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## THE EDMUNDSTON DIOCESE'S FINANCIAL SITUATION

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In March, 1994, with the assent of the provisional Episcopal Council, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and the Council for Economic Affairs, I asked a Study Committee chaired by Mr. Réal Caouette to take stock of the pastoral and financial situations of the Diocese of Edmundston, and to make appropriate recommendations. The committee submitted its interim findings to the diocesan presbyterium and pastoral agents on February 1, 1995; these findings, though of a provisional nature were nonetheless immediately applied: to carry on with already-undertaken pastoral restructuring, continuation of the "École de la Foi," setting up of a pastoral formation service, inauguration of a diocesan seminary, parish pastoral councils and for economic affairs committees, along with a wise utilisation of the Diocesan Centre and parish structures, a moratorium on all further construction, prior authorization for expenses above \$15,000.00, and a balanced diocesan budget.

### A GREAT FOLLOW-UP

There was a most positive reception of these recommendations, despite the conditions they imposed. The "École de la Foi" started its eleventh year; more than fifty persons are in the pastoral formation programme; the diocesan seminary opened its doors on August 4, 1995; since January 1, parish pastoral councils and economic affairs committees are to be found in every parish; and the moratorium on new construction as well as required authorizations are being respected. Appointments made last June were in the line of pastoral restructuring in order to respond, with resources at hand, to the needs of the 60,000 members of the diocese. I marvel at the solidarity and generosity shown, in the face of these new situations; we have together taken up a few of the challenges, thanks to this deep felt feeling of belonging to the same Church and the same diocese. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations steadily stimulated this vital and splendid communion.

### A DIFFICULT BUDGET BALANCE

The creation of new pastoral services through the years, the harsh economic recession, and smaller revenues made it difficult to achieve a balanced diocesan budget, these last few years. The diocese has four sources of revenue: a) the diocesan per capita tax, that is, two dollars and twenty-five cents (\$2.25) per member of the diocese; b) the Christ the King Sunday collection; c) services rendered by the spiritual renewal centre; d) and interest on investments made especially by Bishop J.-Romeo Gagnon between the years 1950-1970. It is with monies generated by these sources that the Diocesan Centre and the personnel salaries must be administered. The accrued deficits force us to make a number of decisions.

### THE DIOCESAN CENTRE

In the fall of 1996 it will be twenty-five years that the Diocesan Centre acquired the Oblate Fathers' retreat house. This acquisition has allowed us to house under one roof the bishop's residence and the diocesan services, and to have a spiritual resource centre which is the envy of several dioceses. The Study Committee had recourse to the services of a firm in Rimouski specialising in such work, for a detailed analysis of the Diocesan Centre and a look at alternative solutions. In looking at certain scenarios for the use of the Centre (elderly housing, travellers' hostel or room rental for people from out of town visiting a sick relative or friend, or pilgrim's hostel), we realised that they would be costly and would bring in very little revenue. The basic problem was not the Centre's profit-earning capability but the lack of revenue to support the episcopal residence and the diocesan services.

## IN SEARCH OF NEW REVENUE

Taking into consideration the situation as a whole, the Study Committee has made a number of recommendations so that all in the diocese may continue to take the diocese's precarious financial situation to heart. The Committee has expressed the hope that more and more people develop the habit of making donations to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Edmundston, that they make the diocese the beneficiary of life insurance policies, make interest-free loans to the diocese, and take an active part in the annual Christ the King collection. Still, the Committee believes that the best way of raising the necessary funds consists in grouping together a thousand or so persons who would commit themselves to donate one hundred dollars per year to the Bishop of Edmundston. This latter source of revenue would ensure the continuation of the diocesan services and the maintenance and upkeep of the Diocesan Centre. The diocesan services and the deaneries are more than ever indispensable in order to give pastoral agents to each parish and to respond to rising needs.

## THE GROUP OF ONE THOUSAND

With the assent of the diocesan councils, the *Group of One Thousand* is hereby created: this will require devoted solidarity on the part of members of the diocese, without having to be heavily burdened with additional taxes or crushed under new requirements. The voluntary donation made to this new organism, addressed to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Edmundston (60, rue Bouchard, Edmundston, N.B., E3V 3K1), is tax deductible. Members of the Study Committee as well as the ex-Coordinating Committee of the Fiftieth Anniversary Festivities have indicated their desire to collaborate together in the setting up of this *Group of One Thousand*. There will be no publicity campaign around this project but we count on the usual solidarity of the members of the Diocese of Edmundston to take up the new challenges of the fast-approaching third millennium. In the name of the diocese I want to express my deep gratitude to the members of the Study Committee. To all those who are helping us in these difficult times I express my fraternal gratitude. Have a good week!

+ François Thibodeau

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

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