



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

Les évêques catholiques  
de l'**Alberta** et des  
**Territoires du Nord-Ouest**

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## **Life and Family: Nurturing God's Precious Gifts**

Dear Faithful in Christ,

Life, marriage and family are gifts of God. As we now embark upon the *Week for Life and Family*, we Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories wish to reflect with you on the beauty and wonder of these realities, and offer our closeness and support to any who are struggling.

From its inception, human life is sacred, possessed of a dignity that endures throughout its natural span. As the gift of God, it is to be welcomed, treasured, and protected. Therefore, the Bishops of Canada have recently undertaken to unite and strengthen the efforts of Catholics across the country to celebrate and uphold the wondrous gift of life. In their document entitled *Elements of a National Plan for Life and Family*, the Bishops call for the establishment of an annual Week for Life and Family, which is to be marked each May in every Diocese according to its capacities and resources. The central and primary focus of this week is the family, the community of love which fashions, nourishes and protects the gift of life.

In God's loving design, human life arises from the marital embrace of man and woman. The communion of love between husband and wife, open to and creative of life, forms the family, which is thus the natural and proper environment for the nurture and education of children. At home we learn to share, to give, and to love. In the heart of the family the faith is taught and embraced. This is why we often refer to the family as "the domestic church". As faith is lived in the home, the family becomes an oasis, a safe place, and a bulwark against outside forces that might diminish human dignity and erode our hope in God. From the family we are sent out into the world to proclaim the Gospel, to build a culture of life and a civilization of love. As Blessed John Paul II said, "As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live."

Today many families are struggling or even broken. To these we express in a particular way our closeness and support. The current pressures on family life are enormous: busyness, financial constraint, unemployment or underemployment, addictions, and separation from extended family

or other support networks. Moreover, the individualistic and self-centered currents of modern society undermine the virtues of fortitude, self-sacrifice, commitment, and hope that enable marriage and family to remain strong and flourish. When a family struggles for these or any other reason, the Church wishes to draw near with its message of hope and the services provided by its agencies of social outreach. The Week for Life and Family will be a wonderful opportunity both to celebrate the beauty of life, marriage and family and to offer assistance in understanding and addressing the difficulties families face.

Each Diocese and Eparchy will plan its own events and learning opportunities related to marriage, family and life. We invite you to participate in these events, which are intended to help you live out your vocation to holiness within the family. The Church offers you support and opportunities for learning. Above all, she offers you Christ – his presence, strength, forgiveness and peace, especially through the sacraments. He is the sure anchor in the changing tides of modern society. Let us entrust our families and marriages to Jesus, and place him at the centre of our family lives, as did the Holy Family of Nazareth, so that the beauty and dignity of family life will shine forth as a sign of hope to the world.



Most Reverend Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton



Most Reverend Gregory J. Bittman  
Auxiliary Bishop of Edmonton



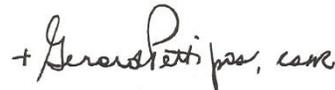
Most Reverend David Motiuk  
Bishop of the Ukrainian Eparchy of Edmonton



Most Reverend Paul Terrio  
Bishop of St. Paul



Most Reverend Frederick Henry  
Bishop of Calgary



Most Reverend Gerard Pettipas CSsR  
Archbishop Grouard-McLennan



Most Reverend Murray Chatlain  
Apostolic Administrator of Mackenzie-Fort Smith

19 March 2013

Solemnity of St. Joseph

Principal Patron of Canada