The Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario held its Spring Plenary meeting in Toronto from March 31st to April 2nd, 2014.

Elections for the Executive Committee were held, and for the 2014-2016 term of office the ACBO Executive will be comprised of:

- President: His Eminence, Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto (4th term)
- Vice-President: Most Rev. Ronald Fabbro, Bishop of London (3rd term)
- Member: Most Rev. Gerard Bergie, Bishop of St. Catharines (1st term)
- Member: Most Rev. Marcel Damphousse, Bishop of Alexandria-Cornwall (1st term)

During the Plenary the bishops received presentations on the following matters:

- Good Shepherds, Good Leaders: Catholic Leadership Institute Programs
- The work of the Southdown Institute: Foundational Spiritual Components
- Efforts of Catholic education partners to support Ontario’s publicly-funded Catholic education
- The work of the French Catholic Trustees’ Association (AFOCSC)
- Status of Proposed Changes to the Provincial Cemetery Administrative Governance

Commissions and Committees

Following are highlights of the reports received by the bishops on the work of all of the Assembly’s Commissions and Committees:

The Executive Committee

The Executive Committee ending its 2012 – 2014 term of office endorsed several recommendations from ACBO Commissions and Committees, as well as the ACBO financial statements for 2013.

The bishops endorsed the Executive Committee’s recommendation to appoint Mr. Roger Lawler as ACBO General Secretary, effective September 1st, 2014, upon the retirement of current General Secretary, Lou Piovesan. The appointment of Fr. Jean Vézina as the Assistant to the General Secretary, French language services (part-time), was also approved.

An update was provided to the bishops regarding the Executive’s initiative to “put the Church’s voice in the public square” in Ontario. The first formal step in this initiative is a full-day workshop hosted by Fr. Tom Rosica (Salt + Light Catholic Media Foundation) for over 20 young adults from six Ontario dioceses.

The Executive Committee also presented their recommendations, based on a survey of the bishops, for Chairs and members of ACBO Commission and Committees, and for the assignment of ACBO Liaison Bishops. The recommendations were approved by the membership.
Education Commission

The Education Commission reported on the status of the project to develop Elementary Catechetical Resources in collaboration with bishops from western Canada. The bishops formally confirmed that the title for the series will be “Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ”.

The bishops also reaffirmed their support for the Catholic Student Trustees’ Initiative – province-wide Masses to be celebrated in Catholic secondary schools on May 7th, during this year’s Catholic Education Week

Michael Pautler, Executive Director of the Institute for Catholic Education, addressed the bishops on a number of matters, including:

- Revision of Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-sex Attraction/Orientation
- Status of Development of Bill 13 Supplementary Resources for use in Catholic schools
- Review of Secondary Religious Education Policy Document
- Liaison with Faculties of Education and Pre-Training Service Programs
- Realignment of Health and Physical Education Policy Document

The report from Fr. Jean Vézina, Executive Director of L'Office provincial de l'éducation de la foi catholique de l'Ontario (OPÉCO), included information on the following:

- OPÉCO’s Revised Operational Mandate
- Status of French Catholic School Graduate Expectations / “Cadre de référence de l’élève de l’Ontario”
- Development of Expertise in Religious Education and Faith Formation
- Religious Education AQ Courses
- Development of Supplementary Resources – Bill 13 - for French Catholic schools
- Project for the Professional Development and Faith Formation of Teachers
- Project to Revise Religious Education Resources for Primary Grades

Commission for Priests

The bishops received a written report on the successful Third Symposium for Recently Ordained Priests (1-6 years) which was held from November 4 – 8, 2013, at the Mt. Carmel Centre in Niagara Falls.

It was also reported that the National Conference of Canadian Vocation Directors took place on October 28 - November 1, 2013, in Ottawa, with twenty diocesan representatives participating.

The National Federation of Presbyteral Councils elected a new Executive during its national meeting which took place in Fredericton from October 7-11. Fr. Dan Van Delst was elected the new NFPC Central Region Vice-President, and now represents the NFPC on the ACBO Commission for Priests.
Diocesan Insurance Committee

The Diocesan Insurance Committee provided status reports regarding the ACBO’s diocesan property, liability, and employee benefits self-insurance programs.

Social Affairs Commission

Bishops received copies of “Fruit of the Earth and Work of Human Hands”, the 25th Anniversary Reflection Statement on the ACBO’s “People and the Land”. The accompanying Study Guide was also provided to the bishops. The resources have been posted on the ACBO website and have been shared with various Catholic organizations.

The Commission’s report also included information regarding the Annual Joint Meeting of the ACBO Social Affairs Commission with Diocesan Social Justice Representatives which took place on Friday, November 8th, 2013, in Toronto. The annual joint meeting featured guests Fr. Larry Kroker and Grace Esquega who spoke to participants on the subject of the experiences and aspirations of the First Nations people, and how the Church can assist in creating a greater appreciation of, and support for, native people.

The bishops voiced their support for recommendations from the Social Affairs Commission regarding diocesan representation for social justice and environmental stewardship.

Institutional Chaplaincy Commission

As the current Ontario Regional Representative on the Corrections Canada Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy, Monique Marchand, has indicated her intention not to renew her extended mandate when it expires on April 30th, 2014, bishops were invited to consider possible candidates for this position.

Bishops discussed the development of procedural processes, especially as pertains to their endorsement of Catholic Chaplaincy candidates for correctional institutions, in light of the appointment of a national contractor by Corrections Canada, and the advisory role in the contracting process for Corrections Canada’s Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy.

The bishops were reminded that Catholic Connections, a restorative justice network in Canada, will hold a national conference from September 19-21, 2014, at Château Mont-Saint-Anne, in Beaupré, Québec, immediately following the 2014 CCCB Plenary.

Pastoral visits to correctional institutions and the sacramental needs of Catholic inmates were also discussed.
Ministry to the Deaf

The bishops received reports regarding retreats organized for deaf persons and those who minister to them.

The South-Central Ontario Retreat for deaf persons and for diocesan representatives who work with members of the deaf community, took place on October 18-19-20, 2013 at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga. Retreat organizers were Alanna McDonald and Willi Goodfellow, and the retreat theme was “Is Jesus Everywhere?”. The facilitator was Deacon Patrick Graybill of Rochester, New York.

The Eastern Ontario Retreat will take place from April 25th to 27th, 2014 at Maison Notre-Dame-de-la-Providence in Orleans (Ottawa). The organizer, Maureen Cerroni, assisted by Fr. Peter Monty, S.J. will continue in their respective roles as coordinator and chaplain. The presenter will be Fr. Joe Bruce, S.J. from Rhode Island, U.S.A. The theme will be “Continue in Hope”.

Supplementary Reports

The bishops expressed their appreciation for reports from the General Secretary of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and from Canada’s Military Ordinariate.

Written reports were received from the Catholic Women’s League, the Knights of Columbus, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Catholic Health Association of Ontario.

Next Plenary Meeting

The next Plenary meeting of the Ontario bishops will be held in Toronto from October 6th to 8th, 2014.

Report submitted by:
Luciano (Lou) Piovesan
General Secretary