
“BUILDING DYNAMIC COMMUNITIES ENLIVENED BY YOUTH”



For several years now the Edmundston Diocesan Church has been setting a yearly priority which affects the diocese's entire pastoral colouration. Choosing a priority aims at marshalling all of our energies in order to correct a particular pastoral weakness or to respond to an especially important concern of the Church. Such a choice does not negate the value of our other pastoral activities; rather, it calls for a special effort in responding to the targeted concern.

UNITY OF ACTION

When taken seriously, the diocesan pastoral priority contributes without a doubt to the diocese's unity of pastoral action. It also commits our Church to going in directions of consequence to its future, as it obligates us to rise above some of our daily concerns which consume so much energy that they often prevent us from thinking of the future. The pastoral priority is also a channel of grace: through this choice to which many people have contributed, the Spirit of God speaks to us and guides us in new directions.

FAMILY-BASED CATECHESIS AND MORE

In the past few years, confronted with new needs created in our [Francophone] school system, we have had to work overtime to reach our children and youth with the Word of God through outside-class programmes, with the aid of parents and volunteers. Despite the vulnerability of the situation we can be justly proud at our progress, here, and in the enthusiasm produced. We shall have to continue expending our personal and financial resources to bring to fruition this mission of ours. While still being involved in this great endeavour we must also attend to youth and family ministries. Along with this, we must also successfully conclude the diocesan financial campaign.

THE 2004 PASTORAL VISITATION

The evaluations of the 2004 pastoral visitation to each of our parish communities indicate not only a dramatic drop in priests and religious, but even in the general population. We are fewer than fifty thousand Catholics, in the diocese. Approximately 20% of the Catholic population attend Mass on Sunday: over 35,000 are absent from the weekly Eucharist. Youth are not very numerous, there; we deplore their absence. It is difficult to reach them and show interest for their concerns and projects. Family liturgies are beginning to take shape. Christian formation must be pursued under different guises, notably through the School of Faith. Greater presence in the mass media is imperative; a committee has been appointed to study the feasibility of starting a Christian radio station. We must give hope to our Christian communities, and pick up the challenges of evangelisation through new methods and renewed energy.

THE EUCHARIST

To mark the beginning of the new millennium, Pope John Paul II reminded one and all of the necessity to become saints, especially through sharing the Word, celebrating the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Reconciliation, and prayer and a spirit of communion at all levels of the Church. Besides, he decreed that a special Year of the Eucharist be celebrated throughout the Church, from October 2004 through October 2005. The Eucharist continues to build the Church, as well as each Christian community.

PRIORITY FOR 2004-2005

Keeping in mind all of these elements and the consultations in each of our pastoral zones, the diocesan pastoral council, whose task is to decide the pastoral priorities for helping the people of God, calls on all parish and diocesan organisations to do all in their power to “build dynamic communities enlivened by youth.” The more our communities are vibrant, the more will they draw people of all ages, especially our youth. We are all invited to continue building our beloved Church by creating ever vibrant and dynamic communities interested in our young people, open and welcoming to them, and walking hand in hand with them.

APPROPRIATE MEANS

Each parish pastoral team, committee, group, community, and organisation is urgently pressed to determine, in the next few days, the most appropriate means to better reach our youth. Four avenues seem promising, for such an enterprise: fellowship, service, proclaiming the Word, and celebration. Being close to youth, reaching out to them, welcoming them fraternally, and listening to them seem to me steps in the right direction. Responding to their basic needs, whether in the area of education, food and shelter, health, work, or leisure seems to me indispensable, in several circumstances. Catechetical family- and parish-based formation and proclaiming to them Good News from Jesus Christ, are urgently needed. Celebrating with them the different stages of their faith journey is a reflection of Jesus’ grand initiative along the road to Emmaus, to highlight the value of our Sunday gatherings, so that our Eucharists be better understood and appreciated. These are but a few possible pastoral directions; a local youth ministry team would doubtless be the best suited, to undertake such activities.

A CHALLENGING PARABLE

Jesus said: “One day the farmer went out sowing. Part of what he sowed landed on a footpath, where birds came and ate it up. Part of it fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprouted at once since the soil had no depth, but when the sun rose, it began to wither for lack of roots. Again, part of the seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked it. Part of it, finally, landed on good soil and yielded grain a hundred- or sixty- or thirtyfold. Let everyone heed what he hears!” (Mt. 13:4-9) If this parable also referred to our youth and our communities, what great harvest we would someday reap!

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