
**Greeting and message by Most Rev. Douglas Crosby, O.M.I.
Bishop of Hamilton and President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
CRC General Assembly, Mary 26, 2016 – Montreal**

Good evening everyone,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you this evening, not only as President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, but as a member of a religious congregation as well. The theme for this General Assembly is “Discerning hope amid the challenges.” And there certainly are challenges! Institutes of Consecrated Life in Canada today face a postmodern culture that does not understand or value evangelical witness a great deal nor does it seem all that interested in hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of our communities are experiencing internal challenges as well: shrinking communities and aging members, the loss of institutions, and uncertainty about the future. However, in spite of these challenges, there is hope! In fact, according to Saint Paul, hope is born of painful challenges such as these: “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rm 5.3-5).

Hope, we all know, is one of the three theological virtues. It is not a generic sense of optimism about the future or a stubborn blindness to the real problems we face as religious. Hope is a force that draws us toward what we already know by faith. It is what we most need when we face difficulties and when the future seems uncertain. And we need never be without it, for Christ himself is our hope (1 Tim 1.1). Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life invited religious “to embrace the future with hope.” It is hope, he said, “which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future.” In other words, it is hope which must galvanize us in our efforts to attract vocations.

I want to thank the many consecrated persons in Canada for all the good, godly and grace filled work you have accomplished, and continue to do, in witnessing to and building God’s Kingdom in our midst. First of all, thank you for your prayers – only at the end of time, when we will know things fully (1 Cor 13.12) will we see the often hidden effect these have had. Thank you for your tireless service in your various apostolates and ministries. I cannot name them all; there are too many. Teaching, health care, safeguarding the environment, serving the community, protecting the vulnerable, working with Indigenous people....

Regarding the latter, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops was honoured and blessed to be able to collaborate with the CRC this past March in jointly responding to some of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. Such collaboration, which also included Development and Peace – Caritas Canada and the Canadian Catholic Aboriginal Council, was a strong witness not only to Catholics in our country but indeed to all Canadians and to the Church throughout the world. I applaud your efforts to strengthen and rebuild relations with the Indigenous People.

Likewise, I would encourage all Institutes of Consecrated Life to reflect on practical contributions that can be made in supporting palliative and home care, and to find new

opportunities to protect the lives and dignity of the most vulnerable in our society, especially those otherwise tempted to resort to physician-assisted suicide. The history of consecrated life is filled with examples of how such dedicated, selfless and generous women and men have read, discerned and embraced as Church the signs of the times. They responded with passion and with their very lives in answering such calls from God. Perhaps the need right now for palliative care, in our Church, in Canada, at this moment in history, is among the signs to which the Spirit of Christ is leading us and empowering us to respond. Though vulnerable and “unproductive” according to society’s standards, the wounded and ill, suffering and distressed are our sisters and brothers in need. When we touch them, as Pope Francis says, we touch “the flesh of Christ.”

I am also heartened by the tremendous work done by many religious this past year in assisting refugees, whether by caring for them abroad or by working in refugee sponsorship here in Canada. This great effort, done in close coordination with parishes and dioceses, has been a great blessing not only for the refugees themselves but for the Church in Canada.

As persons in consecrated life, we have all freely chosen to give a wholehearted, joyful and committed “yes” to Jesus Christ, to follow him wherever he may lead. I conclude my remarks by thanking you most of all for this “yes” to Our Lord. Your very existence as religious is a testament to your dedication to the Lord, and your whole lives are testimonies to what God can do with someone who gives themselves over entirely to him. In this sense, may I say that we are all “oblates” (*oblati*, in Latin)! We have all offered ourselves to Christ, the only Saviour of the world, who alone gives meaning to our lives. Since Christ is our sure and certain hope, I pray that we would never falter in clinging to him, despite the storms and challenges our futures may bring.

Thank you and blessings on your gathering.