
PARISH AND DIOCESAN FINANCIAL SITUATIONS



I first want to thank all those who made possible the financing of our pastoral activities, as well as those who are managing the things of the Church, the grounds and other real estate. Thanks to God who does not cease His kindness to us, it is in confidence that we can pursue our goals.

AT THE DIOCESAN LEVEL

In the last three years, the ordinary diocesan revenue has gone from \$332,642.00 to \$344,919.00. This revenue is from parish contributions, the annual Christ the King diocesan collection, revenue from investments, and the Spiritual Renewal Centre. During the same year, diocesan expenses went from \$362,784.00 to \$376,002.00. This means that each year we operate at a deficit of approximately \$31,000. Fortunately, donations especially from the Group of One Thousand, have cancelled the deficit. To ensure the presence of a bishop among us and the good operation of the diocesan services, parishes will be asked that, beginning January 1 of the year 2000, to give \$2.00 for each parishioner (instead of \$1.75, as in 1999). When we look at things carefully, we must acknowledge that those organisations are few and far between that ask for such a minute membership fee! I trust that the traditional generosity of our people will continue to fully support their bishop, especially in the new projects of parish- and family-based religious education.

AT THE PARISH LEVEL

If a few years ago we had a rather disturbing financial picture, with twenty-two parishes out of thirty-two accusing a deficit, we must recognise that at the end of 1998, twenty-nine parishes had a surplus and three had a deficit of a few thousand dollars. This is a sign of constant vigilance and the participation of all the parishioners for the good operation of their Christian community. The amount asked for parish dues is far from being the tithe, the 10% of the revenue of a person or family; rather, it equals the amount of one day's salary or one day's revenue for a retired person. The minimum asked is \$25.00. The full amount of this sum remains in the parish.

QUESTIONS OF SALARY

For some years now a priest's basic salary, either in a parish or working at the diocesan level, has been \$750.00 per month. Following a specific request of the Diocesan Economic Affairs Commission, the Priests' Senate, and the Bishop's Council, beginning January 1, 2000, the priest's basic salary will be raised to \$800.00. When a priest ministers to several communities, the salary is divided according to the percentage of the Catholic population. Besides his room and board, the pastor receives an additional one dollar per Catholic per year, and \$200.00 per month in travel expenses. Parish economic affairs committees will determine financial arrangements for their pastoral agents and the members of their parish pastoral team, to ensure some compensation for expenses incurred (transportation, baby-sitting, etc.).

SACRAMENTAL CELEBRATIONS

A sacrament cannot be bought, least of which, a Mass: this would be trafficking in holy things. However, on the occasion of two celebrations, weddings and funerals, a fixed rate is established for expenses incurred, while for baptisms, confirmations, confessions, ordinations, and anointings of the sick, no fee is set. It is important for us to truly live these moments of gratuitousness and grace.

MASS STIPENDS

The offering made by the faithful for a mass remains at \$10.00, as it has for the past five years and more. This amount is divided thus: \$5.00 to the celebrant, and \$5.00 to the Fonds d'entraide. This fund was created to help needy priests and parishes. At the end of the year, the stipends of masses not celebrated during the course of the year must be forwarded to the diocese which ensures the celebration in months to come.

FUNERALS

The fee set for funerals is \$125.00, divided thus: \$100.00 to the parish and \$25.00 to the celebrant. Other expenses (choir, organist, burial plot, opening of grave, etc.) are set by the parish. Except for established custom, an offering is usually taken up at funerals, the amount received being divided in this manner: 70% for masses for the deceased, and 30% for the parish's pastoral projects. Several of these masses are celebrated in the parish itself, and the remainder by our missionaries. This way of helping our missionaries is usually well understood and accepted by grieving families. On the other hand, a parish could pass on a supplementary fee to those families wanting an exemption from this collection at a funeral.

WEDDINGS

The fee set for weddings is \$100.00, divided as follows: \$60.00 to the parish, \$30.00 to the celebrant, and \$10.00 for chancery fees. Other expenses (organist, choir/singer) are set by the parish. A [reduced] financial situation should not be a reason for not having a Christian wedding.

FOUR WATCHWORDS

Finally, it seems that while avoiding undue indiscretion the diocese should exercise fiscal transparency, and that every economic question be dealt with in fairness and justice. Transparency, justice, fairness, and gratitude should be our attitudes and behaviour. We have received so much from the Church that it is only right for us to reciprocate in sharing and love.

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (306) (24 November 1999)