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## THE FUTURE OF OUR DIOCESE : PASTORAL RESTRUCTURING

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The annual diocesan pastoral session will be held at the Diocesan Centre February 4, 5, and 6. The meeting this year takes on a particular character due to the circumstances and the setting up of a broad consultation process. It is truly the future of the diocese and its pastoral restructuring that we must look into with courage, serenity, and clear-headedness. Father Gilles Routhier, a professor in the faculty of theology at Université Laval, is to be the resource person. All the priests, pastoral agents, and members of parish pastoral councils, as well as all who are interested in the future of our Church are welcome to attend. There is no registration fee, but those attending have to defray the cost of their meals and must register before January 28 by calling the Diocesan Centre at 506-735-5578, or the head of their parish.

### WHY BE CHURCH?

Throughout this session we shall have to always keep in mind that the Church's mission is first and foremost the evangelisation of today's men, women, and children, in our respective milieus. This is the first mission of the Church as a whole, hence also the mission of our parishes and Christian communities. We shall need the courage to acknowledge the small or great extent to which our brothers and sisters welcome today the Good News of Jesus. Our society has become more and more secular, with few references to Jesus our Saviour, and religious practices have become diversified. We witness the indifference of some and the dropping-off of others. By refocusing on our primary mission we shall be able to better understand the meaning of our existence as Church as well as what we must be as disciples of Jesus, in the midst of this portion of humankind which comprises our Diocese.

### ESSENTIAL WORKERS

If we better understand every parish's and the whole Church's primary mission, we will better acknowledge that the mission task requires many workers, that the whole of the Church's mission is the responsibility of all the baptised, confirmed, and ordained, each one according to one's particular charisms and talents. *Together in Mission*: This could be the slogan mobilising our energies for the third millennium. It will be important for all to know their role: the priest's irreplaceable role, the role of the pastoral agent, the role of each council, committee, and organisation. Above and beyond our differences and our experiences, how do we envisage working together? How can we live co-responsibility and partnership at the parish and deanery levels? In what measure can what has been experienced since Vatican Council II and the Edmundston Diocesan Synod inspire us to bring about the required pastoral restructuring?

### MODELS TO FAVOUR

Regarding the Church's primary mission, and considering the number and the role of baptised people who want to implicate themselves, considering the limited number of pastoral agents, what models must we look for for each of our parishes and for the diocese as a whole? What directions should we favour? How do we prepare the people to adopt these new changes? How do we go from a Church-as-service to a Church-as-communion for mission? Is it possible for a parish to hold on to the status quo? Will we have to look at twinning it with another parish? Will we have to establish a wider-based pastoral unit, one parish with two or

three places of worship? How do we ensure the faith education of our children and others as well? How are we to ensure that our liturgical celebrations are meaningful? How do we turn on the turned-off and bring back those who have deserted our parish gatherings? New models could be found, as we share with one another and engage in consultation.

## **A PROCESS**

Following the directions or recommendations which may come from the session participants, more consultation will be undertaken at both deanery and parish levels, so that all concerned will have their say. We do not want to proceed with changes without the people being aware of these changes being made. It is certain that we shall not be able to maintain all of our actual services. Focused on our mission of evangelisation, we shall have to rediscover the boldness of the Gospel, in reaching out to our youth, the poor, and those left on the margins of our pastoral concerns. I hope that no major event upset the plans we would draw up together.

## **ADDED PRAYER**

It will be very important to have special personal and community prayer to help us live these perceivable changes in calm, serenity and dialogue, so as to discover in all things the will of the Lord and to have the strength to implement it. We shall have to pray for the unity of the entire Church of Edmundston, for its bishop and priests, and for its thirty-two parishes. The session will also be an opportunity to implement some of the Edmundston Synod (1987-1990) recommendations. We are looking forward to this pastoral session: As we look to the future, we shall undertake together the restructuring that is needed, while taking into account the limited number of pastors and the marvellous potential of all the baptised.

## **DISASTER RELIEF**

With all my heart I wish to express to the residents of Greater Montréal and the Montérégie region my solidarity with all in the diocese who are coming to their aid. I thank the people from here for the many initiatives they have taken: what beautiful signs of goodness and solidarity. May the Lord give you a hundredfold for what you have done for these disaster-stricken people.

Have a good week.



+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

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