

# Red Wednesday calls Catholics to hear 'cry' of persecuted Christians worldwide

Catholics in Canada are being called upon this Wednesday to offer spiritual and material support to other Christians being persecuted around the world.

The Conference of Canadian Catholic Bishops, through its Peace and Justice Commission and in association with Aid to the Church in Need Canada, is raising awareness about the persecution of Christians globally.

In a new document entitled *In His Name: Statement on the Persecution of Christians*, the CCCB says the issue is of particular concern in areas where Christians are a clear minority.

Although persecution of Christians has always been an ongoing concern, the timing is right for the CCCB statement.

Communications coordinator Lisa Gall said the statement is intended to draw attention to Red Wednesday, Nov. 20, dedicated to combating persecution of Christians.

Aid to the Church in Need Canada is calling on parishes to do what they can on Red Wednesday to foster prayers and support for the more than 300 million people around the world who are "touched by persecution to varying degrees."

Aid to the Church in Need Canada suggested Masses, vigils, and Rosaries as appropriate ways to pray for persecuted Christians."

The CCCB document said, "persecution is defined as 'a program or campaign to exterminate, drive away, or subjugate people based on their membership in a religious, ethnic, social, or racial group.'"

"It would be tempting to imagine that such actions no longer occur today. However, sometimes a particular idea can push persons or groups to fanaticism, leading to campaigns to 'exterminate, drive away, or subjugate' those who do not share these ideals. This fanaticism can take on religious, political, or ethnic expressions," the CCCB statement said.

"In the news today there is no shortage of such events. Faced with this exclusivist way of thinking, religious freedom is suppressed. This statement is addressed to the Catholic faithful in Canada who, owing to the relative lack of religious persecution in our country, may not be concerned with this phenomenon."

The CCCB said the persecution of Christians is more relevant than ever.

“The idea may conjure up in our minds images of Christians being thrown to the lions, and it is true that there have been persecutions from the very beginning of Christianity. Yet the pace of persecution has accelerated such that the 20th century saw more persecuted Christians and martyrs than the 19 preceding centuries combined. Today, no fewer than 327 million Christians live in countries marked by religious persecution.”

The statement said persecution of Christians can take many different forms, such as intolerance where Christians are portrayed negatively in the media and in social circles, discrimination in which Christians are treated differently than others and to the most extreme forms of persecution that can even lead to death.

“We see this when Christians are singled out for arrest or detention, sent to work camps, tortured, and even killed,” the CCCB said.

“In its most extreme form – where it is directed toward completely eradicating Christians from a region – we can even speak of genocide.

According to Aid to the Church in Need, what took place in Iraq in 2014 was a genocide against Christians as well as Yazidis,” the CCCB said.

There are three main culprits behind the persecution of Christians, according to the CCCB report: governments (communist or authoritarian), other religious groups such as radical Islam, and ultra-nationalist movements which demand that their country be of only one religion.

But while millions of Christians around the globe face varying degrees of persecution for their perceived crime of having faith in Christ, there is also hope because “where there is persecution, there is often a strong and vigorous faith,” the CCCB said.

The CCCB said that while the environment for Christians in Canada is a lot different than for others Christians around the globe, there are still issues to be addressed such as how Christian viewpoints are often marginalized when it comes to public debate. For example, issues that are important to many Christians were considered controversial in October’s federal election campaign.

Being knowledgeable about the condition of persecuted Christians can help us to change their reality; we can become a voice for those who suffer in silence,” the CCCB statement concludes.

“We can make their cry heard, a cry that is also a call to solidarity with all people. Finally, our persecuted brothers and sisters count on our help in navigating their trials. In this regard, we can bring them pastoral and material assistance. Pastoral assistance is very important, since very often

their faith is the source of their courage and is their only hope.

“Material assistance does not solve the problem of discrimination or persecution, but it allows persecuted Christians to survive.