
FINANCES IN THE DIOCESE OF EDMUNDSTON



As there is more and more talk of a financial campaign in the Diocese of Edmundston I would like to offer supplementary information on the actual situation of the parishes and the Diocese, the former being inseparable from the latter since all financial entities are legally under the Roman Catholic Bishop of Edmundston. Unless we find new financial alternatives, it more and more appears to me that it would become impossible to come to the aid of parishes in financial difficulty, to restore the Edmundston Cathedral and to initiate new pastoral projects without greater help of the population as a whole.

PARISHES IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY

According to available data, approximately 21.6 % of the Catholic population participates in church services on a regular basis: the financial burden is therefore shared between a smaller and smaller number of people. Over 78% of the population give no Sunday offering, and this creates a big financial gap for parishes as a whole. What used to be defrayed by five people in time past is very often defrayed by only one. For example, when last October, the Canadian Church asked for three dollars per Catholic in Canada, several "practising Catholics" had to give fifteen in order to compensate for the absence of the non-churchgoers. This is but one example. As much could be said regarding the maintenance of churches and rectories, where their preservation and improvement depend exclusively on Sunday collections. When the number of people attending church services diminishes, the financial burden gets heavier weekly for those who are faithful in attending. During 2001 – we do not yet have complete information on 2002 – total revenue for all parishes was \$3,260,596.00, and expenditures amounted to \$3,286,070.00, a deficit of \$25,474.00. Twelve parishes had budgets over \$100,000.00, the highest being \$341,654.00. Nine parishes had budget estimates lower than \$50,000.00, the lowest being \$29,890.00. Several fear not being able to keep their churches for much longer. For some parishes, tithing ("church dues") is the main source of income. Far from being "one tenth" of revenue earned, the tithing asked of families is a minimum of twenty-five dollars per year. If everyone in a parish gave this annual tithe, several parishes would find their situation more enviable! The other main source of revenue is the Sunday collection. How must we compensate for losses, here? Elsewhere in Canada has been established a VAC or voluntary annual contribution: local parish finance committees prepare an annual budget and asks each Catholic family – practising or not – to help defray a certain percentage of expenses incurred in the course of the year. This VAC is a precious tool of equity and fairness in several areas because it allows each Catholic to do his or her part in the maintenance of parish services.

BALANCED BUDGET

If we consider the financial statement of the Diocese of Edmundston for the year 2002, from both revenue and ordinary expenses, we see that there was, this year, a surplus of \$434.00: revenue was \$385,224.00 and expenses were \$384,790.00. We must add that this small surplus is due to three main factors: a reduction in working hours, government projects, and greater effort to reduce expenses. For ten years or so ordinary revenue is about \$380,000.00 and expenses are \$430,000.00, voluntary donations of the Group of One Thousand and those of the Support Campaign, covering part of the deficit incurred. The main sources of revenue for the diocese are the annual contributions of the "per capita tax", the collection for the Needs of the Diocese, revenue from investments and revenue from the Diocesan Centre. The "diocesan per capita tax" is an annual contribution by every person in the diocese for the maintenance of a bishop and pastoral services. The amount of the tax has been three dollars per year for over four years, and it would be difficult to raise the amount to \$5.00 without "penalising" those parishes who are already in financial straits, especially regarding insurance. The collection for the Needs of the Diocese, the one taken up at Christ the King Sunday, is around

\$16,000.00. Investment revenue is especially from a generous legacy which Bishop J.-Roméo Gagnon, second bishop of Edmundston, left at his death, and the amount received from the Group of One Thousand. The Diocesan Centre gets a small revenue from the rental of halls and rooms to groups and individuals.

DIOCESAN CENTRE

A retreat house was built in Edmundston in 1954; in its twenty year existence it welcomed close to 100,000 people. Bishop Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M. acquired the building in September of 1971, due to the deplorable state of the bishop's residence on Queen St. in Edmundston, and the closing of the retreat house. At the time, the dispersal of diocesan services throughout the city acquired the retreat house from the Oblate Fathers in compensation for debts incurred, and established there the diocesan services, a spiritual resource centre, and the bishop's residence. Bishop Lacroix did not want to harness the future with a debt, and he was faithful to a principle of Monsignor Conway: "Having a bishop two hundred miles away is a bit far, but twenty feet away is a bit too close!" Bishop Lacroix wanted first and foremost to respect the freedom of every pastor who might have had to live with him. It would have been hard to find a better solution at minimum cost, and it would be difficult to do so even today. According to information, it would now cost us four times the amount to have a separate bishop's residence, separate quarters for diocesan services and for a spiritual resource centre. There are four of us priests residing at the Centre all year long, and throughout the pastoral year all of the diocesan offices are open. Besides, at the moment it would be most difficult to reserve space for weekends booked for 2003-2004: diocesan committees and other groups have already reserved nearly every weekend available. No other religious building is as well occupied during the week! The number of paid full-time employees at the Diocesan Centre and the bishop's residence is only six, eight are on part-time salary or are unpaid volunteers. The diocesan staff is very small, to look after all the services of the Chancery, the accounting department, maintenance and upkeep, as well as pastoral animation itself: religious education, family-oriented ministries, School of Faith [French Sector], vocation and mission ministries, sessions and retreats, etc.

URGENT NEEDS

The feasibility study for an eventual diocese-wide financial campaign has indicated the importance of projects considered. What we are aiming at is \$3,600,000.00. The amount received would aid the thirty-two parishes of the diocese, the restoration of the Cathedral, and establish three important pastoral projects in family-based religious education, youth ministry, and the training of parish pastoral agents. The ordinary parish and diocesan budgets do not allow us to respond to the new needs targeted.

May the Holy Spirit, God of Wisdom, help us find the best solutions for establishing the Kingdom of Jesus among us!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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