
LOOKING FOR PRIEST REPLACEMENTS!



A confrere created quite a stir in his parish when he announced, in his weekly parish bulletin: "I am looking for a replacement. If you find one, please let me know. Your pastor." Rumours and questions quickly started making the rounds. "Is Father getting ready to leave? What is the matter? Why is he leaving? Who will replace him?" All that the confrere had in mind was that there be a priest to replace him, if he had to leave at any time. He left the parish... but there was no priest to replace him. His announcement had not been taken seriously enough. In our own Diocese of Edmundston we have seventeen parishes out of thirty-two that no longer have a resident priest. Who will there be to replace our valiant priests still in active ministry, when the time comes?

NOT BEFORE 2010...

When last spring I mentioned that under present circumstances, unless there are exceptional events, there will be no priestly ordination in the Diocese of Edmundston before the year 2010, I received a number of phone calls. We have no seminarians, right now, and this questions me daily. How can we continue building our Church without priestly ordinations forthcoming? I know that in several quarters we would like to see modifications to conditions of access to the priesthood, but until such modifications are made, we must continue to support and affirm those who could take on such Church responsibilities. This is a very difficult discernment process where we soon realise that it is not we who choose, but the Lord himself who continues his work of calling, today. The Lord who has wanted his Church will not leave it priestless, but he urgently requires our collaboration.

WOULD YOU ACCEPT...?

One of the most difficult jobs for pastoral teams is "finding people" to fill positions on different parish committees. It is also far from easy to find team members to take on the responsibility of a parish. But if it is not done, who will do it? This is one of the biggest changes in our Church, handing over the parish ministry to teams composed of a priest, religious, and lay people. And the main reason for this should not be the priest shortage but, as Vatican Council II states, because of the lay person's baptismal commitment: every disciple of Christ is called to do his or her share in building the Church. We are all responsible together for the life of the Church. How great it would be for parishioners to recognise in all simplicity and with the desire to truly serve, their obligation to lend a hand in strengthening the Church, whether it be in the area of religious education, liturgy, work with the needy, the youth, and families, or in the field of maintenance and repair. If this offer were made directly, simply, and spontaneously, parish pastoral teams would not have to call people as often to ask: "Would you accept to teach Sunday school... or to be on a committee?"

DISCERNMENT

It seems to me normal that, as a general rule, those responsible for ministry in a particular milieu usually come from the local community. When the first apostles came to a community they started preaching the Gospel, disciples gathered around them and, before leaving for elsewhere, the apostles would institute leaders for the fledgling community. The Spirit stirs a milieu so much that he can raise up people to be, one day, that group's guides. We only have to read the Acts of the Apostles to learn how the first communities were formed. So,

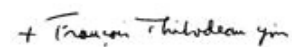
while hoping that your priest remain in your parish as long as possible, and that all the members of the parish team remain in service as long as possible, I nevertheless ask you who there is, in your milieu, who could eventually replace your pastor, and your parish pastoral team members? Who is there in your family or among your acquaintances who could be part of or help the religious education team, the liturgy committee, the pastoral ministry committee?

A PRAYER

There can be no effective challenge without there being intensive prayer. Jesus himself spent long periods of time in prayer before choosing the Twelve, and he has asked us to pray the Master of the harvest to send labourers. These labourers are needed for very diversified tasks: at harvest time, we now ask the labourers to respond to the needs of our youth and our adults, the needs of splintered and of traditional families, and the many needs of the local community. Each one can contribute to revitalising the local Church, according to one's talents and abilities. When every disciple prays our Father in heaven and asks, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done," this petition also calls for availability to respond to the Lord's requests.

HOME MISSION!

It would have been impossible to imagine our milieu as a "mission land," just a few years ago. There were so many priests and religious communities among us that we could afford to send them throughout the world. But when numbers began to dwindle both here and in other areas of the country, we came to understand better and better that we could not work at God's project for humankind without help from others. Still, from the very beginning we were and have remained a mission land, and there is no negative connotation in this. God's project for us, for our community, for our Church is a project which crosses the ages, a project of love, and His heart's desires are eternal. *"His love is from age to age!"* Let us together carry out the mission given to us, and let us try to find collaborators for this grand divine design!



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