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## DO YOU KNOW THE MARIE-JEUNESSE GROUP?



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While I was working for the diocese of Québec Social Justice Office I frequently heard about a group of young people who met together for prayer and who even spent weekends of devotion in honour of the Virgin Mary. It was around 1982 that the group was formed in Québec City, on the occasion of a young person's birthday. The group, which kept on growing and within ten years had nearly 900 youth, was welcomed by the Marist Fathers at their Sillery parish.

### PROVIDENTIAL COINCIDENCE

In March 1995, as I embarked on my second year as bishop of Edmundston and was considering the feasibility of organising a diocesan seminary, a confrere called me to talk about the wonderful work that was being done by the Marie-Jeunesse group at their youth centres and to say that the group's director would like to meet with me. I was pleased to welcome the founder, Mr. Réal Lavoie, who was accompanied by two of the group's young people. I learned that after beginnings in Québec City the group quickly spread to Sherbrooke and that a youth centre had just been opened in Chicoutimi. Our diocesan seminary project interested not only the founder but also several of his young people who showed interest in the priesthood: Could we not pool our projects together?

### LOOKING FOR A HOUSE

April 28, 1995 marked the feast of St. Peter Chanel, a Marist priest martyred in 1841 in the South Sea Islands; it was also the day on which I was given the good news of the possibility of having Marists come to work in our diocese, as well as the date on which I signed, on behalf of the diocese, a five-year undertaking to have the Marie-Jeunesse group here. The group's concern for youth evangelisation coincided with my own desire: it is important for the Church to be close to young people, and that these youth be ministered to by their peers. But where was the group to find lodging? After having visited three deaneries from Upper Madawaska to Grand Falls, we settled for the city of Edmundston. After long, worrisome, and tiring work, during which time I also reminded the group that Joseph and Mary themselves had to look long and hard before finding shelter, a house was finally located through the good offices of the parish priest. 103, Rice Street was quickly noted by the locals, and groups of young people would take turns in setting up the residence.

### ECCLESIAL SITUATION

Marie-Jeunesse is not a religious community in the ordinary sense of the term; it is not recognised as such by the Church. Its official status, both in Sherbrooke and Edmundston, is that of "private association of the faithful," as understood by the Church's official legislation. Just as the Archbishop of Sherbrooke had already done, in April 1994 I recognised the Marie-Jeunesse Group as a private association of the faithful, for our diocese, for a five-year period. I am convinced that the group has the requisite potential to bring to our Church a special contribution to youth ministry. In its 15 years of existence the group has developed a peer approach to youth evangelisation, and this approach is bearing fruit. In Edmundston as in Sherbrooke and Québec City, « *the method is characterised by its quality of open-armed welcome, its joyful atmosphere, its original and fruitful approaches to prayer, and especially its prayerful climate,* » as the Sherbrooke Archdiocese quinquennial report asserts.

## **SPIRITUALITY AND FORMATION**

Given as they are to more than three hours daily of prayer and meditation, members of Marie-Jeunesse have developed a spirituality focused on unconditional devotion to Mary and to the Holy Eucharist. Their house of formation is in Lennoxville near Sherbrooke. At present there are about 30 young men and women getting their human and spiritual formation in view of community life and evangelisation. « *It is a call to turn to Jesus through the tenderness of Mary in the course of their lives. The groups life beats to the rhythm of the heart of Mary.* » « *Marie-Jeunesse is a support to faith, prayer life, and commitment of the heart. In its members one finds fruits of conversion, an invitation to surrender of self, and to live off the very life of Jesus.* » [Evaluation Report]

## **PRAYER, STUDY, WORK**

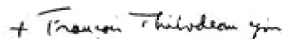
At the first eucharist I had the pleasure to celebrate with the group on September 14, 1994, on the feast of the glorious Cross of Jesus, I called on the Marie-Jeunesse people to pray in a very special way for the youth in our Church, and especially for those among these youth who are called to the priesthood. I incited them to witness to the Gospel of Jesus at all times, not only in their welcome on our youth but also in the course of their daily studies and in their workplace. The way of being, in these situations, can be a major factor of anew evangelisation.

## **ATTRACTED BY THE PRIESTHOOD**

Several of the Marie-Jeunesse group feel drawn to the priesthood, to pastor the youth around them. I rejoice at their generosity and availability. Already six of them have undertaken theology studies at Laval University. According to the 1994 Marie-Jeunesse/Diocese agreement, if some or all of them were to reach the priesthood and wanted to serve our diocesan Church, I would be very happy to welcome them in our midst. At the Canadian Bishops' plenary session held a few weeks ago the bishops were able to share on this topic, as we recalled the norms for the formation of future priests and the importance of the permanent bond of incardination between the priest, the local bishop, the presbyterium, and the people of God.

## **HOPE**

I once again affirm my support of Marie-Jeunesse. Despite its youth, the group has shown extraordinary vitality, and I am confident that it shall be up to the challenges inherent in its growth. May Mary and her divine Son shower them with abundant blessings for the sake of our youth.



+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

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