
OUR SEMINARY: A SOURCE OF HOPE



On October 26, within the framework of a retreat at the cathedral parish of the Immaculate Conception, the theme of Father Yvon Samson's preaching was priestly vocations. He had asked Fr. Roger Dionne to introduce the formation team as well as the eleven seminarians, and this came as an agreeable surprise to the congregation gathered there, a true source of hope.

A GLANCE BACK

Since the closing in 1970 of Holy Heart Seminary in Halifax and, in 1971, the closing of the Voluntas Dei Major Seminary at Red Rapids, there had been no seminary on the entire territory of the Maritime Provinces. Having talked about my interest in raising vocations to the priesthood, at my episcopal ordination, at the end of January 1994 I started looking into the possibility of opening a seminary at Edmundston. I remember the sceptical smiles this brought on, like those of Abraham and Sarah when they were told about the forthcoming birth of their son Isaac. In May, 1994, at the unforgettable first priests' meeting at La Pocatière, I asked all my brother priests whether or not we should have a seminary at Edmundston, and upon their unanimous advice I started looking for ways for implementing this project which seemed to us as one of the more urgent ones for our Church. On August 4, 1995, on the feast of St. John Vianney, the patron saint of priests, we inaugurated the Edmundston Diocesan Seminary in the renovated rectory of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur parish. (We recall that the very first such seminary in North America was established in 1663 by Bishop François de Laval, in the Québec City cathedral rectory. At the time New France's population was less than 3000, and the Québec City parish had fewer than 550 souls.) A first formation team was composed of Fr. Michel Bouffard, a Marist priest, Sister Bertille Beaulieu, a Hôtel Dieu Sister, and Fr. Jeff Doucette. This team quickly set to work developing admission criteria, principles for personalised formation, and the different stages of formation. Over 20 young men checked into this new approach, and seven had already been accepted for seminary training.

NEW TIMES, NEW TEAM

With Father Bouffard's taking sabbatical leave and the closing of Sacré-Coeur parish, the seminary was transferred to the cathedral parish rectory. A new team was formed: Fr. Roger Dionne, V.G., was appointed coordinator, and the other team members are Fr. Almer Levasseur, Sister Lucie Gagnon, D.W., and Robert Laflamme and his wife Claire. Resource persons, both for psychological, spiritual, and academic support, as well as for pastoral internship have accepted to collaborate in this seminary venture. This formation team will have to pick up a ninefold challenge: 1) take care of admissions, set up interviews and make recommendations to the bishop for acceptance or non-acceptance of candidates; 2) ensure that candidates have the required academic formation needed to undertake theological studies; 3) ensure spiritual formation, especially through prayer and initiation to Holy Scripture; 4) guarantee that each candidate has a spiritual guide throughout his formation period; 5) keep in touch with the major seminary the candidate will be attending, for his theological studies; 6) in contact with the bishop, ensure that following his baccalaureate in theology the candidate undergo pastoral internship in our diocese, under the direction of an internship supervisor; 7) throughout the candidate's training, make necessary recommendations to the bishop regarding recommendation for instituted ministries (lector and acolyte) and ordained ministries (diaconate and priesthood); 8) mentor the newly-ordained priests in their first years of ministry; 9) collaborate with the diocesan vocation team in promoting priestly vocations in our milieu. As you can see, this is a very broad but stimulating mandate.

POSITIVE SEMINARIANS

At this time there are eleven seminarians involved with the diocesan seminary, two of whom are doing their pastoral internship: Ivan Thériault at Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs Parish, and Philippe Tardif at St. Quentin. Of the seven members of the Groupe Marie-Jeunesse who desire to work with us, five are in second year theology at Laval University: Patrick Laflamme, Dominic LeRouzès, Martin Proulx, Patrick Rancourt, and Louis Riverin; two others are studying in Sherbrooke: Dave Tremblay and Martin Lacroix. There are two seminarian candidates: Guy Bourque and Tony Duguay. I am certain that this promising future for the Church is due in large measure to the many prayers made throughout our diocese, to the many days and countless suffering offered to God for this very intention. It is also due to the generosity of these young men who have taken time in trying to discern what the Lord is asking of them, and in wanting to eagerly respond to the spiritual and pastoral needs of our time.

PRIESTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

To take part in the training of future priests is one of the grandest missions, as it is also one of the most sensitive ones. What is involved here is giving Christian community leaders to the Church, ordained ministers, servants of the Word, men of prayer, collaborators with their bishop who will be signs of Jesus at the beginning of the third millennium. Taking part in this great enterprise is carrying on the marvellous work of Christ forming his apostles so that they be, through the power of the Spirit, bearers of the Good News and messengers of joy. My gratitude to all who through their prayer, witness, challenge, and generosity contribute in giving our Church many needed holy labourers.

Have a good week.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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