



From A Bishop's Journal (725)

The School of Faith at 22 (1985-2007)

I thank God for giving us the pleasure of celebrating the 22 years of our École de la Foi [School of Faith]. The founding of the School, its constant growth, and the results obtained are truly worth celebrating. *Honour and glory to all its builders. We are proud of it, and it is our story!*

It was Bishop Gerard Dionne, my immediate predecessor, who had the wonderful idea of founding such an institution in the Diocese of Edmundston. While in Sudbury, he had the opportunity of seeing for himself the beneficial effects of the Anglophone School of Pastoral Work, there, and of establishing one for the francophones of the Diocese of Sault St. Marie, the École française de pastorale.

After having set up the Diocese of Edmundston according to the prescriptions of Vatican Council II, Bishop Fernand Lacroix retired for reasons of health, and it was Bishop Dionne who succeeded him. Bishop Dionne's wish was to found here a School of Faith along the same lines as that in Sudbury, along with the same ends in mind: to rekindle in the baptised their reasons for believing, open to them the riches of the Word of God, give them the opportunity of experiencing close fellowship as Church for a few hours, and make them aware of their mission in their own milieu and their volunteer work.

Under the Sign of Constant Giving

What made the originality of this School was that all of its activities were free. "What you have received freely, give freely" (Mt. 10:10). As faith is a free gift of God, participation in this School, whether from the professional aspect as from the student body – and the administration – was deeply experienced under the sign of selfless giving, and this, to the great surprise not only of the people of the diocese, but also of those who, from here and there, were given information on the School of Faith and its being free of charge. For some, this seemed like a "temptation" from God; for others, it was one of the many "miracles," one of the wonders of which Providence knows how to keep secret!

Registered Teachers and Students: Records Broken

Bishop Dionne first called on four priests who were on the staff of St. Louis-Maillet College in Edmundston. Father Robert Simard, C.J.M., the first academic director of the School, was charged with drawing up a curriculum; the Bishop retained for himself the position of director general of the School. It was planned that the School's opening would be in September, 1986, but as early as September, 1985, Father Jean-Guy Lachance, C.J.M., gave a first course on "Faith." Bishop Dionne had estimated having about twelve registrations, "like the twelve Apostles," he would say. With optimism he declared that he would be most satisfied if the number climbed to 25... However, 134 showed up, the first year! This had been totally unforeseen, like many events that have been produced under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. But what a message it was! People wanted to hear about God, the Gospel, and the Church. The people were hungry, and they had to be fed the bread of the Word of the Lord.

Over Seven Years

The School had planned a registration of four years' duration, with courses being given for a maximum of seven years, since the programme was spread over a four year period. The School of Faith was scheduled to end in May, 2007. Thanks to God and to all who collaborated in this project, the most optimistic forecasts were greatly surpassed and the hopes raised were largely met. "God's ways are not limited by our desires; He surpasses them greatly, in His infinite goodness!" In the course of time the curriculum was modified in order to adapt to different circumstances, but the general outline has always been respected, so that from the very beginning one had the impression of having found the formula which best suited the people of our diocese.

All united in the faith: 1891 registrations

From year to year the School of Faith has welcomed a new class of faithful who come to deepen their faith. More than 600 persons signed up for one course or another: and there were 1891 registrations. Regular attendance and faithfulness in following the classes of the School of Faith, in initiating themselves to Holy Scripture and even in falling in love with the sacred text, and the desire to live the Gospels in their milieu, raise the enthusiasm of the School's authorities who repeat the words of St. Paul: "... I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you - or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom. 1:11-12).

Wonderful Devotedness

We must point out the extraordinary devotedness of the many professors - priests, religious, and lay persons - who freely gave many hours to deepening and communicating so marvellously the Good News of Jesus. In going over the story of the School of Faith with teachers and students, it is as if what is being experienced is one of those precious moments of the primitive Jerusalem Church where enthusiasm for the faith had gotten hold of everyone and inflamed all of Jesus' followers. We must also note the work of many other persons who generously supported the School of Faith activities, whether at the Diocesan Centre or at the parish level . This too is faith-filled generosity!

A Well-Appreciated Harvest

According to Bishop Dionne himself, two major pastoral activities of our diocese were brought to life at the School of Faith: the Diocesan Synod and the great parish missions. These had not been planned for, at the inception of the School, but the Divine Providence had its views, and today we can be deeply grateful and tell God that His love is from age to age (Luke 1:50). Since those responsible for the School are people of deep faith and great boldness, I believe that God willed this School and that He will maintain it for as long as He wants, despite difficulties encountered. The time spent together in searching and sharing the Word of God can only have beneficial effects. The Word of God is alive and active in our personal and community lives.

The Future

At the Pastoral orientation Congress of March, 2006, a recommendation was made to strengthen at the zone level an adult faith education programme. The coordinator, Mrs. Patricia Cyr, was appointed in August, 2007, to organise the programme and sessions. I express my special gratitude to Father Jean-Guy Lachance, C.J.M., who devoted over ten years to this wonderful work, and to Father Leo Grégoire, I.V.D., who founded and directed the [English] School of Faith for over ten years; my thanks also to Sister Jacqueline Poirier, F.M.A., who directed the École de la Foi for over twelve years, and her collaborators Sister Paulette Turcotte, F.M.A., Sister Geraldine Brotherton, F.M.A., and Father Ghislain Rémillard.

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