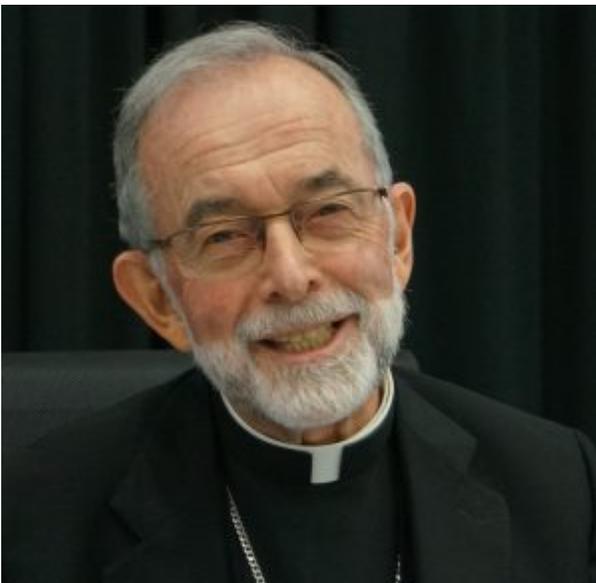


Sexual abuse crisis a 'purifying fire' for the Church says head of Canada's bishops

The sexual abuse crisis is like a fire purifying the Church, Bishop Lionel Gendron of Saint-Jean-Longueuil told the annual gathering of Canada's Catholic Bishops.

"The fire burning in the Church today may appear to be out of our control and in some cases consuming that which we hold dear," said Bishop Gendron, president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (Cccb) to the more than 80 bishops and eparchs gathered from across Canada. "But as it blazes with brightness, it is cleansing and purifying, and thereby casting light on things until now been hidden in darkness."

Last month a grand jury report in Pennsylvania identified at least 1,000 children who were raped in Catholic places of worship, in schools, and in diocesan owned vehicles, and were "groomed" through diocesan programs and retreats so they could be molested. The report heard accounts of clergy sex abuse said to have taken place in six dioceses in the state over 70 years



Bishop Lionel Gendron

Bishop Gendron described the Pennsylvania grand jury report as "shocking," not only its "horrific" accounts of abuse, but also revelations of the bishops' "culture of secrecy, clerical privilege, and misplaced concern for the Church's public image over the well-being of those whom Christ commands us to protect."

"It does not appear that the failures are restricted to the dioceses of Pennsylvania, nor to the United States," Bishop Gendron said.

The CCCB president referred to Scriptural descriptions of God as a "consuming fire," and a "refiner's fire."

"When there is a fire, our first instinct is often to try to put it out to prevent damage," he said. "In this case, however, we may need to allow this fire to keep burning. St. Paul tells us that it is better to expose works of darkness and bring them to light."

Bishop Gendron pointed out the work of building up the Church, a task of all the faithful, is "now being tested."

"Where it has been laid on a foundation other than Jesus Christ, it will rightfully be found wanting and will require rebuilding," he said.

During the CCCB plenary meeting Sept. 24-28 the bishops received a new document entitled *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful for Healing, Reconciliation and Transformation*. Bishop Gendron described it as a "milestone" in the Canadian bishops progress towards prevention of clerical sexual abuse and protecting minors.

"As missionary disciples and successors of the Apostles, responsible for Christ's sheep, we must stand with those of our flock who are wounded," said Bishop Gendron. "We must also stand with those who are scandalized and disheartened. We must stand up unflinchingly for the truth, which alone can set us free."

The new document has been in the works since 2011. Archbishop Anthony Mancini of Halifax, who headed the ad hoc commission that developed it, said he has no worries it will be obsolete in light of the latest revelations involving bishops.

It defines clergy as bishops, priests and deacons, the archbishop said in an interview, so bishops are already included.

This document is different in that not only it is going to be received by the bishops, it includes a pledge from each bishop that he will implement it in his diocese, Archbishop Mancini said.

"If anyone chooses to ignore it, they'll do so at their own risk," he said.

The CCCB has no power to force a bishop or anyone to receive the document, but "ownership must be taken by the diocese as the bishops move forward."



Archbishop Anthony Mancini

Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse will be released publicly after the bishops return to their own dioceses. They received it in their plenary session and heard testimony from victims of clerical sexual abuse.

Archbishop Mancini said the document is proactive rather than reactive. The Canadian bishops' first document of 26 years ago, *From Pain to Hope*, was reacting to the scandals of sexual abuse, he said.

Though it was a good document and modelled by other countries, the new document looks at "how can we protect children," he said. "It's a big shift."

The new document is a product of what the bishops have learned over the past 26 years, Mancini said. It addresses the issue of clericalism and the inappropriate ways bishops responded to abuse allegations in the past.

"It's not just a question of new rules, but of the renewal of minds and hearts and spirits, of conversion," the archbishop said.

The new document deals with the culture of secrecy, power, and the desire to protect the church's image, Mancini said, adding the desire to protect the image comes when one is not authentic.

The document deals with the protections minors and vulnerable adults, but Mancini did not include seminarians in the vulnerable adult category. However, he did acknowledge the power dynamic at play if seminarians are abused by their bishops or seminary rectors.

The new document is a call for healing, for purification and for a fundamental change in the Church for deeper conversion, he said.

Archbishop Mancini said the sexual abuse crisis could not be attributed to homosexuality in the priesthood any more than it could be attributed to the rules for clerical celibacy. While homosexuality may be involved in some cases, the issue is far more complex, he said, noting most sexual abuse takes place in families and involves heterosexual men.

While the United States bishops are looking at setting up accountability structures for bishops and a hot line for allegations, Archbishop Mancini said the procedure in Canada is the same as what happened when former Antigonish, N.S. Bishop Raymond Lahey faced charges of possession of child pornography. It involved a call to the nuncio or papal representative, he said, and Lahey was subsequently removed from ministry.

CCCB marks 75th anniversary

The CCCB marked the 75th anniversary of its founding in 1943. Bishop Gendron noted how relationships with Canada's indigenous Peoples have been a perennial concern for the conference, pointing out how 75 years ago, the CCCB's "predecessors 'condemned' a government proposal to restrict Indigenous Catholics access to hospitals." The bishops said they should have free choice of hospitals and of schools.

The CCCB has held eight listening circles across the country as part of a reconciliation process, Bishop Gendron said. "These sessions have been a true moment of grace and have provided a clearer picture of the hopes, joys, and sorrows of the Indigenous Peoples of the different regions of Canada."

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council that has been renamed, replacing the word Aboriginal. It has also been reconstituted with more representatives from Indigenous communities across the country to reflect their rich cultural diversity. More bishops have also been added to "ensure a closer relation to the conference," Bishop Gendron said.

Bishop Gendron noted the "robust participation in civil society" that has characterized the conference since its beginnings when it defended the reunification of new immigrants with their families .

"The wisdom of Scripture teaches us there will never be an age in which we as bishops are not called to stand up for what is just and right or in the interest of advancing a society which is more humane and in which God can be known, worshiped and loved," he said.

Over the past year, the CCCB intervened with an interfaith coalition to protest against the pro-abortion attestation required for all applicants for Canada Summer Jobs grants.

The CCCB intervened before the House of Commons Justice Committee concerning a section of Bill C-51 that would have removed protections for "Canadians to worship without disturbance," Bishop Gendron said. "Again we worked with an interfaith coalition, and the government eventually agreed to amend the

proposed legislation.”

The CCCB also intervened in the Trinity Western University case before the Supreme Court, and expressed disappointment at the high court’s decision, “which imposes limits on freedom of religion and expression,” he said.

The CCCB also issued statements on the 30th anniversary of the Morgentaler decision that struck down Canada’s abortion laws; and on the legalization of marijuana for recreational use.

Bishop Gendron noted the Conference since its inception has been concerned with the evangelization and catechesis of families and young people, and described how in collaboration with the Catholic Organization for Life and Family, that work continues.

The CCCB president also noted the establishment of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace that marked its 50th anniversary last year.

“In order to strengthen the organizations mission of charity in truth, the Conference has been working with Development and Peace in a thorough joint review of all the organization’s overseas partners,” Bishop Gendron said. “This joint review is ongoing and its results will be provided to all bishops once complete.”

About a dozen bishops across the country have withheld funds from Development and Peace pending the results of the study over concerns some partners promoted abortion or other teachings contrary to those of the Church.