
DEMANDING, EXCITING PRIORITIES



Each new pastoral year starts off with a wonderful blitz. In just a few days I meet the people in charge of each of the five deaneries: priests, pastoral agents, and duly mandated lay persons. Again this year, whether in the Restigouche, Southern Victoria, Grand Falls, Edmundston, or Upper Madawaska, in every deanery I feel this heartfelt desire to devote oneself generously to the Gospel cause and that of the Church.

THE NEW EVANGELISATION

It is in the context of a “new evangelisation” that those in pastoral ministry want to situate their major endeavours, in the coming year: not a re-evangelisation, but a “new evangelisation, new in its enthusiasm, its methods, and its expression,” as Pope John Paul II has so often repeated.. Our calling impels us to proclaim the Word of God, after having received it for ourselves. Our calling compels us to live holy lives, moved by the Holy Spirit, in intimacy with Jesus Christ and in love of neighbour. This same calling causes us to invite our brothers and sisters to live their baptismal life in a spirit of prayer, through their many daily commitments. In other words, it is a call to live the Gospel in the midst of our daily activity!

« WITH YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE »

The priest-poet Robert Lebel challenges us: *« With your everyday life in the midst of a pilgrim people, be a sower of love around you, that the world know that God is alive! Be like yeast in the heart of others, let your simple gestures speak of the Kingdom! Be salt of the earth by your “joie de vivre” seasoned with the flavour of the Gospel! Be like a lamp on a lamp stand, and let your example be a light to your brothers and sisters! »* Simple words drawn from the Gospel, to tell us that, in the footsteps of Jesus, we must be “salt of the earth and light of the world”.

FAMILY- AND PARISH-BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The main priority in each of the diocese’s five deaneries continues to be the implementation of family- and parish-based religious education. Last January Pope John Paul II wrote: *«At the beginning of the new millennium, it is certainly a priority for the Church to be nourished with the Word, so as to be true servants of the Word in our evangelisation mission.»* Throughout the diocese all involved in pastoral ministry are determined to pursue what has started so well. It will be demanding but also very exciting. I invite parents and grandparents, teachers and retired teachers, to continue their involvement in our children’s religious formation. Following upon our own encounter with Christ, the Risen and the Living One, it is an experience of faith, hope, and charity that we have to share, in the midst of the world. We only have to recall the enthusiastic reaction of the disciples at Emmaus: *« Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us? »* (Lk. 24:32) Thank you, you countless volunteers who proclaim the name of Jesus to all, young and old, in the diocese!

« WYD 2002 »

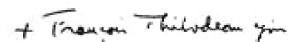
We shall often come across these three letters and four digits, in coming months. They stand for the "World Youth Days 2002" which will be held in Canada July 18 to 28 of next year. This great gathering of young people from across the world will be an awe-inspiring pilgrimage, first in our midst itself and then in Toronto. I hereby call on our young people to take a lively interest in this outstanding grace-filled Event and to register with our WYD Diocesan Secretariat (60, rue Bouchard, Edmundston, E3V 3K1). I call on the entire population to pray for the success of these very special days, for our young people. A great celebration will take place in Toronto, an exceptional gathering of hundreds of thousands of believing youth coming from over 150 countries worldwide to share their faith. One can easily understand that the organisers and the pastoral ministry coordinators have made this one of their main priorities. I ask the youth who have already shown interest in the WYD 2002 to talk about this great event to other youths in their milieu. The WYD Cross which made the round of every parish in the diocese has certainly raised the awareness of some of them. May this period of recruiting, formation and financing contribute in their own way to a "new evangelisation in its enthusiasm, its methods, and its expression"!

TEAM LIFE

A third priority was established by the pastoral ministers: to consolidate pastoral teams. Last June I wrote about my primary concern regarding the 2001-2002 appointments, which is to ensure more effective parish pastoral teams. It is not always easy to undergo change, and that is why I ask for everyone's collaboration, not only that of pastors, pastoral agents, and pastoral teams, but the collaboration of the entire population. For two years now in our diocese, responsibility for the parish's pastoral life has not rested on the only shoulders of one person, no matter how strong that person. Responsibility now rests with a mandated pastoral team. Nevertheless, it is important to further intensify team life and ministry, and to live together a "spirituality of communion", to take the time to prayerfully deepen the mission received, to share responsibilities, to let oneself be "evangelised" in order to better evangelise, and authenticate the quality of the witness given. Let us continue to be, like Jesus the Perfect Evangelist, to be the Good News of the Father.

AN ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE

At the beginning of this new pastoral year we must imitate St. Paul's enthusiasm: « *My entire attention is on the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me – life on high in Jesus Christ.* » (Ph. 3:14) May the Holy Spirit be with you, in this missionary enterprise! I count on your prayers and on your devotion.



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (401) (12 September 2001)