

---

## INAUGURATING THE 1997-1998 PASTORAL YEAR (2)

---



On August 20 the diocesan pastoral team and the deanery chairmen met with the Bishop's Council to look at the situation of our diocesan Church. Last week I wrote about the positive points made, which we want to actively follow on. This week I am sharing with you those important points which were pointed out as urgently needing improvement. The reflection such as we made at our meeting will also be carried out at the deanery and parish levels in the months to come. You too will be invited to point out those areas needing improvement.

### A CHURCH TO LOVE

At our August meeting, it was a Church in need of love rather than one needing improvement, that we endeavoured to discover. To take time for looking at the Church in all her beauty but also to recognise its suffering and expectations, to do this as we would for a member of one's family whom we appreciate and love in a thousand and one ways. Let us take a long look at our parents: without always expressing it they each day worked on the construction of the 'domestic church' which is the family. Let us be grateful for all those who are close to us, for our benefactors, for all those who laboured to the very end in service to Christ, in their neighbours. Their example cannot help but stimulate us. Let us also reconsider the ordained servants, deacons, priests, and bishops; let us consider the pastoral agents. Their service in the past was not always an easy task, nor is it any easier in our time. Let us take the time to measure the extent and the quality of their service.

### A CHURCH TO SERVE

As servants we must love and serve the Church, just as Christ himself has done so. He did not avoid the Church: he gave his life for her. In the wake of such a vast number of witnesses, we must continue the task that has hardly been started. John Paul II says that the Church is still young, still in its first springtime! By specifying our pastoral directions or by retaining certain pastoral priorities, we shall be in a position to adopt means to authentic service to the Church. For instance, by trying to improve the composition and functioning of our liturgy committees we want to respond better to the needs of the people who want more spirited and significant liturgies. By working for more solidarity between priests and lay people, by sharing in a common pastoral project, by eradicating all chauvinism or exclusivity that detaches us from the rest of the deanery and even the diocese, by opening ourselves to all five deaneries, we shall construct a Church that is more and more vigorous. And that is why we say, « Lord, we pray to you for all who labour in the Church: give them the courage to continue their tasks in spite of the obstacles they meet. »

### CHALLENGES TO PICK UP

Faced with the indifference and halfheartedness exhibited by some of the baptised, with the lack of involvement of others in our activities and gatherings, with the lack of interest demonstrated by some committee and parish organisation chairpersons, with self-centredness or giving up in front of obstacles, as baptised persons and in the name of our faith we shall have to ensure that we are all the more visible in our midst, we shall have to follow up on our good ideas or resolutions, whether in the areas of culture,

communications, social or even political activity. « Lord, we pray you to give us the enthusiasm and the daring we need so that we may see what needs to be improved and to better serve the People of God which is the diocesan Church of Edmundston. »

### **CELLS OF LIFE**

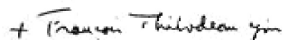
As people in charge of the pastoral ministry at the parish or diocesan level, we shall have to recognise and support what is already being accomplished, and work together; many organisations are now at work. We have to be 'salt of the earth' and 'light of the world' to them, in simplicity, solidarity, and truth. We have to find those means for gathering all our forces so as to respond more effectively to the pressing needs of the needy and the powerless, we must activate our personal and community commitment. These are important paths for us to take. Recognising that there are, in our own communities, cells of life, faith, prayer, is a first step at building base Christian communities that are vital to renewing our Christian communities. These base communities will help us rediscover and deepen together the precious legacy which is the Gospel. Catechetical formation will be an invaluable contribution to our Christian life. Social and family pastoral ministry will then become even more present than now.

### **A DARING CREATIVENESS**

Without minimising the efforts made to preserve and maintain what has already been done regarding our liturgical and sacramental initiation celebrations, it seems to the deanery chairmen and the diocesan team that it is urgent for us "to reach out to the people," to the youth, to those who have deserted our Sunday gatherings, to go to the suffering and the needy. This is a requirement for all pastoral ministry that takes its inspiration from the great mystery of the Incarnation. Jesus was the one who took the initiative of coming to us, to make his home with us, to stop at Zacchaeus's home, to go from village to village. This is where the essential vital element would be found, a mission commitment driving us to reach out to the other so as to better listen in order to love him or her, and better serve our brothers and sisters. « Lord, we pray you to give us the courage which was yours: you loved us just as we were; help us love others as you first loved us. »

### **TAKING APPROPRIATE MEASURES**

The inauguration of our new pastoral year was a joyous occasion. Looking to the future, we walk in your light, Son of the Living God. Turned to the future, like a people that hopes for the rising sun." In days to come we shall have to ensure that we retain the most appropriate means to ensure a narrow collaboration between all in pastoral ministry in order to continue with adult Christian formation and develop the daring and creativity of the Mission Task by reaching out to others. Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (190) (10 September 1997)