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## ESSENTIAL CO-RESPONSIBILITY

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On Saturday, November 4, a training session was held at the Diocesan Centre for the francophone pastoral teams, facilitated by Mr. Claude Carrier, professor at the Université de Moncton's Edmundston Campus, and Sr. Claudette Ruest, S.M., diocesan coordinator of pastoral ministry. I more than ever came to the realization of the necessity to thank God for the creation of these teams in our milieus: they are a wonderful gift of the Father to His People.

### REMOTE PREPARATION

A look of faith at the history of our Church shows us the Father does not abandon His children but that, as the Eternal Shepherd, He keeps watch over His flock to this very day. He has watched over the Church in the past by giving it numerous and holy priests; in these days of ours He ensures His Church with the special presence of those He has chosen from all eternity to take charge in co-responsibility of the Christian communities He raises up. Everything which my predecessors accomplished in the Diocese of Edmundston bears the mark of God's hand. Reading Jacques Paul Couturier's book, *Construire un savoir* ("Building Knowledge"), on post-secondary education in the Madawaska Region, we realize that Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy's decision in 1946 to found a college in Edmundston was a most felicitous decision which continues to bear fruit in most of our parishes. Bishop J.-Roméo Gagnon's support of this educational endeavour and the implementation by Bishop Fernand Lacroix of the Vatican Council decisions all contributed to giving our Church outstanding leaders. The work accomplished by Bishop Gerard Dionne through the creation of the School of Faith [in the French and English sectors of the diocese] and the holding of a diocesan synod not only created an atmosphere conducive to changes but also gave quality workers in the cause of the Gospel. The implementation, in 1995, of the pastoral formation programme and the inauguration of the diocesan seminary also contributed to giving our Church fine collaborators. Without these, the shock produced by the priest shortage would have been extremely painful and, in some cases, catastrophic. God continues to watch over His Church just as He watched over our Acadian forebears throughout their long trek in search of a new homeland; there were few priests at the time, but the witness and commitment of these Acadian parents were exemplary.

### AN INDISPENSABLE PASSAGE

Many recommendations followed fast on the heels of consultations held between 1995 and 1998 throughout the parishes and deaneries. One of these recommendations was that the responsibility of a parish no longer rest with one person only but that it rest on a team, and this, according to Church legislation. And so, on August 15, 1999 the first such teams were created, and on August 15, 2000, supported by one year's positive results, a second pastoral year was inaugurated with boldness, enthusiasm, and courage. On several occasions I expressed my gratitude to the priests, pastoral agents, religious and lay people who took on such responsibilities in their own milieus. It was wonderful to hear them talk about the pastoral work they are achieving together: "We feel more and more at ease in our ministry. It is enjoyable to be part of a team: there is solidarity, fellowship, a desire to collaborate, and commitment. There is respect, a common vision, positive dialogue and listening. We are proud to work together; there are budding alliances! There is humour, pleasure, happiness but especially a lot of love; this energizes us and confirms us in our mission."

## **NO SMALL CHALLENGE!**

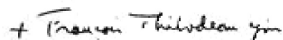
Parish pastoral team members know well that teamwork is a learning process. There is leadership to be taken on and shared, a service for the greater good of the community. Without this attitude of “service”, of “humble service”, it would be hard to carry on the work undertaken. There must be unconditional respect not only for each team member but also for the entire community being cared for. There must be mutual understanding, fraternal support, and undeviating honesty. Like searchers after truth, team members know their limitations, but they strive to overcome the day-to-day problems which arise. By discovering the richness of their teammates, they are happily drawn into the realization of being in the presence of many heretofore unsuspected talents and aptitudes.

## **VARIED TASKS**

Just as there can be no parish without the presence of a priest, so there can be no pastoral team without a priestly presence. Church legislation makes the priest member of the pastoral team the team’s “moderator”. His priestly ordination charges him with preaching the Word, presiding the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and with watching over the unity of the community; he is the bridge between the community and the bishop of the diocese. By decision of the bishop, the moderator may be or may not be charged with coordinating the pastoral team. One of the major directions taken at the 1987-1990 diocesan synod was to free the priest as much as possible from all administrative or financial tasks. The pastoral team as a whole bears the parish’s pastoral responsibility; however, so as to ensure an effective and broad-based way of operating, tasks are shared according to community needs: faith education, parish- and family-based religious education, celebrations, fellowship activities, and commitment in one’s milieu.

## **COMMUNITY TASKS**

If the pastoral team has many responsibilities, the community as a whole must do its share in collaborating closely with those working for its welfare; the community must pray for their pastoral team, it must support, encourage, suggest, assist, and recommend. The community must also ensure the team’s... continuation. The entire Church needs future priests as well as future pastoral agents; the Church needs religious brothers and sisters, catechists, and many volunteers... It is in total confidence that the People of God must address the Father in obedience to Jesus’ instruction to “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Mt. 9:38). As we are about to celebrate the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Edmundston Diocese on December 16, with you all I thank God: “Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks. You founded your Church on the apostles to stand firm forever as the sign on earth of your infinite holiness and as the living gospel for all people to hear.” (Preface of the Apostles, II).



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