



The **Catholic Bishops**
of **Alberta** and the
Northwest Territories

Les **Evêques Catholiques**
de l'**Alberta** et les
Territoires du Nord-Ouest

September 28, 2011

A LEGACY OF HOPE

A Pastoral Message from the Bishops of Alberta in recognition of and gratitude to the many Catholic Sisters who fearlessly and often sacrificially committed their lives to being a hope-filled presence of healing on behalf of the Kingdom of God.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today the people of Alberta pay tribute to the Catholic Sisters with the installation and unveiling of a permanent artwork entitled “Service Through Christ” on the grounds of the Alberta Legislature, followed by a Mass and reception at St. Joseph’s Basilica.

The project undertaken by the Catholic community and led by Covenant Health will be a powerful public testimony of God’s grace at work through the faith, courage and resourcefulness of his people. The bronze statue of a Sister holding the symbols of our faith calls all of us to carry on the healing ministry of Christ Jesus today, following in the footsteps of the founding congregations who, in prayer and sacrifice worked tirelessly, often against all odds, to make this great province what it is today.

The statue recognizes approximately 80 congregations instrumental in caring for the sick, the poor and the disadvantaged in cities, towns and rural areas across our province.

WOMEN OF ACTION

These courageous Sisters were women of action and presence who overcame many obstacles, both physical and cultural, to bring their caring and gentle influence to every corner of the province. Working with their communities, they founded Alberta’s first schools, hospitals, orphanages and homes for the aged. Their universal charity, their love without boundaries and their many works were their legacy of hope, a legacy that compels all of us to reach out to the poor and the vulnerable.



These women were powerful and courageous agents of much needed social change. Their work continues in the Catholic agencies and organizations that foster knowledge and understanding, provide sustenance and healing, and bring compassion and hope to the people of Alberta. Today, Catholic Sisters are few in number but great in presence, support and influence. Through leadership and example they formed the laity to continue the healing ministry of Christ Jesus, to walk in their footsteps, to embrace their vision.

Many of the works they began are now flourishing under lay leadership and a variety of governance structures. The realization of their vision of a compassionate and just society continues, fuelled by the legacy of hope.

A NEW TIME

Pope Benedict invites us to a renewed focus in our commitment to Christ and humanity. In his Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (Saved by Hope), he states: “That the one who has hope lives differently, the one who hopes has been granted the gift of new life.” This was the unique transformative quality of the Catholic Sisters who worked tirelessly to make the world a better place. In this new time, as the number of Sisters diminishes, the role of lay leadership and participation in the areas of health, education and social work is critical.

This leadership and participation role calls the laity to a new vision in a new time – to creatively respond to the unmet needs while cognizant of human dignity and caring compassion. Pope Benedict further commented: “The fact that the future exists changes the present, the present is touched by the future reality, thus the things of the future spill into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.” The roles of the Catholic Sisters, the Church and the laity today and into the future are inextricably interwoven.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The challenge as we look to the future is to continue a focus on the importance of the healing mission and to propel it forward. This monumental task cannot be accomplished by individuals or groups acting alone. It is a collective responsibility for all Catholics as members of the Church. We are all called to heal and be healed within the context of our baptismal promise. We must be powerful agents of change and vibrant signs of hope. Compassion is the tool that can change the world. We will find this opportunity on the fringes of society as we serve the



elderly, the poor, the mentally ill, the immigrants, the most vulnerable. It is at these margins of society that hope is in short supply. Our role as Church is to bring hope to these marginalized groups through our actions.

The Catholic Sisters represented a safe place for those they encountered and served. We need to continue to create and maintain safe places for those in need. The work to address homelessness in our province is a tangible example of creating such safe places as it is clear that these homes must be more than four walls; they must be places of faith, hope and love.

THE ROLE OF THE LAITY

Hope is our heritage. As we focus on the poor and the most vulnerable, the laity need to be a constant presence, living manifestations of God's covenantal love. As individuals, as the Church and as a society, we are called to welcome our brothers and sisters and to ensure those we serve feel safe, loved and accepted - whether in healthcare institutions, schools, hostels or on the streets.

Within this safety zone, every person needs to experience love manifested by tenderness. Tenderness according to Pope John Paul II is essential to human flourishing. This love without boundaries, this love of the poor, is a reflection of the face of God. Caring for the sick and the most vulnerable goes beyond a successful business venture. It is vital for human dignity.

The bronze statue representing the Sisters located on the Legislature grounds offers more than a history lesson. There, the monument will serve as a constant reminder to both the leaders of our province and the people of Alberta of the gospel values essential to building and sustaining a just society.

As we look to the future, we pray that God will grant us courage to be responsive to the gospel call and creative in our Kingdom witness. Together we must dream the dream of a compassionate and just society and work tirelessly to realize this dream in the reality of today and in the possibilities of the future. Accomplishments may fade, but the people changed will set the course of our future world.

The Catholic Sisters specialized in the impossible and in risk-taking always for the sake of others. Their faith, their pioneering spirit and their vision empowered the next generation to be



attentive to a call, to gaze at the unknown and to trust in possibilities. The laity is the next generation. The Catholic Sisters look to these courageous women and men to heed the call, to see possibilities in challenges and to accomplish the impossible.

CONCLUSION

We, the Bishops of Alberta, express the warm appreciation of all Catholics for the hope-filled legacy of our Catholic Sisters. Their many works set a positive course for the future of Albertans.

Today, we call all Catholics, especially the laity involved in continuing their works, to be prophets of hope in the world with a renewed focus on the healing ministry of Christ Jesus now and into the future.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton

Most Reverend Gerard Pettipas CSsR
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan

Most Reverend Murray Chatlain
Bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith

Most Reverend Frederick Henry
Bishop of Calgary

Most Reverend David Motiuk
Bishop of the Ukrainian Eparchy of Edmonton

Most Reverend Luc Bouchard
Bishop of St. Paul