



Diocese of Edmundston

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Monday, January 8, 2018

Pastoral Letter

As a follow-up to the Pastoral Orientation Congress held in the English sector September 16 and the French sector, October 20 and 21, 2017, the 150 participants expressed the wish that the whole of the Christian Community of the Edmundston Diocese be informed of the pastoral and missionary orientations taken together as a Church. After a process which lasted for more than a year, with consultation of the faithful of the different pastoral units, and findings collated by the members of the Pastoral Animation Team (PAT) and the members of the Pastoral Congress Organizing Committee, we have succeeded in developing our diocesan pastoral orientations.

These orientations find their origin in the Vatican II Council, held in Rome from 1962 to 1965. In this Council was rediscovered the mission and responsibility which binds the baptized person. The baptized were invited to recognize, live and celebrate this mission and to announce the Good News received through faith.

Ten years later, Pope Paul VI, following what had been expressed in the Synod on Evangelization in the Modern World, published an encyclical which deepened this evangelization reality: the proclamation of the Good News. Pope John Paul II, subsequently, affirmed that the world having deeply changed, it was necessary to consider a "New Evangelization," new by its agents, its methods and its ardour. And now, Pope Francis has enriched our vocabulary and understanding by speaking of the "missionary disciple," a name that we have adopted to guide our reflexion and our commitment during the Pastoral Orientation Congress.

To be a missionary disciple is, first of all, to have experienced Christ who has suffered, died and is always living; it is to have decided to follow him, to live his Gospel and become "sent" to the world, to be this "Church of outreach," and so become co-responsible to the mission Jesus has entrusted to his Church – the mission to announce the Good News. This awareness is progressive in persons already committed in the Church. But we have **to create awareness for the members of our Christian communities to the fact that, by their Baptism, they have become disciples of Jesus and consequently, missionaries of the Gospel. (1st orientation.)** This is the goal in this process that I would like to make available to all baptized persons of Madawaska, Restigouche and Victoria. But to become missionary disciples, it is important to renew constantly this personal relationship with the living Christ; Christian life is not foremost a moral code or a great idea, but a meeting with the risen Jesus Christ.

The living Christ, can be met in his Word which we are invited to share in faith. The Bible sharing groups, "Bible, Spirituality and Meditation," organized a number of years in our diocese, can help to have a better understanding of the Bible. A prayerful reading of Scripture (lectio divina) can also make us discover the richness of this food offered to us.

The experience of the Cursillo movement may contribute to make us grow in this personal relationship with Christ. Many baptized persons had the occasion to grow in their awareness of the mission entrusted to them thanks to the different movements present in our Church and thanks to the Congregations of consecrated life who have developed the reality of having lay persons associated to their charism. The "Alpha" movement seems to bear much fruit in some of the parishes in the Atlantic region. We could have a pilot experience of this Alpha movement in one or more of our pastoral units. To deepen our reality of missionary discipleship, faith education of the youth and adults is essential.

This relationship with Christ fashions the person as missionary disciples ready to put their talents and resources at the service of the mission entrusted to them by the Lord. One becomes attentive to others' needs, to be at their service, to help each other and thus grow together.

If our first Pastoral Orientation is to really become missionary disciples, there is a need to ascertain within our Christian community an animation which corresponds to missionary discipleship.

For this purpose, we have formulated thus our **second pastoral orientation: Promote a sustained partnership of priests and laity, (men and women) who, as baptized persons, become fully coresponsible in the life of their Christian community.**

For some time now Pastoral Animation Teams (PAT) have been formed in our diocese. We can see beneficial outcomes in some of the Pastoral Units. But there is still a long way to go to arrive at a real partnership. We feel the need to define more clearly the tasks belonging to each of the members of the pastoral team.

Our priests are diminishing in number and also facing the reality of ageing. Since I have arrived, the diocese has acquired two new dynamic priests, in their fifties and sixties. We do not see the day when we will have new candidates for the priesthood.

A few pastoral units have expressed the desire to see the diocese invite international priests to come and serve in our diocese. Two pastoral units have even mentioned they are open to the formation of permanent deacons in our Church, into which we will need to look.

It remains important to provide formation for some laity who would share the responsibilities of the pastoral units. We are thinking particularly of the ministry of presiding at Sunday celebrations of the Word as well as funerals.

A community of missionary discipleship also needs to live and celebrate its faith. Moreover, in our pluralistic world, we realize how formation and faith education are essential for all age groups. These are the needs which we are to take into account in the 3rd and 4th pastoral orientations:

“Make our liturgical celebrations more desirable and more nourishing for all.” (3rd orientation)

“Recognize that Christ and his teachings are the foundation of Christian formation.” (4th orientation)

We have identified concretely the means which have a special importance. I take the liberty of naming a few:

- The importance of welcoming all persons who come to our celebrations.
- The quality of the hymns and of the homilies.
- The need for permanent formation in liturgy.
- The important character of “family masses” in which parents, and often grandparents, accompany the children enrolled in catechism.

We believe in the participation of all who attend our celebrations.

On the level of faith education, we want to highlight the following:

- Prayer, and sharing of the Word of God, should have a part in all our activities and meetings.
- We really want to involve the parents in the transmission of faith to the youth.
- The importance of recruitment and formation of new catechists within the pastoral units.

In terms of young adults, we are conscious that the young adults are the “great absents” of our Church life. Our ecclesial community proposes to:

Reunite and assemble the 18-35 among themselves and around Jesus Christ. (5th orientation)

For the first time during our Pastoral Orientation Congress, some young adults were consulted so as to give them an opportunity to express what they live, their priorities, the meaning they give to their life, family life, the future, and the good choices to achieve success for their lives. A major priority was expressed at the Congress: the formation of a committee of youth 18-35, to identify social and spiritual projects as well as to develop activities for their generation.

Our great wish would be to create a context which would allow the youth to experience and live a real encounter with Jesus Christ and become conscious that they are Church.

One way to meet the Risen Christ is to be involved with the poor in our milieu. This conviction has led us in the direction of our 6th pastoral orientation: **to ensure that the social and missionary ministry are at the heart of the concerns of all our Christian communities.**

Already in this regard we can count on the presence of our Diocesan Committee for Solidarity and Social Justice and many committees at the parish level as well as the committee of Development and Peace. (The 3rd Sunday of October is reserved as World Mission Sunday).

We are looking for more openness to the poor and to involve ourselves with them. Lately, a new face of poverty shows itself – the refugees who have arrived in our midst during these recent years. Involvement with the poor concerns giving persons their dignity. We think in particular of those who are sick and those confined to their homes, the shut-ins. We must sustain and support what already exists in our milieu: food banks, clothing, support to bereaved families by offering a meal after funerals, etc.

Lastly, our Church includes our structural realities, and so we identify our 7th **pastoral orientation – Our church and other buildings**. It is time to review the status of each parish in terms of its administrative and financial aspects. It appears necessary to revitalize the parish communities and find new means to determine the human and financial resources so as to assure the future of each community.

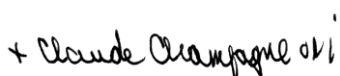
The study on the financial situation of each parish community will be done within the coming months or in future years with the assistance of the Diocesan Council for Economic Affairs.

It is essential to make sure that a part of the funds of our community are allotted to pastoral and missionary activities.

Here are a few of the elements to which the parish communities, the pastoral units, and the diocese have committed last autumn 2017. These commitments will be actualized during the coming months and years.

As conclusion, united together, we can take a missionary turning point proposed by Pope Francis for our Church. As Bishop of the Edmundston Church, I want to assure you of my solidarity in this mission and in prayer.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Claude Champagne O.M.I." with a small flourish at the end.

+ Claude Champagne, O.M.I.
Bishop of Edmundston