
ENRICHING BISHOPS' MEETINGS



September and October are usually heavily scheduled due to the resuming of pastoral activities of the new pastoral year. This year has been enriched with a special meeting with the Bishop of Boma. I would like, here, to tell you about the meeting of the Atlantic Region bishops, the meeting of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the visit of Bishop Cyprien Mbuka, and the meeting of the Francophone bishops of the Maritimes with the major superiors.

WITH THE ATLANTIC REGION BISHOPS

On the evening of September 16 Bishop Douglas Crosby, O.M.I., of Labrador City-Schefferville and of St. George's, welcomed us to Corner Brook in northwestern Newfoundland. Founded one hundred years ago, the diocese of St. George's has a Catholic population of 32,000, and 28 priests. The first resident priest was Father Alexis Bélanger of Saint-Roch-des-Aulnaies in Québec. History has it that after his death Father Bélanger's body was disinterred by the people of Newfoundland who kept his heart, and the body was 'salted' for preservation and returned to his native parish in Québec for reburial there. It was in a cathedral filled to the gunwales that the fifteen bishops present celebrated the happy anniversary with the local population, amidst joy and thanksgiving. At their meeting, besides proceeding to the discernment of priests who could be appointed bishops in the years to come, the bishops recalled the main developments which took place in their respective dioceses in the areas of social ministry, liturgy, ecumenism, faith education, and social communications. Special attention was paid to the functioning of our marriage tribunal, so that it continue to minister to those with marriage problems who seek a declaration of nullity to their marriage. Archbishop Emeritus Francis Spence and Bishop Emeritus Gérard Dionne will evaluate the service which has been very active, these last twenty-five years. More than forty causes are heard each year, in Edmundston, and four thousand causes are heard nationally.

WITH THE BISHOP OF BOMA

Bishop Cyprien Mbuka, C.I.C.M., of Boma in the Democratic Republic of Congo, arrived in Halifax on Saturday, October 9. He came to meet three of his priests whom he sent in 2000 to help the Canadian Church. After visiting Fathers Edgar and Crépin in the Yarmouth Diocese, Bishop Cyprien came to Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska on Thursday, October 14. It was a great joy for Father Joseph to see his bishop again, and a great joy for the population of Rivière-Verte and Sainte-Anne to meet him. On Friday, October 15 I had the pleasure of welcoming Bishop Cyprien to the Diocesan Centre. These past five years I had had the pleasure of writing to him, but this time I could see him and enjoy the benefits of his presence among us. At a fraternal dinner I was able to officially announce that the Diocese of Boma was leaving Father Joseph in our diocese for another three years. Besides, the Bishop has committed to sending us two more priests of his diocese, one in 2005 and the other in 2006. The Diocese of Boma has a Catholic population of over one million, with 250 priests; there are now 86 seminarians preparing for ordination. I had the pleasure of introducing Bishop Cyprien to the Canadian bishops, at the annual Canadian bishops' conference. I praise God for the solidarity that exists between our Churches.

WITH THE BISHOPS OF CANADA

The plenary assembly of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops was held in Cornwall, Ontario, from October 19 to 23. Our Church actually comprises 134 bishops, 48 of whom are now retired, and 20 auxiliary bishops. There are 33 Anglophone and 32 Francophone dioceses in Canada. Presidency of the Conference is now with an Anglophone, Archbishop Brendan O'Brien of St. John's, Newfoundland; the vice president is a Francophone, Archbishop André Gaumond of Sherbrooke. The presidency-vice presidency alternate

between Anglophones and Francophones every two years. In an important speech, the Conference president gave a summary of the year's activities through its episcopal commissions, its offices, and committees. The Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Luigi Ventura, visited the Conference and shared with us the major concerns of the Holy See, especially during this Year of the Eucharist. To help us adequately prepare for the forthcoming synod of bishops being held in Rome in 2005, special workshops were held, and the bishops elected the four Canadian delegates and two substitutes to the synod. Each of the four Canadian pastoral regions gave a report of its activities: I proudly answered those bishops who wanted to know more about the success of our major financial campaign. Our Conference will continue to promote the recognition of marriage as the unique life-generating partnership of a man and a woman. The Bishops of Canada will continue to involve all the members of the Church in deepening their appreciation for marriage as the life-long commitment of a man and a woman, which is basic to the stability of society and family life, and necessary for the survival of society and culture. All Catholics and other Canadians are invited to continue calling on governments and society to protect marriage as the unique and stable partnership of a man and a woman and thus rightly deserving of specific and categorical legal recognition by the State. Many other subjects were discussed, especially the Conference finances, the publication of our liturgical books, Christian education, vocations, elections and the commitment of Catholics, follow-up to the document "From Suffering to Hope," justice and the environment, international solidarity, etc. Founded in 1943 and officially recognised in 1948, our Conference is a strong sign of collegiality and fraternity for all the bishops.

WITH THE ATLANTIC REGION MAJOR SUPERIORS

On Tuesday, November 2 I had the pleasure of welcoming my three Francophone brother bishops of the Atlantic Region: Archbishop André Richard, C.S.C., of Moncton; Bishop Valery Vienneau of Bathurst; and Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I., Auxiliary Bishop of Halifax, along with ten major superiors of the Francophone religious congregations working in our milieu. This annual meeting is held in one or the other of the Atlantic Francophone dioceses, and is filled with fellowship as we share about our pastoral projects, our joys, and our difficulties in implementing our priorities at the vocation level and in the areas of spirituality, the future of our religious communities, and our associates. It is a meeting that gives us the impetus to pursue together as Church, the work already started.

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