
WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH OUR PASTORAL RESTRUCTURING? (1)



During the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 pastoral years, a lot of mention was made of pastoral restructuring. Pastoral sessions with more than 200 people attending were held with Father Gilles Routhier, consultations took place in each of the five pastoral zones, and documents with an impressive number of recommendations were written. The document called *Paths to the Future* was published December 16, 1998; it had 16 general recommendations and 22 particular recommendations. What has been happening? Can there be any further follow-up? Let us try to make a provisional evaluation of what has happened to the general recommendations.

RECALL

At the heart of modern life, events follow one another at amazing speed. No field has been untouched: politics, economy, culture, social life. Following Vatican Council II and the major upheavals in our educational and health care systems, in the wake of the TV era and the rise of the New Culture, following the decrease in the number of priests, and their aging, there is no end to the changes that have occurred in our Church. But there is something wonderful in this: the baptised and confirmed are becoming aware of their responsibilities in the Church and in the world. We are witnesses to the great faith and generosity demonstrated, in all sectors. And it is a happy surprise to realise that we had aimed correctly, regarding several of the general recommendations. So let us look at these recommendations which dealt with the parish pastoral team.

1. That by the end of May, 1999, each parish pastoral council, after parish consultation, submit to the bishop names of persons who could be mandated as members of an eventual parish pastoral team.
2. That at the time of pastoral appointments special attention be paid to the composition and functioning of parish pastoral teams.
3. That at the time of these appointments the priest-team member be also appointed moderator of the team according to Church legislation, and be appointed director of those pastoral activities dependent on his priestly ministry; that another person eventually coordinate team activities while another is appointed to organise religious education and yet another to managing economic affairs.
4. That the pastoral team commissioned by the bishop look after the different areas of Christian living (faith education, sacramental celebration, fellowship, and transformation of one's milieu).
5. That the pastoral team meet on a regular weekly basis, that they participate in monthly deanery meetings, and be faithful in attending diocesan pastoral sessions.
6. That diocesan regulations give specific guidelines regarding stipends to be paid to those in charge of the parish, taking into consideration the hours worked, available resources, and the number of people served.
7. That when a pastoral team has been commissioned, we revise the role and functions of the parish pastoral council so as to avoid duplication or multiplicity of meetings. If the team ensures the carrying out of pastoral activities, members of the parish pastoral council will be more involved in studying what pastoral directions should be taken.

SUMMARY EVALUATION

The foregoing recommendations deal mostly with the parish pastoral team. Each parish team and, even, each pastoral zone/deanery can evaluate these recommendations. However, we can say that one of the main

aspects of our pastoral restructuring was the establishment of our fifteen parish pastoral teams. Much energy was expended to find and support the members of these teams. We found much generosity and faith, among these people. It was no longer possible for one person alone to carry the burden of a parish. Each team had to find its own rhythm. Teams that would not renew themselves by going to the Word of God, or teams that would meet only sporadically and infrequently, would quickly become fictional, teams in name only. Faced with the needs of each milieu, faced also with the resources of that milieu, each team has discovered its own identity. There are no two identical pastoral teams. Besides, recent documents specified the roles and responsibilities of the pastoral team and of the parish pastoral council. There is some concern regarding ongoing formation, but it is not always easy to find the time needed for this. The first seven recommendations must continue to challenge us, so that we can come up with ever more appropriate responses.

IMPORTANT PRIORITY OF CATECHETICS

8. That priority be given to catechetics/religious education at the parish level.

In all our parishes, French and English, numerous efforts have been made to respond to the challenge made by family- and parish-based religious education. Catechetics will continue to be one of the main points of our pastoral restructuring, so that Christ be better known, loved, and proclaimed. This is the key point of the new evangelization. "May the Father's love for all be known by both child and adult; may they proclaim the life of Jesus. His Word urges us today." Not only catechetical levels have been determined, but teams have been formed and generous gifts have been made to ensure the financing of catechetics for the next ten years. However, the basic aspect will always be the faith experience of each baptised and confirmed person in their relationship with Jesus, their familiarity with the Word of God, their ties to the community, and their desire to grow as disciples of Jesus.

+ François Thibodeau

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

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