
A REPORT DEMANDING ACTION



The recommendations tabled on February 1 by the Study Committee on the Pastoral and Financial Situation of the Diocese continues to challenge people and groups. This is a good, healthy sign: the Recommendations must be taken seriously. The committee will remain attentive to reactions provoked and welcome all observations and suggestions. Mr. Carmel Caouette, the Committee chairman, has had two serious operations, lately, and because of this I have thought it seemly to postpone the Committee's final report to November 1. This delay could prove to be very beneficial not only for the Committee members but for the entire diocese as well. After consultation with the diocesan councils, I am presenting to you the actions and directions I am taking.

PASTORAL URGENCIES

Ten parishes out of thirty-three are now priestless. More than ever is it important that a parish pastoral council and a financial council be effective by January 1, 1996. In October, PPC members will be meeting at the deanery level for a pastoral session. The Study Committee had raised this urgency. In true co-responsibility with the duly mandated pastor, it is necessary that the baptised and confirmed take on more and more tasks and services in their own milieu, in the name of their faith in Jesus: education to the faith at the family level, sacramental preparation: baptism, confirmation, reconciliation, eucharist, matrimony, anointing of the sick without forgetting holy orders. It is through these signs that the life of Christ is manifested: it is important that these sacraments be well prepared, in order to live them in the concrete. Different committees or sacrament preparation teams are there to help us get a better grasp on the meaning of these sacred actions and to help us deepen our journey in the faith. It is for this reason that the Study Committee insists that [spiritual and community] needs in a particular milieu be looked after by the parishioners themselves, in narrow collaboration with their pastor. The committee also stresses the exchange of services between neighbouring parishes and throughout the entire deanery. This [collaboration] could take the form of a pastoral team ministering in a few parishes, such as what is already being done in the Restigouche and Victoria deaneries.

Besides the parish pastoral council and other committees necessary for the maintaining of community life, the Study Committee points out the importance on investing in searching out and forming future priests and pastoral agents; the Committee set itself the task of eventually establishing a seminary in the diocese of Edmundston. The setting up of a vocation pastoral ministry in each parish during April and May, founded according to the document *Called by Name*, will hopefully contribute to revive this work of prime interest for our diocese. Study and research now taking place should allow for the opening of a diocesan seminary by August of this year. This is an indispensable task; the seminary would gradually take root in the rectory of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur Parish. The [French Sector of the] School of Faith which is celebrating its tenth anniversary on April 30 will pursue its mission of biblical formation. A pastoral formation service will be in place by September. And on May 27, an information day will be held on the future of the Diocesan Centre. May these provisions help us along the different stages of our diocesan Church life.

CAUTION, VIGILANCE, CREATIVENESS

Looking at the actual state of revenues and expenditures of parishes and of the diocese as a whole, the Committee urged us to caution, vigilance, and creativeness. The effects of the economic crisis are still being felt; the number

of those contributing regularly to parish financing has diminished perceptibly; there is an obvious desire to invest more in pastoral ministry than in bricks and mortar. The Committee therefore recommends a moratorium on all further construction, and the formal authorization for all repairs above \$15,000.00. This recommendation is to take effect April 1, 1995. This does not mean that one can neither build nor repair; it means that one must come up with further reasons for doing so, and that these repairs and constructions are done only when urgently needed, and done with caution and with the approval of the bishop and his council for economic affairs.

Besides the moratorium, the Committee urges us to show concern in the daily use of the buildings we have or maintain. Could we do better by doing differently? For instance, could the rectory be refitted for community purposes? Must we keep it, transform it, use it differently, or get rid of it? It is this same principle that the Committee employs regarding the Diocesan Centre: Do we have the means to maintain it as is? Must we use it differently, or get rid of it? Is it possible for other organisations to join the diocesan services or already existing rectories? The study must be pursued.

At its March 17 meeting, the Committee insisted on the necessity of coming up with a few concrete gestures that would indicate our desire to alleviate the burden of expenses, and to seek out other possible avenues of revenue: little by little, without making waves, readjust [our services, etc.], and use to the utmost what we have. Members of the committee are trusting in the future: this period of questioning and of reflection is beneficial in helping us better understand and respond together to today's challenges.

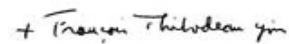
ZERO DEFICIT

It is in this spirit and with the total concurrence of the diocesan councils that we have reviewed our budget forecasts, aiming at a *Zero Deficit*, beginning this year in progress. We count on your collaboration and your constant generosity, in order to carry this out. We shall not be hiring any new personnel: a smaller number of paid personnel will ensure the pastoral animation and seek the collaboration of volunteers, especially in the areas of mission, catechetical, and liturgical pastoral work, as well as in the area of social communications. The technical services offered by the Renewal Centre will be looked into separately, especially regarding room and board.

SOLIDARITY AND GRATITUDE

I want once again to express my gratitude to the members of the Study Committee: Mr. Paul Arseneault, Mr. Carmel Caouette, Mr. Arthur Desjardins, Sister Jeannette Doucet, Mrs. Ginette LeBlanc, Mr. Rino Nadeau, Mr. Ronald Ouellette, Mr. Maurice Picard, Father Armand Plourde. I assure them of my solidarity with them: the recommendations and directions they are offering us can help us take on with courage and serenity the challenges with which we are confronted. And to Mr. Caouette in particular, my best "Get Well" wishes.

Have a good week!



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

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