

## Introduction

### To our Brother Bishops

In the coming year, you will be called upon to pay your *ad limina* visit. This important pilgrimage will not only enable you to express the solidarity of the Canadian Church with its chief Shepherd, but to explain to him, as well as to his close collaborators, the situation of our Church. Aware of the importance of this event, and knowing that you are carrying the hope of our Church as well as its achievements, its challenges, and its vulnerability, your brothers and sisters in Religious Life wish to address this message to you.

Our primary intention is to express our creative fidelity to the Canadian Church; this will translate into the expression of our perception of its reality. May you understand from our message that we, women and men religious of Canada, wish to convey what we believe to be the principal highlights of our reality at this time. It is with great humility that we present to you a viewpoint that unequivocally urges an ever-increasing awareness of the issues surrounding the growth of the Church. Our message is based in particular on a survey addressed to congregational leaders throughout the country. The seriousness of the responses received, and the high degree of participation of our members, attest to the importance of this intervention.

We would like to share our concerns, our questions, our sufferings, as well as those of our brothers and sisters. We do this in a spirit of faith and communion, as People of God, faithful to Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

This is an uncommon step for us to take. We take it with the firm conviction that it is absolutely essential, particularly at this time in the history of the Church. We recognize the heavy burden you carry in shouldering the enormous challenges facing Catholics in our country. We are persuaded of the need to offer you our full support as you share these with the current successor to Peter. Our Church has seen great suffering and is being called upon, now more than ever, to carefully discern the signs of the times. In the history of the Church, religious life has often

been a bearer of light, particularly when it pointed to a need for transformation. In that same spirit we feel called upon to deliver this message to you.

Our hearts will be with you during your *ad limina* visit. Please convey to the Holy Father our resolve to fulfill the mission the Church has entrusted to us; rest assured of our solidarity. We ask the Holy Spirit to grant you the courage and determination that make of our faithfulness a dynamic process of constant transformation.

Throughout its history, and still today, the Church has abounded in remarkable people, witnesses to its vitality. It is in company with them that we address this message to you. As we do so, we reiterate our faith in the Living Christ!

On behalf of my religious sisters and brothers, I entrust to you that which lives in our hearts and nourishes our hope.

Alain Ambeault, c.s.v.,  
CRC President

# A GLANCE AT OUR CHURCH

## Preliminaries

Between April and June 2005, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) distributed a comprehensive survey to 230 religious congregations throughout the country. The purpose was to allow Canadian religious to express their **perception** of the Church in Canada.

To facilitate this intervention, an *ad hoc* Committee of the CRC targeted five significant aspects of Church reality:

1. The Church and the Search for Meaning
2. Community Life in the Church
3. Celebration in the Church
4. Solidarity within the Church
5. Prophecy in the Church

For each of the above, communities were asked to elaborate on their vision from three different angles:

- Point out the strengths and main achievements of our Church under the heading: "*We recognize...*"
- Point out any weaknesses or neglected aspects of our Church under the heading: "*We regret...*"
- Express our hopes for the Church under the heading: "*We hope...*"

More than 60% of congregations responded to the survey. The overall quality of the answers reflects the care that went into their work.

For this message, the CRC selected the perceptions that were mentioned with the most frequency or insistence or that reflected deep convictions, clearly rooted in their experience of religious life and life in the Church.

# 1. THE CHURCH AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

*In view of the fact that today's young people and adults engage in an active **search for meaning**, increasingly through diverging paths: cults, alternative religions, Eastern spiritualities (Zen prayer, etc.), parapsiritual experiments, clairvoyants and others...*

## *We recognize*

1. That our Church has made a concerted effort to take up the challenge of new evangelization and education in the Christian faith: rites of Christian initiation and faith development (for children and adults); sacramental preparation; catechumenate and programs for "new beginners"; the overwhelming participation of women in these programs.
2. The benefits of programs for introducing young people to the faith and the growth of adults in the Christian faith.
3. That our Church has recognized the need for renewing its catechetical pedagogy: reaching adults from their own experiences (andragogy) rather than the formal teaching of doctrine.
4. That our Church, in general, supports the formation of pastoral agents and catechists; that an increasing number of lay people – especially women – study theology, exegesis, and pastoral and spiritual care.
5. The benefits of a number of publications and of organizations that reflect on life and current events from a Christian perspective.
6. The participation of religious and lay people trained to provide moral support in specific situations: divorce, suicide, homelessness, drug addiction, terminal diseases (palliative care), persons searching for meaning.

7. That within our Church there are still young people who take part in specific movements seeking a Christian response to their search for meaning.
8. The importance given to spiritual and pastoral care and the contribution of religious congregations in this area.
9. The continuous efforts of several of our Bishops to adhere to and follow up the Vatican II perspective on the role of laity in the Church and Church life.
10. Particularly in English-speaking communities, the importance given to other symbols and expressions of faith, to interreligious dialogue and the spirituality of First Nations peoples.

### *We regret*

1. In terms of ethics and bioethics, the holding up of an ideal that leaves little room for advancement and progress; the defence of principles that do not reflect human experience (divorce, contraception, protection against AIDS, alleviation of suffering at the end of life).
2. The lack of receptiveness and openness to the concerns and values of younger generations; insufficient investment in human resources and the threat of financial disengagement of the Bishops from grassroots Catholic Action movements; the insufficient energy devoted to spiritual care, especially of young teenagers after their confirmation.
3. The lack of freedom of speech among Christians; in the universal Church, the quick condemnation of theologians; the perception of the Church by the media as having no meaningful role for humanity; the loss of confidence of a growing number of people (men, women and young people) in the Church as the carrier of a message that responds to their profound search for meaning.
4. The inadequate preparation of many ordained ministers to provide spiritual leadership to Christian communities and to build relationships with lay people based on mutual trust.

5. The inadequacy of priests' theological and exegetical formation, and of their preaching, for nourishing the faith of God's People and bringing valid answers to their search for meaning.
6. That our Church often gives priority to the reaffirmation of dogma and traditional morals rather than listening to the people's search for meaning and journeying alongside them in the discovery of their deeper motivations.
7. The lack of receptiveness, openness and initiative of our Church in helping people to cope with the new and difficult situations they face: separation, divorce, joint custody of children, domestic violence, new religious orientations chosen by family members, etc.
8. That our Bishops have not taken sufficient measures to provide adequate training and formation for members of the clergy called upon to work in multicultural environments: foreign language learning, cultural integration, interfaith approaches, collaborative and collegial leadership structures, and respect for the role of religious and lay people in the Church.
9. The legalistic image of the Catholic Church – and of our Canadian Church – its rigidity and its intransigent stands on sexual morals; its lack of openness regarding access to the sacraments for divorced and remarried Catholics, its lack of compassion for them; its unwelcoming attitude towards homosexuals: images and attitudes that represent a regression from the evangelical perspectives advocated by Vatican II.
10. The unconditional alignment of our Church with directives issued from Rome: the disappearance of the practice of general absolution in communal celebrations; the lack of consistency in regard to the role of women in the Church or to married priests...
11. The position of our Church that creates a disservice to the cause of ecumenism: a fear of dialogue with other Churches, other religions, other cultures and marginalized people.

## *We hope*

1. That, in accordance with the expressed desire of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, our Church will remain open to the world, more receptive to "*The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way*" (No. 1); will succeed in offering Good News that answers their search for meaning; will express more compassion and openness vis-à-vis people's suffering, leaving no one marginalized or excluded.
2. For greater autonomy of episcopal conferences; for an effective exercise of the episcopal collegial structure; for more consultation with the laity, taking into account their suggestions and proposals (for example, before choosing pastors or closing places of worship).
3. That the Bishops will further develop the necessary dialogue within our Church, with other Churches and with the different ethnocultural communities of our country; that we will allow ourselves to be transformed by this cultural exchange (cultural integration).
4. That a significant dialogue between Bishops, religious and lay people be maintained; that rites and symbols be more relevant to the world of today. That ecclesiastical language be more accessible to Christians, so that the Gospel message can reach them.
5. That our Church will offer Christians, especially young people, venues for revisiting and sharing experiences; for meaningful places of belonging, enabling them to express themselves, pray, share the Word of God; find new ways of answering their spiritual search.
6. That our Church will support initiatives capable of empowering Christian men and women to express their faith: through investment in faith sharing, base Christian communities, and other spiritual movements.

7. That our Church will further develop and promote ministry to marginalized and alienated Catholics, homosexuals, and "new beginners".
8. That ordained ministers arriving from other countries and other cultures will receive orientation for pastoral ministry specific to the Canadian Church and its culture before practicing their ministry here (leadership, public speaking, work with women, etc.: cultural integration).
9. For greater use of modern means of communication (TV, Internet) for effective outreach; enhanced dialogue with other religions; that the issues facing our Church be taken into account and discussed in Christian communities.
10. That an evangelization relevant to our cultural milieu be the first priority of our Church: for this purpose, that it work to develop a religious presence in all areas of Canadian life, reflecting the contribution of various religious, social and cultural traditions; that it remain open to diverse western and eastern spiritual practices; and that it be attentive to the ancestral wisdom and spirituality of First Nations peoples.
11. That, in terms of ethics and moral teaching, our Church will be open to current developments and perspectives of anthropological, social, and medical sciences, etc.; that in this field, Bishops not forget that lay people (men, women, couples, families etc.) form the People of God, acknowledging their competence and freedom of conscience. As Cardinal Josef Ratzinger pointed out in 1966: *"Conscience is the supreme and ultimate tribunal, even beyond the official church, and it must be obeyed."*
12. For a more pastoral approach for bishops and ordained ministers: an approach based on the concept that all members of the People of God form a pilgrim people, walking together and sharing their Christian journey for the good of all.
13. That the primacy of the person be effectively recognized and promoted within our Church and that any formation of conscience be carried out with respect for the individual's fundamental freedom.

## 2. COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE CHURCH

*Strong in our conviction that community life in the Church is expressed, among other things, by the vitality of Christian communities, the integration of the new models of Church life, participation in the exercise of collegiality and the full recognition of the place of women...*

### *We recognize*

1. That Church communities find their source, their centre and their summit in the study and celebration of the Word of God. (Eucharist). (Vatican II Sacr. Liturg. No. 10 and following).
2. The importance of Christian communities for countering the isolation of people and the lack of social support for individuals and families.
3. The efforts made by several Bishops to meet, listen to and accommodate the suggestions of the laity in the parish restructuring process.
4. That in the process of this restructuring, generous efforts were made to invent new processes and/or forms of regrouping adapted to decreasing church practice: merging into pastoral units or sectors; collaboration between priests and lay people; diversification and restructuring of pastoral services.
5. That the vitality of these communal gatherings is proportional to the commitment of lay people to create or strengthen the fabric of community within these new structures.
6. That in some dioceses there is greater involvement of religious and lay people, particularly of women, in ministry, catechesis and administration.
7. The increasing openness to forms of expression of shared responsibility: the place given to lay men and women and to religious in diocesan services, parish councils and committees, etc.

8. The essential role of small grassroots communities as a process for building Christian communities and giving them roots.

*We regret*

1. That often our hierarchical Church, far from the progressive statements and proposals of the Vatican II Council, still exerts a clerical, minimally synodic and minimally collegial power in leading the People of God.
2. The clear loss of autonomy of the Bishops and the CCCB in making decisions related to the Church in Canada, ignoring or not taking into account its specific reality.
3. The fact that not enough pastors seek the collaboration of qualified lay people, entrusting to women only subordinate tasks; the fact that lay and religious men and women are involved to such a small extent in the governance of their Christian community.
4. The absence of young people, young couples and a growing number of women in the life of the Church: its future, its projects, its spiritual, liturgical and sacramental life do not hold much interest for them anymore.
5. That the ministerial role of women in our Church does not reflect their numerical importance in communities; that they do not have access to various decision-making processes or to all aspects of Church ministry;
6. That the importance given to the unmarried male clergy takes precedence over the right of the People of God to celebrate the Eucharist; the emphasis placed on the solely hierarchical structure of the Church, to the detriment of the exercise of our baptism into the priesthood of the laity.
7. Certain abuses of power by pastors which result in limiting the pastoral responsibilities available to lay people, particularly to women.

8. That the restructuring of parishes into pastoral units or sectors often favour large, anonymous gatherings, especially in rural areas, to the detriment of close relationships in the community and with their pastors, of a sense of belonging to the Church and, in some cases, of community vitality.
9. That the restructuring of parishes requires priests to race around for Sunday masses, and entails a reduction in their listening and attendance time, as well as administrative overload which can often prevail over evangelization.

### *We hope*

1. Beyond the practice of Sundays and holy days, for the implementation of new ways of revitalizing Christian communities (grassroots communities, etc.)
2. That our Church be a true collegial Church, where Bishops, informed of the needs of their people, may, in solidarity with the Vatican and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, enjoy autonomy in their dioceses; and that this autonomy be fully respected by Roman authorities.
3. That our Bishops create opportunities for discussion and discernment; engaging in the questions and problematic situations raised in today's society: separated families, reconstituted families, domestic violence, the place of women in the Church, marriage between persons of the same sex, assisted suicide, etc.
4. For more openness, dialogue, mutual recognition; for synergy in joint projects at the pastoral unit level (merged parishes).
5. That, in a continual search for truth, the issues related to ordained ministry be open for discussion: ordination of married men, women, and "Elders" in First Nations communities. That Christian communities discern the signs that would assist them in recognizing the type of leaders they will require in the near future.

6. That our Church, a pilgrim community of sinners, agree to engage in respectful dialogue without arrogance, allowing for plurality of opinions and a reasonable level of disagreement; that it be attentive to what its members are experiencing. That it find the means of facilitating the full participation of people currently alienated from the Church.
7. That our Bishops risk innovative ways to ensure the sacramental life of Christian communities, today and tomorrow. *For instance:* appropriate theological preparation of lay people who demonstrate some aptitude for the ministry; optional celibacy for clergy; greater involvement of lay people in decision-making and, ultimately, exploring the ordination of women.
8. For the practice of joint responsibility for lay people in decisions that concern them, and for effective consultation regarding the implementation of these decisions.
9. That our Church support greater sharing of human and financial resources between the dioceses of the North and South, as well as between Christian communities in a single diocese.
10. That our Church be more open to men and women who are going through a failed marriage; to reconstituted families, aware of the fact that God's mercy and tenderness towards people mean more than strict obedience to canonical dictates.
11. That, before "incardinating" ordained ministers coming from other countries and other cultures, we make the necessary efforts to give the people in our own milieu access to these ministries.

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### 3. CELEBRATION IN THE CHURCH

*When we speak of Church celebrations, we are thinking specifically of the practice of the sacraments, in the sense of liturgical creativity and the evolution of rites, in the exercise of various ministries...*

#### *We recognize*

1. The fundamental importance of liturgy in Christian life: *"Liturgy is the summit (...) also the fount"* of Christian life. (Vatican II, Sacr. Lit. No. 10); the need for words and rites illuminating our life and behaviours; the importance of considering the liturgy as a whole: meaning, ritual, rhythm, speech/gesture combinations, celebrants.
2. The quality of resources used by liturgical committees for the preparation of celebrations. That in some Christian communities, these committees demonstrate liturgical creativity in bringing life and meaning to their celebrations: words, texts and songs, symbolic gestures and evocations of significant events experienced by community members.
3. In a large number of our Christian communities, the implementation of adequate preparation for the sacraments of baptism and marriage, and of young people for the sacraments of reconciliation, communion and confirmation; that greater flexibility should be offered to lay people responsible for the preparation of these sacraments: adapted rites, evocative symbols...
4. That in several Christian communities religious women and men have contributed greatly to the quality of liturgical celebrations: presentation, appropriate comments, expressions of creativity, inclusive language, etc.
5. That communal celebrations of reconciliation with general absolution are the occasion of a beautiful catechesis on the mercy of God.

6. The importance of multiculturalism in our liturgical celebrations, particularly in environments where First Nations people live.
7. The efforts of our Church to renew liturgical resources: missals and rituals, music and songs, translation of texts.
8. Some local initiatives that tend to introduce inclusive language into liturgical celebrations.

### *We regret*

1. The maintenance of a number of strict liturgical laws that still constitute barriers to the full participation of lay people in liturgical celebrations; the little place granted to women in the Eucharistic liturgy. The rigidity of the directives of Roman documents: the insistence on the observance of rules rather than taking into account the life experiences of participants.
2. The resistance of efforts to translate and update liturgical texts (which, along with the use of patriarchal language, help reinforce feelings of exclusion among women in our Church). The fact that women are still ignored in our Church, not only in the decision-making process, but also in the "exclusive" language used by the Church.
3. The prohibition, by Roman authorities, from holding communal celebrations of penance with general absolution despite the fact that the People of God had expressed their positive support for this practice.
4. The exclusion from Eucharistic communion of divorced people in new relationships.
5. In a large number of Christian communities, the lack of preparation of liturgical celebrations, lack of cultural integration of the liturgy and little adaptation to the various audiences.

6. The growing number of liturgical celebrations presided by priests who are blasé or who have little or no liturgical or exegetic formation: resulting in poor commentaries and homilies that fail to nourish the faith of those in attendance! Lack of formation in liturgy of a large number of presiding celebrants.
7. Overall, in our sacramental liturgies, the persistence of rites that do not find an echo in participants' experience; that certain rites of passage (baptisms, marriages, funerals), are often wasted opportunities to reconnect with alienated parishioners.
8. That there are few places where young people can gather to celebrate in a way that gives meaning to their lives.
9. That too many diocesan synods created legitimate expectations that were not followed up on.

### *We hope*

1. That, in our Church, the meaning of *baptismal priesthood* of the faithful will be fully recognized and developed; that lay ministries be established, giving expression to full equality among women and men.
2. For a revision of liturgical rites, the encouragement of initiatives respecting the sacred nature of the liturgy with more reference to people's experience; a liturgy that is closely grounded in life.
3. That Christian rituals and the expression of faith in liturgical celebrations will interact (be in symbiosis) with people's life experiences, language and culture. That festive celebrations will mark the various journeys of faith or deepening of one's life experiences.
4. That our Church will be more open to various ritual and cultural aspects of other Churches.

5. In celebrations of funerals and marriages, that greater attention be paid to people who have given up their religious practice; that pastors take special care with rites of passage: baptism, confirmation, marriage, funerals; significant steps in people's journey.
6. That the celebration of funerals and marriages (without Holy Communion) will be entrusted to qualified lay people (men and women) who are recognized as such in the community: pastoral workers, catechists, retired teachers, etc.
7. That marginalized, or divorced and remarried Catholics, be made welcome in liturgical celebrations; for the full participation of members of other Churches in celebrations.
8. That our Bishops intervene with Roman authorities to seek the recognition and restoration of the practice of general absolution, at the very least during high times of the liturgical year: Advent and Lent.
9. That our Church will maintain and intensify its presence in ecumenical and inter-faith celebrations.
10. That concrete projects will be implemented in response to expectations created at diocesan synods.

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## 4. SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE CHURCH

*Solidarity in the Church, in our opinion, refers to elements such as: social justice, the transformation of society, gender equality, the phenomenon of marginalization, impoverishment and the support of Third World Churches...*

### *We recognize*

1. That our Church, through publications by the Bishops, has developed a greater awareness for humanitarian causes and the need for solidarity by taking a stand for social justice. With its support for *Development and Peace*, it has educated people to the cause of the Third World and developing countries.
2. Relevant statements by the Canadian Bishops to denounce inequalities and to promote ways of transforming society.
3. The concerted efforts of our Church with its ecumenical partners and various charitable organizations in specific actions in favour of the poor and of those who face emergencies (wars, famines, natural disasters).
4. That many religious women and men have been working in solidarity with our lay Christian communities in the work of social action.
5. The action of religious congregations in seeking alternative economic systems and the defence of justice.
6. The effective contribution of religious communities, in terms of human and financial resources, in poor or grassroots contexts, here with First Nations peoples and in Third World countries (missionary work for First Nations, promotion of human rights, solidarity with the poor).

7. The presence and pastoral action of our Church in other places and sectors of society: schools, hospitals, prisons; with marginalized people, alienated people, migrants (host communities).
8. The charity and generosity displayed by our Christian communities in responding to the urgent needs of its members: mutual support services, youth in distress, single-parent families, aid to the poor, short-term assistance services, fundraising, local support during trying times (catastrophes, job losses, fatalities).

*We regret*

1. That our informed comments on vital social issues are sometimes couched in obscure language, with the result that Christians are not well-informed on the positions and standpoints of our Church.
2. The fact that Christian communities are largely unaware of the Church's social doctrine and that pastors do not follow through on the implementation of the Bishops' documents on social justice.
3. An often intransigent attitude of the universal Church and the Canadian Church that contributes to the creation of marginalized constituencies (women, divorced and remarried Catholics, homosexuals).
4. The lack of equality in our Church between men and women, between ordained ministers, religious, and lay men and women.
5. That our Church is not ready to carry out a social analysis of its organizational structures.
6. That the media give more coverage to the Church's statements on sexual issues (abortion, contraception, homosexuality) than on justice issues (wars, the environment, AIDS, impoverishment of social groups, violence against women, refugees threatened with expulsion, etc.)

7. The erosion of financial support to *Development and Peace* in some dioceses and to *Kairos* at the national level.

### *We hope*

1. That our pastors, following the example of the Good Shepherd, will welcome all marginalized persons (women, divorced and remarried Catholics, homosexuals, etc.).
2. That our Church structures will favour the need for communion over power.
3. That members or groups within the Church who work towards the transformation of society will be recognized, encouraged and promoted.
4. That the Canadian Church will continue to promote justice through justice education and efforts for systemic change rather than solely through charitable appeals.
5. That our Church will position itself closer to the major issues of the world: impoverishment, inequalities, rights and roles of women, defence of the disenfranchised, respect for the environment, and the safeguarding of humanity; that it will open paths that lead to the elimination of inequalities: between rich and poor, between social classes, between men and women.
6. That a broader dialogue and a true partnership will be established between Christian communities and social organizations and groups involved in the struggle for humanitarian causes and working with suffering humanity.

*Just as it is in the world's interest to acknowledge the Church as a social reality and a driving force in history, so too the Church is not unaware how much it has profited from the history and development of mankind. (Gaudium and Spes No. 44)*

7. That the social doctrine of the Church will be better known in Christian communities, and that local Bishops will ensure that Church publications on the subject gain more recognition.
8. That the solidarity between the Church and the First Nations be maintained so that they receive support with their social, cultural, spiritual, and economic challenges.

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## 5. PROPHECY IN THE CHURCH

*Within this essential dimension of the Church, we include prophetic events, statements, and actions in the name of the Gospel. We also include respect for initiatives, the ministry of vocation promotion and evangelical radicalism...*

### *We recognize*

1. That by their baptism, Christians, and particularly religious, are called to question society and the Church.
2. That religious congregations have a more visible prophetic presence when they involve themselves with the vulnerable and abandoned, the excluded, disinherited or exploited peoples; their contribution in creating favourable conditions for reconciliation and their involvement in eliminating all forms of violence, especially those committed against women and children (trafficking) is good news.
3. The prophetic boldness of our Church in pointing out certain human, social and evangelical values even though its intervention is not always well-received by the media and the larger community.
4. That, in the name of faith, our Church makes its voice heard by denouncing inequities, promoting evangelical values, developing Christian attitudes in terms of ethics and bioethics, and opting in favour of the environment.
5. That our Church has a prophetic voice when it takes its stance with the poor, with the excluded, for life, peace and human rights; when it issues statements on labour, ecology, social injustice, the integrity of human life, and respect for Creation.

6. The prophetic role of some centres for formation and growth and of periodicals which open up a diversity of experiences and provide opportunities for social analysis, freedom of speech, and environmental responsibility.
7. That the Holy Spirit is active and present in the preferential option for the poor, ecumenism, feminism, pacifist movements and non-violence.
8. That the process in place for seeking forgiveness and reconciliation of the Canadian Church and of the universal Church are of a prophetic nature.
9. The real challenge to our Church of living in a pluralistic world and a post-modern culture.

### *We regret*

1. The timidity of the prophetic voice of the Canadian Church: fear of change, lack of encouragement of various initiatives by lay people in our Christian contexts, clinging to old and obsolete traditions.
2. The reticence of Bishops to express what could be perceived as contradicting or softening Rome's discourse.
3. In our ecclesiastical environments, the continued use of language and actions that perpetuate a clerical mentality.
4. The eclipse or retreat of major inroads of the Vatican II Council, on collegial structure and collegiality, as proposed and adopted at that Council; the lack of recognition of the prophetic role of lay men and women in the Church.
5. The absence of a true consideration of the decline of religious and priestly vocations; lack of new initiatives in this area.
6. The hesitation of our Church to partner with other organizations, secular or civil, in humanitarian, social, and environmental causes.

7. That our Church has so little influence in the great social debates, because of its conservatism and that of Rome which it supports, and also because it does not accept any dissent, even responsible dissent. It stifles its prophets...

### *We hope*

1. That the universal Church, to be prophetic, recover the spirit of Vatican II and adopt the outlook expressed in the major documents of the Council. That the Canadian Church will influence the universal Church to return to the pastoral vision of Vatican II; that the structures necessary for the local Church to take hold of and deepen these objectives be put in place.
2. For a serious search for truth in our Church: a place for dialogue, of respect for diverse theologies, for initiatives to be taken by groups of Christian men and women and for openness to post-modern realities which convey more than just negative values.
3. That our Church, to be prophetic, manifest first and foremost its solidarity with the oppressed, becoming increasingly the "Servant of the poor", a title that was bestowed upon it by the Vatican II Council. (L.G.)
4. That our Church, to be prophetic, become a Church whose pastors primarily carry the sufferings, the struggles and the challenges of others, the littlest among the People of God, because this is the breeding ground wherein the Gospel takes root: a Church based on listening, respect, dialogue, and the humble search for truth.
5. That our Church will speak out on current issues such as oppression, overconsumption, pollution, and the need for dialogue between cultures and other religions.
6. That the Canadian Church will re-examine its entire means of social communications so as to shed light on and express in common terms some of the major issues of the universal Church.

7. That dialogue will be encouraged and promoted in our Church, as much on the major issues of faith, religious practice and means of social action as on controversial issues such as the ordination of women and married men, and same-sex marriage.
8. That our Canadian Church, to be prophetic and faithful to its history, will focus more on developing close bonds with the artistic and intellectual world.
9. That our Church will develop a prophetic theology and resources for ethical reflection; that it will promote more education and leadership training for ordained ministers and lay men and women.

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## CONCLUSION

Dear Bishops, our message is meant to convey our profound solidarity with you during your forthcoming *ad limina* visit. It also gives voice to the strong bonds that exist between us and our people. It expresses the perception of our reality as Church, and permits numerous consecrated women and men who love the Church to express themselves freely. They want to see it ever more alive and faithful to the mission entrusted to it by Christ Jesus. Even if at first some of our statements may be difficult to receive, we assure you that it is not our intention to judge your actions, but to call us all to that same transformation. It is the only true way to be faithful to the Gospel. We religious are among the first to be called to greater honesty in our attitudes, statements, and actions. As *Lumen Gentium* challenges us: "*The Church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.*" (No. 8). The humility with which this message is offered finds its source and strength in the call to transformation. It touches us to the very core.

In your review of the message you will surely have noticed that some elements appear more than once. This was done consciously; we chose to restate them under various headings so as to reflect the urgency as well as the nuances with which they were submitted. Having them appear under one dimension or another offers a special flavour to their significance. At the same time, certain points may seem contradictory: they appear simultaneously under "we recognize", "we regret" and "we hope". Our intent was to highlight certain noteworthy pastoral practices in some instances, to deplore their absence elsewhere and to dare to hope for their promotion throughout the Church in Canada.

To the same Spirit we invited to accompany you during your pilgrimage to the throne of Peter, we now plead on our own behalf. May we, with courage and determination, form a Church of faithful men and women animated by the constant call and process of conversion.

Finally, we want to reiterate our desire to walk beside you in the building up of the Canadian Church. In whatever diocese Religious may be found, there is a need to release the prophetic charism to which their vocation calls them. To that end, they need your involvement and your support, your faith and your trust in them. Our love for the Church and the mission entrusted to us encourages us to go to the very frontiers of the mission, where the sufferings and the wounds of humanity are most vivid. The depths of their sentiments and the manner in which they express them challenge us as women and men of the Gospel!

Dear brother Bishops, the message we convey is meant to express our belief that hope always finds its roots in the strengths and weaknesses of a humanity in search of truth. In closing, we recognize the responsibility that falls to us as we relay our message, and reaffirm our determination to assume it with conviction.

Together for a reconciled world!

The Canadian Religious Conference