embrace this opportunity of grace and look forward to the sharing later in the week on how we can listen, dialogue, share, welcome, discern and act as a Synodal Church and in a synodal way.

## **6. Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace – *Caritas Canada***

Since the 2020 Plenary Assembly, you have received periodic updates from the CCCB General Secretariat regarding the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace – *Caritas Canada* (CCODP). Over this past year, work began on implementing Deloitte’s recommendations following an Organizational Review of CCODP. As part of that process, in November 2020, a transitional National Council was formed which, in keeping with one of Deloitte’s key recommendations, is to be a smaller, more focused governing body with four episcopal members. This role was filled by Bishop Guy Desrochers, C.Ss.R., Bishop Pierre Goudreault, Archbishop Peter Hundt, and Bishop William McGrattan. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of them for their service on the National Council, as well as for their participation in the four Working Groups mandated to assist CCODP with the renewal process of Deloitte’s recommendations.

## **7. Responsible Ministry and the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons**

A major milestone in responsible ministry was achieved this past year with the establishment of the *Canadian Reporting System for Sexual Abuse or Cover-up by a Catholic Bishop*, known more familiarly as the ClearView Reporting System, thanks to the secure and confidential platform which is used to operate it. Consistent with the requirements of the Apostolic Letter *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, the reporting system can be accessed anytime in both official languages via a dedicated website and a toll-free hotline. I wish to acknowledge the work and support provided by the CCCB General Secretariat in this enormous undertaking, from set-up and training to the public launch, as well as the valuable input provided by the Standing Committee for Responsible Ministry and the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons.



## **8. Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide, Palliative Care**

After a concerted and strategic effort carried out over several months – by the CCCB, individual dioceses and Catholic groups, as well as a CCCB-led coalition of various organizations – to prevent the expansion of the eligibility criteria for euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada, Bill C-7 most regrettably and tragically passed into law. Shortly after this had happened, in its statement to the Catholic faithful, the Permanent Council noted: “Our advocacy must continue for rapid access to mental health care, social support for people with such illnesses, and suicide prevention programs.” A further urgent need, as already identified by the Plenary Assembly, involves providing the faithful with education on palliative care. At the request of the Plenary Assembly, an interdisciplinary CCCB-led *Ad hoc* Committee on Palliative Care has been working on such resources since 2018. This work is quickly nearing completion and there are plans to launch a tool-kit for parishes this fall.

## **9. Freedom of Conscience and Religion**

Euthanasia and assisted suicide continue to raise serious questions about the freedom of conscience and religion for healthcare professionals and the autonomy of Catholic healthcare and educational institutions. Unfortunately, freedom of conscience and religion also became a question with the government’s proposed ban on so-called conversion therapy. In a somewhat related manner, a recent escalation in violence against people of faith, not excluding the many Catholic Churches burned, vandalized, or desecrated in recent months, points to the ever increasing need to encourage and strengthen respect for the protections in Canadian law against all forms of hatred and discrimination.

## **10. Ministry and Formation**

With the publication in 2016 of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* by the Congregation for Clergy, the CCCB was required to develop new English and French national versions of the *Ratio* for priestly formation in Canada. In 2018, the Permanent Council established two *Ad hoc* Committees for this purpose. Drafts were eventually submitted to the Bishops for a canonical vote, and the Congregation for Clergy was petitioned for *recognitio*. Since the Congregation has responded favourably in regards to the French version, preparations are underway for publication. The Congregation’s response in regards to the English version is still pending at this time. We are grateful for the tremendous work undertaken by the two *Ad hoc* Committees and their networks of formators and experts in bringing forward what will undoubtedly be a vital resource for formation and for the living out of the priestly pastoral ministries for our faith communities.

In addition to the many lay men and women who assist us and our priests with liturgical celebrations, the vitality of our parishes and dioceses often owes much to the presence of ecclesial movements and associations. This year, on behalf of my brother Bishops, I wish to acknowledge the dedicated, dependable, and diligent work of the Catholic Women’s League



of Canada, which is now 101 years old. The faithful service of its members has greatly strengthened and enriched the witness of the Church in Canada. In this spirit, I bid farewell to National Past President and Chairperson of Laws Anne-Marie Gorman, with whom the CCCB enjoyed close collaboration, and welcome National President Mrs. Fran Lucas. In a similar spirit, I turn to the Knights of Columbus, a stronghold of faith and service in many of our parishes, to offer the CCCB's congratulations on the recent and long-anticipated beatification of their visionary founder, Father Michael McGivney, as well as for the recent appointment of the 14th Supreme Knight, Mr. Patrick E. Kelly. Our gratitude goes out also to former Supreme Knight Mr. Carl Anderson for his extraordinary dedication.

### **11. New Apostolic Nuncio to Canada**

In June, Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič as the new Apostolic Nuncio to Canada. At the time of his appointment, Archbishop Jurkovič was the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Office of the United Nations in Geneva and Other International Organizations, the Permanent Observer to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Representative of the Holy See to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). We will have an opportunity to welcome and hear from Archbishop Jurkovič later today. We are deeply grateful to His Holiness Pope Francis for this appointment which expresses his closeness to us through his personal Representative, as well for the ministry of Msgr. Matjaz Roter, secretary, and the Nunciature staff. We also give thanks and appreciation to the former Apostolic Nuncio to Canada, Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi, who ended his mission on 10 December 2020 upon his appointment as the Apostolic Nuncio to Albania.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I shall like to reiterate my heartfelt thanks to all the Bishops who have been working with great generosity and diligence in the various Commissions, standing Committees and various bodies of the CCCB. In times often marked by stress, limitations, frustrations and unease, you have come through and provided guidance for the Church in varied and multiple ways. We move forward this week with the election of a new Executive Committee. May it be a moment and occasion of grace and renewal for all. And a final acknowledgement and thanks for our CCCB staff and their continued commitment and labour of love for the life of the Church in our country. Allow me to close with the inspiring words of our Holy Father in **Patris Corde**:

*“Often in life, things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Our first reaction is frequently one of disappointment and rebellion. Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history. Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow.*

*The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that explains, but accepts. Only as*



*a result of this acceptance, this reconciliation, can we begin to glimpse a broader history, a deeper meaning. We can almost hear an echo of the impassioned reply of Job to his wife, who had urged him to rebel against the evil he endured: “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” (Job 2:10).*

*Joseph is certainly not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive. In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit’s gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments.” (n.4).*

May our deliberations, discernments and decisions be inspired and guided by the Spirit of Christ.  
Thank you.

20 September 2021

The Most Rev. Richard Gagnon,  
Archbishop of Winnipeg  
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops