
BUILDING THE CHURCH TOGETHER (4)



Our major financial campaign is only one aspect of pastoral developments to come, and it can be compared to the cost of food we have to buy at the grocery store. A Black Forest cake, a pizza, or the latest type Subway can cost a particular amount, but they still need expert hands to prepare them to suit our tastes. The same goes for youth ministry. If there is a cost involved in developing such a ministry, it is important that there be a renewal of energies, in order to respond to the expectations and concerns of our youth.

A YOUNG AND DYNAMIC CHURCH

The Church is as youthful as the youngest of her children. This must be kept in mind if we are to remain young! When young people come to a particular meeting or gathering, the atmosphere quickly changes: there is movement, energy, drive! On the other hand, things are different if the young person is alone: there is usually a quick exit, with a promise of not returning, of not letting oneself be roped in! If young people feel welcome, listened to, and understood, then everything changes. We have only to look at our more recent gatherings, what they were without young people present, and what they were with them there. Without diminishing the importance of either gathering, I am reminded of these words of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, in *The Little Prince*, regarding children and adults: "Adults are a tiresome lot; they don't really understand; they need lots of explanations, endless explanations!" These words are towards the beginning of the story, but then we have these words, coming like an apology: "All adults were children once upon a time, but few of them remember." And in his book *The Prophet*, Khalil Gibran writes: "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, and though they are with you yet they do not belong to you. You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you. For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday. You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth."

SWIFT AND FAR

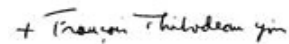
And Gibran goes on : "The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far. Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness; for even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable." This is an excellent summary of the deep attitudes needed, to successfully develop an appropriate and dynamic youth ministry. It is before all in the attitude of Christ Jesus himself that we must seek the foundation of an appropriate youth ministry, since Jesus revealed himself the way, the truth, and the life. The one who spent his childhood and youth in the household of Joseph and Mary, with the neighbourhood children, can still teach us. He who could question the authorities of his day, and even dispute their positions, will help us better understand those who question and challenge our ways of thinking and acting, and even our convictions, and he will help us remain attentive to what our youth today are going through. In chapter six of the Gospel of John we read about a young man and how he was the catalyst of the multiplication of the loaves: "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and a couple of dried fish". (Jn. 6:9) And Jesus orders the apostles to make the people sit. We know what happened next... These loaves and fishes were nothing, compared to what was needed to feed thousands, but everything comes from Jesus who calls on us to give the little that we have. It is Jesus who accomplishes everything, he is truly gift and mystery.

BECOMING DISCIPLES OF JESUS

Just as we are invited to become disciples of Jesus, so too are our youth. We seek to know who Jesus is, we want to love him more and more and be loved more and more by him, we want to allow ourselves to be loved by Jesus so much that we follow him by making him the source of our every choice, without consideration for the length of the journey, the fatigue involved, and the lack of every comfort... Despite appearances to the contrary, youth, too, hunger and thirst for a true encounter with Jesus the Son of the Living God. If Jesus looked at a young man, one day, and loved him, he still does the same, today, he looks at each one of our youth with love and understanding. In response, we invite the young to look on Jesus, their Friend, Master, and Lord of life. Following Jesus, the Church is concerned with youth and wants to have at their disposal the best resources it has both in personnel and finances. The Church wants to help the young become, according to Pope John Paul II's beautiful expression, be watchers of the dawn, salt of the earth and light of the world.

WITHOUT NOSTALGIA, BUT WITH RENEWED ENERGY

It would be quite useless to draw up a list of pastoral activities directed to youth, in the not too distant past: ACLÉ, Weekend Jeunesse, Diocesan Youth Council, school ministry, etc. We must renew together the energy of those who were involved in this ministry from the seventies to the nineties, to get youth ministry back on track. What our children experience in elementary and high school, and universities must be a concern to us. We must take interest in the challenges they are faced with today, of the seriousness with which they confront them, and in the long- and short-term projects that they are planning. Our past experiences, our exceptional experience of preparing and celebrating the 2002 World Youth Day, and the expertise of the diocesan youth committee for 2002-2003 will help us go forward with renewed energy and enthusiasm. And like the story of *The Little Prince*, we shall be able to talk about what, together, we have tamed. It will be good to hear John, Natasha, Jonathan or Sylvia say: "Please tame me, if you are my friend, and until my last minute on earth you will be a unique person in the world. We can truly believe only those things that we tame, but people no longer have the time to stop when they come across one another. They buy ready-made things, but there are no friend markets that sell ready-made friendships. And so, people have no more friends..." So, if youth ministry really means making friends with youth and children, it will truly be exciting!



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« From A Bishop's Journal » (508) (01 October 2003)