

---

## NEW PRIESTS... IN 2010

---



Save major events, I do not believe that I shall be ordaining new priests for our diocese of Edmundston before 2010... I know that nothing is impossible with God, that He can raise up new collaborators in totally novel ways. Still, if we set to work immediately, we might see some undertake theological studies, in the near future, that they undergo the pastoral internship and... that they be ordained in 2010.

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

First of all, we must be aware of the Church's urgent needs and of the lack of priestly resources to answer these needs. We must not rely on pictures we see of great gatherings or even of funerals with a large congregation of priests! One must not be taken in by appearances. In our own diocese it is no longer possible, because of the lack of priests, to have Sunday mass in every parish: in Southern Victoria Deanery, we must alternate between eucharistic and Word liturgies, to celebrate the Lord's Day. If we have only two priests for eight parishes in Southern Victoria, it is the same with the Restigouche Deanery, while there are three priests in the Upper Madawaska Deanery. There are but 39 priests in our entire territory, while in 1970 there were over 100! The average age of the priests ministering in our diocese is 65.2 years. In ten years, of the nineteen priests actually in parish ministry (14 diocesan and 5 religious priests), there will be only 10 below the age of 70.

### "PRAY THE MASTER..."

The Lord's instruction that we pray the Master of the harvest to send workers to the harvest, is ever timely. But before doing so, it seems to me that it is good to thank him for all the Gospel workers which he has given to our Church, especially for all the priests who gave the best of themselves and who still carry on in ministry today. If we cannot appreciate what our priests are accomplishing today in our respective communities, how then can we raise up petitioning prayer to the Lord? Even before this prayer of petition, it might be good to ask forgiveness for not having always collaborated with our priests, for not having always spoken well of them, for not having encouraged our youth to dedicate themselves in service to the Church... Prayer is demanding, it must be true and honest, and if I ask God to come and pick, from among our youth, candidates for the priesthood, then I as a young man must be ready to answer the call of the Lord; I must be ready, as a parent, to let the Lord ask such a service from one of our children; and I must be ready as a pastor to mentor the young person from my community whom the Lord has called to his service, and to mentor through prayer and personal example of life... Our personal and community prayer will then be filled with confidence and hope. Besides, there is nothing against having masses of intercession for priestly vocations.

### FINDING PEOPLE WHO ARE APT FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

After prayer and more prayer, it is important to look at those around us, the young and the not-so-young, people who seem to have qualities of leadership for animating and leading the community with wisdom and discernment, men of prayer, filled with faith and hope, people who freely and generously devote themselves in service to the group, men of sound health who wish to make a success of life in service to their brothers and sisters; and, finally, people who can undertake theological studies with a certain ease. The Lord who freely

scatters seed for a future harvest has already chosen those he wants in his service: all we need is to discover them! Let us not be afraid: those he has called to baptism and confirmation have been marked by the Holy Spirit! The gifts of wisdom, strength, counsel, and filial adoration are there at work in those he has chosen.

### **TALKING ABOUT IT AMONG US**

It would be good for parishioners to discuss among themselves about those they know who could become priests. This could bring up happy surprises, and surprising news. One day, my predecessor challenged the Maliseet on this very question, and what a beautiful response he got! It could happen – indeed, it shall happen, I am sure – that a parish community through its parish pastoral council or vocation, liturgy, or religious education committee, decide on one possible candidate. There is nothing against a pastor or other authorized person to discretely approach the one designated. It might be that this young or not-so-young man will not be indifferent to the words exchanged. “Our community easily sees you as a priest.” This must be done very discretely. In certain areas and at a certain age, a young person cannot talk about wanting to be a priest without being pointed at, mocked, or ridiculed. If there is a positive response, though, it would be important to get the Diocesan Vocation Office involved, or to bring it up to the bishop himself. Then, perhaps, if the number warrants it, a vocation weekend could be organised, or at least a get-acquainted, informal meeting with the bishop and the prospective seminarian(s).

### **A GOOD FAMILY BACKGROUND**

In my 2002 pastoral letter of May, thirty-five priests wrote about their vocation story. Very few are those who did not mention the family as first element in their vocation itinerary. It bears repeating with gratitude and pride: it is within our own families that our vocations developed! The love that was there, the open and trusting prayer, the charity which nourished it all, all of this was conducive to leading many young men to answer the Lord’s call to the priesthood. For my part, I lay great hope on the sharing taking place between parents and children through family-based religious education. Parents who love Jesus and who do not shy away from talk of him with faith and feeling are the main agents in vocational discernment and facilitation. These meetings cannot help but transmit the invitations of Jesus.

*+ François Thibodeau*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.  
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop’s Journal » (486) (30 April 2003)