



## **From A Bishop's Journal (782)**

### **Fifteen Years of Episcopal Ministry**

**O**n Friday, January 9 it will be exactly fifteen years that I received episcopal ordination from the hands of Bishop Gerard Dionne and the other bishops present, becoming by the grace of God the fifth bishop of Edmundston: it was Sunday, January 9, 1994. It is not my aim, here to evaluate this long ministry among you. However, as far as the length of my ministry is concerned, it has been longer than that of Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy (1945-1948), Bishop Fernand Lacroix (1970-1983), and even Bishop Dionne (1984-1993). Bishop Joseph Romeo Gagnon's ministry lasted twenty-one years (1949-1970).

#### **Difficult Decisions**

It was with peace of mind but some sadness that on May 8, 2008 I requested the Holy Father to relieve me of my ministry as fifth bishop of Edmundston, for health reasons. A few days later, the Apostolic Nuncio called me to say that he had received the documents, and to ask about my health. When a resignation is accepted by the Pope, it is effective when the new bishop accepts his appointment by the Holy Father. This is how, as of January 5, Pope Benedict XVI officially accepted my resignation and appointed Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I., to replace me. We must pursue together the work begun, especially the effective implementation of our pastoral priority on the new evangelisation: Meeting Jesus on my Journey. As the see of Edmundston was officially vacant, the College of Consultors ensures the administration of the diocese's day-to-day affairs until the coming of the new bishop. On Tuesday, January 6, the College appointed me Administrator of the Diocese.

#### **Fond Regard for the Diocese of Edmundston**

I cannot forget the obligations I accepted at my episcopal ordination: "I accept this charge given to me by the Apostles and the laying on of hands. I accept this charge for the service of God, and I commit myself to carry it out until death, with the grace of the Holy Spirit." I want to carry on with my episcopal duties with all of my remaining strength, by collaborating according to my possibilities in the task of evangelisation by cooperating discretely in the pastoral activity either as a research assistant or in the implementation of social ministry or other sectors of pastoral work. I am convinced, though, that the main function of a bishop emeritus, like that of every human being, is to "love and to pray." This twofold function that Saint John Mary Vianney, the venerable Curé of Ars described, can be exercised any time and everywhere. Jesus, who is present in each and everyone of us, prays and loves for us. He is the most loving and most prayerful human of all ages. He is only

love and prayer, before the Father. To the two questions that Bishop Gerard Dionne asked me, on January 9, 1994, I answered fervently: "I am, with the help of God:"Are you resolved to build up the body of Christ and to remain united to it within the order of bishops under the authority of the successor of the Apostle Peter? Are you resolved to pray for the people of God without ceasing, and to carry out the duties of one who has the fullness of the priesthood so as to afford no grounds for reproach?" With all of my brothers and sisters of the "golden age," as well as with those of the younger generation, I want to join my prayer to theirs (for the glory of God and the salvation of the world."

### **New Freedom**

Even though the bishop emeritus is free to go where he wants and organise his own new lifestyle unless the pope decides otherwise, I personally believe that I have first of all obligations towards the Diocese of Edmundston with which I covenanted in 1994. Our beloved diocese has only around thirty priests and a hundred people working in parish animation teams, besides volunteers working in different pastoral ministries like catechetics and youth work. If the new Bishop lets me, I shall remain discretely available to him. I could return to Charlesbourg, Québec to be with my Eudist confreres, I could move in with members of my family or elsewhere, but I shall have to take into consideration the wishes of the new Bishop and especially of my health. The absence of a resident priest in my milieu could quickly turn me into the "unofficial pastor," but this responsibility would be beyond my capacity.

### **Canonical Obligations**

Canon law stipulates very little concerning bishops emeriti: the phenomenon hardly goes further back than Vatican Council II. "A bishop whose resignation from office has been accepted, acquires the title 'emeritus' of his diocese. If he so wishes, he may have a certain residence in the diocese unless, because of special circumstances in certain cases, the Apostolic See provides otherwise. The Episcopal conference must ensure that suitable and worthy provision is made for the upkeep of a Bishop who has resigned, bearing in mind the primary obligation which falls on the diocese which he served. Regarding suitable and worthy subsistence, canon 402§ 2 is to be observed, unless the religious community of the bishop provides for it." At Charlesbourg, the local and provincial superiors, and the superior general have all invited me to come back to the Eudists. However, after a brief rest period, will the apostolic work offered me be enough? And will all the ties that have bound me to the local population be maintained?

### **The Will of God**

As Saint John Eudes has trained us to wholeheartedly obey to God's will, you can be assured that during these days and years of discernment I shall constantly pray to know and accomplish God's will in all things. Just like Saint Paul towards the end of his life, I leave you all "to the grace of God."

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