



Reflection

Week 3

# Individual rights & social responsibilities



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The limitations placed upon us during the time of the pandemic remind us that individual rights and freedoms are bound up inextricably with duties and responsibilities towards our neighbours and society in general.





### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Pope Benedict, [Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations](#) (2008).
- Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#) (2006): [Ch. 3, Section IV, Human Rights](#).
- Saint Pope John XXIII, [Encyclical Pacem in Terris](#) (1963): [On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty](#).

Ours is a society that highly values and pays close attention to individual rights and freedoms. As a result, we are quick to push back against authorities or structures that threaten to inhibit or restrict the personal liberties that we hold dear. We see this dynamic at play during a time of pandemic whenever we witness strong reactions toward public health measures and guidelines introduced for the common good. Finding the balance between our individual rights and freedoms, and our social responsibilities, sometimes requires us to consider and choose self-imposed limitations on our personal liberty for the good of everyone.

In his homily for the Feast of Divine Mercy this year, Pope Francis cautioned that a more serious condition could arise in the post-COVID period if individuals and societies forget that the human person is essentially a social being. “The risk,” he warned, “is that we may then be struck by an even worse virus, that of selfish indifference. A virus spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and that everything will be fine if it is fine [only] for me.” (1)

Pope Francis, “Egoism: An Even Worse Virus,” Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Easter (Feast of Divine Mercy), 19 April 2020.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Which individual rights promote authentic human dignity and are most important to you? What are some of the social responsibilities associated with those rights?
- 2 What questions or lessons has the pandemic surfaced for you about human freedom, your personal choices and how these affect the lives of others in our Church? in society?
- 3 Jesus taught us to love our neighbours as ourselves (cf. Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31). In moving forward, what activities should our Church undertake to reinforce this teaching in today’s world?

*Reflecting on the social nature of the human person, and both the value and limits of human freedom, we desire a society where social responsibilities inform and shape individual rights, leading us to live more generously, joyfully and peacefully as children of God.*



# PANEL DISCUSSION

Week 3

## Individual rights and social responsibilities



**Moderator**



**Mr. Matthew Bodnarek**

Grandin Media,  
Archdiocese of Edmonton

### *Panelists*



**Dr. Ryan Topping**

Academic Dean,  
Newman Theological  
College, Edmonton, AB



**Hon. Kevin Feehan**

Court of Appeals Judge—  
Alberta, NWT, Nunavut



**Dr. Timothy Harvie**

Associate Professor,  
St. Mary's University,  
Calgary, AB



**Ms. Jo-Anne Paquette**

Marian Centre,  
Edmonton, AB



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

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de l'**Alberta** et des  
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8421 - 101 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T6A 0L1 | T 780.469.1010 F 780.465.3003

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## **A Pastoral Statement on the Impact of COVID-19 and the Call to Christian Renewal**

**“Save your people, O Lord, and bless your inheritance”**

Dear faithful in Christ,

For the past several months, our Catholic community, together with all Canadians and indeed the whole world, has been seriously impacted by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). All of us – whether individuals, families, parishes, institutions or dioceses – have been required to make sacrifices, including many difficult but necessary decisions about matters at the very heart of our Catholic faith and way of life. As bishops, we acknowledge and are grateful for the way in which our Catholic faithful – clergy and laity alike – have lived the unprecedented circumstances of these months. We know, too, that the Lord allows all occasions – positive and negative – to teach and re-teach us lessons for right living in light of the Gospel. It is in this spirit that we address this letter to you as an invitation to consider along with us what the Lord may be saying to his people and his Church through this time of trial.

While the situation of COVID-19 continues to develop in our lives and communities, it is increasingly evident that the pandemic has had, and will continue to have for some time to come, a far reaching impact on all people throughout the world. In Canada, including here in Alberta and the Northwest Territories, many human and social values have surfaced that, as Catholics among others, we will need to reflect upon as we consider the future of our life together in society, especially in the light of Christian revelation and our faith in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

In particular, the pandemic has alerted us to a number of important social issues that touch us all including:

- the care of vulnerable persons in our society and supports offered to medical personnel in hospitals, nursing homes and other care facilities;
- the education of our young people and supports offered to families and to educators;
- isolation and depression in our homes and communities, and the prevalence and stigma of mental illness, substance abuse, suicide and other social ills;
- increased rates of domestic violence, elder abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence;
- societal discord over different responses to COVID-19 that have fractured human relationships and challenged our call to love one another;
- incidents of racism, bigotry and religious intolerance, including in our towns and cities;
- anxieties caused by massive losses of employment and the general situation of economic instability;
- the fragility of our human condition and the basic needs we all have for safety, solidarity, and love within authentic human community.

At the same time, we have witnessed on a daily basis many heroic and selfless examples of individuals who exemplify true human goodness and charity. These are the so-called “saints who live next door” identified by Pope Francis as medical professionals, educators, parents and grandparents, shop workers, cleaners, communications and information technology specialists, law and order personnel, delivery drivers and so many volunteers in all sectors of our society. Whether motivated by faith or otherwise, young or old, these individuals are role models for all of us, demonstrating dedicated care and compassion that goes beyond duty to a level of human solidarity that is inspiring to others. We give thanks to God for raising up such generous human individuals who embrace this collective challenge as a way to witness to the enduring human and social values by which we need to live.

All of these situations described above – the good examples and the social challenges we face – give us insights into certain behaviours, actions and structures that we value as a society and as a Christian people. Some of these we will rightly want to hold on to going forward, while others may be in need of remedy or renewal.

On this feast day when we contemplate Christ's victory over death through the life-giving wood of the Cross, we, the Catholic Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories, invite you to reflect and discern with us the kind of response that will be needed to address some of the human and social values that have surfaced during this pandemic. Specifically, we seek new ways to promote authentic human development and flourishing in the very way that we live, care for others, work, organize society and interact with one another. Moved by our faith in Christ and inspired by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, we invite the Catholic community to join us in looking afresh at certain aspects of our life together in society, to discern and decide a course for true social, cultural and spiritual renewal.

In the coming weeks, *Grandin Media* will be hosting a series of recorded panel discussions on various themes related to the pandemic and its challenging effects on our society. These sessions, featuring Catholic voices from around the province and territories, are meant to encourage our Catholic faithful to engage new questions and to take up new actions that reflect a “new normal” consistent with our life in Christ. Together with written texts, prepared by our bishops and released weekly, we shall present a series of reflections on the following topics:

- Reflection Topic #1: Inherent dignity of every human life
- Reflection Topic #2: Importance of the family
- Reflection Topic #3: Individual rights and social responsibilities
- Reflection Topic #4: Vulnerability and solidarity
- Reflection Topic #5: Responsibility for the common good
- Reflection Topic #6: Healthy use of information technologies
- Reflection Topic #7: Value and dignity of human work

We encourage all of our faithful to “tune in” to these sessions and take an active part in offering their own experience and wisdom on the topics presented. [An online mechanism will be available to receive your comments and feedback.] In this way, we hope to receive your insights into living our Christian faith in new ways in Catholic homes and in our communities, through our parishes, lay movements, schools and institutions, marked by hope, compassion and charity.

Our Catholic faith has much to contribute with respect to promoting human, social and spiritual values for the common good of society. We trust that you, like us, see the urgency to discern wisely the *signs of the times* and to “reset” our lives so that our collective experience in moving forward accords with the Gospel. Guided by the Holy Spirit, and

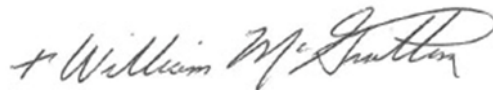
through the intercession of the most holy Mother of God, we are confident that this can be a time for bold creativity and life-giving transformation for all. We ask for God's blessing on this endeavour and upon all who join with us in this journey of discernment and path of renewal.

Yours in Christ,

Catholic Bishops of Alberta and NWT



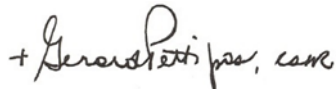
Most Reverend Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton



Most Reverend William McGrattan  
Bishop of Calgary



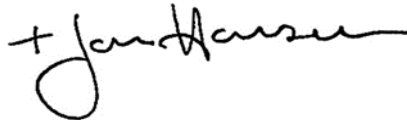
Most Reverend Paul Terrio  
Bishop of St. Paul



Most Reverend Gerard Pettipas CSsR  
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan



Most Reverend David Motiuk  
Bishop of the Ukrainian Eparchy of  
Edmonton



Most Reverend Jon Hansen, CSsR  
Bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith

**September 14, 2020 – Feast of The Exaltation of the Holy Cross**

*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you,  
because by your Cross you have redeemed the world.*