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## **BRAVO ! TO THE BUILDERS OF OUR CHURCH**

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I am so impressed by the multitude of generous volunteers and donors we encountered during the Diocesan Major Financial Campaign. On behalf of the entire diocesan Church and in my own name I express my deepest gratitude to all those who so wondrously committed themselves to very carefully preparing what we shall be needing, in the next ten years. These most precious gestures of theirs are already contributing to our pastoral projects, to family- and parish-based religious education / catechetics, the formation of new pastoral agents, restoration work on our cathedral, and aid to our parishes.

### **WONDERFUL RESULTS**

By the end of May, 2004, over four million dollars (\$4,052,649.00) were received by the campaign in donations and five-year pledges. By subtracting the campaign organisation fees and office expenses for the next four years, the net result is in the order of 3.6 million dollars (\$3,601,669.00). We already plan on giving to parishes, over the next four years, \$1,241,302.00, \$800,000.00 to the cathedral, \$1,200,000.00 to the diocesan pastoral office, leaving us a reserve balance of \$361,367.00; the first cheques will be mailed August 30, 2004. As of now, a little over one million dollars have been deposited in the bank, which means that we shall have to wait a few years to receive and redistribute the amounts pledged. A committee has been formed to see to the reception and deposit of these gifts, and to the distribution of the money between parishes and programmes, according to agreements made between the diocese and the individual parishes. The Campaign follow-up committee is composed of the following: the Campaign co-chairs Mrs. Marcelle Fafard-Godbout and Mr. Gérard Landry, and the five deanery (pastoral zone) vice chairs: Mr. Gaston Voyer (Upper Madawaska), Mr. Gaston Thériault (Edmundston), Mr. Réal Dionne (Grand Falls), Mrs. Reinelde Thériault (Restigouche), Mrs Rita Baker (Southern Victoria), and Mrs. Jeannette Pelletier and Mr. Rino Nadeau of the Diocesan Council for Economic Affairs.

### **SURPRISING RESULTS**

When I look at individual division results (major gifts: \$859,713.00; advance gifts: \$963,458.00); special gifts (\$717,696.00); and general gifts (\$1,316,680.00) coming from the clergy, the pastoral zones, and the parishes, I am totally amazed. The priests of the diocese have donated over \$325,000.00, when their objective was \$200,000.00: the average amount donated per priest was \$9,800.00. When we know about a priest's annual salary, we are more than amazed at the results. At the pastoral zone or deanery level, the Upper Madawaska Deanery brought in close to \$300,000.00 (\$293,489.00), the Edmundston Deanery totalled over one million dollars (\$1,060,242.00), the Grand Falls Deanery brought in over \$600,000.00 (\$612,230.00), the Restigouche Deanery totalled close to \$240,000 (\$237,601.00), and Southern Victoria raised close to \$200,000.00 (\$196,439.00). Twenty-four of our thirty-two parishes exceeded their objective. The average gift per parishioner is \$559.00. There were 5,189 gifts made, from close to 10,000 homes visited. What generosity! If we had had sufficient volunteers to visit the remaining 6,000 homes, you can easily imagine what the grand total received could have been!

### **PROMISING RESULTS**

The money received and pledged gives us hope for a brighter future. However, what is even more wonderful is that there was sharing of parish and diocesan life during these months, an indication of future vitality. In the words of the Campaign theme song, "Tomorrow is ours today." I am sure that the financial campaign was a very special occasion for all the people of the diocese to feel a sense of being involved not only in certain pastoral programmes, but also of being in relation with the Church as a whole, whether at the parish or the diocesan level. I have heard parents openly state their desire that religious education continue and develop even further: "I want my children to be given religious formation, and that is the main reason why I'm making

a donation." I have heard youths and families express hope that something will happen in their lives: "We want our place, in the Church;" "The message of Jesus is for us, too;" "I know better than ever what it means to be salt of the earth and light of the world." Others told me how important it was to form tomorrow's parish leaders – whether priests or lay people – very well. Others spoke of their sense of belonging to a given parish: "I was baptised in this church, and married in this church, and it is here that I want to be buried! I wouldn't want my church to close at any time, due to lack of money."

#### **INCREASED RESULTS**

While our donations to the church are acknowledged by the state through the giving of receipts for income tax purposes, these donations can still be an important source of blessing. If a glass of water given in Jesus' name can bring us an everlasting reward, these gifts are such a wonderful investment to ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed more and more every day, and that the love of God extends throughout the next generation. For my part, I believe that the financial campaign was a fantastic exercise in charity. The urgent needs which the diocesan synod discerned and which were confirmed by successive studies without, however, receiving appropriate responses, will now be given proper attention. Aren't contributing to the proclamation of God's Word to both young and old, and helping form Gospel workers for tomorrow, building our beloved Church in very specific ways? Is it not saying loud and clear that we believe in the reign of life and holiness brought about by Jesus, so that all may have life in abundance?

#### **UNFORGETTABLE RESULTS**

Just as we are proud of those who helped build our Church in years past, so will those who come after us be happy at what we shall have allowed to develop and grow, by giving to the financial campaign. Who knows? We shall probably have a chance to reminisce, in 2015! May the Lord bless you one hundredfold for your generosity, and may He keep you in his peace and joy!

*+ François Thibodeau*

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

« From A Bishop's Journal » (545) (15 June 2004)