



From A Bishop's Journal (708)

Preparing for the 2007-2008 Pastoral Year

At a time when the new car models are already on display, along with new houses and new appliances, we are called to begin a new pastoral year under the sign of hope, of faith, and of love. There is enthusiasm in our realising that God loves us and that we belong to the same youthful and vibrant Church despite weaknesses that appear here and there. We are helping fashion a community that has many resources and is capable of constant renewal.

Solid Foundation

Founded on Christ and the Apostles, our Catholic Church can be justly proud of its modest but divine origins. The Crucified One from Nazareth, the Risen One on Easter Day left us a final message: "Love one another as I have loved you, know that I am with you always, until the end of time." And Jesus the Living One has kept his word: he gave and continues to give his disciples the Holy Spirit to make them special witnesses by reminding them of everything he had taught and done. It was said of the first Christians that "They were of one heart and mind." The Acts of the Apostles, the epistles, and the Book of Revelation constantly remind us of the foundation of our faith, hope, and love. The bishops, successors of the Apostles, are the witnesses that Jesus called to proclaim the Word and build vibrant missionary communities. Pentecost was like the jumping-off point for the Church being sent into the midst of the world. The Second Vatican Council showed us once again aspects of works of our salvation and of our Church's wonderful mission for the coming centuries. In his letter to me of October 30, 1993, appointing me bishop of Edmundston, Pope John Paul II referred to this apostolic succession and pastoral mission in the midst of the people of God.

45 Years of Incredible Work

On January 25, 1959 Pope John XXIII announced that he would hold an ecumenical council of the entire Church. It is hard for us to imagine everything that this event brought about in the whole world, since the Council's opening on October 11, 1962. While the Acts of the Council are the joint work of some 3,000 bishops from across the world, and the input of experts and the presence of our brothers and sisters of different Christian denominations, they were first of all the work of the Holy Spirit and the prayer of the whole people of God. The following anecdote has often been repeated about Pope John XXIII, about a night when he could not go to sleep: "Giovanni, who leads the Church? Is it you or the Holy Spirit?" Pope Giovanni humbly replied: "It is the Holy Spirit." And the voice concluded: "If it is the Holy Spirit, then lie down and go to sleep!" We have only to read

the Acts of the Council: They are far from being out of date. The Holy Spirit spoke to our Church, and He still guides us today. We can be justly proud of the fact that our diocesan Church was represented by the second bishop of Edmundston, Bishop J.-Romeo Gagnon who attended three major sessions. We can be proud of Bishop Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M., and Bishop Gerard Dionne who had the courage to undertake the application of the conciliar decisions. Special thanks to Bishop Dionne for having called the Edmundston Diocesan Synod, from 1987 to 1990, despite the difficulties inherent to this major pastoral activity: following Vatican II, it was the *aggiornamento* of our diocesan Church.

An Outstanding Congress

When I came here on January 9, 1994, I had no agenda to propose. All I had to do was to pursue the application of everything the Holy Spirit has spoken to his Church. I give thanks to God for the generous commitments which the priests, sisters, and lay people have taken within our Christian communities. The Pastoral Orientation Congress of March, 2006 was aimed at tying together all that these outstanding “Pentecosts” which were Vatican Council II and the Edmundston Diocesan Synod had given us. We had to consider our ecclesial resources and the new needs expressed. The many consultations held especially in the last two years prompted me and the different diocesan and parish committees to take important decisions. After establishing parish economic affairs committees in every parish community as early as 1996, we had to set up, in 1999, family- and parish-based religious education, and the formation of pastoral animation teams. Thanks to the great generosity of the people of the diocese, a major financial campaign will have brought in, between 2003 and 2008, donations and commitments to the sum of 4.1 million dollars, which ensured the setting up of a more appropriate youth ministry and family life office, help to financially-strapped parishes, the training of new pastoral agents, and the restoration of our beautiful cathedral.

Appointments in 2007

In June I published the new appointments for our priests. This was a long task of consultation and discernment. According to Church legislation, a “pastor’s” term in a parish is for six years, renewable once. However, the legislation does not mention the term of office of a “priest moderator.” Since the members of parish animation teams desire a one-year term, I do the same for the moderator’s term, hoping in this way that every parish pastoral team enjoy a certain appropriate stability. Except for 4 priests in pastoral ministry, all the others will take on their new assignments on August 15. I praise the Lord for their great spirit of faith and their truly evangelical availability. It is in relation to the recommendations of the Diocesan Synod and the Diocesan Pastoral Orientation Congress that these appointments were made, and in agreement with the priests concerned and the Bishop’s Council.

Understandable Reactions

It is no exaggeration to say that it is difficult to leave a milieu we love and have served in daily with all of one’s energy. This is difficult for both priest and faithful. However, no parish can consider itself the owner of this or that priest, and no priest can call himself owner of the parish: like the bishop, priests are called to serve the Church. It is well that we remember the words of the Lord: “It

was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure” (Jn. 15:16). In making pastoral appointments we must ensure that everyone in the diocese without exception has access to the Word of God and sacramental celebration; we must work more than ever to ensure the construction of “*vibrant communities energised by youth.*” I thank you with all my heart for your support and for the generous understanding you exhibited at such events as the Diocesan Synod, the Pastoral Orientation Congress, and the 2007 appointments. In the next few weeks, parish priest moderators will be forming their pastoral teams and different pastoral committees. In the very name of our baptism, do not hesitate to collaborate in the life of your parish community.

Culture of the Call

Throughout the coming year you shall often hear about the “culture of the call.” We have all been called to be the people of God: through our parents, our educators, our priests, we have been “called” to form this holy people. Now it is our turn to “call” those who do not yet know Jesus Christ or who have distanced themselves from our Eucharistic assemblies and our pastoral projects. We must proclaim the words of the Lord: “Come and see,” and “Come, follow me.” It is together that we are “called” to be more and more disciples of Jesus, filled with kindness and compassion, seekers after justice, peace, and truth, makers of happiness and kindness. Through prayer, let us show gratitude to our pastors who ministered to our needs. Through prayer and commitment, let us welcome those who serve us as members of parish pastoral teams. I hope you have a wonderful 2007-2008 Pastoral Year!

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

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