
AN URGENT APPEAL TO REALITY, BOLDNESS, AND SOLIDARITY



The official launching of the Major Diocesan Financial Campaign took place on October 4. By virtue of my apostolic charge, and in the name of Jesus whom I wish to serve, love, and proclaim, I call on everyone in the diocese to rally together, these coming six months, in order to endow our diocese, through their prayer and generosity, with the means to boldly fulfill its prophetic mission.

REALITY

Last spring, when I gave you the financial statement of the diocese and of its thirty-two parishes, I stressed the fact that at the diocesan level it is impossible for us to introduce new pastoral programmes due to lack of funding. The Diocesan Synod recommendations on faith education and family and youth ministry, urgently needed though they be, cannot be implemented now due to a lack of financial resources. More than a third of our parishes cannot meet their budget; despite drastic cuts in expenses, they have had problems balancing revenue and expenses. Several parishes can no longer afford to pay the salary of a full-time priest or pastoral agent, and several others can hardly pay their heating bills, insurance premiums, or simple regular maintenance costs. Most parishes do not have the necessary resources to finance religious education programmes or pastoral activities for youth and families. It is exactly to implement the new pastoral priorities of evangelisation and to aid parishes in difficulty that we are having our Major Diocesan Financial Campaign. Just as the diocesan services have had to evaluate the cost of catechetical and pastoral renewal for the next ten years, every parish has to estimate the financial cost of restructuring pastoral activity and the maintenance of its buildings and property over the next ten years. A parish budget does not only have to do with "buildings," but with pastoral activity as a whole: animation, renewal, preaching, and formation. We must invest in people first of all, but we must also keep in mind the valuable yet expensive heritage of the buildings bequeathed to us by the pioneers, a heritage which is also a sign of our identity. It is of the utmost importance that the parish community be involved in drawing up the 2005-2015 budget: it shall serve as a benchmark against which are measured our forecasts and projects for the coming generation.

BOLDNESS

It is not true that the Church is in a phase of "terminal illness." She would be if we did not give her the required "oxygen" and the boldness of new beginnings. We are all called to a new evangelisation, and the boldness of our forebears shall be ours, too! All around us mega projects are emerging, like those new super highways which no one would have thought about, fifty years ago. And the information highway: who could have told us, twenty-five years ago, that we would be involved in all these discoveries? Who could have proclaimed the era of globalization, and of all the new modern changes? The Lord said, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... You are the leaven in the dough... You will receive Power... and you shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth... I am with you always, even to the end of time." It is not a spirit of fear that we have received, but a spirit of boldness and trust. Jesus said that, because of his Spirit, we would accomplish even greater things than he has... And at this time marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's pontificate, listen to his pressing call: "Do not be afraid! Open! Open wide the doors to Christ Jesus!" The financial campaign is there to confirm your boldness and your courage.

SOLIDARITY

It seems to me that this financial campaign gives us a special opportunity to truly experience solidarity with all the believers among us, between the well-off and the less well-off, between associations, organisations, better-off parishes and needy parishes. I marvel at the solidarity which is springing up throughout our diocese. The priests have already showed the road to follow, and I thank them gratefully for having given more according to their hearts than to the size of their wallets. The “Caisses populaires” banking establishments have already pointed out the way; every one of these establishments has contributed to the campaign according to its abilities. Generous donors have already made their contribution or have pledged a specific sum for the next five years. It feels like there is an extraordinary second breath of hope, of faith and love, especially through the energy of the campaign directors. I perceive a love of Jesus and his Church which touches me deeply.

AVAILABILITY

The planning phase has already started, in parishes. We already have, but we shall need more volunteers, for the campaign's success. Do not hesitate to let your parish leaders know of your availability. Our aim is that no canvasser have more than 10 contacts to make, during the campaign. If your parish chairperson or vice chairperson has not been appointed yet, contact the deanery vice chairperson. Canvassing of every family will take place from January to March, but I take this opportunity to urge you all to give according to your capabilities and according to your heart. Imagine the results of the campaign, if every person in the diocese pledged to give to the Diocesan Financial Campaign, in the next five years... the smallest amount, a sign of love for the Church, will be gratefully acknowledged. The financial campaign is a time for looking at the present and to the future, and not to the past; it is not a time for “dredging up” past grievances: the past is passed! Now is the time to pool together our riches so that the Church may continue to proclaim Jesus' message to “Love one another as I have loved you,” so that all of Jesus' sacraments be celebrated in our midst, and that in the midst of the people of God our churches may stand to proclaim to all the loving presence of our God. On behalf of the Edmundston Diocesan Church and in my own name I thank you for everything you shall do for our diocesan Campaign. The Lord will give you a hundredfold in return for what you do for him.

+ François Thibodeau

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