



PRESIDENT'S REPORT
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
2022 Plenary Assembly

Brother Bishops, distinguished guests, and members of the CCCB staff,

After two successive years of holding Plenary Assembly meetings online, it is with great joy that I welcome you back in person for the 2022 meeting of the Plenary Assembly of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB). In this report to CCCB members, I will be drawing attention, as is customary, to select highlights from the life and work of the Conference over the last 12 months.

1. Walking Together with the Indigenous Peoples in Canada

While the CCCB has a longstanding history of engagement with Indigenous Peoples, this has been considerably strengthened in recent years, thanks in part to the work of the expanded Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council and the Bishops Working Group on Coordinating Pastoral Initiatives for Indigenous Peoples, as well as through the CCCB's membership in Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle.

More specifically, you will recall that over the span of five days at the end of March this year, representatives of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples met at the Vatican with Pope Francis, sharing their stories of pain and trauma experienced by both former students of Residential Schools and their descendants. Today, in the context of remembering that momentous event, I would especially like to recognize the Bishops Working Group on Coordinating Pastoral Initiatives for Indigenous Peoples or BWG.

Originally established following the 2018 Plenary Assembly in order to chart a path, grounded in the Gospel and the wisdom of Listening Circles, toward better relationships with Indigenous Peoples, the BWG's work has gradually expanded to include more and more complex areas of pastoral need, from initially drafting pastoral responses, through planning the Indigenous delegation to Rome during COVID-19, to supporting preparations for the Papal Visit, and now to assisting with the follow-up after the Papal Visit. As it took on these and other areas of responsibility, the BWG established various subcommittees to support its work, drawing on even more Bishops as well as lay experts. Looking back, I am sure you will agree, there is much to acknowledge – more than could ever be mentioned in this brief report – with respect to the BWG's work and contributions over the past four years, but especially over the last 12 to 16 months, not to mention the additional support provided by its subcommittees and collaborators. Overall, what has truly impressed me is not only the variety, breadth, and quality of what has been accomplished, but the unflinching generosity of time and effort of each of the Bishops and their collaborators who have been labouring to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. To each of them we owe a great debt of gratitude.

We will be invited later this week to discern together how best to continue our role, as Bishops and as a Church, in the journey toward reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, both nationally, at the level of the episcopal conference, and locally, at the diocesan level. We have gained so much insight from our experience of walking together with Indigenous Peoples over these past few years.

To be sure, what we have experienced since our last Plenary Assembly would not have been as extraordinary as it was without the Apostolic Visit of Pope Francis to Canada, both in terms of the lead-up as well as the visit itself. After receiving an invitation from the Bishops of Canada last September and following his meeting with the Indigenous delegation at the Vatican this March, the Holy Father made a promise to visit Canada with the very specific purpose of fostering reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, he desired to do so at a time of year when Saint Anne, the grandmother of Jesus, is honoured, precisely because of the role and respect given to the elderly in Indigenous cultures. To fulfill that promise, Pope Francis arrived in Canada on July 24 to begin his “penitential pilgrimage.” He spent the better part of a week meeting with Indigenous Peoples, including Survivors, hearing their stories and becoming acquainted with family and community histories tragically affected by centuries of misguided colonial policies and practices. As we followed Pope Francis from Edmonton to Quebec City and then to Iqaluit, we witnessed the Successor of Peter, in communion with us, his brothers, the Bishops of Canada, acknowledge the truth of the past, seek pardon, and pledge anew to walk with Indigenous Peoples, while likewise summoning support and encouragement for younger Indigenous generations.

As you are all well aware, the Papal Visit, including its preparation and logistics, came together on a very tight – some would say nearly impossible – timeline. A key player in making it all happen so efficiently and effectively was Archbishop Richard Smith, who accepted, at the request of the Permanent Council, to serve as the Chief Coordinator of the Papal Visit. There can be no question that the success of that extraordinary week owes much to the quality of his work with a talented team of volunteers who supported him. On behalf of us all, I wish to express deepest gratitude to Archbishop Smith, confident that Pope Francis’ visit to Canada will continue to bear new fruit in our ongoing efforts to walk with Indigenous Peoples on the path of truth, reconciliation, healing, and hope.

Indeed, Pope Francis’ visit to Canada and his apologies to Indigenous Peoples, along with our own apology issued as a college of Bishops last September, and our pledge of \$30-million over five years toward a new Indigenous Reconciliation Fund, do not mark the end of the Church’s journey of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Much more work remains to be done at the personal and pastoral level of encounter, where true and lasting relationships are forged and the foundations of a brighter future are firmly set in place.

2. Family and Life

Even in the midst this very busy and historic year for the Church in Canada, the CCCB continued to respond to a number of other pastoral needs and exigencies.

The new Standing Committee for Family and Life realized two national initiatives to support local celebrations of the World Meeting of Families with videos on the theme “Family Love: Vocation and Path to Holiness” and a National Rosary featuring families from across the country. Moreover, inspired by the *Amoris Laetitia* Family Year, the Office organized two national networking workshops for diocesan animators to discuss the joys and challenges that families face today and how the Church can better accompany and support them. Furthermore, the Office launched an open-access e-newsletter entitled *All Things New / Toutes choses nouvelles*. Published periodically, it includes written and audio reflections on family and life themes, as well as social media tools and resources for parishes and families.

3. Update on the Synodal Process

Last October, at an international celebration in St. Peter’s Square, the Holy Father opened the path that will culminate next October in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*.” Following the participation of the CCCB’s delegation in the opening ceremonies last October, each diocese in Canada embarked on the first phase of the synodal journey, which entailed listening sessions at the level of the local Church. This fed the preparation of synthesis reports by each of the four Regional Episcopal Assemblies. The four regional reports were then sent to the CCCB and were used to develop the national synthesis by the same delegates who had attended the opening ceremonies. The national synthesis was submitted to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops last August. The next and penultimate phase of the synodal journey will be the Continental Phase, on which the CCCB will embark in collaboration with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Finally, in view of the culminating event in 2023, we will be invited this week to elect delegates to represent the CCCB at the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod.

4. Other milestones

This past year also saw the implementation of new French version of the *Roman Missal* in French-language parishes across the country, as well as the publication and implementation of the French and English versions of the new National Program for Priestly Formation, replacing the provisional version used since 2018. In the coming year, we can anticipate a new CCCB resource to assist dioceses with the formation for the lay ministries of catechist, lector and acolyte in keeping with the Holy Father’s Apostolic Letters *Antiquum Ministerium* and *Spiritus Domini*.

Moreover, while the CCCB continues to monitor and respond to the possible further expansion of the eligibility criteria for euthanasia and assisted suicide, work has also continued simultaneously on the promotion of palliative care with the roll-out of the toolkit for Catholic parishes called “Horizons of Hope”, as well as with plans for a colloquium this fall in partnership with the Pontifical Academy for Life and a larger event in 2023.

A number of other projects and activities were completed over the last twelve months, as you can read in the various reports submitted to the members from the CCCB’s Commissions, Committees, and other advisory bodies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I should like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the Bishops who have supported the work of the CCCB in this crucial year. In a very particular way, I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the other members of the Executive Committee, among whom I must reserve a unique word of thanks for the Vice President, Bishop William McGrattan, who generously participated in the Bishops' Working Group on Pastoral Initiatives for Indigenous Peoples (BWG), and offered a great support to the newly constituted Board of Directors of the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund.

With that said, may our deliberations, discernment and decisions this week be inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Thank you.

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President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops