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## MEETING WITH MY BROTHER-BISHOPS OF CANADA

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From October 14 to 19 the Canadian Bishops held their general assembly in Cornwall, Ontario. Over 80 bishops were present; in Canada there are 133 bishops, of whom 70 are heads of dioceses, 15 are auxiliaries, and 48 are retired. It is very special to live these moments of fellowship and reflection, especially following the Atlantic bishops' intensive Roman visit. Needless to say that this occasions many meetings!

### A FULL PASTORAL YEAR

Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte gave a summary of the past few months' activities of the twelve national and sector commissions of the bishops' conference at both national and international levels: the Roman Synod on the Church in America and the publication of the Holy Father's Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in America*: such an event followed by such a document are bound to act as guideposts for future projects involving the Church throughout the Americas. An example of this was the extraordinary ongoing help provided by Development and Peace at the time of the terrible tragedies following Hurricane Mitch in Central America, the earthquake in Colombia, the aftermath of war in Kosovo and the tragedy in East Timor. And there were also the 500,000 signatures collected from Catholics demanding that the external debt of poor countries be reduced. Each of the four pastoral regions and national and sector commissions tabled very extensive reports.

### SOCIAL AFFAIRS

For my part, I carried out my last acts as chairman of the Bishops' Commission on Social Affairs, after four years of continued work. Rules provide that after the renewal of a term chairmanship of the commission must be handed over to someone else, and in my case to an anglophone bishop. It also was a wonderful coincidence that the end of my term also marked the Commission's fifth anniversary. We published a booklet titled *A Call to the Prophetic Tradition*. Commissioned to promote harmonious and meaningful relations between Church and society, the Bishops' Commission on Social Affairs is there first and foremost to help bishops deal with questions of justice, communion, and solidarity which are often complex and delicate. If the Commission's only response were to repeat time and again the simple words of the Saviour as recorded in Saint Matthew's Gospel, regarding the last judgement: "*I was hungry... I was thirsty, I was a stranger, a prisoner; I was sick... and you visited me*" or "*... you did not visit me.*" - this Commission would have exercised timely pastoral vigilance. A simple message, but one with terrible and weighty consequences. Considering the growing number of the newly-poor and newly-hungry, considering the situation of our fellow citizens who are sick, and of refugees, one could easily slide into despair. But because of Christ's victory over evil and even death, we are not afraid. May the Commission on Social Affairs continue to lead us along the road of evangelical solidarity and communion. When our lives as bishops draw to a close we shall be judged on the love we have had or not had for our needy and deprived brothers and sisters. This was my final message as chairman of this Commission.

### NEW CHALLENGES

At the request of my brother bishops, for the next two years I shall be on the Social Communications Commission, French Sector, and also represent the Bishops' Conference at the Development and Peace Commission. One of the main items on the agenda at this time is whether or not to create a French Catholic religious TV channel similar to the English "Vision TV." Father Pierre Babin's speech left us with three big

challenges: the training of seminarians, pastors, and pastoral agents in communications; ongoing permanent dialogue with media professionals; and the politics of electronic visibility. I shall also support the work of Development and Peace in responding to international challenges to development.

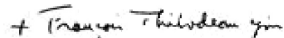
## **WITNESSES TO HOPE**

As it has been determined that the Tenth World Synod of Bishops will take place in the year 2000 and have as its topic the episcopal ministry, a full day was been set aside to reflect on the following theme: *"The Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for the Hope of the World."* This allowed us an excellent period of reflection on the future, as we looked at these signs of hope arising in our respective milieus, new signs of the times.

## **OTHER TOPICS**

Special attention was given to the Great Jubilee of the year 2000; in view of this, Monday, October 18 was for us a day of penance and forgiveness, during our assembly. Also discussed were the World Days of Youth of the years 2000 and 2002, which will probably be held in our country. We received a report of the Council for Reconciliation, Solidarity and Communion with the First Nations; here, too, we find signs of hope and healing. Christian education was another item on the agenda, especially regarding what is now happening in both Québec and Newfoundland. We also welcomed the new papal nuncio to Canada, Bishop Paolo Romeo who stated that he would be very happy to visit each of the dioceses of Canada. We also talked about vocation ministry, the situation of priests and religious, and pastoral readjustments in parishes.

In a few broad strokes of the pen, I have summarised of the contents of this 1999 bishops' assembly.



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