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## INAUGURATING THE 1998-1999 PASTORAL YEAR (2)

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The objectives we had set ourselves at our day of study and on the subsequent pastoral visits to each of the five deaneries were: to travel together along the road of renewal, to bless the Lord for the wonderful things He accomplished during the past year, to carry on the restructuring project, constantly bearing in mind the mission of Jesus, and reinforcing the missionary attitude in ourselves by reaching out to the poor, the youth, the sick, and the elderly. Now, let us listen to the concerns expressed by those who took part in this day of study.

### DEANERY CONCERNS

How do we keep focused on the mission of Jesus? How do we help people discover their baptismal vocation? How do we go about reaching out to the young? These were three predominant concerns of our deanery chairpersons. Recruitment, training, and renewal of lay people as catechists or pastoral aides, education and information on pastoral restructuring, these, too, were concerns voiced by the deaneries. How do we go about helping priests and lay persons join in an ever-greater partnership in the mission that is theirs, and how do we go about learning to enhance our teamwork? The development of pastoral teams at the deanery level, the creation of more inter-parish ties, and the religious and pastoral continuation are other major preoccupations. The number of baptised persons having stopped all Sunday religious practice, as well as the physical and psychological welfare of our clergy are ongoing challenges to those involved in pastoral ministry.

### CONCERNS OF THE DIOCESAN SERVICES

Similar concerns are voiced by the diocesan services: constantly reminding about the mission of Jesus, the discovery of the greatness and the mission of the baptised, ongoing contact with youth, the Christian formation of lay people, difficulties that exist in the married life and within families, the plight of the poor becoming even poorer, the challenge of responding adequately to the concerns, needs, and changes of the elderly, the future of religious education in both school and parish, [Religious education has traditionally been dispensed in school, among the French population. This situation is changing and parishes must now develop Sunday School programmes much like we have in English parishes. Tr.] the appropriate use of mass media communications, the training of future Christian leaders and pastoral agents, the discernment of vocations to the priesthood and appropriate guidance of future priests. Jesus' words in Matthew 25, verses 35, 36, and 40 are a fitting conclusion to these concerns: *"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me [...] Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."*

### CONFIRMING THE NEEDED CHANGES

Confronted with all these new spiritual and pastoral necessities, important changes are needed. And we must be most sensitive to anything that could stop or curtail these changes now taking place. Criticism, mistrust,

pessimism, disinformation, rumours, fear, refusal of team work, disinterest, misunderstanding of the mission of Jesus, exaggerated nostalgia for the Church of yesteryear, all these are serious obstacles to the changes recommended by parishes and deaneries. To believe that everything has already been decided, to skip steps, to want immediate results and to be concerned only with one's small parish to the exclusion of all others, these too run counter to the proposed changes.

#### **ON THE OTHER HAND**

If we believe in the recommendations made, if we remain optimistic, if we let ourselves be motivated so as to motivate others in turn, if we maintain solidarity with the Bishop, the priest and lay people, if we give out information and raise awareness, if we tell about and reiterate the mission of Jesus and the Church, if we remind people of their mission as baptised to build up the Church, if we know how to read the signs of the times, if we respect the progress of people and groups, if we reassure others about our undertaking and remind them that nothing has yet been decided and that society, too, is in a state of change, if we insist on inter-parish collaboration and team spirit, if we know how to proclaim our faith, if we let ourselves be evangelised... then shall we achieve the hoped-for renewal.

#### **WONDER**

With the inauguration of the 1998-1999 pastoral year I am filled with wonder at the solidarity and generosity I have encountered not only in the diocesan offices but throughout the deaneries, too. The challenges are there, but we are certain that the Spirit is leading us and that he will not stop being with us so that the Church may always be a sacramental sign of the presence of Jesus in our world. Good day - and have a good pastoral year!

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