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## A BENEFICIAL PRIORITY (1991-1994)



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The Edmundston Diocesan Synod (1987-1990) had recommended that a project of evangelisation of a few years' duration be set up in order to reach the greatest number of people possible throughout the diocese, and the purpose of which would be to respond to the many deficiencies regarding knowledge of our Christian faith, and to generate a greater commitment to their Church on the part of our Christians. Following Jesus the first evangeliser, the Church's task and mission is to evangelise the world of today. At the same time as the Synod, Pope John Paul II published his eighth encyclical letter on the topic of the Redeemer's Mission, in which encyclical the pope insisted on the urgency of mission activity for the renewal of the faith and of Christian life.

Parish evangelisation missions on the theme of *The Gospel: An Inheritance To Discover and To Share*, were set as a priority in pastoral activities for the years 1991-1994. More than 75 % of our parishes have had this mission. On September 6, some 40 individuals who had been instrumental in preparing and ensuring the unfolding of the mission met with the Eudist Fathers mission team to evaluate this great priority. The evaluation was positive. Following is some feedback on the experience.

### PROMISING RESULTS

"The great Mission did not have as its sole object to stimulate Christian living but to set forth long-term elements which would ensure the renewal of community life." One of these positive major elements was the feeling of unity and communion which this priority aroused throughout the diocese. The establishment of small evangelisation teams in each parish, to work during at least six months at preparing the Great Mission, and to ensure that the Mission itself went smoothly, was an invaluable benefit to all. The sermon theme, *What Are You Doing with Your Baptism?* served as a reflection starter on Christian mission in the midst of the world. The four sub-topics were: *Called by the Father, United to Jesus, Alive in the Spirit, and Sent out into the World*. Far from being moralistic sermons, the preaching reminded us of what baptised people are.

Several individuals noted the times of prayer, the atmosphere of prayer which contributed to give force to this mission enterprise. It wasn't a rare event to have a hundred or more people present at prayer, each day; the prayer was inspired by the Word of God, a prayer of the Church, a prayer of thanksgiving and of petition. The songs and hymns of the various celebrations allowed for a truly active participation on the part of all: this is what is being asked by the liturgical renewal.

The Scripture sharings seem to be the key element of this great mission. Christians were able to share together on the Word of God, deepen the fundamental elements of their faith, and seek together answers to questions raised. It was a direct contact with the Word of God, simply and in a spirit of fellowship, in the heart of the Church. As the theme proclaimed, *The Gospel: An Inheritance To Discover and To Share*, it was truly a discovery and a challenge.

### NEW MEANS

If we at times deplored that the Great Mission touched only those who usually attended parish celebrations, we also noted that the activities held probably reached more people than one might think. It was the topic of family sharings

as well as at work and play; even youth teams had their place, at these missions. People commented on the Gospel Nights, and of evenings of prayer and song that were held especially in the Restigouche, in Edmundston and St.-Basile, and broadcast by the local media. Many families and people of every stripe were able to talk of their faith and their baptism.

### **THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON US**

What remains of all this? It all depends on us and on our respective communities. The Great Mission was like the ploughing and sowing of a field; we need to carry on the mission and pursue what has been undertaken. If a parish figures that prayer life is important, something must be done about it. If another parish deems it necessary to have Bible sharing groups, it is important to find good leaders and scripture guides. If it is thought essential to be visible in the mass media, it is up to the community to follow this path.

The foregoing is what I retained of the evaluation made on September 6. As I listened, it brought to mind what I myself experienced of the beauty and grandeur I experienced at the Great Missions I participated in, at St.-Léonard, St.-Léonard-Parent, and St.-Basile, and I continued giving thanks to God. And throughout my meetings in the different deaneries, I heard similar and encouraging comments. "The theme of evangelisation takes us back to our primary mission." Three years are not enough: we must pursue the task undertaken by focusing on one or the other of the aspects of this great enterprise. In the forthcoming months, the Diocesan Pastoral Council will be specifying the priority for the years 1995-1998. In the meantime, the jubilee year of our diocese calls us to celebrate, to reflect, to renew ourselves both as individuals and as communities: all of this can fit in with what was experienced during the great mission.

Have a good week!

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