

Canadian priests, nuns rap Vatican's rigidity: Challenging "intransigent stands on sexual morals"

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Mincing few words, an umbrella group representing 22,000 Roman Catholic monks, nuns and priests in Canada's religious orders has challenged the "intransigent" stands of the Vatican on such issues as divorce, contraception and homosexuality.

"We regret . . . that our Church often gives priority to the reaffirmation of dogma and traditional morals rather than listening to the people's search for meanings," the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) says in a document sent to the country's bishops in advance of their expected visit to the Vatican later this year.

The 26-page document expresses regret for the "legalistic image of the Catholic Church—and of our Canadian Church—its rigidity and its intransigent stands on sexual morals; its lack of openness regarding access to the sacraments for divorced and remarried Catholics; its lack of compassion for them; [and] its unwelcoming attitude toward homosexuals."

It further voices misgivings, "in terms of ethics and bioethics," about "the holding up of an ideal that leaves little room for advancement and progress; the defense of principles that do not reflect human experience (divorce, contraception, protection against AIDS, alleviation of suffering at the end of life)."

The CRC statement also asks the bishops to consider the "ordination of married men, women and elders in the First Nations communities," a reference to those whose people lived in Canada before the arrival of Europeans.

Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the Catholic primate of Canada, said he would take the concerns of the religious conference to Rome, Montreal's *Gazette* newspaper reported March 29. But he stressed that the Canadian church would never separate itself from Catholic teachings.

Publication of the document to the bishops coincided with media reports that Pope Benedict XVI might make his first visit to Canada in 2008 for an international event in Quebec City. Canada's 2001 census found that 12.8 million, or 43.2 percent of the population, are Catholic.

Alain Ambeault, president of CRC, wrote to members: "We have the firm conviction that this message reflects the thinking of the leadership of religious communities in Canada as well as the majority of the religious men and women throughout this country." *-Ecumenical News International*