



VOCATION STORIES OF CALLS TO THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

« YOU HAVE SEDUCED ME, O LORD,
AND YOU HAVE PREVAILED! »

(Jeremiah 20:7)



Bishop François Thibodeau, C.J.M.

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Presentation

The feast of Pentecost is an extremely important event in the life of the Church. As in the first days of the Christian communities, Jesus' disciples still marvel today at what the Spirit does, in the world we live in. The Acts of the Apostles tell us that « They began talking about the Mirabilia Dei », the wonders of God (Cf. Acts 2:4).

One verb very often used in Holy Scripture is the verb « to tell, » « to tell about ». Just as the Chosen People loved to retell the wonderful story of their liberation by God, in the same manner the early Christians quickly picked up the cue: they could not praise the Lord often enough.

From the very beginning, John's Gospel tells us of the call of the first disciples who confirm that « We have found the Messiah! » (Jn. 1:41) In this way and thanks to the Holy Spirit, new disciples were added to the fledgling community.

In presenting to you the vocation accounts of baptised people called to the ordained ministry, it is a pressing invitation I send you to acknowledge the marvels which the Spirit is still working in our midst. By witnessing the « wonder », the « marvel » we feel, others also will feel gratitude for all the gifts given to our Church. A prayer will flow from our hearts: « Continue to send us many good workers for your harvest. »

Then the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians (4:15-16) will be fulfilled: « Let us profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head. Through him the whole body grows, and with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself up in love. »

I wholeheartedly thank all the priests who have participated in preparing this pastoral letter. May their witness be for the greater glory of God!

May the Spirit pursue his wonderful work among us! And may the mysterious and unexpected calls continue for many years to come!

Bishop François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
« His Love Is from Age to Age. »

It is in the light of these words of the Virgin Mary that I want to look back on my vocation story. Was God's love really present to my family and to me in particular ?

In Poverty

I was the seventh of twelve children. While not living in dire poverty, we had few material resources. Father worked hard to feed the family: work on the farm in the spring and summer, and work in the woods in the winter. The children, too, had to work according to their ability. It was through the affection shown in the family that I had my first intuitions of God. I came to recognise Jesus more and more clearly in the bonds that united us to one another. We lived in a faith-filled atmosphere which was expressed in prayer, prayer before meals, morning and evening prayer, and worship in church. Following the family rosary, Father would remain kneeling a long period of time in silent prayer. Mother also spent long moments in prayer: I still see her in my mind's eye, praying with arms outstretched in the form of a cross. The love of God was truly present in the family.

Mother's Death

July 27, 1961: I had just had my twelfth birthday. Mother had been in hospital for a week; doctors have diagnosed meningitis. Mother's last words were to Father, to ask that my brother and eventually continue our studies for the priesthood. Father agreed and she thanked him with a beautiful smile. But how would this happen ? August 5, 1951: Mother dies at the age of 44, leaving Father alone with 11 children, a little sister of mine having died in 1948 at the age of five months. As was the custom then, Mother was waked at home three days and nights. During this time, the assistant priest visited the family to offer his condolences. Taking me aside, he told me that I had passed the entrance exams two weeks before, and informed me that I was accepted at the St-Jean-Eudes College, and my classics studies would take place at the Saint-Coeur-de-Marie Minor Seminary; he himself would find the money to pay for my tuition. To do so, he asked the local lumbermen to each cut a cord of wood for a future priest; because of this, I shall never know the names of my

generous benefactors. August 9, 1951 was the date of Mother's funeral. The church, all draped in black, was filled with people. During the afternoon, following the funeral, family friends came with an offer to adopt one or the other of us... Father thanked them for their kindness and understanding: « It is bad enough that they are orphans, without their being separated from one another. » Father would be widowed five years, providing for the younger children. Throughout this difficult and tragic period, our faith in divine Providence never flagged. The death of someone as loving as Mother would always remain an unhealed wound, but the love of God was there. Throughout my life I have felt Mother's presence at my side, and her tender care of me has been felt many times. She left us all the exceptional values of kindness and solidarity.

School and Seminary

September 5, 1951 marked my first trip to Québec. It was also my first day at the Saint-Coeur-de-Marie Minor Seminary, lodged at the Saint-Jean-Eudes College, a school for students who think they might have a vocation as Eudist priests. Used as I was to wide-open spaces, I suddenly found myself enclosed by fences, with the odours of the Anglo-Pulp Mill poisoning the air. October 3, 1951: I become a runaway! With the help of a friend I manage to make it back to Saint-Odilon. Noticing my absence, the director of the seminary notified my parish priest. When I arrive, my family is waiting for me at the bus stop. Father, whose reaction I quite feared, said aloud: « I knew very well that you were too young to go off to boarding school! » But I believe that St. Theresa of Lisieux, whose feast day it was, had a hand in this. The priest came to the house and asked whether I wanted to return to the seminary of stay home. On my bus trip back home I had had the time to reconsider my action, so I answered, « I'll go back tomorrow! » Thanks to the assistant director and my spiritual director, I continued along the path I had undertaken. Studies went well, interspersed by many periods of prayer and reflection. Retreats and days of recollection are a great aid in learning to discern God's call, whose presence is always there. Following the students' retreat capping six years of classical studies - a retreat animated by a Vincentian priest, Father Maurice Couture, who is now the Archbishop of Québec - I asked to join the Eudists. September 7, 1957, at the age of 18 I, along with six fellow graduates were « clothed with the cassock », when we began our training as future Eudists. Following two years of philosophy at Saint-Coeur Seminary in Charlesbourg, Québec, from August, 1960 to July, 1961 I was sent « into the active life » to Université Saint-Louis in Edmundston. In September of 1961 I and a few other theology students are welcomed to Saint-Jean-Eudes Seminary in Limbourg, Québec, by **Father Fernand Lacroix**, the superior. I became a full-fledged member of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (the Eudist Fathers) October 1, 1961. This was followed by tonsure and minor orders. I was ordained subdeacon June 3, 1964 from Bishop Paul-Émile Charbonneau, and deacon by newly-consecrated **Archbishop Joseph-Aurèle Plourde** whom I had known in Edmundston. On Saturday, May 8, 1965, **Archbishop Plourde** came to Saint-Odilon to ordain me to the priesthood. On my souvenir card I had the following words inscribed: Love is not loved enough: let us love one another!

A Wonderful Mission

For 37 years now the Lord has continued to show me His love. After teaching religious studies at Saint-Jean-Eudes College I had the privilege of taking a three-year course at the Laval University School of Social Service. In May, 1971, Cardinal Maurice Roy appointed me director of social services for the Diocese of Québec. In May, 1986, Cardinal Louis-Albert Vachon appointed me editor in chief of Pastorale Québec. In June, 1990 the Superior General of the Eudist Congregation asked me to take over the charge of provincial superior of the Eudists in North America. On October 23, 1993 the Holy Father appointed me the fifth bishop of Edmundston, and on January 9, 1994 **Bishop Gérard Dionne**, assisted by Archbishop Donat Chiasson and **Bishop Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M.**, with eleven other bishops present, consecrated me bishop. Based on Holy Scripture and the rich Eudist spiritual heritage, I chose as my motto: **His Love Is from Age to Age.**

Bishop Gérard Dionne
« Familiar Company »

Along my vocation journey I want to mention first of all the influence of my family. I had the chance of growing up in a devout Catholic environment. My parents' example was certainly a determining factor in the blossoming of my vocation. While still very young I developed the habit of attending daily Mass with my Father. In grade 7 I became an altar server. Two of my brothers attended seminary, one became a priest and the other had to stop due to health problems. A priest uncle, Mother's brother, was our benefactor during our seminary days. A cousin was a missionary priest. The company of priests was familiar to me.

A second factor in determining my vocation was without doubt the admiration I had for the parish priest of Ville-Dégelis, the parish of my youth. He celebrated Mass in such a way that he made us appreciate and love serving at the altar and liturgical celebrations. Without his ever forcing us, without even alluding to the

question of vocation, it seemed that we were drawn to imitate him.

The Sisters who taught me also influenced my choice of vocation. My prayers and theirs converged.

I did my classical studies in a seminary for adult vocations where everything was geared to the priesthood. The seminary's founder was still living when I arrived as a student. He used to repeat often, « One must be a priest before becoming one. » This was an invitation to try to live out our vocation as if we were already priests.

As we grow we are tempted by different life options, and I felt drawn to medicine, for a while; still, deep down my first option remained the priesthood, but the care of the sick attracted me very much. When the time came for a final decision, the first option was the normal course for me to take. My spiritual director told me that if I desired the priesthood it was because I was following my dreams and capacities. He even said that if I decided otherwise, the idea of the priesthood would come back to me again, later.

So, I followed what seemed to be meant for me, and I have never for a moment regretted it. I have been truly happy with my choice of vocation. And I am still happy!

Albert, Fr. Rino
« Mysterious Design »

It is difficult to evaluate the priestly vocation and its many steps, because the Lord shows himself in God's mysterious designs and the human response in actions which are coloured by each one's character, family and cultural background, the awareness of an ideal to strive for and the realisation of human weaknesses, to reach the summit which, one day, makes us react in wonder: « It is good for us to be here! » (Mt. 17), after having heard beforehand, « If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his self, take up his cross, and follow me » (Mt. 16).

It was self-denial which first marked my childhood and youth: orphaned at the age of 3, following my father's death at the age of 29, along with his 15 year-old brother, in a farmhouse fire at Baker Brook.

Our family home was in Saint-Hilaire, a short distance from the church. For about ten years my mother sang at the pastor's daily Mass, and she would take me to serve Father Aurèle Godbout's Mass. I much esteemed this priest for his piety and spiritual and human graciousness. Mother's volunteer service to the parish edified me, as well as her Christian behaviour in her tragedy. An aunt who was a Religious of Saint-Rosaire wrote: « Yvonne, my sister-in-law, seven months pregnant and mother of two children among whom is three year-old Rino who owes in great part his vocation to the priesthood to her generous self-sacrifice. »

Another fact which can influence a young person in the choice of a vocation whatever it may be is the ambient environment. Mine was solidly directed toward the priesthood. My mother's side counted eight priests, and my father's side had two, one of whom was a missionary in Bengal, and I felt drawn to that. However, I had to give up this project for health reasons. Considering my eighty years, it must be that God wanted me where I am now, in relatively poor health but so ever grateful to be able to still minister to the hundred-odd residents of the Villa Des Jardins in Edmundston.

I exercised my priestly ministry in the parishes of St-Georges, Grand Falls (1959-1971), Saint-Basile (1971-1989), Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur, Edmundston (1984-1995), among a pious people who felt fiscally responsible for the upkeep of their church, and who listened carefully to the Word of God as they heard it either at church or at religious gatherings and meetings. I have also shown great concern for religious education at all levels, and I consider it the most precious heritage of my ministry.

I was engaged in other priestly functions at various levels, during my 55 years of priesthood: chancellor of the diocese, hospital chaplain, spiritual director to several diocesan organisations, assistant judicial vicar at the marriage tribunal: these were all services asked of me by my diocesan superiors, they were a response to a call from God, for finding happiness, as it is written, « It is better to give than to receive ». If I have experienced this, it is thanks to the kindness and mercy of Jesus!

Bernier, P. Gaëtan
« An Irresistible Call »

I was born May 27, 1967, and am from Edmundston. From my birth I have had to struggle to keep alive, as I have several serious health problems. Most of my childhood years were spent at the Montreal Children's Hospital. Very soon I learned to recognise the presence of God in my life. Without Him - and, certainly, without the love of my parents - I would no longer be living. For me, the Lord was a confidant, and my best friend. I was barely three years old when the doctor once asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. My answer: « A pope! »

My parents are committed believers, and for them religious education is a priority. I was therefore initiated very young in the Catholic faith. In elementary school I learned about the Gospel, especially about Christ suffering on the Cross. He has always been and still is for me a source of inspiration, helping me to walk on in faith despite my health problems.

I was in grade 5 at Notre-Dame School when I felt called to give myself to God in a final and complete way. I dreamed of becoming a monk or, at times, a missionary brother. At the time a young curate at Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs parish would visit us at school, and his way of acting out and explaining the Gospel message inspired me to pursue this special relationship I felt I had with God, and in grade 6 I resolved to follow in this young priest's footsteps and become priest myself. The young priest I am referring to is our beloved confrere Roger Dionne. He sowed in me the seed which would make me a priest!

My vocation also stems from my mother's heart. Hers was the heart of a shepherd, a pastor, and she passed it on to me. In grade 12 I decided to contact our [then-Bishop Gérard Dionne](#), to talk to him about my call to the priesthood. He advised me to wait and to pursue my university studies. I then did a year of nursing, but it was a failure because of my poor health. I therefore tried my luck again with [Bishop Dionne](#), but he once again recommended that I continue with my studies at university, to test my vocation and acquire more maturity.

Faced with what I felt was a refusal, I forgot all about the priesthood and opted for the teaching profession. Towards the end of my student teaching I watched a TV programme on the Major Seminary of Montreal. That was all I needed to rekindle the call to follow Christ. I therefore approached [Bishop Dionne](#) a third time, and he welcomed me with open arms. In June 1990 I entered the Major Seminary of Montreal.

I remember how much I doubted my vocation call, that first year in seminary. A friend and I decided to go to St. Joseph Oratory, and before the great statue of the Saint I lit a votive light and asked for some visible sign of the authenticity of my calling. I hadn't even finished praying when the votive light blew up! For some, this would be pure coincidence, but for me it was a sign of God telling me to continue my studies at the Montreal Major Seminary.

Those were four difficult years due to my health problems, but I kept climbing the hill which led to the crowning of my vocation. During these years I received the rite of admission of candidates, then the ministries of lector and of acolyte. The seminary superior, Marc Ouellet, P.S.S., often reminded me that I looked like Christ on the Cross! As a matter of fact I was very much broken by numerous operations, and I could readily see Christ's wounds, there.

I was ordained deacon at the Cité des Jeunes A.-M. Sormany Regional High School on March 19, 1997, following two years of internship at Assumption Parish in Grand Falls and a year at Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur Parish in Edmundston. Then followed priestly ordination in the St-Jacques parish church on June 7, 1997, feast of the Holy Heart of Mary. While at Assumption Parish I was with Fr. Roger Dionne who had inspired me to become a priest. Here I would like to tell you a story: One evening at supper, he and the cook were talking about how they had enjoyed visiting Expo 67 in Montreal. Noticing that I was not joining in the conversation, Roger said, « I'm sure you went to Expo, Gaëtan. What did you enjoy the most ? » It was then that I reminded him that I was born only in 1967! Poor Roger, he suddenly became aware of his age!!

I would like to end by telling you about what has been sustaining me after five years of priestly life. I have discovered and have attached myself to Christ, especially to the suffering Christ. Why ? Simply because suffering has stamped my life, like it has marked the life of many others. For this reason I also have a great devotion to Our Lady of Seven Sorrows. Then, the lives of two saints have greatly impressed me: the Curé of Ars and Brother André. Both experienced suffering, and they persevered in humility. Like the Curé of Ars [St. John Vianney], I often feel unworthy of my calling. Still, I feel great joy, and a call to always witness to the love of Jesus Christ in my life and in the hearts of all persons of good will.

If you are young and feel called by God but have doubts, remember that this is normal. Do not hide your call from others, talk about it. You must trust in God and His divine mercy. It is His unconditional love which makes this vocation irresistible. No matter the route you take, you will feel the call as something urgent. The Lord needs our hearts to love the neighbour, our arms to welcome others, our ears to listen to the suffering, and our voices to comfort those in despair. God awaits you at the crossroad of your life... Follow Him!

Bossé, Fr. Benoît
« Something Not Easy! »

I was born in 1927, a farmer's son. I started attending church with my parents at a very early age. Around the age of four I had heard a 16 or 17 year-old comment: « Me, I never went to school, and I can't read or write. » This comment upset me and really scarred me. Thereafter, I often used to tell myself: « I won't be like him, I'll go to school, and there I'll learn to read and write. »

When the time came, I started school. It wasn't far from home, only 100 / 150 feet from the house. I remember enjoy school because I learned to read, write, do arithmetic, etc. I was in second or third grade when I told my mother I would like to be a priest. She answered in approximately this way: « You're thinking of getting into something not easy, my Ben! Look! It takes everything she has for the schoolteacher to please thirty-dd families, and a priest has to please an entire parish! Think about it carefully. » I had been hoping for her approval... but I felt quite let down. I continued with my school work. Some time later, I had a real disappointment: in the fall of 1937 - I was 10 - fire destroyed the barn, the harvest, and the garage with the car inside. At the time, this spelled pretty much disaster. I was in grade 5, I could continue, here, until eighth grade, but could I continue school, after that ? As a matter of fact, I continued in the same school until 1941, when I finished grade 8.

I then asked to attend school in Edmundston. I lived at my sister's. She had been married three years, and lived in the city two miles from the school. My mother - with the meager revenue from knitting and weaving, and my brother who was five years my elder - supported me financially. In September I started high school, and in June I was first in the class. But suddenly, a second big disappointment: my mother suffered a heart attack and could no longer help me as before, though my brother continued. Two years later I finished grade 11 and passed the provincial exams with top honours, with « First Division » Mention. This earned me the Governor General's Medal. At that time I was considering getting a job scaling wood, working as a clerk, or something else, enough work to earn enough to pay for my schooling and reach my goal. You can rest a sure that I also prayed hard, to the Lord...

My success in school had raised the family's enthusiasm. Without knowing too much how things went, it happened that at the end of July or the beginning of August I was registered as a student at Université du Sacré-Cœur in Bathurst. Some time later, two of my high school teachers visited my sister to ask what I planned on doing, come fall. They volunteered to help, if I ver needed it. At that same period, while I was working in the fields with my father and older brother, Monsignor Conway left a telephone message at the neighbour's telling me to see him as soon as possible.

In September, 1944, I started university where I continued as an interested and serious student. At home, things were going well and there were sufficient financial resources to meet my needs. But then, after my third year, my younger brother married, and he would be taking on other responsibilities as head of a household. It was at that point that help came from another direction. I was asked whether I would accept a teaching position while pursuing my studies. This would help defray my room and board and tuition. It would also give me a private room instead of a common dormitory and study hall. Besides, it would keep me in pocket money. Of course I accepted, especially that it would bring relief to my parents.

That fall, upon arrival I met with the dean of studies to find out what was in store for me. After a few words he assigned me the room I was to occupy and the books of the course I was to give: chemistry to the second year college students! He told me to take good care of the book, since I would be needing it next year, to teach the third year students. He wished me good luck and assured me of his help, should I need it... Two years later, after having done good work, I obtained my B.A. degree « *summa cum laude* ».

Accepted and guided by **Bishop Joseph-Romeo Gagnon**, I entered the Québec Major Seminary in 1949 and registered with the faculty of theology, there. I was ordained four years later, May 30, 1953, in the Edmundston Cathedral; on June 10 I received my licentiate in theology « *magna cum laude* ». Since then, I taught at Université Saint-Louis in Edmundston for eighteen years and did weekend pastoral ministry; I was also assistant priest at Saint-Jacques for a year, and pastor of St-Thomas-d'Aquin Parish in Baker Lake for seventeen years. I am now retired, but help with occasional ministry... Allow me to say that I have never regretted answering the Lord's call.

« He has led me by the hand into green pastures. »

Like every vocation, mine has the Lord as its starting point... The Lord challenged me. Not directly, like a voice I physically heard, but by people I met along the way... or by events.

Among the people I met there were, first and foremost, my parents, honest people who did not consider themselves above others, people whose faith was unswerving. This faith illuminated the family. Family prayer was part of daily life. My parents always considered it a privilege to welcome a priest in their home or to their table. It is not surprising, then, that many priests became friends of the family! When I was in grade 8, a priest, the first pastor of the parish, spoke to me, but the ground had already been well prepared. For over four years an Ursuline nun had suggested that the family say a short prayer every day, for as long as one had not chosen a vocation. The prayer ran: « O God of wisdom and counsel, grant me the grace to discover the state of life I must choose, to accomplish your holy will. » I said this prayer until I reached my final decision.

After years of study with the Eudist Fathers, and after many years also of spiritual direction and much prayer, the Lord's calling came into sharper focus. It was a call to me, to preach to others the message of love which Jesus had given, especially to the poor and the little of this world. After four years of theology I felt great joy in my response and, on May 8, 1965, Bishop Louis Langevin ordained me in my parish church. I was the first priest from the parish.

Before ordination I had to decide whether to be a parish priest or to join the Eudist Fathers. Having studied with them, I had been able to learn firsthand about their community life, and I was impressed by the spirit animating them. Since I had been steeped so many years in this atmosphere, I opted for the Eudists.

It is not always easy to discern God's ways, but after 37 years of priesthood, I see better, now, how the Lord has led me, and I can only thank Him for having chosen me to work as a priest, in his mission.

The Lord has truly overwhelmed me with the wonder of His love, and I would like to continue proclaiming this loud and clear so that as many as possible taste and experience His love.

Desjardins, Msgr. Eymard, P.A.

« Come and See! »

Lord, I am a bit embarrassed at being asked to place in the light of day this relationship that naturally developed between you, Christ the Priest, and the one you have deigned to call by name, inviting him to share in your one priesthood. - « You have not chosen me; I have chosen you... » (Jn. 15:16a).

In revealing too much, isn't there a risk, Lord, to break the tandem call-response, on one hand, and graciousness-gift, on the other? In giving so much importance to the one called one runs the risk of moving you over a bit, you the Author of all grace.

All of this is the mystery in human form. But, then, Lord, is this not a bit in the image of your own incarnation in this world, where it is sometimes very difficult to separate these two realities without misrepresenting the ever-present action of your grace ?

If I dare look at the human soil where the grace of my priesthood took root, I do so with the conviction of seeing there the presence of your hand leading me at every turn, in my journey. - « Come and see! » (Jn. 1:39)

At the age when one awakens to a sense of wonder, when one learns, at home and at school, awkwardly at first, to discover God the Father and to « tame » Him... in the person of the Son, You were always there, but so quiet!

Then - Remember, Lord ? - when the long period of growth arrived, you made yourself even more discreet. The world of culture was to be topmost on my mind for quite some time. The acquaintance of the great classics, as it spread my horizon, slowly filled a mind ever eager to learn and to know. An introduction to the philosophers crowned a search that was more and more stimulating. It was then that I discovered at one and the same time that man has always yearned for love and happiness, for the beautiful and the good; that he was exhilarated by noble realisations, and crushed under the weight of resounding defeat; still, it was always happiness that he pursued... And that is where you were awaiting me. « Oh, that we might see better times! » (Ps. 4:7).

It was with the Author of the beautiful and the good, revealed in His Son Jesus, that I would be gratified. Guided by his Word, strengthened by his eucharistic Presence, I discovered the path to true happiness, a fulfilling but exclusive joy. Demanding, also, to the point of sowing doubt and fear. Lord, you did not stop there, far from it! By having me discover the deeper meaning of my own human experience, you developed in me the awe-filled desire to pass on this treasure to others through the total gift of self. True, an invitation I had tried to ignore, but the battle engaged was truly unequal. The liberating net... had just been cast. « Come, follow me! » (Mt. 19:21)

You knew, Lord, that the risk was not so much on my side... I could always plead your love, which is everlasting (Rm. 8:39). But this treasure you were handing me I would have to, like everyone else, carry it in a « vessel of clay » (2 Cor. 4:7). « Trust me, » you said to me, Lord. Besides, had you not placed along my path many priests who reflected the joy of your presence, a joy which was theirs « as if they saw the invisible » ? A constant source of inspiration. « I no longer call you servants but friends » (Jn. 15:16b) « All is grace. »

Lord, I stop here, I have already unveiled too much... Sign the text ? Before I do, Lord, would you kindly imprint your seal ?... But I already hear a voice, soft « as a breeze »: - « Not right now: a little more time, to add a few more details... » Fine, Lord!

Dionne, Fr. Roger, V.G.
« Mysterious Ways »

I would love to say that I had an apparition or an illumination during which the Lord spoke to me directly to say that he was calling me to be a priest... but the reality is altogether different. Still, looking back on my journey, I am convinced that it was really the Lord who called me. However, the ways of the lord are very mysterious!

I am the sixth of ten children, a native of Saint-Léonard. My father had a farm on Rang de la Montagne, two miles from the village, but he was also a potato farmer and broker. Growing up, I didn't show much aptitude for being a farmer. Apart from very limited manual labour, I considered myself as more of an intellectual bent. I succeeded much better in solving a math problem or making a book report than I did milking cows or cleaning the chicken coop! A good chance that my older brother was just the opposite. Recognising my limitations and the little interest I showed for farm life, Father - so I was told - saw in this a first sign of a priestly vocation. « I have a son who can't do much: he'll probably be a priest! » The preceding is a great simplification of a journey that was much more complex.

When I think of my family, I feel that I was blessed. My parents were believers and their Church membership showed itself in their sense of duty and responsibility for their children, in family prayer, Sunday Mass, membership in Catholic associations, and their open arms despite a small house already filled to overflowing.

While still quite young, I was greatly impressed by one of our parish priests, especially by his preaching, but also because he was influential, listened to, and respected. I felt called to become like him. However, if I asked my parents to attend Université Saint-Louis, it was not because of any thoughts of the priesthood, but rather to rid myself of a teacher at the village school who made me hyper-nervous. I was then a young boy of 13, very naive regarding what to expect in a boarding school environment: the strict rules and the boredom of a big institution which was far from radiating the human warmth of a family. My illusions quickly dropped, and I became bored to death. Nevertheless, my adaptability proved to be the stronger.

I was there seven years. As a teenager I often doubted what seemed to me a childish dream more than a true vocation. A few months before graduating from the classical course, I was torn between the call which still seemed very unclear to me, and the possibility of teaching in public schools, where there were interesting prospects.

I entered the major seminary just to see what it was, with a strong feeling that I would not stay there. After all, I had had enough of boarding schools! But it was there that the Lord was waiting for me. The further I advanced in my studies, the more convinced I became that it was the Lord who had spoken to my child's heart, many years before. After theological studies at the Québec Major Seminary and pastoral internships at Saint-Roch Parish in Québec City and Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs Parish in Edmundston, I was ordained June 29, 1975 in my parish church at Saint-Léonard, a long way from knowing what was awaiting me in a changing Church and a society in total ferment; still, I was convinced that the Lord would never let me fall.

Dubé, Fr. Étienne
« Go All the Way! »

When I consider what gave rise to my vocation I realise that among other things, there were three decisive elements: the family, Sunday Mass with my parents, and the many conversations I had with a neighbour who sincerely wished to have a priest in his family.

Like most people then, the family gathered for evening prayer. My mother presided over the recitation of the rosary, and every evening she would have one decade to ask the Blessed Virgin to give the Church many good priests. This particular formulation raised my curiosity, and one evening I asked her: « Why do you ask the Virgin to send 'good' priests »? Aren't all priest 'good priests'? » At that moment I noticed some kind of embarrassment cover her features. Then she answered: « Of course, all priests are good, but it's always possible to get better. »

AS I grew older, my parents started taking me to church and Sunday Mass. It was « quite a thing » for me to attend Mass! I was quite impressed by everything surrounding me, in the church: the priest who led the congregation, the altar servers, and the people's piety. I would often tell myself: « When I get older I want to be like Father! I'll talk like him, sing like him, and I'll give communion. » But then I had no idea of the long road I would have to travel before getting there.

What probably touched me the most were my conversations with a neighbour, at the time I was doing my classics course at Collège Sacré-Coeur in Bathurst. His name was Victor Godbout. He loved and greatly admired the priests and he sincerely wished for the Lord to call one of his sons to the priesthood. When, one day, I confided to him my intention of becoming a priest, he said: « Congratulations! » But then, towards the end of my studies at the college, World War II broke out on September 9, 1939. Like many young men of my generation, I was excited with the idea of volunteering. I was about to write to the Trenton, Ontario School of Aviation to seek enrollment when I was suddenly « inspired » with the following reflection: « You have always wanted to become a priest and now, all of a sudden, you're thinking of going to war, to a war that will probably last no more than six months! (As a matter of fact, that's what we used to think; in reality, it would last six years!) Besides, what about your good friend's advice to 'Go all the way' ? » I thought about it and finally decided to go to the major seminary at Halifax. However, at the back of my mind I had decided that « I better like it! »

When I entered the seminary building I immediately felt at home and I felt especially at peace: it was truly my place, to be there. That was when I finally decided to « Go all the way », I was ordained May 7, 1944, with two classmates, *Archbishop Joseph-Aurèle Plourde* and Father Adrien Martin.

Then followed years of ministry in my home province.. I am now retired at Lac-Etchemin, Québec, where I am surrounded by many good friends, though I have kept in touch with many former parishioners. As for my friend Victor (to whom I owe my vocation, for the greater part), his wish was granted a hundredfold, as three of his sons became priests. For myself, I thank the Lord for having chosen me and sustained me through all those years when I have had in my heart the happiness of working for Him!

Duchesne, Fr. Gaston, S.M.
« Everything Spoke to Us of God »

I was born May 15, 1934 in Saint-Hilarion, Charlevoix, Québec, the tenth of eleven children. My father, who was a farmer, moved to the Lac Saint-Jean Region, to the farming community of Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc, when I was a baby. That is where I spent most of my childhood and adolescence.

My parents who were devout Christians raised their family in the respect of God, the Church, and those dedicated to the Church. My mother told me, one day, that she would pray fifteen decades of the rosary every day for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life in her family. I remember something she said when I was a child: « Pray God, and ask Him to let you know your vocation. » From then on I remained faithful to this prayer. My vocation was born in the heart of my mother and my family.

Towards the end of elementary school, a religious priest visited our class to talk about God and about his vocation. He impressed me very much by his words and his kindness. He was the catalyst that triggered in me the desire to give myself to God.

Like all other families at the time, mine was steeped in a religious atmosphere: morning and evening prayer,

Sunday Mass, evening rosary, novenas. Everything around us spoke to us of God. We were tightly reined in, but with respect for the dignity of each person. The family has an important role to play in raising up vocations.

Some years later an older brother became a priest. My mother was getting her first reward for her prayers... then I joined the Marist Fathers, where I really felt at home. It was not easy leaving my family behind, but God in His grace supported me with His love.

I did my studies with an eye to teaching. For twenty-three years I had the joy of being with young people I loved so much. As a child I would collect the neighbourhood children into the family attic, and there I would teach them, pointer stick in hand, because they could be quite raucous at times!! Teaching went very well with the religious ideal I had formed in my youth. Through the years I have taught all secondary school classes.

Once ordained - a youthful dream which developed through the years - my superiors set my steps in another direction. With no knowledge of the ministry to which I was directed, I became a parish priest and pastor for several years. Here I discovered another facet of the Church. It was not always easy to move from eastern to western Québec, to fill in positions as parish priest. Always far from family and family friends, I experienced great loneliness, especially when I learned someone from back home had passed away.

The last task my superiors asked me to take up was that of chaplain in a health institution in New Brunswick. With no preparation for this type of ministry, I had to do as usual, trust in the Lord. All of the sick people I met on a daily basis helped me discover the fragility of life and the kindness of God, through their suffering and prayers.

Looking back on my life, I recognise with joy that God has led me along unknown paths. Without His aid, and the prayers of hundreds of people, I would never have been able to accomplish all that the Lord did through me. I give Him thanks for His kindness and fidelity to me.

Of the eleven children in my family, four survived. My parents, brothers and sisters all died between the ages of 65 and 80. My brother who was a priest died at fifty-six, while pastoring in a parish in the Saguenay Region of Québec.

To review my life is to give thanks to God for having given me such parents and family. I thank Him also for the thousands of adults and youths I have met and who were like « guardian angels » to me. I have always trusted in God, and He has never let me down. I have remained faithful to my original commitment. For me, fidelity has always been a great value. I ask God to grant me the health to continue in service to my Church until the day He calls me to be with Him and with my loved ones forever.

Dumont, Fr. Claude, P.M.É.

« Divine Providence for Missionaries! »

My vocation call started in my family. My father and mother were the guides and formators of my vocation. I realise more and more how much I was formed by their example. My school years also affected me. I had the chance of getting a Catholic education: grades 1 and 2 with the Sisters of Saint-Rosaire; from grades 3 through 8 I studied at the Académie d'Edmundston with the Daughters of Wisdom Sisters. In grade 8 my teacher was Sister Julienne, and one of my classmates was Father Arthur Rossignol.

My parents owned a business on Victoria Street in Edmundston, and they asked me to take the commercial course at École Cormier. I finished there in 1941. Then I asked my parents to pursue my studies at the Eudist Fathers' Université du Sacré-Cœur in Bathurst. I wanted to do my classics course because at the time I was considering becoming a missionary priest. My parents readily accepted.

At Bathurst I had Joseph Godbout as a classmate. He, too, would eventually become a P.M.É. missionary. Those like me who had finished high school had to do a year of preparatory studies, then after four years more of studies, I was ready to undertake my philosophy courses and university proper. The Eudist Fathers, especially Father Arthur Gauvin, helped me very much in pursuing my vocation; they were very much involved in youth movements such as scouting. Public debates were also very popular at the time, and I remember being on a team opposite one which had on it the future premier of New Brunswick, the Honourable Louis Robichaud.

After studies in Bathurst I attended the Séminaire de Philosophie in Montreal: that was where I decided to join the Société des Missions Étrangères de Québec (P.M.É.), the Québec Foreign Mission Society. I joined them in

1947 at their house of probation in Québec, for a year of preparation for theological studies. After my third year of theology I was ordained to the priesthood July 1, 1951, by Bishop Gagnon of Edmundston. In 2001, as I celebrated my fifty years of priesthood I thanked the Lord for all the graces I received through all these years. I have always maintained that there is a divine Providence for missionaries. My years of priestly and missionary life were filled with both joy and sorrow, but mostly joy.

I would like to thank the clergy and religious brothers and sisters of the diocese of Edmundston for their warm hospitality whenever I visited. I have a wish, regarding vocations, a wish I make in the form of a prayer: « Lord, develop in us the conviction that the Church cannot effectively carry on its mission without devoted pastors to guide it, and witnesses to inspire it. »

Gagnon, Fr. Narcisse
« My Choice of Vocation »

It was the end of summer. Father Thomas Castonguay, C.J.M., a family friend, asked my parents: « Why not send your youngest son to the Collège of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière, where I'm from ? » And that was it! Without further ado I was registered at Collège Sainte-Anne where, besides education, one learns about living one's faith. Each day began with prayer together, followed by the celebration of Mass in the chapel. Each evening ended with night prayer together. All of this bore close resemblance to what was lived in families then, where prayer and Sunday Mass were part of life.

Students were also free to join the sodality of the Blessed Virgin or, later, the League of the Scared Heart. I joined both of these pious, highly commendable associations.

Before graduating from classics studies, students had a few days' retreat whose topic was « the choice of one's vocation. » It was following one such retreat, and with my bishop's consent, that I entered the Seminary in Halifax.

When I entered the Seminary in 1928, we were 28 seminarians. We followed the same course of studies as the second, third, and fourth year students, but thank to competent and capable teachers, things were made a bit easier in canon law, dogmatic and moral theology, and Church history.

Twenty-five students made it through the four years of seminary and were ordained by **Bishop Patrice Chiasson, C.J.M.** Four of the new priests were ordained at Saint-Basile, June 22, 1941. They were Hermel Daigle, Cyr Dubé, Narcisse Gagnon, and Lionel Martin.

Pray for priestly vocations, in your prayers.

Thank you, Lord, for having been my support all these 61 years of my priesthood.

Godbout, Fr. Normand
« A Path to Happiness »

It is said that vocations develop and grow in a family. I believe that that is where mine started. At home prayer, listening to the Word of God, family harmony and helping one another were values we learned to apply at a very early age. I was barely out of babyhood when I first learned to make the sign of the cross, and it was at my mother's knees that I first learned to stammer the name of Jesus and my first prayers. Sunday was a special day for the family, and Sunday Mass and communion were essential elements of the day, besides the family meal.

I never felt that going to Mass and joining in family prayer were burdens. Quite the opposite. I felt quite at ease in the church on Sunday and enjoyed listening to the priest's sermons and the choir singing. The atmosphere of quiet and silence I found there pleased me and I loved at times just to be there in the silence, to rest. My parents had a deep faith and God held a special place in their lives. The Advent and Lenten seasons were respected as times of prayer, in the family.

On September 6, 1939, tragedy struck the family. My father died at 39, leaving a wife pregnant with what was to be her tenth child, who was born 18 days after Father's death. The day after the funeral my brother Arthur,

the family's eldest, entered Collège Sacré-Cœur in Bathurst. It was Father Aurèle Godbout, my father's brother, pastor at Atholville, who payed for Arthur's studies. Arthur was 14, and the one who stayed behind to work the farm with mother to feed the family was only 12.

Thanks to my mother's persistence and courage, thanks also to relatives, uncles and aunts, our family grew and most of the children made it to college. After my father's death two siblings left to live with an aunt in Grand Falls. This aunt, who was my father's sister, payed for their studies at Collège Sacré-Coeur in Bathurst. These brothers were Aurèle who would later join the Eudist Fathers, and Wilfrid who later married. Another brother, Fernand, was lucky enough to have a benefactress pay for his college studies. Since the family farm could hardly meet the family's basic needs, there was no money around to pay for advanced studies. Since there were no benefactors to help me with tuition and since I showed a knack for farm work or some other trade, my mother had decided to keep me on the farm for some time, and later to have me learn a trade for a livelihood.

Still, in her prayers Mother, who always sought what was best for the good of all her children, had placed me under the care of the Virgin Mary. In the summer of 1946 - specifically, August 15 - I won a scholarship from the Société Assomption; the bursary was awarded each year to young people whose parents had their insurance with the Société. My mother was overjoyed to learn the news, and she prepared a fifth suitcase of clothes for Collège Sacré-Coeur in Bathurst! There were four of us brother at the same college, and a fifth brother, Arthur, was going to the Major Seminary in Québec that same year of 1946. As I had never left home before and had already left school some six months before, it was hard to leave my mother who needed my help, and to go back to studies. As I was a timid child and used to hard work, I set down to tackle my studies with courage. This scholarship changed the course of my life.

God took me from behind the plough to become a tiller of men. It was probably at that moment that God had chosen me, without my realising it. Thanks, however to my inner dispositions, like that of feeling at ease in His presence, I now believe God had chosen me from my youth.

My brother Arthur was ordained in 1950 by **Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon** . By that time I already had four years of college, with four more years to go, to complete my classics studies. It was during that period that I started thinking seriously about what I wanted to do in life. As I loved nature and the outdoor, I thought of becoming an agronomist. However, I felt in me a call to dedicate my life to the Lord by following in my elder brother's footsteps. In 1952, my brother Aurèle entered the Eudist Fathers' Seminary, in Québec. He had a knack for teaching and that community staffed a number of colleges, at the time, especially in the Maritime provinces. As I had no penchant for teaching, I opted for the diocesan clergy to do parish work ministering to plain and decent people such as we find in all our Christian communities.

Discerning a call to the priesthood is not always an easy task. God does not usually whisper in someone's ear that he has been chosen to be His minister. Most often it is through people and events that God's call is made clear. The family atmosphere is the first favourable ground for the growth of a vocation. For my part, my family and the college were the places which allowed God's call to develop in me. We usually find happiness where God has called us. To be open to others and to bring them respect and joy, isn't that the way to happiness, for humans ? It is 44 years this year that I minister as a priest. I have never regretted my decision, my choice, even if life has not always been a bed of roses. True happiness, for a human being, is striving each day to do the will of God.

Grégoire, Fr. Léo, I.V.D.

« Bloom Where You're Planted! »

One never knows where to begin, in telling one's story, and this is doubly true when it is a matter as mysterious as one's vocation. Still, we all have a story to tell. So I shall try to tell you my story as simply as possible.

I am American, born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, into a practising Christian family. I am one of 19 children (10 girls, 9 boys), the fourth child and eldest son. In the family there was never any question whether or not we would attend Sunday Mass: everybody went.. The rosary and family prayer in the evening were practices that continued well into the 1950s when the children started leaving home. There was prayer before meals, and daily Mass during Lent. For some time in 1949 we walked three miles to church.

My father, a deeply committed Christian, worked in textile mills in Woonsocket and the area, as well as in Springfield, Massachusetts, and Meriden, Connecticut, before having a convenience store in the village of Hill, New Hampshire. My parents' final move was back to Meriden in the latter part of the 1970s. Father died in

January, 1992, and Mother is the « glue » keeping the family together, despite her 88 years.

I look back on my parents with a positive feeling. Father worked long and hard, up to 20 hours a day to feed and clothe his family. Mother was cook, laundrywoman and seamstress, at work into the wee hours of the night.

Education and intellectual formation always held a very important place in my parents' lives, and both were well taught, according to their time and social milieu: father had a grade 10 education and Mother had attended commercial school. There was a lot of reading, at home, Mother with her many religious magazines like the St. Anthony Messenger, and Father with his correspondence course in textile manufacture. All of my studies were made in parochial schools in Woonsocket (Presentation of Mary Sisters, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Religious of Jesus and Mary) and with the Brothers of the Sacred Heart.

During my studies it was two Sacred Heart Brothers who had the greatest influence on me, and neither one ever taught me in class. The first one was an « old » Brother nearing 60: he often invited me to his room for long chats. He was like a spiritual father to me. The other Brother was the school librarian, and he guided and directed my course of reading, mostly French. He introduced me to the life of Father Charles de Foucauld. The Little Sisters of the Assumption, « home nurses to the poor », were another influence, as was also one of my father's sisters, a religious of Jesus and Mary who is now 89 years of age. My parents never mentioned the priesthood or religious life to me, as such, but they always encouraged me in things of the Church, and it was as if it were altogether normal that my vocation should develop in the direction of the priesthood. I was an altar server about two years, a « ministry » I had to give up in grade 6 when the family moved too far away from the church we attended. As for the priests I knew then, there is none who struck me particularly or who even encouraged me in any way in my vocation, before I left for the Oblate Fathers' seminary.

I entered the Oblate Juniorate in Bar Harbor, Maine in 1955, to take the « preparatory course » given to students who needed to upgrade their studies in French and Latin. At the end of July, 1958 I entered the Oblate noviciate at Colebrook, New Hampshire. After close to a year's noviciate I returned home rather than follow the advice of my spiritual director who would have wanted me to join the newly-founded (July 1958) Voluntas Dei Institute. At the time, though, being fresh out of a community, I was not too keen on joining another one, so soon. It would happen, though, in 1960.

It was with the encouragement of my former novice master that I finally answered God's call by joining the Voluntas Dei Institute on September 9, 1960. The Institute was newly-founded, and the personnel comprised Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I., our founder, a young Oblate who had been ordained a year or so, a priest from the Sherbrooke archdiocese, and another priest from Yugoslavia. The rest was composed of well-intentioned young men without experience. I quickly became aware that the Voluntas Dei lifestyle was very different from what I had known with the Oblates. At the time, we had to beg for our food at the Trois-Rivières and Cap-de-la-Madeleine public markets Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons. The most humiliating of all was the fact that some of the merchants who knew us very well - with our cassocks and flower-print shopping bags! - took pleasure waiting until we begged for « charity in the name of God » before donating anything.

Following studies in philosophy at Trois-Rivières there was a three-year break from studies, at which time I was sent to teach in Roberval, Québec and at the seminary at Saint-Victor-de-Beauce. I entered St. Joseph the Worker major seminary at Arthurette, New Brunswick, in 1965 to do my theology studies, and was ordained in 1969. As a deacon I was sent to Baie-Comeau, Québec where I taught in two English schools. I returned to the diocese of Edmundston in 1971 to take over ministry at Plaster Rock and Red Rapids. Except for a period of about six months, my entire life as a priest has been spent in the Edmundston diocese, so I can rightly talk about « my diocese » and « my brother priests of the Edmundston diocese. » I have always felt at home and well received by all the clergy, all the years I have been here. Besides Plaster Rock and Red Rapids, I have ministered in Aroostook, St. Patrick, Tilley, Perth-Andover, Assumption Parish in Grand Falls, and Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs in Edmundston. Adult faith education has always been one of my major concerns, and I am still involved with the School of Faith. I am also in my final year of studies in canon law at St. Paul University in Ottawa.

I cannot explain it either to myself or to others how it is that I am a priest today, why the Lord has chosen me rather than so many others more deserving than me. I believe that this is one of the Father's secrets. I remember that, as a young child, my aunt who is a Sister had told me that if I prayed three Hail Marys to the Blessed Virgin before going to sleep, I would be a priest... It must be true! Anyway, I still continue this habit of the Hail Marys every night, they have become a part of my daily prayer.

I am happy as a Voluntas Dei priest, I am happy being a priest, I am happy to be part of the clergy of the Edmundston diocese. I believe that the greatest gift my Institute has given me was to form me to be a person of service. I have been a priest for more than 30 years, and I have often said that I have never felt called to

parish ministry but rather to teaching. Through it all, though, I believe that I have learned to « bloom where the Lord has planted me, » and this, I believe, is the secret for being happy along the road the Lord has set us on.

Lang, Msgr. Urbain, P.H.

« My Vocation to the Priesthood »

It is hard to find the specific cause of my vocation. Basically, though, my family was devoutly Christian. My mother was raised a Catholic by my Protestant grandmother, Annie Douglas, who was herself baptised January 6, 1910, my mother being then a little over 21 years of age. My grandmother had the utmost respect for religion. As a seminarian, I wore a cassock as was the custom, in those days, in the 1930s and 40s. My grandmother showed me special respect. She died suddenly February 9, 1938, three months short of my ordination.

We lived close to the church, in Clair. I began serving Mass at the age of 8.

At 11, my parents enrolled me in the convent school in St-Basile, where they boarded boys. There, we had the opportunity of meeting our pastor, Msgr. Louis-Napoléon Dugal, two or three times a week.

In 1927 I left to study at the Collège Ste-Anne-de-la-Pocatière, directed by Québec diocesan priests. I stayed there seven years, doing my classics studies. In 1934 I began to study theology at the Eudist Fathers' Holy Heart Seminary.

The influence of all these people, beginning in my childhood, doubtlessly contributed to the growth of my priestly vocation.

There would surely be a lot more to write about, but what I have written partly explains how I became a priest.

Levasseur, Fr. Almer

« A Comforting Presence »

Born in 1937, the eldest of five children - two boys and three girls - I grew up in a practising and fervent Catholic milieu; my father and mother were both implicated in social and especially causes. My elementary school studies were with the Daughters of Wisdom Sisters. My high school and college course were at Collège Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière which was then directed by diocesan clergy. As a child I was given a spiritual and religious grounding. At the age of thirteen I became a boarder at the Collège Sainte-Anne. That is where I met my spiritual director, who would later become bishop of Chicoutimi. I was impressed by this self-assured man, a mystic of sorts, refined yet with great strength and very present. It was with him that I undertook my spiritual quest, the beginning of my vocation.

Before going to the Collège, my two years' experience in the Scout movement marked me. A sentence of its founder always remained with me: « May the world be a better place for your having passed through it. » In meditating the holy Gospel I came across a verse which I have often meditated, since: « What does the reign of God resemble? To what shall I liken it? It is like mustard seed which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a large shrub and the birds of the air rested in its branches » (Lk. 13:18-19). Something so small... practically invisible... which can become so big... so rich! I have also known priests whose life and presence fascinated me, especially the priest who had baptised me: he was a man of deep piety, humble cultured, all to the service of God and others, who seemed to so love his work, a ministry in which he was most happy. What I still remember to today is his kindness and his smile. All of these events of my youth have been determining factors in my vocation to the priesthood.

What moved me first and foremost to become a priest was the desire I had to be a comforting presence to others. There was only one word that kept recurring: service! I remember that during this time of spiritual journeying I hesitated for a while between medicine and priesthood. A hesitation between « physical healing » and « spiritual healing »! I wanted to be close to others, to the suffering, to those with problems, and to lead them s best I could to a better life. With these few years of enriching experience, I turned to the priesthood at age 20.

From my seminary years, 1958 to 1962, I recall a few priest teachers, two of whom were from France, cultured men, disciplined, humanists, mystics. At the seminary I experienced life in community, discovered liturgy, and silence. Already during this time of my theology studies, one could feel the coming « Quiet revolution », the challenges to society and the emerging Church, and the Council which was seen as fostering an « openness of the Church to the world ». All of a sudden we were surprised to believe that deep changes were possible for the Church, despite reservations of certain professors, on this question.

Until ordination I lived within a « changeless » society. My life unfolded within a Church steeped in a long tradition of religious observance, where the priest worked in every sector, social as well as religious. Then came Vatican II, in the early years of my pastoral ministry. My life was then marked by change and adaptation, obvious outcomes of the renewal called for by the council. Pope John XXIII had issued the challenge to « Aggiornamento » (adapting to the progress and evolution of the modern world). There were deep changes in society, in the world-wide Church: questioning what seemed to be immutable truths, new ways of being and doing, for everyone including priests. For me this was an exhilarating time which marked me deeply by the breath of fresh air and of freedom which these years brought to society and the Church.

Of the three main pastoral ministries I have been involved in until now, that is, liturgy, community leadership, and faith education, I must say that the three have been at the forefront of my life. I have always tried to add my stone to the building of the Church. What the Lord expects of me is that I bear fruit, whatever the nature of my pastoral work. The fruitfulness of my work always depends on my attachment to the Lord, like « the branch attached to the vine » (Jn. 15:1ff). It is really the « sine qua non » condition of being a priest of God and a priest to the people of today.

A priest's life is truly a love story: a history of being in love with God and with others. It is a story made up of joys and sorrows, success and defeat, greatness and affliction, security and crisis, praise and criticism.

In other words, the adventure of the priesthood is the adventure of faith, one must surrender to God who is Love. A priest's life is a mystery, the mystery of God communicated to human to bring them what is essential to life: love. Despite my weaknesses, I want my life to continue proclaiming this essential value. Because Someone, one day, « seduced me and prevailed. » And when on the final day I shall return home at the Father's call, I hope to hear him say: « Come, faithful servant... » (Mt. 25:21).

Lévesque, Fr. Guy, P.M.É.
« Like A Treasure »

I was seven years old and in grade three at the village (St-Basile) school when one day the Sister who was teaching us had us write on a slip of paper what we wanted to do when we got older. A serious question!

To help us along, she listed on the blackboard a list of possible careers. A word on the list immediately drew my attention, the word « missionary ». But that was not what I wrote down on my slip of paper because I had heard of stories about missionaries, like the story of St. John de Brébeuf and his companions, and the story of the martyrs of Uganda, and I did not want to end up a martyr!

Still, I want to say that at that early age the seeds of a missionary vocation had been sowed in the garden of my desires and of my deepest yearnings. The seed would grow into my life's ideal and develop through my youth. This childhood dream was not to evaporate with my childhood, quite the opposite: it would become a pressing call whose meaning would consume my energy and direct my life. « The reign of God is like a buried treasure which a man found in a field. He hid it again, and rejoicing at his find went and sold all he had and bought that field » (Mt. 13:44).

I have often meditated on this beautiful Gospel parable which so adequately expresses and illustrates this « something » of great worth which I found, one day. It might perhaps be better to say that my heart was drawn to a mysterious treasure, a treasure offered to me. I could either take it or refuse it. I took it and it has been my greatest wealth ever since.

A Gradual Journey

During my childhood and youth, my attraction to missionary life strengthened. Besides, I remember that to me, missionary life always implied the priesthood. Could this be due to the fact that in the 1950s missionary life in foreign lands was realised for the most part in the religious life or the priesthood ?

Whatever the answer to this question, I would dream of one day going away to a foreign country to share what I had received and to introduce Jesus and his message to others.. I was an avid reader of mission magazines like *Missions étrangères*. I was quite impressed by all those mission stories, of the stories of the men and women involved. They would awaken, sustain and feed my inner flame: St. Francis Xavier, Doctor Albert Schweitzer, Father Damien de Veuster, apostle of the lepers of Molokai, Doctor Tom Dooley... all were role models I wanted to follow.

After my classics studies, I remember being perplexed regarding the kind of missionary life I wanted: should I be a missionary doctor or a missionary priest? On December 26, 1964, an exceptionally mild and rainy day, as I walked through my village street, I reached a decision. It was as though human reasoning on the one hand and the perception of faith on the other had joined together. I decided to go to the seminary, staking my all - and not without hesitation - on a long-heard call, on a treasure that was being gradually unearthed.

My seminary training at Pont-Viau, Québec, ratified my vocation call, and in the summer of 1970 I was ordained a priest in my home parish.

My Short Mission STORY

On Christmas Day, 1970 I left Canada for the Philippines. If Jesus could make it from heaven to earth to be among us and one of us, crossing the Pacific Ocean to go live all the way out there should certainly be an easy thing to do! I served the Church in the Philippines for ten years or so in the areas of pastoral ministry and priestly formation.

Then, in the early 1980s, a new field of evangelisation awaited me, in Africa. I, along with three confreres, formed the first group to go to the Sudan. It was like starting anew, having to learn a new language - Arabic - and adapting to a new country and its many geographical, historical, cultural, and social aspects.

In the Philippines I could contemplate the beautiful blue sea; in the Sudan, on the other hand, I would contemplate the vastness of the Sahara Desert. The beautiful blue ocean changed before my eyes into the immense plain of yellow sand through which winds the Nile River! Nevertheless, in going from sea to desert, from the situation of a well-developed Church to a young Church whose development is affected by a disastrous civil war, I always continued to share the precious Gospel treasure.

I lived in the Sudan from 1984 to 1999, mostly in the field of priestly formation of future Sudanese priests. I returned to Canada for a three-year assignment in mission awareness education. The work has been both demanding and enriching.

The year 2002 is another year of transition, for me: I am winding up my mission education work during the summer, and I return to the Sudan in the fall.

My missionary life continues. The Treasure continues to captivate me, and I want to continue spreading it « to the ends of the earth. »

Lévesque, Fr. Lucien

« You'll Be Here in My Place! »

François Lévesque married the widow Agnès Cyr, July 22, 1922, and they had six children; Noé was the oldest of the six and I, Lucien, was the youngest of the boys. At the birth of the sixth and last baby, there occurred a tragedy, as my mother died in childbirth, giving birth to her sixth child, a baby daughter. I was then three and a half.

Of my mother I have one memory, an aunt lifting me up so that I could look at Mother in the casket. Then I remember Father crying. He had always had a hard time making ends meet and earning a livelihood on the farm for his family, since from prior marriages he had six other children of various ages. Father endured so many trials! During my childhood it was my older sisters who took turns looking after the younger children; my new-born sister had been adopted by my maternal grandmother who lived a few doors from us.

One day I and twin cousins who lived on the next farm were sent to the Saint-Basile convent school, in grade 5. The Hospitaller Sisters gave a well-rounded education. Three years later I went to the Collège de Bathurst, and from there I continued my baccalaureate at Church Point, Nova Scotia.

While at home on vacation I was very close to the life of the parish; we lived next door to the rectory, across from the parish church. The parish priest often took us on hikes while we ran many errands and did odd jobs for him. We didn't miss weekday Mass, the different church services, forty-hours devotions, evening prayer, and the like.

My father was a perfect model of the devout and exemplary Christian, with great and strong faith. He was the main influence in my life. Besides, each time some farm produce was ready, and before reaching the family table, some of it had already been given to the parish priest.

Something I remember to this very day: one day as I was serving weekday Mass I attempted to give Father Claude Cyr, our parish priest, the burse in which the corporal was placed. Noticing that I could not reach where the burse was placed, next to the tabernacle, Father said: « You'll grow, and maybe one day you'll be standing here in my place! » This simple statement from a man of such faith, always stayed with me. It was at that moment that I started praying every day to discover my vocation and to grow taller, too, because I could not believe that someone as short as I could ever become a priest!

I grew, and the call made itself all the more insistent. I felt an inner pull towards the priestly vocation. Finally, after my B.A. **Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon** sent me to the Major Seminary in Halifax.. I had told myself, « I must go and see whether this is really my place. » At the end of my first year I was in a position to tell my friends that I had discovered my vocation and felt truly called. then I completed my three other years of theology.

I want to stress the following points, in conclusion to this story:

First, the family environment, which was a good example of fervent prayer at home and at church, was great help throughout my childhood and development: unity and work together promoted this development. The parish community was a great moral support.

The parish of Saint-André had already given a number of religious vocations, so many families were involved: this, too, was a means of encouragement. Besides, our parish had many very good priests who constantly encouraged our following Jesus. Besides, when I attended convent school at Saint-Basile, it was our assistant pastor, Father Hermel Daigle, who had brought me and my brother Noé there.

It was with the Sisters at Saint-Basile and the Eudist Fathers during my studies that I was able to develop and deepen my vocation. I am grateful to them.

Throughout my ministry I have had great consolations and known great joy. Trials and illness have bolstered my faith and given my serving greater impetus. I had to serve.

I thank the Holy Spirit, the Church, my confreres, my family, the former priests at Saint-André, my benefactors, my parish, and all those who have supported me.

Michaud, Fr. Bertin
« A Place for Youth! »

Relating the story of my vocation after nearly eighteen years of priesthood seems a difficult task requiring a great exercise in remembering, a lot of work for an already-faltering memory! Nevertheless, thinking seriously, eighteen years is not all that long when we feel good about our choice in life, and time goes by very fast when we are where God wants us!

My vocation probably had a start a long time before I could ever remember: as a baby, some will say, or in my mother's womb, according to the prophet. What I remember, though, is that my parents showed respect for priests and the Church. Prayer had an important place in the family... even if it didn't always please us. Like many others I experienced for a while praying the family rosary, and the joy felt by children my age when the « Rosary Hour » was taken off the air. Sundays were holidays that extended well beyond Mass time. However, the most important role played by my family in the development of my vocation to the priesthood was its sense of the sacred and of values transmitted, with balance in all things, including religion.

Very early in my teen-age years, my parish priests were instrumental in my choice of vocation. These men who were dynamic and involved in daily life had special concern for young people like me, and they opened my mind to the possibility of my becoming one of them. They seemed happy in what they were doing, and they

strengthened in me a secret resolve I dared not share with anyone.

Once in university I realised that I would have to make a definitive career choice. Fearing that I would spend a lifetime regretting not choosing for fear of others laughing at me, I entered major seminary. Still, even then things were not that certain, and a few times I would have liked the superior to tell me that I was not in my place, there. It didn't work that way: the decision must be mine and that of Christ. I couldn't understand why he seemed to choose me. There were others with greater talents, who were more worthy, and holier than me!... Why me? I must admit that I don't know the answer any more today than I did then, but today as then, I trust in God.

There were times when I was afraid of this commitment. There have been periods of uncertainty. But there have never been moments of deep regret.

Today, as during my priestly formation, I keep on hearing these words which helped me continue, and with still strongly challenge me: « Do not fear! Do not be afraid! Follow me! »

Michaud, Fr. Claude

« There Was Someone..... »

There was Father Gérard Deschênes. He was a missionary to the native people of Vérendrye Park in Québec. He was Mother's cousin, and she loved him very much. In Father's opinion, he was a very remarkable man, and a man of duty. His rare visits to New Brunswick left their mark on me. He was a very simple man, spontaneous and affectionate, who loved his cousins. During my teen-age years in boarding school, he was the strongly present Absent One. However, at that time I had no thought of being a priest, one day. Studies, books, sports and, later, girls were more on my mind.

Around 16 and 17, while I was doing grades 11 and 12 of the liberal arts course, I developed a great interest in the cause of the working class. I was an avid reader of the major papal documents on the labour question, such as *Rerum Novum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* which awakened my sensibilities to the socio-cultural transformations of the time and opposition to the power of capitalism and the tenuous situation of workers. Instinctively I saw myself as a front-line union militant. These sentiments lay dormant in me while during my first two years of college studies I became more interested and taken up with academic work. Philosophy and physics now became my pleasure.

During my final year in college I thought of moving into the physics field. Then, during Easter break, when the time had come to reach some kind of decision, things no longer seemed as clear. What came more and more persistently to mind was the question: « What should be done to improve the condition of workers, and to bring more justice to society? » The answer was clear: those who were fighting for social justice were priests. Hence, that is the direction I must follow. The decision was made with no inner conflicts.

In June I visited my bishop, **Joseph-Roméo Gagnon**. He greeted me kindly and decided that I should go to Québec, to study. For a Maritimer, this decision was disappointing. Going to the Big City was a bit intimidating. My first year at the Québec Major Seminary I was « culture shocked » by the perpetual presence of clergy, throughout the city, and I developed a strong anti-clerical feeling. Paradoxically, though, this did not affect my decision of becoming a priest.

Society was then experiencing deep changes. The Catholic workers' unions would soon be replaced by non-denominational labour unions. The end result was that I never was involved on the labour front. Proof that life itself does a good job of changing the directions thought to be ours, at first!

I have been happy as a priest, despite the trials I have had. I now look at myself - without regret - as one of a dying breed. Priests tomorrow will be different; the rules will be different. All that will remain, because it is basic, will be the decision to make our world more human or, in Gospel terms, the will to build the Kingdom of Jesus.

Nadeau, Fr. Laurent

« An Indescribable Dream »

It was the family which contributed the most to the discovery and development of my priestly vocation. I believe that the Holy Spirit graced my parents with a faith and generosity which were fertile ground for the growth of my vocation.

For my parents as for many others, practice of the Christian virtues of love and forgiveness, in the family, moulded our mind and behaviour on a daily basis. The aim of my parents was to make us (three girls and six boys) responsible and happy individuals. From childhood on, each one contributed according to his or her capacity to the welfare of the family. Solidarity was a necessity for material survival, as it was a school of sharing, at the psychological level, and this fostered each individual's life direction. There was no pressure, here, but each one felt a need for commitment, as all were assured of the whole family's support.

At the age of thirteen, I decided I wanted to be a priest. My only fear was not making it, because of lack of money and, later, hurting my hands. My father, who was a carpenter, hurt his hands too often. Still, Providence was watching over me!

It was the beginning of World War II, there was a lot of work, and all fifteen year-olds could easily find a job. With a few dollars and especially with help from my parents, I was finally able to begin my studies in September of 1942, at the St-Victor-de-Beauce Minor Seminary. Yvon, one of my brothers, had already been there for a year, and another, Jean-Médard, joined us two years later. A fourth brother, Alonzo, had opted for Collège St-Joseph near Moncton. Healthy competition! My other two brothers, Dave and Aimé, were already married. Two of my sisters, Yvonne and Yvette, were also married. The youngest, Laurette, was a secretary. If I name them all it is because they all played an active role in my becoming a priest.

I also owe a boundless debt of gratitude to my parish priest, Mgr. William Conway, and his assistant, Father Camille Côté, who were to me, in that period of my life, role models and examples of the beauty and greatness of the priesthood. It was thanks to them that I felt drawn to join the priestly family.

Realising my ideal carried me through Saint-Victor-de-Beauce where I lived eight years of adolescence and formation in an atmosphere of study and prayer. What devotion and generosity there was, on the part of the twenty-odd priests who, for a salary of \$200.00 a year, dedicated their entire lives to the formation of future priests as well as many laymen. They prepared us to go out into a world awaiting our personal contribution to its human and spiritual promotion. Each day brought me closer to realising my dream.

Then I was at the Halifax Major Seminary. It was like entering Paradise, for me, so happy was I. For Catholics in 1950, it was the year of the dogma of the Assumption. It was therefore under the Virgin's protective mantle that I began my final four years of preparation to the priesthood, and it was during the Marian Jubilee of 1954 that I reached my goal. The motto, « To Jesus through Mary » is true, then! All the more so, as the Eudist Fathers who have so generously trained many priests for the Maritime Provinces, have a great devotion to the Heart of Mary.

Excellent supported by them and by the Virgin, I was ordained a priest by **Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon**, in Edmundston on June 12, 1954. Ever since, I have not stopped proclaiming the praises of the Lord and thanking all those who have contributed in making my indescribable dream a reality.

Numbi Phaku Mavambu, Fr. Joseph, F.D.
« I Come to You, Just As I Am! » »

The first missionaries to come to my country of the Congo were members of the Missionary Community of the Alliance, the American branch of a Protestant church. For many years they held a monopoly in the evangelisation of our milieu.

Several members of my family were instrumental in implanting this church, and they have remained close collaborators to the ministers. At birth, my sponsors were Reverend Taylor's family, with whom I spent the better part of my childhood. They called me « Harold », after one of their sons. My grandfather, a deacon of the church, travelled great distances on foot, to preach the Gospel.

When I reached school age I was sent to the Catholic school which two of my brothers already attended; this did not please the Taylors and, as a consequence, they cut all ties with my family, accusing them of having given their godchild to Catholics. They turned over a new leaf and returned to the United States a few years later when the Congo achieved independence. However, my parents and my entire family have kept the faith and are still members of the church.

The Catholic priests showed a lot of interest in our village. They visited regularly and held prayer services in all the villages of the region, even where the Catholics were a minority.

In grade four I registered for the catechumenate to prepare for baptism. To make sure of my parents' support, the director asked my parents before accepting me as a candidate. With my parents' permission, I was baptised at the age of 9 years and 5 months. I was the third in my family to be baptised in the Catholic Church.

At the end of elementary school I was not admitted to seminary because my parents were Protestants. I therefore attended another school. From 1970 onward, my parish no longer had a resident priest, and this inspired me to become a priest. The last year of high school (1976) I told my mother about this, but she would not hear of it, at first. So I joined the work force, teaching for nearly two years in a Protestant school. But it was no use: I preferred walking three kilometres to attend Mass than attend church services in the Protestant church which was a mere five-minute walk away.

On a May evening in 1978, while talking with my mother, she relented on her objection of my becoming a priest. It was then that she spoke these words to me: « Son, I brought you into the world, but I know that it was God who gave you to us. If He wants you to serve Him, I won't stop you. Forgive me for having refused, before. » A few days later I wrote to my bishop asking to enter the major seminary. He answered quickly. I was happy to take leave of the school administration, the staff, and the students to begin the grand adventure of my priestly training.

During my six years' seminary training and pastoral internship in country, town, and city parishes, I learned to connect academic learning with reality. In perseverance and patience I experienced high and low points until September 22, 1985, the day of my ordination. My ordination motto is taken from two verses of the Bible: « The Lord God opens my ear that I may hear » (Is. 50:4), and « Because I believed, I spoke out » (2 Cor. 4:13). I added the following prayer to these words: « I am coming, Jesus, I am coming to you; take me, just as I am. » This prayer is my act of faith and surrender to the Lord, as well as the expression of my availability for service to him and his people.

My father died February 27, 1986, five months and five days after my ordination. This was a hard blow to me... Knowing all that he did for me from my very childhood until his last days, I have always maintained that he played his role like Simeon, and the Lord has let him come to him in peace.

During my fifteen years' ministry in the Congo I worked in different country parishes with people of modest means, but so very devoted, and five years in city parishes. These people with whom I shared my life edified me greatly, and their simplicity has been an inspiration to me. This gave me courage to go long distances on foot, in all kinds of weather, adapting to different foods, to the rapid multiplication of countless sects...

In my second year in Canada, I am very happy with the welcome I am given wherever I go. This new experience shows me the Church's universality and the nature of its mission, which is far from unilateral. It confirms the words of our divine Master: « Go, therefore, and make disciples of every nation... » (Mt. 28:19). It is therefore in a spirit of total availability to serving Christ and his people that I shall continue to exercise my priestly ministry wherever I am.

Ouellet, Fr. Alfred
« Contagious Joy »

God's call is so discrete, so intimate, personal, and often unconscious, that it is difficult to relate its unfolding. The road to Damascus is no more frequent today than it was at the time of Saint Paul.

What I can specifically recall after many years is Dad's happiness at working feverishly to prepare the least family event for the our enjoyment: birthdays, anniversaries, Sunday activities, the day always reserved for the family. I do not remember Dad ever being absent from the house or the family meals, all the time I was at home.

I have always felt emptiness and boredom, Sundays in college; I understood that, humanly speaking, family life was a source of happiness that could hardly be replaced.

On vocation retreats in fourth and sixth years of my liberal arts studies, the retreat master made me realise very quickly that human happiness was tied in with the happiness we bring to others, and that personal

happiness grows and multiplies with the number of those we make happy. This equation was quickly established in my mind. I was aware that, with my physical and intellectual qualities, it would be easy to make a wife and a few children happy. Still, my quest for happiness would not be complete, and I concluded that I must expand the family circle to the dimensions of a village, a town, a country, and - Why not ? - the world itself.

For this, though, I would need to learn a lot, more than just scientific knowledge which restricts one's field of action to one particular group of people: the sick, artists, and others... I therefore put aside the study of the sciences which, for a time, had fascinated me. Philosophy, psychology, and theology have taught me how to present to others, to as many as I could reach, the happiness which God offers to all...

I has excellent preparation through involvement in Catholic Action movements: scouting, YCS, YCF, even military service gave me the tools needed to go out to others, and this led me to the study of several languages, especially English, in order to meet as many people as possible. This journey of mine led me to consider that as parish priest, the spiritual paternity of a parish would be of a dimension sufficient to bring me happiness and to really blossom forth. From the time I had my first parish, at age 34, I realised my dream as well as the teaching Dad had given me without ever being aware of it.

My happiness has grown despite those difficulties which are part and parcel of any kind of public life today. I always find great joy in bringing happiness to others and in hearing people call me « Father » and the little children, « Grampy! »

This is not an « Amen », because I hope that it will continue for a long time to come!

Picard, Fr. Patrice, P.M.É.
« A Heavenly Exploit! »

This exploit took place in Joseph Picard and Arthémise Laforest's large family of six boys and four girls. My parents were poor, materially speaking, but were very wealthy spiritually. My father's faith and my mother's spiritual devotion were the solid grounding of my priestly vocation. The other person who had a strong influence on my vocation was my parish priest, Mgr. Alfred Lang. His style of preaching and his way of encouraging others to live their faith quietly called me to do the same. As for my becoming a missionary, the idea came from a woman who taught in a one-room country school where all eight grades were taught in that classroom. It was quite mysterious, the way God used to attract me to the missionary vocation. My teacher, Laura Lavoie, put me in a lower grade. What a shock! I was a problem child in school because I had been hearing the same story for three years straight! But being a good educator, my teacher knew what my problem was; she had me skip ahead a year and gave me a responsibility: looking after the Holy Childhood group whose task was to collect pennies, nickels and dimes for the « Chinese children ». The seed had been sown: one day I would be a missionary in China!

I finished grade 8 at 13. At the time, those who wanted to become priests and missionaries had to attend minor seminary. My father said to Mother: « There is enough money to pay one year's tuition; if it is his vocation, more money will come. » Such faith! In 1947 there was the Great Mission at Drummond. My father made me a small cedar « mission cross » which I still have. It reminds me of the many sacrifices incurred by my family on my behalf.. Until my ordination in 1958, my parents, brothers and sisters, and Monsignor Lang were God's instruments enabling me to answer God' s call. In sixth year of minor seminary I passed the COTC (Canadian Officers Training Camp). Not that I was interested in becoming an army officer: it was just that it was an easier way of earning money than working in lumber camps, which was what I had done, the summer holidays preceding. When I told Mgr. Lang of my project, he said: « Don't join the army, you'll lose your vocation! » To my mother's chagrin I became a log « driver » on the Saint John River, from Grand Falls to Fredericton. I need not tell you that log drivers are not all ready for canonisation! What a great place to lose one's vocation! But God is good and merciful.

Why did I join the Prêtres des Missions Étrangères (Foreign Mission Society) rather than the Holy Cross Fathers or the Sulpicians, with whom I had studied ? The Society's then-superior general, Bishop Edgar Larochelle, had visited Collège Saint-Joseph, and had made a good impression by his simplicity, happy disposition, and stories of China. I met him, and he invited me to continue my philosophy studies in Montreal, with the promise of helping me, financially. I hesitated in accepting, since I was first of my class at Saint-Joseph. But China and the promise of financial aid got the better of me. I did not want to become a teacher. What I wanted was to be a priest and to cross jungles. From the time my grade school teacher dropped me one grade until my graduation from Université de Montréal, I was always at the top of the class. At Pont-Viau, I completely lost my taste for study; for more than a year my only interest was prayer. I even did holy hours during the night.

At the end of my second year theology I was told that I was not doing well enough in my studies. In third year I recovered my « senses » and started studying again. I was finally ordained a priest in Drummond, my home parish, June 29, 1958, by *Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon*.

God continued to surprise me. First surprise: I was sent to Rome to study for three years. Second surprise: Upon returning from Rome I was told that I would not be going to the jungles of Peru: a phone call from my superior announced that « It will be the Philippines! » I was needed there to open a major seminary in Mindanao! Third surprise: I am already in my fifth term as superior of the P.M.É. in the Philippines. I who didn't want to teach have been teaching ever since I was ordained. I wanted to work in the jungles as a missionary, but spent my time visiting confreres in mountain regions. I wanted to work in China, but haven't even set foot there! Even if I wasn't able to do what my young priest's heart so desired, I can state that after 44 years as a priest and 40 as a missionary in the Philippines, no one can surpass God in generosity. He has made me happy, even in the midst of great trials. I believe that it is quite an exploit... a heavenly exploit!

Plourde, Fr. Armand

« **Love Is the Essence of Every Vocation** »

Born in Saint-Quentin in 1934 to Joseph P. Plourde and Marie-Anne Cyr, I was baptised Armand Plourde. I was privileged to witness at home the love Father and Mother had for one another. I am from a large family: twenty-four children, three of whom died at an early age, and seven others as adults. Mother had the boldness of marrying a widower with nine children, and she herself had twelve. I am the fourteenth child. I was very happy, out in the country where we lived and where Mother was born. I must admit that the family home was the anchorhold of the Plourde family.

Growing up, we learned to love and to share, and there were all kinds of surprises awaiting me. Surprise! « But, Lord, what is happening to me ? You want me to be a priest ? It's OK with me, but give me what I need, for this. » At first, things were not too attractive; yet, one prepares a priestly vocation.

The Last Supper, where Jesus shows his love, is at times difficult to grasp, but it always boils down to love, love, love... Love is the essence of the priestly vocation, and this love is what leads to commitment to celibacy, and (intelligent) obedience to one's bishop. I was ordained June 11, 1960.

For thirty years of pastoral ministry, with good - even exceptional - health, I was totally given to ministry with youth, different committees, meetings galore (even political ones!), and pastoral ministry to all without exception: school board, village council, and committees for the needy. Also engaged in the Acadian Cause. Words came easily, whatever the cause. I had a lot to do, but I believe that I was gifted for this and things were going well, in my pastoral work. At one time I was so very much involved in social justice issues that I even considered laicisation and a return to the lay state.

Everything was going quite smoothly, without too many difficulties when, on a Tuesday noon in 1987, as I was sharing a meal with my partners in ministry at Kedgwick, my head full of projects, and my heart and soul energised. All of a sudden, I passed out in the restaurant, a total breakdown... and it was from that moment on that my life changed forever. After countless doctors' appointments and batteries of tests for a year, the verdict was delivered: Parkinson's Disease. The final verdict: I am afflicted with continuously and mercilessly attacks me. It has taken over my life... and what a battle it is! At first I took things stoically, but when life and evening and time do their work, when I look in the mirror I notice a series of changes which make me realise that the illness is gradually taking control of my body, despite me and despite the battle I am waging.

It is a terrible disease, and I am fully aware of what is happening. Totally incapable of living alone even for half a day, I went to live with the other seriously ill of our society. Good-bye fishing, hunting, baseball, trips, etc. How can I keep my vocation? How can I remain a priest ? What is my reason for living ? How can I find interest in life ? How can I keep my dignity ?

In hallways I sometimes hear what others are saying about me, I tell myself: « Come on, brains, do your thing! » One night I thought I had reached the depths of hell, but then I saw the sun rise: I was transformed, and had recovered some autonomy. I can't believe that Jesus who has never let me down before... What does he want of me? I still love my vocation as a priest, and I offer you answers to my questions.

One must continue to love, to be lovable, but we must apply energy to do this. One must pray, pray, pray again, pray and pray some more, and it is very hard to pray, when one is sick.

I am called to transform my work by making the acquaintance of suffering. I tame it as best I can. As I have always been a down-to-earth, plodding person, slowly and quietly with God present, I am still taking one step, and then another...

I know that the disease I have will eventually get the better of me, I see it as a wild beast in the corner of the arena of my life; I shall fight and surrender only one inch at a time the ground of Life which God has given me. Here am I, Lord, I have come to do your will... Incardinated in Edmundston, I am 67 years old and am always a priest; my vocation has made me happy, it has made me realise the greatness of my baptismal life. Lord, I offer you my hands, my life. Hold me! Support me!

I shall never be able to repay what I have received from my spiritual Mother, the Church.

Postras, Fr. Frédéric

« Called by Name »

I was born in the village of Saint-André-de-Madawaska June 26, 1937. I was given the name Joseph Frédéric Postras, and my parents were Onésime Postras and Yvonne Dionne. On June 27, 1937; my godparents, Cyprien Postras and Marie A. Postras, brought me to church to be baptised.

My father would have liked to be a sailor, but circumstances made him a farmer. A conscientious man, he did his work with love. He looked after the needs and education of his eight children, five boys and three girls; I am the eldest.

My mother always cared for the children and looked after the house with devotion and love. She needed very little, to be happy. For her, prayer was time taken to thank and praise God, and to ask His blessings. She always looked forward to this prayer time.

At a young age I was drawn to religious practices. At the age of seven, I and my brother used to play at saying Mass. After my first communion, in an effort to please God, I became an altar server.

On September 11, 1946, **Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy**, Edmundston's first bishop, gave me the sacrament of Confirmation. I was very impressed with the ceremony and have happy memories of the occasion.

Elementary school was in Saint-André, N.B. I attended Collège Saint-Louis in Edmundston for two years, then at the age of sixteen I went to join the Trappist brothers in Rogersville. After ten months, there, I had to return home because of health reasons.

I loved farming. From February, 1955 to September 8, 1958, feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, I worked the farm with my father and my brother Raymond. In September, 1957, our assistant pastor Father Jérôme Wilfrid Cyr gave me good and sound advice regarding my first choice in life, the priesthood. I enrolled at the Saint-Pie X Seminary in Sherbrooke, Québec, where I studied for five years. Then I had to stop for another two years, from June, 1963 to September, 1965. Then with the agreement of **Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon** I continued at the Voluntas Dei Seminary at Trois-Rivières, Québec, where I completed my second year of philosophy.

In September, 1966 I arrived at the Major Seminary at Red Rapids, for four years of theology which ended at the end of May, 1970.

I was ordained sub-deacon by **Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon** at the Red Rapids Seminary on December 8, 1969. I was made a deacon by Bishop Norbert Robichaud in Saint-André, June 7, 1970, and was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Austin Émile Burke in St. Peter Church, Pubnico West, Nova Scotia, June 15, 1972.

At my ordination I felt an immense joy at having placed my trust in the Lord Jesus who had called me to follow him, to serve my brothers and sisters. I often tell him: « Jesus, meek and humble in heart, make my heart like unto thine. »

Prayer is very important to me, a very important part of my life. I love to praise God for the goodness of His presence among us. « Draw near to me, » says Jesus, « and I shall draw near to you. »

I love being close to Jesus, and it is a joy to begin or end the day with the Eucharistic celebration. I ask the

Lord to keep me focussed on him, for my own good and the good of all those in my care.

Finally, I have a deep devotion to the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus and our mother. For me, she is the shortest and surest way of getting to her Son and following him unswervingly.

Rice, Fr. William
« A Deep Secret within »

My vocation began at home when I was very young. I remember that my older brother, younger sister and I loved to play at saying Mass. My brother would be the priest, my sister was the choir and I was the appointed server. My parents were close by and would smile. This was our second « Mass » of the day, following high Mass at the cathedral.

If I am a priest today it is because of the Christian atmosphere in the family where I grew up. My father and mother were the first to talk to me of vocation. I already knew the word, as a young child. I remember my mother telling me very confidentially, one day: « We shall have a priest in the family! » This was shortly before she became ill and died. I was then only eight years old. I don't know whether her statement had been influenced by what she read in the Messenger Saint Antoine, to which the family was subscribed. At the time, becoming a priest was very far from my thoughts. It was only several years after her death that the idea of vocation started to grow in me. I was a teenager and the idea of vocation was very present to me. Truth to tell, though, I had started writing to an aunt who was a nun, and she would talk to me of vocations.

First contacts with priests began when I was very young. First, there were the parish visits. I remember that we had to be very polite, when the priest spoke to us! Then I started serving Mass in my parish church, and there I served Mass for several priests in the parish. What struck me the most, in my father's garage, was the happiness Father showed whenever a priest, brother or sister stopped in. Father had a lot of respect for these people.

Why did I want to become a priest ? Besides being a vocation, a call from the Lord, I have always seen the priests I knew as among the happiest people on earth. I could take over my father's garage, later, but I was never drawn to the trade. Rather, I saw how the priests were loved by the people, how their life was spent doing good, and I wanted to be like them. One day someone asked: « Have you ever considered being a priest ? » I was deeply moved by the challenge. It was as if that person had glimpsed the secret I held within my heart. The following year I enrolled at the major seminary. The entire family - stepmother and stepsister included - were very happy, sharing the secret of my heart.

I have been a priest twenty-five years. To the Virgin, I want to express my happiness in serving the Church and my diocese, and in giving myself to Jesus Christ.

Sirois, Fr. Guy, P.M.É.
« It Takes Quite a Few Sacrifices! »

If my memory serves me, I first became attracted to the priesthood around the age of ten. That year, 1943, the family had gone through a difficult period, with the death of one of my older brothers from diabetes. He was only 23. It was perhaps the faith of my parents that and their submission to God's will that influenced me. I was the youngest child and the conversations of my older siblings may also have guided me along. I remember that in those days we used to ask, where is heaven, and what must we do to get there. Then, the example of my brother's self-surrender to God's will certainly played an important role. I know that my parents often told me that my brother loved to pray from a very early age, and that he would go directly to heaven when he died...

Then there were the many visits of our assistant parish priest, Father Thomas Beaulieu, a man who knew how to encourage and inspire my parents, my brother and sisters with confidence. I remember full well how, upon witnessing my sick brother's resignation and deep faith, he told us that someone like him would go directly to heaven, after death. In my ten year-old mind, I told myself that I, too, had to get to heaven and that to get there, I needed to be a priest. At that moment, my heart was filled with unutterable joy. I talked to my father about it, not long after, telling him that one day I would be a priest. When he asked me why, I gave him a curt answer: « I want to get to heaven! » He answered: « That's fine, but you know that to get there you need to study long and hard, and make many sacrifices. » We never mentioned the subject again, and I started my

minor seminary at the age of 14.

The thought came back to me around the age of 18 or 19, in conversations with classmates, neighbour friends, and the spiritual director. Nothing was decided, but there were many possibilities. With my college friends, our lifestyle was quite simple and disciplined. The priests at the Collège had taught us respect for girls, and not to create false expectations with serious relations. We were advised to have many girl friends, and not to become attached to any one of them in particular, since our future was still quite hazy and undecided. If we went on to university, marriage would have to be postponed, anyway, and if we opted for the priesthood, there would also be breaks and separations. In other words, we were taught to remain free, during the course of our studies. This was very wise, and I give the same advice to young people today, when they ask me. It was especially the example of kind, devoted and noble men that I met at the Collège that helped my decision. They were hard-working, but they were always happy and calm. I want to mention here the following men: Edward Cottreau, François d'Entremont, and Raoul Martin, the dean of studies, as well as several others, because the atmosphere at Collège Saint-Louis was healthy and relaxed.

Around the age of 20, when it came time to make a choice, I opted for missionary life because I loved to travel and had always dreamed of adventure. By the way, this hankering to travel and to seek adventure soon fades away, the very first year of preparing for the missionary life, with the detachment from one's family which it requires. There is also another thing I must mention: I found parish life rather boring and routine, and I had noticed that parish priests lived very alone. This was what I thought then, but my perception has changed, since, because mission life can be very lonely and become very boring and routine, too. That was why I looked for a place where there would be some kind of common life while maintaining sufficient freedom and space to exercise and develop all my talents. The Société des Missions Étrangères (Foreign Mission Society) seemed to fit this description. I have never regretted my decision, even during the crisis period between 1965 and 1970, when several of my priest confreres left.

As with everybody, there were painful moments and many changes. There were also periods of deep conversion, like the full acceptance of the teachings of Vatican Council II and all this implied; there were also moments when one had to leap in the dark. Basically, though, I have always loved my work and the lifestyle I chose nearly 43 years ago, and I thank God.

Thériault, Fr. Ivan
« A Thirst for Happiness »

Pentecost Sunday, 2002 coincides with my second anniversary of ordination; on May 20, 2000 I was welcomed among the clergy of the Diocese of Edmundston, as a priest of Jesus Christ.

From the time of my early childhood my maternal grandmother played a determining role in awakening my faith. A woman of prayer, I would often see her praying the rosary, when I stopped in. She cared for her handicapped husband until the day of his death. When she was pregnant with her second child who later became a Fille de Marie de l'Assomption sister, she would often stop in at the church in Grand Falls, for prayer. Many vocations have come from the Thériault and Michaud families. Even my great grandfather had thought about it, at one time. There were several, ahead of me, to prepare the way... with their Hail Marys, their humble prayer, and their daily work.

My parents always respected and loved priests. I have never heard either my father or mother criticise them. We were always glad to have priests visit us for a meal, or on an errand. They were all interesting! My project was slowly taking shape in my heart... Mine was a very happy childhood. I had many school friends in Saint-Georges, my home parish. My classmates showed confidence in me by twice electing me class representative. Without necessarily being a great leader, quiet as I was, I left my mark in my milieu. I am always very happy to see my former teachers and classmates. What more did I need, to be happy? Nothing, really, because I was truly happy.

Like all the youth around me, I, too, was thinking about a great career. I imagined having my own family; I would have loved to teach, to be a doctor, but... I wouldn't let the Lord speak to me. I couldn't stop thinking about all the consecrated people I knew, and I admired them from a distance. As I got closer to them I realised that, yes, it was possible to be happy, there. My university studies broadened my knowledge base, and helped me grow interiorly: human sciences, philosophy, religious sciences, theology.

After reading many of Jean Vanier's books I decided to go to his community of l'Arche, in my last year of theology, and to keep an open mind regarding my vocation. At l'Arche I discovered the beauty of the person, the warmth of human relationships, and the communion which can exist in the context of community. Despite

that, though, I was well aware of the problems experienced by those with special needs, the difficulty which some experience in trying to express their feelings in an acceptable way, and the friction that can exist among the assistants. After a year a seminarian, the vocation call was still there, so much so that, following the opening of *Bishop Thibodeau's* Diocesan Seminary at Edmundston, I visited its director. At the time I was still a residential counsellor at l'Arche-Ottawa. The desire I had been harbouring for so long was still with me. Would I have the strength to leave the context of Jean Vanier's l'Arche and those I had met and learned to love?

Circumstances made it that I underwent a two-year pastoral internship at Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs Parish and one year's immediate preparation for the priesthood at St. Paul University and the Centre of Formation to Ministries, in our beautiful national capital of Ottawa. It was there that the final decision was made. My year in Ottawa was a full one: pastoral internship in Hull, serious spiritual direction, post-graduate course in pastoral theology, involvement in the University Centre community, and the great fellowship that existed among us. After all this, how could I resist seeking ordination, when all signs pointed to it? How could I not believe that God was calling me to serve Him as a priest? If God was the cause of my happiness at this moment, why couldn't He do the same thing in twenty years!

A few weeks prior to ordination and well beyond, my wish was to be a priest in the manner of Jesus, a merciful priest. I notice now that in the many opportunities for growth in ministry and meeting with people within or outside the pastoral context, there is in me a thirst which in some way has already been quenched...I have always wanted to be at God's service and for me being a priest is a way of doing that. I am so happy whenever I take the time to be rather than to do, and I take the time to have a relationship with people before being a minister of the sacraments. Jean Vanier's wisdom follows me in my ministry as a priest. I inhale deeply of inner freedom and peace when I am faithful to the promptings of my deepest self... but I am also a realist, with both feet firmly planted on the ground. It is easy to fall into the trap of pastoral efficiency, so I always need to recharge my batteries, to keep going. One of the ways I do this is to return to the Centre of Formation to Ministries in Ottawa for one week, every year, to store up the energy I need to follow the path which is difficult, at times.

You, young man who reads this, I have a secret for you: If you want to be happy in life, believe me, dear friend, that Jesus Christ can truly satisfy your craving for happiness. It is by opening up to the Lord and to those around you that you will experience joy. Please pray for me, as I pray for you.

Thériault, Fr. Jacques
« A Mysterious Dream »

On this feast of the Annunciation marking the day when Mary said yes to the calling of the Lord, I myself renew the yes of my vocation, and comply with my bishop's request to write the story of my vocation.

There is, in Jeremiah, this word of God which summarises my vocation: « Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you... » (1:4-10).

I have always yearned for Jesus Christ. I had thought of becoming a priest for a long time... since always! I was raised in a Christian home, of humble means, poor and happy. Surely my baptism sealed or deposited in me this priestly vocation: the day of my birth, feasts of the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Lourdes, « Le Jour du Seigneur » programme, the Sunday high Mass... all were high points in my life. My parents were very unobtrusive, but very present in this story.

I have met people whose lives touched me by their faith and their commitment, but I have always preferred that my desire to be a priest be first and foremost « my project ». There were a few well-taken challenges by people who truly lived their vocation.

I have always trusted the Lord, in this. I carried this « secret » with me for many years. I prayed. Jesus, the faithful Friend, took me by the hand... I would attend daily Mass.

It was at Christmas, 1972, that I announced to my parents that I would be attending major seminary, the following fall. My parents' reply: « It's your decision... and we're with you. » I admired their quiet response. Pastoral internship helped me discover the happiness that goes with introducing Jesus Christ to others.

The day of my diaconate, the reading from Scripture was about Jeremiah's vocation. Ten days before leaving for my ordination retreat, my mother said: « Your father and I always knew that you would be a priest. » In

fact, when my mother was in her fourth pregnancy (I was the one to be born), four children in fewer than five years' marriage, my mother was quite concerned: « How are we going to make it, with so little money and a family to raise ? » One night she was awakened by a « mysterious dream »: « Don't worry, the child will be a priest! » My parents kept this a secret until the very last moment, so as not to pressure me in any way. I understand, now why Jeremiah's vocation, despite the fact that I was ignorant of my mother's dream, has always remained with me.

My vocation has grown and developed, after putting in strong roots... The Spirit of the Lord has enlightened me calmly, and it was only ten days before my ordination that I was given the concrete and real « sign » of my vocation.

P.S. I am very modest to talk about the story of my vocation... It reaches into the very depths of my being, a secret shared with my bishop. The world cannot understand such a story! But let them understand, whoever have faith!

Thériault, Fr. Rino
« The Seal of My Vocation »

I often say that one's vocation story can be sealed only at the end of one's life!

Forty years and more is a long time! However, it is a very short period for answering God's call. I hope that in these years a few people have benefited from my ministry. I accomplished a lot of work, during that time. I have tried to do so to the best of my abilities, even though I was often dissatisfied... perhaps due to my personality... I have learned not to get too upset with work and tasks that are sometimes shoddily done or summarily executed.

During these 44 years, it is much more what I was and have become that seem more important. I hope that my presence, where I have lived, has been and continues to be a reflection of the goodness of God: this is what I would like to be the seal of my vocation.

The story began simply enough. Living in a very Catholic household, my education disposed me to consider the priesthood. It was while an altar server that I dreamt of the priesthood. The Eucharistic celebrations dazzled me, and I would reflect that one day I would be able to do the same thing. My dream became reality June 1, 1958. Let us thank God!

Thériault, Fr. Sylvio
« Bright Decisions! »

Looking back on the past and thinking about my vocation, I seems that from the time I was a child, I wanted to be a priest. I was the eldest in a family of thirteen children, living on a small family farm. The family lived off the produce of the land. There was not much money, but we were not living in misery.

My parents were very devout Catholics. There were the family rosary and evening prayer, every day. The priest was loved and respected, and we played an active role in all parish events. We lived two miles from the church, and the children would walk, while the parents travelled by horse and buggy or by horse sled, depending on the season What was special about my parents was their concern that all their children be educated, at least as far as the parish school system allowed. My parents could read and write, but they suffered from the little schooling they had had. Education, to them, was a sacred trust.

Two attitudes were constant, in the family: there was a lot of love from my parents, but there was strict but gentle discipline. Father had served in World War I and had been marked by military order and discipline.

I never spoke to my parents about vocations, I trusted in their determination to give us an education. I realised the decisiveness on this issue when I was in grade 8. The schools in Sainte-Anne did not have a grade 9. I was ready to take time off from school, but my father had other plans. As he always kept abreast of the school board decisions, he got wind of the fact that grade 9 would begin the following year. He took the « bright » decision of having me take my grade 8 over again, telling me that if I did not keep my nose in books for a whole year, I would lose all taste for studies...

This made me think of my vocation: the Lord was probably trying to look after it without my knowing. After all, I reasoned, if this idea is from Him, He will have to do a lot of the work to bring it to maturity. So I accepted my father's solution and kept on reading and studying. During grade 10 I started to think about my possible vocation to the priesthood with a little more concern: I would certainly have to do more than grade 11, which was the furthest the Ste-Anne school system went. Besides, my parents' financial possibilities were not improving enough for me to hope that I could go to college, after high school. The future of my project was getting fuzzier by the moment, but I still thought about it.

During this uncertain period, I got an idea. I had never talked to anyone about my project. Why not do so? Ste-Anne had a young priest who was very close to the youth of the parish. He would help us organise our leisure time, and spent a lot of time with us. In fact, he was the kind of priest I wanted to be if I ever made it there. I decided to share my secret with him. I was hoping he would say that it was not possible for the son of a farmer to become a priest. Then I could abandon this foolish project without any qualms, and I would regain peace of mind. But things went otherwise. I asked him whether he thought I could be a priest, one day. His answer was firm and joyous at the same time: « Of course you can be a priest! » « That killed me » as we say in Ste-Anne. (He cut through all my doubts and objections.)

I continued at the village school which was two miles from home. Spring and fall on foot, winter by dog sled. Without my noticing it, my teacher was gradually preparing me for college. He told me so the day I graduated when he drove me back home. He strongly urged me to continue with my studies. I couldn't imagine how this could be possible.

Towards the middle of summer vacation, there was a glimmer of hope. A Eudist Father came to visit and suggested that I go to the Congregation's minor seminary close to the Collège de Bathurst. At the minor seminary I could take my liberal arts course at a cost lower than at the Collège. The condition was that I hope to become a Eudist, one day. This viewpoint was new to me, but the good father reassured me by adding that I would have plenty of time to consider it, during my years of study. With my parents' approval, I accepted the proposal.

Three weeks before classes started at the seminary, I was out working with my father when he told me he was sorry, that it would be pointless for me to consider going to the seminary. The family's financial situation was simply not strong enough to buy me new clothes and pay my tuition. All my human hopes evaporated in the mist of my family's poverty.

The following Sunday I decided to turn to God. After Mass, I stayed in church a little longer, to pray the following prayer to the Blessed Virgin: « If you want me to be a priest, do something! I can't do anything more, I've used up all my resources. » Then I went to my uncle and godparents', for a brief visit. They were away. Their eldest daughter was at home, though, and she questioned me about when I would be leaving for seminary. She was sorry to hear my story. « You were doing so well in school; you should continue. » When I left her, I was very sad.

She must have mentioned our conversation to her parents because the Blessed Virgin's answer to my prayer arrived on Tuesday. My godparents came for a visit, after supper. My uncle told me: « You want to go to seminary ? » I told him about it, and he answered: « I will help you and you will go to the 'real' college, then you'll decide what you want to do, after you've finished. » My heart swelled with the happiness caused by this unexpected offer, but I still needed my parents' consent. Mother seemed happy; father was outdoors, working. « Get your father, » my uncle said. I quickly went to take over his work, telling him only that the uncle was in the house and wanted to talk to him. I took his place on the harvester and prayed a lot of Hail Marys while mowing the oats! When I came back home, they had reached a decision. My father accepted another sacrifice, to help me. This is what he said: « Your uncle has decided to help us. We will never be able to reimburse him for this financial aid. Here is what you'll do: from now on, beginning today, you will work for him, during your summer vacation. You will help me only when he doesn't need you. »

This is the greatness of his sacrifice: I was seventeen years old, and I had hardly started helping my father on the farm. My next oldest brother was only thirteen. This meant that he accepted to work alone four extra years, to let me continue my studies. This is what we call self-denial, self-sacrifice... That was the kind of parents we had.

After two years at the Collège de Bathurst, the Administrator of the diocese (*Bishop Chiasson* having passed away) met with all the sixth-year and older students. It was during the war of 1939-1945, and students were obliged to undergo military training. We were asked to leave our name and address with the college authorities, before leaving on vacation. We would probably be transferred to a different institution, one where we would be dispensed from military service. My spiritual director recommended that I give my name.

This is how I got to finish my last two years of college with the Sulpician Fathers at their philosophy seminary,

in Montreal. Then it was off to the Eudist Fathers' Holy Heart Major Seminary, in Halifax.

Towards the end of my third year of theology I was saddened by the death of my uncle and benefactor; of a heart attack. He never saw me a priest, but as I was already a sub-deacon, he knew that I would be ordained the following year. This was his only consolation.

I was ordained a priest May 6, 1948, by the first bishop of Edmundston, in my home parish of Ste-Anne-de-Madawaska. And I have been going on for 54 years.

Thank you, Lord, for having needed me for so long, and for having confidence in me.

Thibodeau, Fr. Pierre
« Happy to be a Priest »

I was very young, and I wanted to be a priest. I admired my parish priest, and wanted to be like him.

After my college studies, I was less certain of wanting the priesthood, so I went into teaching. Following further studies, I became a school guidance counsellor.

I worked in the school system for six years. During this period, the thought of becoming a priest would come back to me every so often; I even took steps to become a seminarian... with no results.

After five years as guidance counsellor, I wanted to do something else. I therefore went back to university, but was not accepted into the programme I wanted. I tried again the following year, but without success. By that time I had decided to quit my job, which I did. I decided to go on sabbatical. It was during that year that I registered in the faculty of theology at the Université de Sherbrooke.

At the beginning of my first semester of theology, one morning at breakfast I suddenly had - from within - a clear feeling that I truly wanted to be a priest. A feeling I equate with a calling. At the time, I was 32. At the end of the week I came to Edmundston to see the bishop and talk to him about my project. After a few moments he said that he would consider my request and let me know shortly... which he did.

I was then accepted as a candidate to orders and, there being no impediments, I was ordained May 23, 1982. I have never doubted my call, feel confirmed in my vocation... and am happy to be a priest!

Conclusion

At the end of this collective pastoral letter, it is fitting for me to quote the Holy Father John Paul II, at the conclusion of his biography « My Vocation, Gift and Mystery »:

« I cannot bring this reflection to an end, on this year of the golden anniversary of my priesthood, without an expression of my deepest gratitude to the Master of the harvest for the gift of my vocation, for the grace of the priesthood, for vocations to the priesthood, all over the world. I do this in union with all the bishops, who share the same concern for vocations and who experience the same joy when their number grows. Thanks to God, a certain vocation crisis in the Church is being resolved. Every new priest brings with him a special blessing 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'. As a matter of fact, it is Christ himself who comes, in every priest. If Saint Cyprian said that the priest is 'another Christ' - *Christianus alter Christus* - all the more can we say: *Sacerdos alter Christus*. May God help the priests remain aware of the gift they have received, and use these gifts to good effect. May he raise in many young people a prompt and generous response to his call to give themselves totally to the cause of the Gospel. It will be beneficial to men and women today who are so in need of meaning and hope. »

It is this same gift, this same mystery that, throughout this Letter we have seen at work in our Church. We focussed on the one calling - God who chose, formed, sustained, sent and brought about a rich harvest - and then on the one called - the young man chosen from all eternity, the young man answering the call discerned, the young man going through the different phases of formation to the priesthood, the priest carrying out for God and the world the mission given to him - and then the family and the local Christian community - interceding before God and supporting the one called by every spiritual, moral, material and financial means.

However, do we share the Holy Father's vision ? Is the vocation crisis being resolved, in our milieu ? If not, how could it be resolved ? If yes, what thanks are we giving to the Lord ?

The vocation stories we have read were not directed to apostolic activity; they were rather focussed on God's fundamental call, the call which changed the lives of our future brother priests and made them available to the People of God generally. However, contemplation, prayer, preaching, welcome of others, sacramental celebration, visits, administration, collaboration, collegiality, daily work, all of these constitute the many facets of a concrete response to this wonderful call from God. A daily Yes! Yes to collaborating in building up the Kingdom of God! An answer of love to a call of love, for building up the Body of Christ! A Yes to respond to the spiritual and pastoral needs of our brothers and sisters! A Yes which echoes Peter's loving response to the risen Jesus: « You know I love you! » - « Be the shepherd of my sheep! »

To help us go from a simple reading of the text to a true commitment, I have five simple questions to ask ourselves:

- a) How do we perceive the priests of our Church ?
What support do we give them ?
- b) What form does our concern for continuing priestly vocations take ?
- c) What encouragement, what solidarity do we show to those responsible for priestly formation ?
- d) What continuing attention do we give to those - young and older - who could become priests ?
- e) What priests and what type of priest will we have helped produce, to respond to the needs of today in our world, at the beginning of the third millennium ?

Dear brother priests, I gladly repeat to you the words of the hymn, in the liturgy of the Apostles: « Men of the deep, cast in us the desire for God, and set us anew along the path! »

Sisters and brothers of the Edmundston diocesan Church, may the Spirit of Pentecost which inspires every prayer make us truly grateful for the priests of yesterday and today, and may we say: « Raise in the hearts of all the baptised a desire to offer their gifts and talents in service to one another. In this way you will make of our Church a good soil where the seeds of your Kingdom of justice, love, and peace will grow. »

May the Virgin Mary and her divine Son fill us with countless blessings!

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston