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## BUILDING THE CHURCH TOGETHER (6)

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The major financial campaign which is now in full swing in our diocese is but one aspect of the immense pastoral work site open to us, at the beginning of the new millennium: family- and parish-based religious education for both old and young, family and youth ministry, formation of new Christian leaders for our society as well as our Church, and mutual help for each of our thirty-two parishes. It is quite exciting to labour on such a work site! Our Christian communities are more zealous than ever and are getting together for a new evangelisation to our communities.

### THE VILLAGE FOUNTAIN

Blessed John XXIII was fond of saying that the parish must be a house open to everyone. It is the village fountain where all come to quench their thirst. If our parishes have totally changed outwardly in the last fifty years, they still remain the meeting place for all the baptised and confirmed who strive to become more and more disciples of Jesus. The pastoral restructuring was the occasion of being reminded of every parish's primary mission: to ensure that God's love for the world, made known to us in Jesus Christ, is made known to all people, both the great and the little of the world. It is essential to make certain that this mission is really understood and acknowledged by every parishioner. To this great mission task is attached Jesus' teaching, proclaiming the faith, prayer, celebrating the sacraments, and transforming one's milieu according to Gospel values. Every parish's first objective is the transmission of the Christian faith through family- and parish-based religious education. Every parish must be concerned with welcoming and fostering the growth in faith, hope, and charity, of every baptised and confirmed person. Every parish must be involved in an appropriate family and youth ministry. And every parish must find in its own milieu people who can best exercise the responsibilities of the pastoral charge. All of this illustrates the immense responsibility resting on the shoulders of a parish. It is not enough to have one and even four places of worship, to be a real parish. Every Christian community must experience very deeply a life of faith, hope, and charity, and become more and more missionary by reaching out to others, especially the needy, the excluded, and the marginalised.

### RENEWING THE PARISH INSTITUTION

Pope John Paul II is convinced of the importance of parishes. He says: "Today in America as elsewhere in the world the parish is facing certain difficulties in fulfilling its mission. The parish needs to be constantly renewed on the basis of the principle that the parish must continue to be above all a Eucharistic community." And he adds: "This principle implies that parishes are called to be welcoming and fraternal, places of Christian initiation, of education and celebration of the faith, open to the full range of charisms, services and ministries, organized in a communal and responsible way, capable of utilizing existing movements of the apostolate, attentive to the cultural diversity of the people, open to pastoral projects which go beyond the individual parish, and alert to the world in which they live."<sup>1</sup> A parish thus renewed can raise great hopes. From the faithful, it can create a community, offer support to family life, overcome anonymity, welcome people and help introduce them to their milieu and society. Such a parish can promote more personal evangelisation while developing more positive relations with teachers and other community agents.

## PASTORS WANTED

Pope John Paul continues: "This kind of renewed parish needs as its leader a pastor who has a deep experience of the living Christ, a missionary spirit, a father's heart, who is capable of fostering spiritual life, preaching the Gospel and promoting cooperation. A renewed parish needs the collaboration of lay people and therefore a director of pastoral activity and a pastor who is able to work with others. Parishes in America should be distinguished by their missionary spirit, which leads them to reach out to those who are far away."<sup>2</sup> This is the spirit animating our parish pastoral teams: together they want to be the eyes, ears, mouth, hands and heart of Jesus; together they want to bring his message of love and mercy to every man, woman, and child they meet.

## SIGNS OF PRESENCE

Through the sacraments Christians become privileged signs of Christ's presence in the world; through their mutual love they confess their attachment to Jesus the Messiah, the One sent by the Father. Even our gatherings become signs of Christ's presence and return. Wherever two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus is there among them. Each Eucharistic gathering not only proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also his coming at the end of time. Even the places of our gatherings become special signs of the presence of the Risen Christ: our churches, and especially our beloved cathedral are signs to the world of the presence of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

## GIVING THANKS

To conclude this reflection on the Church, I would simply like to take the preface for the dedication of a church; the preface speaks to us of the mystery of the Church, bride of Christ and temple of the Spirit: "Your house of prayer is also the promise of the Church in heaven. Here your love is always at work, preparing the Church on earth for its heavenly glory as the sinless bride of Christ, the joyful mother of a great company of saints."<sup>3</sup> Brothers and sisters, let us continue building our beloved Church together! Where there is love, where there is life the future is ours today! May the Father's love for everyone be the way of all, both great and small. As we witness the message of Jesus, may his Word challenge us today! May the Spirit keep our families and be with them now and everywhere, blessing our children with life and peace. His Kingdom invites us today. May Jesus the Lord choose as his People those who proclaim the Good News with hearts filled with love and courage. His mission compels us today. In the midst of the People of God, may our churches be beacons of light to proclaim that God-is-with-us. His presence abides forever.

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1. *Ecclesia in America*, n. 41

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Preface for the Dedication of a Church II*