
« PATHS TO THE FUTURE »

A SECOND DOCUMENT OF THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL SUBMITTED TO BISHOP FRANÇOIS THIBODEAU, C.J.M. WORKING PAPER DATED 16 DECEMBER 1998 TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE WHO ARE ATTENDING THE JANUARY 6-7, 1999 SESSION

Introduction

We are grateful to all those who took seriously the pastoral restructuring of our diocese and sent us their suggestions and recommendations. This participation and solidarity is a sign of vitality and success.

Process

We want to apprise you of where we are, in the restructuring process. After the memorable diocesan session of February, 1998 and meetings at the deanery level, each parish was able to submit by the end of June of that year its own recommendations to the Diocesan Pastoral Council. In September, the Council compiled the answers and recommendations and these were sent to the heads of parishes along with a working paper giving the guidelines to be followed, regarding steps to be taken. In the fall, heads of parishes reacted to this paper and submitted further recommendations. Following these responses from all the priests of the diocese and all the deanery chairpersons, we offer you the working paper approved by the Diocesan Pastoral Council on December 16, 1998, which is to serve as a discussion guide for the January, 1999 pastoral session. In the coming months - especially at the time of appointments in June of this year - there will follow the bishop's decisions which will initiate the process of implementing the restructuring.

Mission

Throughout this process the main objective of our reflection has been to become aware of the mission that the Lord has given to the Church and every baptised and confirmed person, the mission of proclaiming the Father's love to all who would hear, and to build together the Church, Body of Christ, People of God, and dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. The Church's mission is to proclaim the resurrected Jesus Christ and the Kingdom he has come to set up. « Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. » One must find one's own place and vocation within this church-communion, and place one's gifts at the service of one's brothers and sisters.

Co-Responsibility

As living members of the People of God we must remind ourselves that we are all co-responsible for the precious inheritance that Jesus the Risen One left us: the Gospel of Salvation. « The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. » We have a task to accomplish, a ministry to carry out because of our baptism, because of the charisms and gifts we have received, and because of our ordination.

In the Light of Our History

In order to better understand the present situation and look for paths to the future, it is good to take a look back at history. Before the founding of the first parish in 1792, the « people of the Madawaska Area » were visited by missionary priests on a regular basis; in this manner priests from Isle-Verte came to the St. John River Valley down to the Tobique. In 1850 there was still only one parish in the entire territory: Saint Basile, with a Catholic population of 1007 and one resident priest. In 1900, there were eleven parishes with nine resident priests. At the time of the founding of our diocese in 1944, the Catholic population was 37,782 (6739 families), with 21 parishes and 14 missions. There were 35 churches, 42 diocesan priests, 12 religious priests and 170 sisters (7 congregations). By December 31, 1997, the total population on the territory of our diocese was 56,240, of which 53,079 were Catholics grouped in 32 parishes. There were 43 diocesan priests, 9 religious priests, and 130 sisters. As of November 30, 1998, there were 15

diocesan and 4 religious priests, and 19 pastoral agents involved in parish ministry; 3 retired priests are regularly involved in ministry, and five others are involved on an occasional basis. Because of their vitality, our parishes have been able to adjust to the reality of the time, making do with available resources.

Decisive Changes

Vatican Council II (1962-1965), the changes which have occurred in all areas (work, education, transport, health, politics, culture, economy, migration), the priest shortage, lay participation, and the 1987-1990 Diocesan Synod, compel us to reconsider our entire organisation, as the objective of our mission is ever before our eyes.

Necessity of Pastoral Teams

It must no longer be that only one person is in charge of a parish. Wanting to maintain this structure from the recent past is to risk not being able, on the very short term, to guarantee basic pastoral service: faith education, celebration, prayer, and leadership. Faced with a variety of situations and the actual spiritual and pastoral needs, what must prevail is the assurance that for the time being a team composed of three to five persons working together to ensure the stability of the community. But we must honestly recognise that it is not every priest, nor every lay person or sister who can work in a team or within a framework of co-responsibility. If before any other change each parish head, parish pastoral council, and Christian community were to present to our bishop as early as possible a list of persons capable of team work and of taking over a Christian community, a big step would be taken. And as a first step, our bishop could give this team a one-year mandate.

Training

It is all right to have a pastoral team in every parish, but team members must be appropriately trained, otherwise there is risk of confusion of roles and mandates. It is true that life brings experience, but quality pastoral ministry cannot be improvised: it needs time and energy. Our diocese has its quota of quality in this area because of the services it initiated: the École de la Foi [School of Faith], the Pastoral Formation Service, both English and French sectors, the diocesan seminary, the Centre de spiritualité [Spirituality Centre], pastoral ministry sessions, etc. We can be rightly grateful to all these persons in our diocese who are helping in these areas, as well as to those who will be following them.

Task of the Shepherd Priest

Faced with a shortage of priests, it is important that these be freed more and more from administrative tasks and that members of economic affairs committees take on their own responsibilities. Priests must find time to pray and celebrate, to look after the spiritual training of their team, and to ensure the spiritual formation of committee members, to renew and upgrade themselves, and rest. Priests must also visit the sick and the poor in their milieu; they must proclaim the Gospel in every way, but especially through their homilies and religious education. Within a short time they must no longer be priest / administrators but be moderators of pastoral teams appoint first of all to those tasks directly related to their priestly ordination. Besides, recent Church legislation (Canon 517.2) proposes this style of animating: « If the diocesan bishop should decide that due to a dearth of priests a participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon or to some other person who is not a priest or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest endowed with the powers and faculties of a pastor to supervise the pastoral care. »

Role of the Pastoral Team

It is important that each community have a group of persons with the specific mandate of ensuring the pastoral animation of the parish, in co-responsibility with the pastor. This commitment of Christians flows from their baptism through which each one shares in the mission of Jesus the Priest, Prophet, and King. It is the mission of the Church to evangelise and transform one's milieu according to the Gospel that must guide the team members' pastoral action. The community must have time for prayer, it must look after its sick and handicapped, welcome the children, comfort the dying and grieving families, stand up for justice and against oppression, ensure the faith education of all, and educate the children in the faith. The priest-moderator looks after the animation of team life, which team is answerable to the bishop for its decisions. By his ordination the priest is a sign that the Church is a gift of God, and that we do not give it to ourselves; hence, there is a responsibility to be watchful and vigilant. The priest presides the eucharist, the community gathering. The one in charge of coordinating convenes and facilitates team meetings and coordinates the team's pastoral activities.

« Inter-Parish Services »

In order to avoid exhaustion and the depletion of our human and financial resources, it is important to establish now common services and to broaden « inter-parish services » in religious education, sacramental preparation, a common schedule of masses, and common accounting services. We must slim down our structure. It seems that in close cooperation with the local deanery, our parishes could make recommendations to our Bishop, in this matter.

Pastoral Project

A major element in the formation of a pastoral team and the energising of a Christian community is what is called the "pastoral project." When a team can pinpoint a project it would like to carry out, this is already a good beginning. When the whole community is implicated in this project, this is a sign of remarkable life in the community. In our young diocese certain "traditions" have cemented our communities together: concern for the poor (witness the people getting together to help, in emergency situations), concern for religious education (we have tenaciously insisted that our youth be given quality religious education), an outstanding missionary spirit (our communities have given numerous missionaries and substantial financial aid to missions), and a sense of gathering (we have been ensuring week-end celebrations to the entire population). If our pastoral teams or our communities can appropriate these characteristics, our Church will have a bright future. We have the success of our eucharistic congresses as an example: these have been and remain pastoral projects that gather communities together.

Recommendations

From all the recommendations we received from our parishes and a few individuals, the following are those we would like to prioritise. We wish to inform you that the deanery chairpersons met with the Bishop's council on December 9 to look at several of these recommendations. We would be grateful to you if, at this present session you look at the following document and come up with your own suggestions and recommendations. These will then be passed on to our Bishop.

a) General

That by the end of May, 1999, each parish pastoral council, after parish consultation, submit to the bishop names of persons who could be mandated as members of an eventual parish pastoral team.

That at the time of pastoral appointments special attention be paid to the composition and functioning of parish pastoral teams.

That at the time of these appointments the priest-team member be also appointed moderator of the team according to Church legislation, and be appointed director of those pastoral activities dependent on his priestly ministry; that another person eventually coordinate team activities while another is appointed to organise religious education and yet another to managing economic affairs.

That the pastoral team commissioned by the bishop look after the different areas of Christian living (faith education, sacramental celebration, fellowship and transformation of one's milieu).

That the pastoral team meet on a regular weekly basis, that they participate in monthly deanery meetings and be faithful in attending diocesan pastoral sessions.

That diocesan regulations give specific guidelines regarding stipends to be paid to those in charge of the parish, taking into consideration the hours worked,

available resources, and the number of people served.

That when a pastoral team has been commissioned we revise the role and functions of the parish pastoral council so as to avoid duplication or multiplicity of meetings. If the team ensures the carrying out of pastoral activities, members of the parish pastoral council will be more involved in studying what pastoral directions should be taken.

That priority be given to religious education at the parish level.

That special concern be shown to the poor, the sick, youth and the elderly; that the pastoral team appoint someone to look after each of these sectors.

That special attention be paid to our families, especially those that have major problems.

That the training of committed lay people be a priority for those in charge of parishes.

That in order to strengthen community life the Sunday mass or Sunday gathering be strongly encouraged, with services during the week for those institutions having no chaplain.

That new parishes to be created be groupings of Christian communities, with each community's identity being respected, so as to ensure the long-term spiritual needs of the population.

That at the announcement of a new parish the pastoral team study with the existing PPCs the composition and functioning of the future parish pastoral council.

That each new parish be given a new name; that the PPC of the parish concerned submit a few possible names, especially of saints and blessed of our Church.

That each place of worship of new parishes maintain its proper identity and be administered by an economic affairs committee, according to diocesan guidelines.

b) Specific

I - Upper Madawaska

The Upper Madawaska has a Catholic population of 5 315, in six communities presently served by three priests and three pastoral agents.

Establishment of a new parish composed of St-François d'Assise, Clair, St-François Xavier, and Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire, Connors. Each place of worship keeps its actual name and its economic affairs committee.

That in August, 2000, the Christian communities of St-Hilaire and Saint-Coeur de Marie, Baker Brook, be amalgamated as one community with two places of worship, keeping their actual patronymic, and their own economic affairs committees.

That in August 2001, the St-Thomas d'Aquin Christian community of Baker Lake

be joined to one of the above new parishes,
according to evaluation and recommendations made.

II - Restigouche

**The Restigouche deanery has 6 584 Catholics
in four parishes served by two priests and three pastoral agents.**

That in August, 1999, a pastoral team made up of priests, pastoral agents and a delegate from each community form the new deanery council and together coordinate their deanery's pastoral activities.

That each community identity be maintained,
as well as each place of worship, PEAC, PPC, or equivalent.

That in August, 2001 the Christian communities of Notre-Dame-des-Prodiges, Kedgwick, Saint-Martin, St-Jean-Baptiste and Très-Saint-Sacrement, St-Quentin comprise a new parish with each place of worship maintaining its own identity and economic affairs committee.

III - Grand Falls

**The Grand Falls Deanery has a Catholic population of 13 738,
in seven Christian communities served by six priests and seven pastoral agents.**

That in August, 1999,
the Assumption Parish pastoral team be reinforced for broader animation.
That Sunday celebrations
or our Assumption Parish anglophone brothers and sisters
be ensured by a priest
who will also serve the Edmundston anglophone population
and a parish in the Southern Victoria Deanery.

That in August, 1999,
a pastoral team be commissioned to facilitate
the communities of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes,
Saint-Léonard, and Saint-Léonard-Parent.

That in August, 2000,
the communities of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, Saint-Léonard
and Saint-Léonard-Parent form a new parish
with each place of worship maintaining its own identity
and economic affairs committee.

That in the next two years (1999-2001)
a pastoral team composed of priests, pastoral agents and community delegates
ensure pastoral ministry in the parishes
of Saint-André, Saint-Georges, and Saint-Michel, Drummond.

That in August, 2001,
the Christian communities of Saint-André, Saint-Georges
and St-Michel, Drummond be formed into a new parish
with each place of worship maintaining its own identity
and economic affairs committee.

That the St-Éloi Chapel [St-André]
become a place of individual and community prayer,
with sacraments celebrated at the St-André church.

IV - Southern Victoria

The Southern Victoria Deanery comprises 3 630 Catholics grouped in two pastoral units comprising eight communities served by two priests and eight pastoral agents.

That in August, 1999,
the Christian communities of Blue Bell, St. Theresa, Anderson Road,
and St. Thomas Aquinas, Plaster Rock
form a new parish with each place of worship
maintaining its own identity and economic affairs committee.

That in August, 1999,
a pastoral team be commissioned
to ensure the pastoral animation of the Christian communities
of St. Patrick, Limestone Siding, St. Joseph, Tilley,
St. Mary of the Angels, Perth-Andover, and Our Lady of Mercy, Aroostook,
with each place of worship
maintaining its own identity and economic affairs committee.

That in August, 1999,
a pastoral team be commissioned
to ensure the pastoral animation of St. Ann, Maliseet.
That the Aroostook church become a place for individual and community prayer,
with sacraments being celebrated mainly at Perth-Andover.

V - Edmundston

The Edmundston Deanery comprises 24 180 Catholics in seven parishes served by seven priests, two pastoral agents, and one seminarian intern.

That in August, 1999,
a team be commissioned to ensure
the pastoral animation of the Christian communities
of Sacré-Coeur, Green River, and Ste-Anne-de-Madawaska.

That bonds be strengthened
between the parish community of St-Basile, the Hotel-Dieu of St. Joseph
and Foyer St-Joseph [senior citizens] communities.

That in August, 1999,
a team be appointed to ensure the pastoral animation
of the St-Jacques and St-Joseph Christian communities.

That in August, 2000,
a team be appointed to ensure the pastoral animation
of the Christian communities of the Immaculate Conception
and Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs.

That Sunday celebrations for our anglophone brothers and sisters in Edmundston
be assured by a priest
who also ministers to the Grand Falls anglophone population
and to a parish in the Southern Victoria Deanery.

The Edmundston community could meet in the chapel
of the Sisters Servants of the Blessed Sacrament on Saturday evenings,
with the two Sunday Masses being held at Grand Falls and Southern Victoria.