



TOWARDS A NEW DECADE

When I came to Edmundston in 1994 I told you of the priorities I had at heart and which I hoped to carry out with you: unity of heart and action with the priests, constant attention to the poor and needy, family and youth ministry, vocation ministry, proclaiming the Gospel, and discovering the riches of baptism and of the Church's mission. I wanted these priorities to be a concrete follow-up to everything my predecessors in Edmundston, especially Bishops Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M., and Gérard Dionne had accomplished. It seemed to me that this was a way of carrying on the work of the great Missions that had been preached in most of our parishes; but it seemed especially that it was a way of implementing the principal recommendations of the 1987-1990 Diocesan Synod. It is now the task of every pastoral entity, whether local, or at the deanery or diocesan level, to review the accomplishments.

ONWARD FOR ANOTHER TEN YEARS!

For myself, after the work done in parishes, deaneries, and diocesan services, following the priorities chosen by the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and following the big decision to hold a major diocesan financial campaign, I want – while keeping sight of the poor and the needy of our milieu – to expend my energy on the necessity of a reality that is new both in its method and its zeal: the “new evangelisation.” This requires continuing to set up a dynamic and appropriate catechetical programme for both children and adults. It also requires the implementation of family and youth ministry as near as possible to those concerned, youth evangelising youth, and families evangelising one another. It requires an ongoing search for people to be leaders of our Christian communities, youth and elders who are open to the ordained or consecrated life, and youth and elders who are happy to devote themselves to their brothers and sisters. It is more than ever necessary to join together as Church. Our community buildings, especially our rectories and places of worship of which we are justly proud, will eventually need adapting and even totally transforming. However, they must remain, if possible, at the service of all the baptised and confirmed. If there are some who for one reason or another have left our Sunday gatherings, if they have deserted our churches and communities, we must rediscover with them the need for getting together on the Lord's Day and for periodic meetings, for a better renewal of our faith and hope. It is not true that our churches are doomed to become museums or places reserved for baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. Our churches must return to being the family dwelling where it is good to meet, to grow in faith, hope, and charity.

“DON'T FORGET THAT IT IS THE DROPS OF WATER...”

Far from being discouraging, such a pastoral programme must rouse our best personal and community energies. If we are asked what our diocesan Church of Edmundston will be like in ten years, we can already, with the grace of God, offer a hope-filled answer, to the measure of our personal commitment. As Jacques Michel so aptly sings: “Don't forget that it is the drops of water that nourish the bottoms of the streams...” If at the beginning of this third millennium the 50,000 or so baptised help one another build our beloved Church, we shall then have succeeded in picking up an extraordinary challenge, the challenge of witnessing in word and in action to the presence of the Risen Jesus in the midst of our world!

ADMIRABLE GENEROSITY

At the beginning of this financial campaign, I and your pastors approach you with open hands, in the name of the Lord Jesus himself. The wonderful example set by our priests moves me to invite you to imitate them, according to your means and the stirring of your heart. I truly marvel at what the priests have accomplished: it is a gift more proportionate to their greatness of heart than to their wallets! By investing such money into our Church's future, we can be assured that they will be imitated and followed by thousands of other donors. May your gift be proportionate to your means, but proportionate especially to the love you have for the future of the

children, youth, families, and leaders of our communities, and proportionate to the love you have for our beloved Church. God the Father has given us everything when He gave us His own Son. How can we respond to such a love without making a loving gesture in return?

LET US CONTINUE...

I am happy to leave you with the words of the song I wrote, to accompany you in the months to come!

We continue to build together
This Church we love so well.
Where there is love, where there is life:
The future is ours today.

May the Father's love for ev'ryone
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 ev'rywhere,
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.

+ François Thibodeau ym

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

« From A Bishop's Journal » (522) (07 January 2004)