



From A Bishop's Journal (614)

"Unless the Lord Build the House, They Labour in Vain Who Build it"

It was the words of Psalm 127, which we had sung together at the closing of the Canadian Bishops' Conference, that nourished my reflection all along the 670 kilometres from Cornwall, Ontario, to Edmundston, New Brunswick. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it." The work we are about must stimulate our faith and fill our hearts with gratitude. We are God's helpers, each time that we serve our brothers and sisters in the community and in society. As Saint Paul says: "We are God's co-workers, while you are his cultivation, his building... No one can lay a foundation other than the one that has been laid, namely Jesus Christ" (1Cor. 3:9, 11).

Demanding Year

Some eighty titular, auxiliary, and eastern rite bishops joined in fellowship at Cornwall for our annual plenary meeting. The outgoing president, Archbishop Brendan O'Brien of Saint John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, summarised the activity of the Conference. Special care was paid to the redefinition of marriage by the Canadian government, as well as other pastoral dimensions of social justice, the 2005 World Youth Day in Cologne, globalization, world poverty, stem cell research, techniques of human reproduction, ecumenical relations, liturgical research, and a number of issues relevant to the different national and regional episcopal commissions. As for me, I was re-elected to the francophone episcopal commission on social communications. Archbishop Luigi Ventura, the Apostolic Nuncio, talked about the historic moments of the death of Pope John Paul II and the election of Pope Benedict XVI, and the ties of affection that bind our Churches with the Church of Rome.

The Eucharist

During this year dedicated by Pope John Paul II to the Eucharist, twelve days before the World Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist (October 2-23, 2005), and a thousand days before the International Eucharistic Congress to be held at Québec City, June 15 to 22, 2008, on the theme, "The Eucharist, Gift of God for the Salvation of the World," it was reasonable that the Conference spend a full day on the marvel of the Eucharist. The Canadian Conference of Bishops is represented in Rome by Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Archbishop of Québec, and the confreres we elected: Archbishop Thomas Collins of Edmonton, Bishop Paul-André Durocher of Alexandria-Cornwall, Bishop

Clément Fecteau of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière, and Bishop Gerald Wiesner of Prince George. In connection with the theme of the World Synod, “The Eucharist, Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission,” they plan on dealing with the question of the participation of the baptised in the celebration of the Eucharist, of awaiting the Lord, of consecration and the Real Presence, of the thanksgiving of the baptised who have been personally chosen to serve in the Lord’s presence, to praise him and for the salvation of humankind.

Painful Report

The working group organised by the Canadian bishops to revise the *From Suffering to Hope* document published in 1992, concerning issues of sexual aggression against minors by members of the clergy, submitted a report giving priority to transparency, imputability, and secure environments. The bishops have several weeks to suggest amendments to the proposed protocol. In 1993, our diocese appointed an advisory committee to develop a protocol on the question. In the weeks to come we shall continue to work on measures to counter such deplorable situations affecting our children, whether in the areas of religious education or of youth movements.

The Culture of Life

Concerned with promoting a culture of life, our Conference published, in cooperation with the Catholic Organization for Life and Family, over 200,000 brochures on marriage and the family. Noteworthy are the following titles: *Marriage Matters*; *The Christian Family: Good News for the World*; and *World Peace: A Family Recipe!* For a free copy of these brochures, just write to COLF (2500 Don Reid Drive, Ottawa, ON K1H 2J2). It was with the same pastoral concern that the Canadian bishops unanimously adopted a motion signifying their firm opposition to Bill C-407 favouring euthanasia and assisted suicide: the adoption of such a project would be a dramatic failure of society, an unwise and inappropriate response to physical, affective, and moral suffering of people of all ages, especially the seriously handicapped and the terminally ill. The bishops stress the importance of palliative care and end-of-life care in the home. The culture of life, where everyone feels a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others until their natural death, should inspire our judicial system to a greater extent. In his address at the Salon des Aînés in Edmundston, on September 24, Archbishop Bertrand Blanchet talked about this important subject of life.

Other Points

There were over thirty items on the agenda, excluding the regional francophone and anglophone meetings: the restructuring of the Conference, the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, regional reports, reports of national and regional commissions, etc. However, the plenary meeting is not only discussions! It also includes many moments of prayer and fellowship where we can meet a little more intimately. We gather together each day for the eucharistic celebration and the liturgy of the hours; our Ukrainian brother bishops associate us with their own particular form of worship, and an ecumenical guest was invited to address the Conference and share in faith. The Conference really supports the bishops in their diocesan ministry; it is a channel for sharing about our ministry, the life

of the Church, and the important questions of the times. With our new president, Archbishop André Gaumond of Sherbrooke, we want to continue building the Church!

+ *François Thibodeau gm*

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Bishop of Edmundston

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