
CANADIAN BISHOPS' GENERAL MEETING



The Canadian bishops' general meeting was held in Cornwall, Ontario, October 12 to 17. Nearly 100 bishops attended, along with observers from other Christian Churches, associations, and organisations. This was my seventh bishops' meeting.

PERIOD OF SOLIDARITY AND HOPE

Beyond the discussions and presentation of reports and summaries of all kinds, there is the sense of fellowship in living a common mission. This is stated clearly in the theme of the next World Synod of Bishops to take place in the year 2001: «The bishop is a servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for the hope of the world.» The Church feels in its very being the tensions and oppositions afflicting humankind today and through its own members the Church seeks to be there to defend and promote human dignity to the fullest. At the threshold of the third millennium, the Church is aware that its message will be credible first of all through the witness of its works, and in a coherent inner logic. Church history is peopled with bishops who truly carried the mission confided to them as they committed themselves deeply to the courageous defence and promotion of human dignity.

SEEDS OF HOPE

Being sowers of hope means to carry out the mission entrusted to the Church. The fulness of episcopal ministry is for hope, a ministry for the life-giving experience of the People of God and of each of its members. For this, a bishop must direct his entire evangelising ministry to the service of hope, especially regarding youth and the deprived who are afflicted by poverty in its myriad forms. As servants of hope, bishops must maintain this hope strong in themselves since it is a gift of the Lord. Where there is no hope, pastoral action remains sterile. The secret of a bishop's mission lies in his dauntless hope. These thoughts come to mind at the approach of the Synod of Bishops on the mission of the Bishop in the Church and the world today.

FORWARD, WOMEN OF THE WORLD!

While there unfolded a historic world march of women in 150 countries, against injustice and poverty, I was joined in thought and prayer with my brother bishops to all these women, young and old, who insist on totally new human relations and novel and adequate social programmes. On Sunday, October 15, in the Ottawa Cathedral I joined in a concelebrated Mass presided by Archbishop Marcel Gervais of Ottawa. Hundreds of believing women were in attendance. The Canadian Religious Conference representative, Sister Anne-Marie Savoie, R.H.S.J., the Catholic Women's League of Canada, and the Canadian Organisation for Development and Peace all expressed their solidarity and support for such a cause and expressed the hope that never again should women have to march, to get justice for themselves. By the New Brunswick women's banner, I had the opportunity to meet with a large group of people who thirst and hunger for justice.

FORWARD, YOUTH OF THE WORLD!

Canadian dioceses are preparing to host the World Youth Days to be held in Toronto, in July of 2002. A recent CROP survey on the values espoused by our youths introduced us to Bishop Michel Dubost, C.J.M. bishop of Évry (France) and coordinator of the 1997 World Youth Days which were held in Paris. Laying much stock on mass meetings, an international flavour in an atmosphere of freedom and fellowship is very important to youth. Bishop Dubost pointed out the missionary role of the sacraments, the importance of visits to dioceses, and quiet periods. The W.Y.D. are a huge challenge, but one to which both the youth and the Churches can take up. A steering is already in place, and in the next few weeks our diocese will set in motion the mechanism required to welcome to our diocese, from the July 18 to 22, youth from across the world who will be coming here "on pilgrimage". With them, we shall then go to Toronto, where the Pope will be waiting, from July 23 to 28. I truly count on the generosity of our families to welcome these young people in our midst: we shall be living a truly momentous period in our diocesan life. Check with those who attended the 1997 days in Paris...

A HISTORIC MOMENT

Each year the Canadian bishops usually incite a member of our sister-churches to address the Conference, and this is how we have welcomed churchmen from the Anglican and Lutheran confessions and the Canadian Council of Churches, to address us. Every time we felt a great sense of joy at the progress of ecumenism. This year, though, was the turn of our elder brothers in the faith, the Jews. And so, on October 13 we had the pleasure of welcoming Rabbi Howard Joseph and Mr. Victor Goldbloom. They noted the great strides made in the last century, especially since Vatican Council II and the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. That same day, October 13, the Canadian bishops published a pastoral message on Canadian Catholic-Jewish relations, to reaffirm our common ties. *«Jesus' roots and the fact that he was truly a man of his time and milieu point out to the reality of the Incarnation, that is, the very sense of the history of salvation, as it has been revealed to us in the Bible. The more we are acquainted with the Jewish faith, its traditions and everyday reality, the more will we get to know Jesus.»*

FORWARD! CARRY ON YOUR MISSION!

As the full agenda of the Conference meeting unfolded I had the impression of hearing my brother bishops and the People of God with them, encourage the different speakers to carry on their mission. To the members of the twelve national and sector committees, to the members of the four episcopal regions and to the northern bishops, to the members of the committees and organisations such as Development and Peace, Life and Family, Society and Communication, and others, the Bishops' Conference, through its many motions of support and its recommendations repeatedly said: "Continue your work despite problems and difficulties of this evangelisation. Boldly take up the challenges. The happiness of your sisters and brothers and the cause of the Gospel depend on it."

NEW BRUNSWICK BISHOPS

The Conference was an occasion also for the New Brunswick bishops to get together and share on eventual pastoral projects, especially regarding the 2002 World Youth Days. On November 18 we shall meet together on this with the national moderator. Besides, we evaluated the historic Jubilee 2000 Miramichi meeting of New Brunswick clergy. Through these get-togethers may we better encounter Christ Jesus, the Living One who graces us with so many blessings. My brother bishops also gratefully accepted a copy of the English translation of my 1994-1995 pastoral messages, and the report on my pastoral visitations (1995-2000), "Keep Alive the Memory of Jesus".

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