



### **From A Bishop's Journal (783)**

#### **Welcome, Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I.**

**I**t is with joy and gratitude to God that I welcomed the news of Bishop Claude Champagne's new appointment as sixth bishop of Edmundston, who gladly accepted the Holy Father's request, I am certain, however, that he also feels sad about leaving the faithful of the archdiocese of Halifax, and those of Yarmouth in particular. He is not the first Oblate to take on a major position in the diocese of Edmundston. As early as April 21, 1946, Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M., announced the inauguration of closed retreats. Between September of that year and September of 1971, 62 Oblates of Mary Immaculate, fathers and brothers, were involved in directing and animating retreats in which over 60,000 people participated. Seventy retreats were given every year at Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur retreat house that became, in 1971, the Edmundston Diocesan Centre. The protection of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, whose statue stands by the diocesan centre, will continue to be present to Bishop Champagne who comes to us as we are fully into the new evangelisation he himself launched, last September.

#### **106 Sticks of Dynamite!**

For the last six years, the diocesan pastoral ministry team has been working on an action plan that is compatible with the pastoral priority. This year, 106 projects related to catechetics and adult faith education, youth and family ministry, liturgy, vocation ministry, and pastoral restructuring were inventoried: These are like sticks of dynamite in each of the vital fields of endeavour. Some of the projects are like leaven in the dough, while others will be major remodelling in many phases. Examples of this are Expo-Jeunesse and the coming of singer Gregory Charles and his choir, January 31, 2009. Then there are the hundred of catechetical teams, and the liturgy teams preparing the Lenten and Easter programmes, and we can well imagine the future of social ministry in our respective milieus. With all of these together, we are confronted with dynamic forces that call us together. In his kindness, the Lord has made it that Bishop Champagne was with us in September, to light all these fuses!

#### **New Workers**

What was exciting to me in all this, and what especially touched Bishop Claude were not only the projects but first and foremost the persons who voluntarily, in response to their baptismal call, committed themselves to the cause of Christ and his Church, to become involved in some aspect of these activities. Thanks to the generosity of these baptised, ours is a vibrant Church, it is the

organisation that has the greatest number of volunteers, in our region. There are hundreds in our parishes who respond to the Lord's invitation through their pastoral leaders: choirs, Development and Peace committees, catechists, home visitors, sick ministry and ministry to the grieving, baptism preparation, penance preparation, marriage preparation, etc. According to the grace received, every baptised person is called to offer his or her talents to the community.

## **A Challenged and Challenging Church**

This year when we have adopted the theme "Meeting Jesus Christ on my Journey," the members of our pastoral ministry teams and of the different diocesan and parish committees were invited to take a few moments in prayer and reflection, at their meetings. It would be a good opportunity for them to share with the others how they have encountered Jesus Christ, and how this encounter was for them a call to follow him in one or the other states of life, celibacy, marriage, religious life, or the priesthood... In my third book, *Au jardin de Dieu reconnaissons ses appels*, I marvelled at the depth of the testimonies received from couples about how they met or are meeting Jesus Christ, of religious and priests who have written their vocation stories, of single people telling us why they remain single for the kingdom of God. From these testimonies or voluntary "confidences" can arise wonderful projects. The first Christian communities took the time to recall the wonders that the Lord had worked among them. The community can be challenging when it has become aware of being challenged itself. It is the same for every baptised person: one can challenge, when there has been awareness of being challenged oneself. Vocation ministry is not reserved for future priests and religious sisters, but it is open to every baptised who is aware of his or her baptismal call or the challenge of confirmation. "What can I do with the gift of the call I have received?"

## **"Witnesses" Wanted**

The catechetical journey can be the ideal place to meet Jesus Christ, just like our celebrations can be. I would be worried about a meeting, a catechesis or a celebration not being an opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ, because he says that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, he is there with them. This is certainly the first criterion of every good pastoral activity, meeting, and celebration: Has this activity given me the opportunity to meet Jesus Christ? Did I really meet him? Did I recognise Jesus Christ, in the poor that I met? Why not invite a priest, a seminarian, a sister, a lay person, to tell us how they really feel committed to the cause of Jesus Christ, in their social, religious, economic and even political activity? These are very important "vocation seeds," for a parish community.

## **Wishes**

As Bishop Claude Champagne has reminded us that "the Kingdom of God is already growing in our midst" and that "the Holy Spirit always goes before us in our activities," I wish him much happiness in our beloved Church of Edmundston: The new evangelisation has begun, with its joys and challenges. As we meet Jesus on our journey we shall realise that he truly has the words of life everlasting: *Verba vitae aeternae habes* (Bishop Champagne's motto).

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

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