



From A Bishop's Journal (764)

A Happy 2008-2009 Pastoral Year!

I have been wishing a Happy 2008-2009 Pastoral year for some time now, whether at the time of the pastoral appointments, the feast of St. Ann, or that of the Assumption. I wish that every one of you – children, youth, adults, couples, families, workers, the elderly, the poor, and the sick – have a remarkable year. May this year help us experience fully a personal encounter with Jesus, on life's path!

A Busy Programme

I don't know whether you have had the chance or not to glance at the diocese's pastoral calendar for the coming 2008-2009 year. It is quite full. Despite a reduced personnel, numerous activities are already planned, according to a tight schedule: parish- and family-based catechetics, youth ministry, family ministry, mission ministry, liturgical celebrations, adult faith education, parish pastoral work, pastoral agent formation, Bible sessions, etc. No one and no group has been left out. Thanks to hundreds of volunteers and to the many parish and diocesan committees, we set forth in confidence. Assured that the Holy Spirit always goes before us in our pastoral activities, and that the Kingdom of God is built up day after day thanks to the presence of the Risen Jesus, we are ready to walk humbly in the Lord's footsteps, to show forth the kindness of our God, and to promote always a greater justice and sharing in our milieu. The action plans, whether diocesan or parish-based, serve as our guides in carrying out our pastoral priority.

Wonderful Teams

As I offer to the Lord and his blessed Mother Mary this new pastoral year, I say my gratitude for the twelve pastoral units that have generously accepted to serve, to take charge of our 32 parishes. My gratitude also extends to all the parish and diocesan committees; each of them is indispensable. How can we properly appreciate our liturgical celebrations without the help of active and dedicated liturgy committees? How can we manage a parish adequately, without the aid of parish economic affairs committees? How can we ensure the appropriate sacramental preparation of our children without the constant devotion of committees to prepare adequately the reception of baptism, first confession, first communion, and marriage? How can we ensure a kind and loving presence to the sick and the grieving without the help of parish teams and grief committees? How can we give or reinforce hope to the poor and the marginalised among us without the help of a forceful social

ministry? Every person, every committee, every council have a mission that is proper to them in order to energise our beloved Church of Edmundston.

Diocesan Launchings

Our pastoral year will be launched on September 29 and October 1, and we shall have the pleasure of having Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I., with us, the Auxiliary Bishop of Halifax. As a professor of missiology at St. Paul University in Ottawa, and as provincial of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and bishop since 2003, he is in a good position to launch us along the path to the great dream of Pope John Paul II, that of the new evangelisation according to new methods and with renewed energy. These two days shall be moments of grace for the entire Church, and I request your prayers for the success of this pastoral year.

Rumours Vs. Reality

Rumours have been going around for some time that I have submitted my resignation to the Pope, and the extent of these rumours urges me to tell you honestly and frankly about this. I cannot hide the fact that the last few years my health has suffered a number of important reverses (anaemia, exhaustion), to such an extent that I was advised to not only reduce my activity but to retire altogether. After prayer and consultation, on May 8, 2008, the forty-third anniversary of my priestly ordination, I wrote to the Holy Father, humbly submitting with sadness but serenity my resignation as the fifth bishop of Edmundston. Three courses are open to the Holy Father: he can refuse my request and ask me to continue as bishop, he can accept my resignation immediately and appoint an apostolic administrator; or he can, as was done with my predecessor, accept my resignation and make it effective on the day an eventual successor has been appointed sixth bishop of Edmundston. This latter process could take six months to a year. I accept whatever decision the Holy Father makes.

L.D.V.S.N.C.E.T.C.

This is not a secret code that I am sending, with this acronym. When I first entered the Eudist Fathers seminary at Charlesbourg in 1957, we would use these letters as the heading of all our letters: *La divine volonté soit notre conduite en toutes choses* (“The divine will be our conduct in all things”). It was in faith that I accepted this divine Will. Two things are certain: I have always worked with all my strength for the diocesan Church of Edmundston, the Church I loved and continue to love. I have always felt supported, these fifteen years or so, by each and everyone of you. I once again repeat my gratitude to you for your fervent prayers and many kindnesses. I hope that through those I shall meet – the priests, the faithful of the diocese, the journalists, my colleagues and my family – I meet Jesus himself inviting me to come aside and rest a while, as he did with his disciples... or else urging me on to proclaim in novel ways that God’s love is from age to age.

Calendar

For your information, I send you, along with a schedule of my daily obligations, this rather special “calendar” for the next few weeks: meeting of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops at Cornwall, Ontario (September 22-26), the installations of Bishop Pierre Morissette as Bishop of

St-Jérôme (September 21) and Bishop Pierre-André Fournier as Archbishop of Rimouski (September 28), the meeting of major Francophone religious superiors of the Maritimes at Edmundston; the meeting of the Atlantic Episcopal Assembly at Halifax (October 6-9), and a meeting with the Maritime region Eudist Fathers at Caraquet (October 12-15). Taking into account the preceding, I can only ensure my confreres and colleagues of my prayers. May the Virgin Mary and her divine Son grant me their choicest blessings.

+ François Thibodeau

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

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