

Bishops grapple with 'reshaping' of Canada's moral fabric

Religious persecution, the continuing fallout from past sexual abuse, reconciliation with First Nations and an ongoing commitment to "our missionary zeal" were among the grand themes that emerged at the start of the annual plenary meetings of [Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops](#).

CCCB President Bishop Lionel Gendron of Saint-Jean-Longueuil stressed that although Canada is seen around the world as setting a good example on human rights, recent government policies at all levels and recent court rulings "have shown contempt for those moral beliefs of Christians which run counter to the thrust of other, ostensibly more progressive, social views."

"The moral fabric of our country is well in the process of being reshaped," Bishop Gendron said, citing the [Ontario Court of Appeal which upheld a decision that overrides conscientious objections](#) in medicine and require doctors to make effective referrals for euthanasia or abortion.

"While moral setbacks such as these are reason for deep concern, it remains important as faith leaders to make our voices heard," he said. "We all recognize the need to gain a better grasp of the philosophical undercurrents which give almost exclusive authority to a post-Christian worldview."

"When the governments and courts of this land lead their citizens down morally erroneous paths, it is incumbent on us as shepherds in Canada to provide our flock with additional spiritual and intellectual resources."

Bishop Gendron made the comments Sept. 23 at the Canadian bishops' annual meeting which continues for the next four days.

While he lamented the moral reshaping underway, he did not shy away from addressing two large issues that the Catholic Church is dealing with – past sexual abuse of the young and reconciliation with Canada's First Nations.

"Perhaps nothing has hurt our credibility as teachers and witnesses of the Gospel more than sexual abuse committed by clergy, religious and laity, and its devastating effects on victims, their families and ecclesial communities, which we continue to feel deeply," Bishop Gendron said in his president's report during the first session of the Plenary Assembly.

"The CCCB and individual bishops in their respective dioceses have taken up this challenge and initiative with seriousness of purpose."

Gendron added that as a follow-up to last year's Plenary Assembly, a Standing Committee for Responsible Ministry and the Protection of Minors and Adults has been established and will be meeting in a few months.

The 2018 CCCB document [Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse](#), published last October, was to be the focus of further discussion at the 2019 conference to examine and hear about the initiatives being undertaken to further protect minors.

Some critics of the Church's handling of the abuse of minors met with some Church leaders Sept. 21 before the CCCB conference started.

Winnipeg Archbishop Richard Gagnon confirmed at a press conference. However, he would not go into the details of that meeting. He did say the issue will be discussed in more detail among the bishops as the conference continues through to Sept. 27.

Bishop Gendron outlined the ways in which the Church can further initiatives and new relationships with Indigenous peoples.

"We were recently summoned to this task, confronted with the stories of survivors deeply affected and even traumatized by the sins and sometimes misguided ways of those priests and religious who ran the former Indian Residential Schools on behalf of the government," he said.

Issues related to reconciliation with First Nations were discussed over the course of the conference, with an emphasis on action and not just words.

"It must go beyond superficial offerings," Bishop Gendron said. "It must touch Indigenous peoples and make a real difference in their communities and lives."

Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith noted that an ad hoc committee is developing kits focused on alleviating suffering through palliative care. The kits will hopefully be ready by 2021.

The kits, which are expected to include three- to five-minute videos as well as other written tools, are to be used as resources by parishes and are part of a collaborative effort of the CCCB and other Catholic institutions and social agencies.

It is expected that once the resource kits are developed as parish resources, similar initiatives will be undertaken to develop educational resources about palliative care for use in schools and for health-care personnel.

One of the issues discussed in detail at the CCCB conference is the Extraordinary Missionary Month, with the theme "Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on a Mission in the World" which included a keynote address by Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, president of the [Pontifical Mission Societies](#).

"Our missionary zeal must extend across this vast land from sea to sea to sea," Bishop Gendron said of evangelization in the Canadian context and within the Church as a whole both at home and abroad.