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## A REVIEW OF MY PASTORAL VISITATION (2)

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In Part One of the report on my 2004 pastoral visitation of the 32 parishes of our diocese, from January 3 to April 4, I mentioned a few of the major changes which have affected our milieu, especially regarding the 10% population drop... I also mentioned the limited number of priests, that while there were over 100 of them in the diocese in 1970, we now have only thirty diocesan priests and ten religious priests.

### **WANTED: RELIGIOUS SISTERS AND BROTHERS**

Ten years ago we still had 150 religious sisters in the diocese; they are now only 107, or 43 fewer than in 1994. During that period, one young man and two young ladies have joined the religious life. The young man, from Green River, has become a Benedictine monk. One young lady, from Saint-Léonard, has joined the Marist Sisters, and another, from Saint-Joseph made her religious profession February 11 with the Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception. You know about the beautiful witness the sisters give, and the exceptional services they render: through their lifestyle and mission they remind us that through baptism we are all called to holiness, that our lives must be a praise to the glory of the Trinity, that our respective commitments are for service to our brothers and sisters, and that eternal life which has been promised takes root in the world today. We must continue to hold religious life in high esteem. The precious legacy of compassion and excellence which the sisters have bequeathed us in the fields of education, hospital care, and community services, must be received with gratitude and care. I rejoice at all those who are associated to our religious communities, and who ensure that the influence of their mission and their spirituality will continue. We would be surprised at how the founders of the religious communities in our diocese would be proud of the work of their sons and daughters in our midst: Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint John Eudes, Saint Peter-Julian Eymard, Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, Saint Marguerite d'Youville, Bishop Arthur Melanson, Father Jean-Claude Collin, Mother Jeanne-Marie Chavoin, Mother Marie-Louise Trichet, Mother Marie de la Ferre, Mr. Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière, Mother Suzanne Cyr, Mother Marguerite Guillot, Mother Délia Tétreault, and Father Louis-Marie Parent. May their work throughout the world continue for a long time yet!

### **WANTED: PARISH LEADERS**

I also want to point out how great the need is for pastoral agents and aids. For close to five years now, men and women have generously accepted to form parish pastoral teams for one, two, or three years. However, we must find new personnel for each of the five pastoral zones or deaneries, people who are recognised for their faith and commitment, and who are accepted by the community. I thank all those who have accepted to take on this service in our parishes: it is thanks to these parish teams that pastoral ministry in our parishes has picked up. We are still looking for people to ensure family- and parish-based religious education, sacrament preparation (First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage), and ministry to the sick, the shut-ins, and the needy. We can all do something for our Church, and I count on you to guarantee our Church's future. The vast fields of family- and parish-based religious education to children, youth, and adults, liturgical celebration, sacrament preparation, and organisations for fellowship and social transformation according to the Gospel, all of these must continue to challenge us. They are the special paths to the new evangelisation.

### **RELIGIOUS FORMATION**

I have felt in both French and English sectors a deep concern for religious formation. Despite the many means of social communication, despite the plethora of religious books, periodicals, and magazines – and perhaps because of our being swamped by so many documents and programmes – some people are more confused today than before, as they have lost the basics of the Christian faith. The increase in religious sects, so-called “spiritual” movements, sessions and conventions of all kinds... do not make things any simpler. So-called “traditionalist” and “liberal” camps are becoming more and more vocal, and their becoming refusal to dialogue

will not make matters any easier! Bishop Gérard Dionne figured that a Catholic who regularly attended Sunday services got approximately eight hours' worth of religious formation yearly, in the areas of scripture, liturgy, doctrine, and morality. That was his reason for establishing the École de la Foi in 1985 and the School of Faith the following year: over a one week-end session, the participant got more religious education than he or she did over the course of the whole liturgical year!

#### **NEW BIRTH TO HOPE**

The truth parable of the good seed and the weeds can still be verified today. There is, here, a real mystery for a number of parents: those values which they have inculcated in their children throughout their family life together, are constantly being brushed aside or challenged. Parents have told me that week after week they would attend Mass, but without being able to bring one or the other child of theirs along; they had more or less "resigned" themselves to this fact, believing that peer pressure was stronger at times than their own religious convictions. It is in this way that our society has become more and more secularised. It has become difficult to talk about the religious aspect of what is happening. Still, we can sense some kind of yearning for spiritual things and sure values. As bishop I receive many invitations to take part in community events, and I am pleased to respond as often as I can, and in my heart I pray the words of the Eucharistic Prayer: "Open our hearts to the needs of all, so that sharing their grief and anguish, their joy and hope, we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation and advance together on the way to your kingdom." It is perhaps not always possible for parents and pastors to have the right Gospel word but then, actions often speak louder than words!

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