



50 years of solidarity, justice, compassion and action

2017 is the 50th anniversary of *Development and Peace*, the Canadian Catholic organization for international solidarity. The *Conseil Église et Société* (“Council on Church and Society”) of the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops, for its message of May 1st, 2017, wishes to highlight the accomplishments of this organization which is a member of *Caritas internationalis* [“*Caritas*”], an international Catholic organization devoted to aid, development, and social services. Caritas is present in 200 countries and territories and works on behalf of the poor and oppressed; it constitutes one of the largest networks in the world among non-governmental organizations. *Development and Peace* was founded in 1967 by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in response to Pope Paul VI’s declaration, in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, that “*development [is] the new name for peace*” (para. 76).



In Canada, this network of solidarity is financed by parish collections, individual donations, and governmental subsidies. The Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops wishes to reaffirm its support for the work of *Development and Peace*. This organization allows our Church to work concretely for an integral human development through a united commitment that fosters the growth of justice and peace in our world. Everyone who has created this movement, as well as their partners in Canada and abroad, deserves thanks for their contribution and their

courage. A number of difficulties have had to be overcome, even within the Church, to keep the organization and its work going. Today we would like to say again that, for the Catholic faithful, it is one of the main ways in which we can get involved on behalf of human development and be in solidarity with the poorest among our brothers and sisters with whom we share a “common home” (Pope Francis, *Laudato si’*: *Encyclical Letter On Care for our Common Home*, 2015, paras. 50-52).

Causes supported by *Development and Peace*

The activity of *Development and Peace* in Canada and the world would not be possible without the combined strength of its members and staff, its partners here and abroad, and those in the Catholic Church in Québec and the rest of Canada who - year after year, for 50 years - have worked to ensure the dignity of each child, woman, and man, and to build a just world. In the context of this joint effort on behalf of development and peace, a number of particular causes have been the focus of attention over the last 50 years. Notable among these causes are the struggle against apartheid in South Africa; the promotion of local groups as agents of development; the defence of indigenous peoples; responses to famine in Africa; debt cancellation in the case of poor countries; campaigns against the pillaging of natural resources in the Global South; rebuilding in earthquake-ravaged areas; the creation of bottled-water-free zones in the country; and protection of small family farms. This year, the theme chosen for the 50th anniversary is “Women at the Heart of Change”.

Promoting the role of Women

Indeed, after a half-century of involvement on behalf of social justice, it must be acknowledged that a major part of



our great human family has not been able to progress and flourish to the same degree. Many groups of people are caught up in serious injustices and are facing a desperate shortage of resources. Simply by virtue of being born female, many of our sisters do not experience equal opportunities in life, neither within their families, nor in their workplaces, nor - least of all - in public life. Other segments of the population, especially children, are hurt by malnutrition and sickness, or by exploitative labour. Workers experience substandard conditions and are not treated justly. Small farmers are denied the right to own land, or are exploited by the economic situation.

We know that all of this is contrary to God’s will.

The promotion of the role of women, in many societies, needs our support in order to develop and to overcome inequality. *Development and Peace*’s highlighted theme this year calls us to recognize the injustices that afflict women in many spheres, including, at times, our own. There is still a gap, too often, between men and women in the matter of wages, work-family balance, and respect for civil and economic rights. Women make it possible to understand the world by providing a different perspective. Their words contribute to developing a stronger mutual support and a more creative humanity, to build up a civilization of love.

In many cultures it is women, mothers and grandmothers, who conserve the histories of their communities and hand them on to

younger generations. Their stories are a source of knowledge, traditions, and values that form the consciences of the youngest community members and prepare them to take on their responsibilities. Through their courage, they contribute directly to the process of peace in the world, and they ensure that the land is respected and the community fed. Every day, women contribute to the progress of participation and democracy by

having the courage to join their voices to those of other people of good will, even at risk to their own lives. In this fiftieth anniversary

of its founding, *Development and Peace* wishes to acknowledge and highlight the role of women in advancing the cause of justice in the world. We should note especially the incomparable contribution of communities of women religious in implementing the social teaching of the Church here and abroad.

In the Church, we must be “*convinced that it is urgent to offer places to women in the life of the Church and to welcome them, bearing in mind the particular and transformed cultural and social sensitivities. Therefore, a more widespread and incisive presence of women in communities is desirable, in order that we may see many women involved in pastoral responsibilities, in the accompaniment of people, families and groups, as well as in theological reflection.*” (Address of Pope Francis to participants in the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, February 7, 2015).

Solidarity is not optional

In a message published in November 2016, the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops’ *Conseil Église et Société* invited believers to reflect on the link between their faith and their actions of solidarity for justice. Because of the universal destination of goods and because the Earth is our common home, we all have the duty to look out for one another. There is an obligation to social solidarity that is “*essential to the Church’s witness and is an integral part of evangelization*” (*Conseil Église et Société*, “Restoring and Rebuilding Solidarity”, section 2.5). Seen in this light, the moral duty of coming to the aid of another person is not merely one possibility among others; it is not just an optional act that one might omit.

We recall that Christ Himself calls us in the strongest terms to take time to listen to human distress, to see and recognize the sufferings of others, to be in contact with people who are poor and wounded. He expects us to respond to the cries of those left to their own devices, and to give them a place in our plans and in our prayers for persons and neglected causes. Working to transform society and to improve the living conditions of our brothers and sisters is an integral part of proclaiming the Gospel. We cannot hold ourselves aloof from the drama of people’s lives. A Catholic organization like *Development and Peace* offers us concrete ways to work for social justice and peace; it helps us to leave our comfort behind in order to be more attentive

to the needs of the world and to respond to them. It encourages us to become involved alongside the poor of our own society and of elsewhere. *“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise*

an echo in their hearts. [...]this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.” (Gaudium et Spes, para. 1, December 7, 1965).

Strengthened by this involvement, we continue to bear within us the hope of a more just world and we will carry on with our work in solidarity to build it together.

Members of the Conseil Église et Société:

Bishop Pierre Morissette, president, bishop of Saint-Jérôme;
Archbishop Denis Grondin, archbishop of Rimouski;
Bishop Claude Hamelin, auxiliary bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil;
Bishop Marc Pelchat, auxiliary bishop of Québec;
Bishop Noël Simard, bishop of Valleyfield;
Ms. Ariane Collin;
Sr. Élisabeth Fernandez, SFA;
Mr. Norman Lévesque, director of the *Green Churches Network*;
Mr. Pierre Piché;
Ms. Louise Cormier, secretary.

Original Title: 50 ans, de solidarité, de justice, de compassion et d'action
English translation by Richard Bernier

WOMEN AT THE HEART OF CHANGE

A publication of Conseil Église et Société (Council on Church and Society)

Secrétariat des évêques catholiques du Québec
3331, rue Sherbrooke Est – Montréal (Québec) H1W 1C5
Téléphone : 514 274-4323 - Télécopieur : 514 274-4383
Courriel : aecq@eveques.qc.ca
Site Internet : <http://www.eveques.qc.ca>