

8 December 2011
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Dear brother Bishops,

During our October 2011 Plenary Assembly, we agreed as the Bishops of Canada on a number of elements to serve as a common basis for ongoing diocesan pastoral plans for life and family. We also decided that during 2012 each of our dioceses would start looking at ways to prepare for and gradually implement its own pastoral plan.

Our decisions were made in the light of our reflections together over the past two years, and the recommendations of the *Ad hoc* Committee for Life and Family. Following the practice of our Conference, these decisions by the Plenary were then forwarded last week to our Permanent Council for it to review and to consider the various practical questions involved.

By this letter, which will shortly be made public, I am happy to confirm that we will proceed, as we had all agreed, with the elements of the pastoral plan for 2013 and for a preparatory year during 2012. The proposed elements of the pastoral plan, and possible suggestions for the preparatory year are, of course, subject to your own decisions as Bishops in your respective dioceses. It will be for you to decide how to adapt the elements of the plan to your own evolving pastoral needs, diocesan resources, and local priorities.

Our then President Bishop Pierre Morissette in his report to our October Plenary Assembly reminded us that the family is closely linked to the New Evangelization, since it is the “most basic ‘school’ for us to teach the values of justice, peace and reconciliation.” This relationship of the family with the New Evangelization was also recently made by the Holy Father:

... [T]he New Evangelization is inseparable from the Christian family. The family is the Church’s ‘path’, because it is a ‘human place’ in which we encounter Christ. ... The family founded on the Sacrament of Marriage is an individual microcosm of the Church, a community which is saved and saves, which is evangelized and evangelizes. Like the Church, the family is called to live, irradiate and express to the world the love and presence of Christ. (Address to the Plenary

Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family, 1 December 2011)

I now invite each of you to begin preparations for the pastoral plan and for implementing the various elements. At the same time, I also wish to express the gratitude of our Conference to the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF). It has agreed to assist in developing any CCCB resources needed for the pastoral plan and its implementation. All of us are most thankful to the Knights of Columbus for their generous support in helping the Bishops of Canada to fund COLF and support its own mandate of promoting life and family.

The Permanent Council has decided that the General Secretary of our Conference will be responsible for coordinating, reviewing and sending you information and possible resources to assist you in your respective pastoral plans for life and family and for the proposed preparatory year. You will be hearing more on these details from the General Secretary over the coming days and months. The Permanent Council also agreed to thank the members and staff of the *Ad hoc*

Committee for Life and Family for their work, and to bring the

Ad hoc

Committee to a close, now that its final recommendations have been presented.

The season of Advent, and today's Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, help us deepen our appreciation and understanding of what it means that Our Lord is the Son of God and the son of Mary. May his Nativity and the example of the Holy Family inspire and guide each of us in our own diocesan preparations for this pastoral plan for life and family.

Fraternally in Our Lord,

+ Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton
President
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

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