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## TOWARDS THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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The Canadian Bishops' General Assembly was held at the shrine of Our Lady of the Cape from October 16 to 21, this year, at its focus was on the third millennium. The Canadian Bishops Conference was established in 1943, and it is now composed of 134 bishops, of whom 74 are diocesan bishops, 18 auxiliary bishops, and 42 bishops emeriti.

### COMPASSION

At the very beginning of our assembly we extended our condolences to the people of St.-Bernard-de-Beauce, at which time the community funeral was being held for the 43 victims of the Éboulements tragedy. On the day of this terrible accident I had just arrived at the Eudist summer cottage when I started hearing the sound of a dozen or so ambulances speeding towards the site; I walked there, and when I arrived it was horrible to see all those bodies laid down along the railroad track. While the ambulance people were working hard at getting people out of the bus wreckage another priest and I prayed for all those involved in this catastrophe. In the midst of this tragedy, the St-Bernard Christian community gave us such an example of faith and solidarity.

### ELECTIONS

At the General Assembly's first session Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte, Archbishop of Montreal, was elected president of the Conference, and Bishop Gerald Wiesner, O.M.I., of Prince George, B.C., was elected vice-president. Were also appointed a new permanent council, a board of directors, six national commissions and six sector commissions. I shall continue on for the next two years to serve the Bishops Conference as chairman of the Bishops Commission on Social Affairs. We have much to do because of the everincreasing poverty of women and children, because Pope John Paul II wants to dedicate the year 1999 as the International Year of Charity, and because of the global economic trend and the ever-timely question of social justice for the native people.

### TOWARDS CHRISTIAN UNITY

During 1997 the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops became a full member of the Canadian Council of Churches. This is an ecumenical point of major importance. The Council of Churches is one of the most important media for Church unity in our country. According to Fr. Jean-Marie Tillard, O.P., church unity remains one of the major challenges to be met at the threshold of the third millennium. « *If we cannot achieve this visible unity,* » he declared, « *it is Christianity itself that will no longer appear to be credible.* » Dialogue continues unabated with the Anglicans, Lutherans, and Orthodox. Not only are we called to act together for greater justice but we must also pray together, study together some of the theological points, and forgive one another.

### SYNOD FOR THE AMERICAS

I have written to you a few times concerning the Synod of Bishops for the Americas, which is taking place in Rome from November 16 to December 12, under the theme of *The Encounter with Jesus Christ the Living One,*

*Way of Conversion, of Communion, and of Solidarity.* The fifteen Canadian participants shared with us what they wish to table at the Synod. The topics are varied but here, too, they focus on the family, a proper balance within the world economy, the culture of life, the environment, the situation of women, of native peoples and their spirituality, involvement in the media, ties with Latin America, solidarity in social justice, Christian communities and ministry, post-emigration catholicism, the ministry of priests and priestly vocations. We can be justly proud of our delegation; I am convinced that it has accepted the Synod's three objectives: promoting the new evangelization, reinforcing ties between dioceses, and a careful scrutiny of social justice.

#### **DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE**

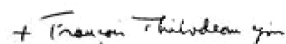
In recognizing the outstanding work of the Canadian Catholic Organisation of Development and Peace during its thirty years of existence, the bishops published a pastoral message reaffirming the two objectives that they had given the Organisation, mainly to contribute to the welfare of third-world countries and to educating our people in international cooperation.

#### **MANY SUBJECTS**

Wanting to pursue further the fight against poverty, the bishops often brought up the topic of the most needy in our midst, especially the children and youth, women, and the native people. We also studied the situation of religious education in a number of provinces, the different forms of sacramental preparation, liturgical celebration, and social communication. All in all, every general assembly gives us the opportunity to review as a church our pastoral responsibilities within a context of collegiality and mutual support, and in a climate of prayer. The Conference is really a service to the bishops as a group and to each one in particular, hence a service to the people we have been called to lead into the new millennium.

#### **BISHOP MARIE-ANTOINE ROY PRIZE**

I want to remind you that submissions for the 1997 Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy Prize must be made by November 15. If you know of groups, committees or associations whose vitality is well recognised in the areas of fellowship, celebration, education in the faith, or transformation of our milieu, do not hesitate to nominate them as a sign of gratitude. Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

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