

---

## A POW WOW ON VOCATIONS

---



As there is a youth retreat "pow wow" taking place at the Diocesan Centre directed by Father Christian Beaulieu, I would like to draw your attention on the role of the priest in vocation ministry, according to Pope John Paul II in his January 22 Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*. [Numbers 39 and 40]

### THE PRIESTHOOD AS A SIGN OF UNITY

As a member of a particular Church, each priest must be a sign of communion with the Bishop, since he is his immediate collaborator, in union with his brothers in the priesthood. With pastoral charity, he exercises his ministry chiefly in the community entrusted to him, and he leads his community to encounter Christ the Good Shepherd. His vocation requires him to be a sign of unity. Therefore, he must avoid any involvement in party politics, since this would divide the community. The Synod Fathers call for "a pastoral plan for diocesan clergy, to strengthen their spirituality and their sense of mission and identity, centered on following Christ, the eternal High Priest, always striving to obey the Father's will. Christ is the model of generous dedication, of austerity of life and of service even unto death. The priest should be conscious of the fact that, by virtue of the Sacrament of Orders, he is a bearer of grace, which he communicates to his brothers and sisters in the sacraments. He himself is sanctified in the exercise of his ministry." The field in which priests work is vast. Therefore they should concentrate on what is essential to their ministry: Aletting themselves be configured to Christ the Head and Shepherd, the source of all pastoral charity, offering themselves each day with Christ in the Eucharist, in order to help the faithful both personally and communally to experience the living Jesus Christ." As witnesses and disciples of the merciful Christ, they are called to be instruments of forgiveness and reconciliation, putting themselves generously at the service of the faithful in the spirit of the Gospel.

### ALERT TO CONCRETE CHALLENGES

As pastors of the People of God in America, priests must also be alert to the challenges of the world today and sensitive to the problems and hopes of their people, sharing their experiences and growing, above all, in solidarity towards the poor. They should be careful to discern the charisms and strengths of the faithful who might be leaders in the community, listening to them and through dialogue encouraging their participation and co-responsibility. This will lead to a better distribution of tasks, enabling priests to dedicate themselves to what is most closely tied to the encounter with and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and thus to represent better within the community the presence of Jesus who draws his people together. The task of discerning charisms also includes knowing how best to use those priests who show an aptitude for special ministries. Moreover, every priest is expected to offer his fraternal help to other priests and to turn trustingly to them in time of need.

### GRATITUDE

Given the outstanding number of priests in America who, by God's grace, strive to meet the challenges of a truly remarkable workload, I join the Synod Fathers in acknowledging and praising their "untiring commitment as pastors, preachers of the Gospel and agents of ecclesial communion, in thanking them and in encouraging them to continue to offer their lives in service of the Gospel."

## PROMOTING VOCATIONS

The indispensable role of the priest within the community must lead all the members of the Church in America to recognize the importance of promoting vocations. The American continent has many young people, who represent an immense spiritual resource. Therefore, it is necessary to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life where they first develop, and Christian families must be invited to support their children if they feel called to follow this path. Vocations are a gift of God and they are born in communities of faith, above all in the family, the parish, Catholic schools and other Church organizations. Bishops and priests are particularly responsible for encouraging vocations by personally presenting the call, and above all by their witness to a life of fidelity, joy, enthusiasm, and holiness. The entire People of God is responsible for promoting vocations, and does so chiefly by persistent and humble prayer for vocations.

## WELCOME AND TRAINING

As places which accept and train those called to the priesthood, seminaries must prepare the future ministers of the Church to live a solid spirituality of communion with Christ the Shepherd and of openness to the workings of the Spirit, that will make them specially able to discern the needs of God's People and their various charisms, and to work together. Therefore, in seminaries there should be special insistence upon specifically spiritual formation, so that through constant conversion, the spirit of prayer, the practice of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance, the candidates may learn to be close to the Lord and learn to commit themselves generously to pastoral work. Those responsible for formation should carefully supervise and guide the seminarians towards emotional maturity so that they may be fit to embrace priestly celibacy and be prepared to live in communion with their brother priests. They should also foster in seminarians the capacity for critical observation so that they can discern true and false values, since this is an essential requirement for establishing a constructive dialogue with the world of today.

*+ François Thibodeau*

+ François Thibodeau

Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (266) (24 February 1999)