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## THE FUTURE OF OUR PARISH COMMUNITIES

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After having reflected with you on the priceless value of each person, the importance of the family, the holiness of God and the gift of the Lord's Day, I want to look at the future of our Church of Edmundston, with you. I hope that this Pastoral Letter which was published on the occasion of the feast of Pentecost will have revived in you the marvellous gifts which the Holy Spirit gave us on the days of our baptism and confirmation

### THE FUTURE OF OUR PARISH COMMUNITIES

I am neither pessimist nor fatalistic regarding the future of our parish communities. "Happy the eyes that see what you are seeing! Happy the ears that hear what you are hearing!" These words of Jesus can be applied here, in this diocese of Edmundston, if we collaborate wholeheartedly in the extraordinary work of the Spirit of Pentecost. If each baptised Christian strives with all his might to become what he is as son of God and member of the people of God, if every baptised person strives with all her heart to become what she is as a daughter of God and a member of the people of God, we have nothing to fear, and our vocation and mission will carry us far together. "Who will separate us from the love of God ?"

If each one of us truly lives his or her own baptism, if we fully take on our responsibilities in our parishes, in our milieus, if we welcome the word of God and apply it on a daily basis, the Holy Spirit will continue to raise up leaders to guide His people and lead it to its fullest development. The ways of leading and governing may change, but there is still a Gospel to welcome, study, internalise, and transmit. In our communities we must be attentive to the Word of God, to the apostolic teaching transmitted to us by the Church, to the prayer and celebrations of the community, and to the fellowship which daily unites us to one another. If we fully live the great commandment of love, we have nothing to fear: our communities will continue to be brotherly and sisterly, and missionary.

At the heart of our faithfulness to the Gospel, in the midst of the attentive concern we have for our brothers and sisters, the Lord will continue to raise up prophets who will speak and act in his name, missionaries to bring forth the Good News of salvation to various places, servants to respond to human necessities, and priests to proclaim the Gospel, serve the Church, and offer prayer in the midst of God's people. It is to the Church as a whole that the responsibility is given to discern the calls of God today, to challenge the baptised regarding these calls, and to accompany with our support and prayers those who the Lord has chosen.

As soon as I arrived among you I spoke of the urgency of developing a vigorous and bold vocational pastoral ministry. I have blessed the Lord for the remarkable fruitfulness of the Church of Edmundston over the years, in priestly and religious vocations. On this very day, the Lord graces us with a new priest, Father Jeff Doucette : what goodness on the Lord's part, but also what obligations are ours to thank him and ask him to send labourers to his harvest. It is not foolhardy to think that the diocese of Edmundston could eventually have not only a house of formation for its future priests, but also a training programme for those young and not so young men who are called to the priestly life.

The day when the sower stops sowing would mark an end to the harvest, but if the sower sows, there is room for hope, even for "one hundred to one," as Jesus says. With the grace of God, what we will have sowed today in vocational ministry will bear abundant and unhoped-for fruit. "What is needed is to believe in these calls of God, to pray, and to act," said a seminary director in South America who had just welcomed some one hundred young seminarians.

The diocese of Edmundston has a population of sixty thousand, in thirty-three parishes. Thanks to God, twenty or so priests are engaged in serving the believers; pastoral planning has been undertaken in order to ensure quality service to the entire people of God. But we must be more vigilant and daring to challenge and accompany future shepherds; the Lord has never abandoned his people, he will continue to watch over his Church. He will continue to choose living stones to build his Church. May he bring forth in his Church an abundance of fruits of the Spirit which he gave her on Pentecost Sunday; and may the people that is his never stop progressing in faith, hope, and love.

May these few lines repeat my firm desire to contribute with you to the task of evangelisation and to the building up of this young Church of Edmundston. May we carry on the work already begun, by respecting always more the human dignity of each person and each family, by making our Sundays truly days of the Lord, and by sowing seeds of hope for the future of our Church. May the Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Mother of Jesus, repeat for us and with us that *the Love of God is from age to age*.

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