**Report on the short speech made by Noël Simard, Bishop of Valleyfield, upon his return from the Synod on October 27th 2015**

The Synod, whose theme was “The calling and the mission of the family in Church and in the contemporary world” and took place from October 4th to October 25th 2015, brought together 270 synodic priests (bishops and cardinals) 70 of whom were cardinals; several lay experts and seventeen couples from different countries also participated. There were two types of discussion: in general Congregation, that is to say the big assembly with all the participants, and in little workshops, called Crossroads and divided by spoken languages (French, English, Italian, Spanish and German). There were thirteen of these groups.

The episcopal Conference of Canada had delegated four of its members to the Synod: from the French Sector, Paul-André Durocher, archbishop of Gatineau, and Noël Simard, bishop of Valleyfield, and from the English Sector, cardinal Thomas Collins, archbishop of Toronto, and Richard Smith, archbishop of Edmonton. Cardinal Gérald-Cyprien Lacroix, archbishop of Quebec and primate of Canada, was personally invited by Pope Francis to participate to the Synod. The theologian Moira McQueen, director of the Canadian Catholic Institute of bioethics, was also part of the Canadian delegation as an expert. Father Michael Brehl, Superior General of the Rédemptionistes, a Canadian, was elected by the Union of Superiors General.

Bishop Noël Simard spoke three times before the general assembly during the Synod; he especially insisted on the importance of moral conscience, and on the part of elderly people in the transmission of faith and familial values.

Bishop Simard reported that two poles seemed to stand out during the discussions among the synodal fathers, one focusing on the strict upholding of the doctrine and presentation of the truth, and the other on the importance of mercy; the fathers agreed that each pole must work with the other, and not without it. Keeping in mind “the importance of the institution of family and marriage, founded on unity and indivisibility, and to appreciate it as the fundamental basis of society and human life” (Pope Francis, *Speech of October 24th 2015*), we must also listen to the voices of families and carry with them their sorrows and their joys, their pains and their wealth. It means reading the reality, or rather the realities, with the eyes of God, and pass on to families, most especially wounded families, the novelty of the free and merciful love of God.

As Pope Francis reminded, « the Gospel is good News, not a catalog of principles and norms”, and that “true defenders of the doctrine are not those who defend the letter, but the mind; not the ideas but the man; not the methods but the free love and forgiveness of God” (*Speech of October 24th 2015*).

Of course, intense discussions took place around the stumbling block (Medias echoed each other): the access to sacraments for people who are divorced and remarried. Bishop Simard asserted that a pastoral approach worthy of the name must accompany those people on a road to discernment calling to their conscience, conscience that must of course be formed. This question that is found in the items 85 and 86 of the *Final Relation* of the Synod was in fact narrowly approved by the synodal fathers.

Actually, all 94 items of the *Relation* were approved by two thirds of the voices, which demonstrates that this Synod was really held under the sign of collegiality and synodality, with respect to the diversity of cultures. It will be a memorable Synod, said Bishop Simard, because it expresses the will of the Church to be a Synodal Church, to be attentive to the people of God, a Church solicitous in announcing the joy of the Gospel to all of humanity and to especially march towards and with people hurt through life. In that sense, the Holy Ghost blew in and through the Synod a fresh pastoral wind.