



From A Bishop's Journal (637)

The People of God Proclaim Their Love for the Church

On March 14 and 15 the French-speaking sector of the diocese of Edmundston held a pastoral orientation congress for a new evangelisation, while the English-speaking sector had their congress March 18. Three lively, enthusiastic, and animated days, full of promise! There was such a show of love and faithful support for their Church! Preceded by a day of spiritual reflection on the Church, theologian Sylvie Latreille, assistant director and professor at the Dominican Pastoral Institute in Montreal, was confident that we can pick up the challenges of today's mission: She told the French group: "Be inventive, responsive, courageous, closely united with one another in a spirit of collaboration, at work, in managing the changes, and in prayer. With the freedom of children of God, find solutions adapted to today's situations." For the English-speaking, facilitators were Sisters Viola Côté, f.m.a., and Marie-Paule Couturier, f.m.a.

What Satisfaction!

For me as bishop of the Edmundston diocese, I am happy and satisfied with the deliberations which involved 135 people from the Francophone parishes, and 50 from the Anglophone. The assembly that was formed was truly a gift from God.

Over 90 Recommendations

Among the many recommendations adopted, I want to mention this one: "That every parish or pastoral unit take on a pastoral project of evangelisation and implement it, taking account of the situation of families and young people." This recommendation reflects the one suggesting looking into the possibility of an eventual diocesan evangelisation campaign. I was glad to accept in their entirety the recommendations which the assembly had voted, with the hope of their being implemented in the months and years to come. By accepting the recommendations I express my joy and exercise my pastoral responsibility for the work done by the assembly. I shall respectfully consider the votes taken throughout the Congress. As shepherd of the diocese of Edmundston, I ask you all to welcome with me all the proposals made. Reception of the fruits of this Congress is an event of our diocesan Church.

New Evangelisation

Regarding the new evangelisation, during these days we discussed several subjects: family- and parish-based catechetics, adult faith education, a pastoral evangelisation project, pastoral formation, pastoral ministry to the sick, the needy, and the handicapped, youth ministry, and ordained ministry. As for pastoral readjustments, these shall be explained in a future pastoral document, but I can say

at this time that the recommendations voted shall be implemented only after consulting the parishes concerned.

A Special Epistle

At the Congress I wanted, like St. Paul, to address a special letter to the people of the diocese of Edmundston: “François, servant of Jesus Christ, called by God’s will to be apostle of the Gospel, to you, brothers and sisters, God’s beloved ones in our diocesan Church. Grace and peace to all of you, friends, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

I constantly give thanks to God when I think of you who are *in the service of the mission to build living communities energized by youth*. Indeed, the Gospel we proclaim together demands great faith, hope, and perseverance, so that this Good News of our salvation will always reveal the message of God’s love for all human beings. And this is my prayer: May the Holy Spirit who constantly surprises us at all times of our Church history fill us with his sacred gifts so that we may bear witness to our faith in Jesus Christ before all those who are in our beloved diocese.

Your presence here has given me great joy: you, priests, parish delegates, and you, of the diocesan services. You have participated actively and courageously in searching for answers to the challenge of today’s mission. We have reflected together on the Church and on the pastoral and ecclesial experience of Saint Paul with the early Christian communities. They have encouraged us to keep on working on what we have already begun in our diocese, as we looked into how they put themselves at the service of the mission, how they wished to build living communities, and how they wanted to fulfill their prophetic, priestly, and royal mission. We are indeed not called to imitate them, nor to compare ourselves to them; but like them we want to respond together to the demands of the mission today, and to face our own challenges as they appear to us now.

We have listened to each other respectfully. Already in Peter and Paul’s time, the communities had to meet and discuss as we did in order to find a consensus and answers to their own challenges. The exercise we did today has therefore been deeply rooted in the Church since its very beginning. We believe that, guided by the Holy Spirit, we are presently living through an important part of the history of our diocesan Church.

Let us be joyful, let us encourage one another, and the God of Jesus Christ will be with us. Let us also recall the presence of Mary when she participated with the disciples in the life of the early communities. She certainly brought joy to the community.

After this day of fruitful work, may you find time to rest. Greet the members of your family for me, and bring them my gratitude.

This greeting is from me, François, servant of God in your midst. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all.

+ François Thibodeau *ym*

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Bishop of Edmundston

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