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## PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE DIOCESE

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On February 1, the Committee studying the pastoral and financial situation of the Diocese of Edmundston - whose mandate has been extended to Easter - chaired by Mr. Carmel Caouette, presented a first report. The committee's mandate has been extended to Easter. This is a preliminary report, but one to be seriously considered since the forecast is that in the year 2000 there will be only one priest per three parishes - this, according to Fr. Armand Plourde, sub-committee chairman. "In the near future, certain parishes will no longer be able to count on a resident priest, hence the need for teams of priests ministering to several parishes." This implies that if we are to consider the welfare of the 60,000 members of the diocese as a whole, we shall have to work even more closely together at both parish and deanery levels.

### URGENT SOLUTIONS

There are actually twenty diocesan priests and five religious priests ministering in the diocese's 33 parishes. As of now there are nine parishes without a resident priest; sisters and pastoral agents look after the animating and administration of the parish. The pastoral council becomes indispensable, in responding to the needs of the entire community. "Each parish must begin now the process of selecting and training of pastoral agents, in order to close the gap caused by the actual and future lack of priests. Teams of priests and lay people must be formed within each deanery in order to establish sacramental preparation programmes."

### TRAINING OF PASTORAL AGENTS

Within this context of dwindling numbers of priests, the preliminary report stresses the immediate training of pastoral agents in order to ensure the smooth functioning of our Christian communities. The School of Faith renders important services at the level of deepening one's understanding of the Word of God; still, it is important that a real Centre of Pastoral Training be set up, where candidates would be trained in family, catechetical, social, or other forms of ministry. Special care would be paid to those who would desire the priesthood: "... that a team composed of priests and lay people be established to welcome young people interested in the priesthood and to discern their vocation with them and affirm them in it." This is a call to the entire diocesan community to actively and prayerfully support those who are called to serve their brothers and sisters.

### REGROUPING OF PRIESTS

Two proposals on the regrouping of priests: "So as to favour and encourage the spirit and formation of teams of priests in the diocese, [it is recommended] that the priests of Edmundston and Grand Falls be the first to be grouped together in a central rectory"; [and] "that the regrouping of priests of the other parishes be done progressively, taking into consideration the local mentality." Most positive experiences have already been made at the Cathedral rectory, at Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs, and at Saint Quentin.

### PRECARIOUS FINANCIAL SITUATION

The sub-committee on the financial situation, chaired by Mr. Rino Nadeau, presented charts based on the past five years of operation; these charts indicate the precarious situation of parishes and of the diocese as a whole. If two

or three parishes have higher revenues because of the greater number of practising parishioners, most parishes have to perform a difficult balancing act in their profit and loss departments. The economic recession has affected the entire financial structure, and it is difficult to get over it. That is why the Study Committee calls for extreme prudence and asks that "a moratorium be decreed on all new major repairs and constructions; that every project whose cost exceeds \$15,000.00 be submitted for study and approval by the Bishop and his Council for Economic Affairs." Strong support is also given to the formation, in each parish, of a council for economic affairs to be established before January 1, 1996. A number of persons have already been approached for this, and they agree to volunteer their services.

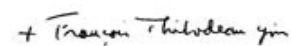
## THE DIOCESAN CENTRE

On the diocesan level, the last three years have been marked by a deficit average about \$70,000.00 per year; at this rate, we could not hold on for longer than seven years! Major decisions must be taken. One of the most challenging preliminary recommendations has to do with the Diocesan Centre: "That the Diocesan Centre be sold in the next few months, if it cannot meet its own operating expenses." Since 1971, this former retreat house houses the bishop's residence, the diocesan offices, and the Spiritual Renewal Centre. Through that years it has become the "family house" where many people of the diocese have come for renewal and to meet one another. Happy is the diocese that has such an arrangement! This is what we would wish for, if we didn't have one! But for the last five years, the rate of rental of the diocesan facilities has dropped from 68 % to 12 %.. Where are they now, the groups that held their sessions and meetings there: La Rencontre, Marriage Encounter, Rencontre-Fiancés, Charismatic Renewal, Week-End Jeunesse, etc.? What caused their departure from the Centre? Is it that these groups are disappearing? Would it be more appropriate to have shorter sessions in different deaneries?... God knows that pastoral activities are not what brings in the greatest revenues, but the members of the Study Committee recommend that our centre be put up for sale in the next few months, if it cannot meet its own expenses... This must concern us deeply. Is it possible to do better more quickly? Is it possible that organisations, groups, generous benefactors, businessmen and women volunteer their support on an annual basis to guarantee either the financial survival of the Spiritual Renewal Centre, or ensure the funds necessary to operate the diocese's pastoral activities?

## NEW DIRECTIONS

According to whether the Diocesan Centre is kept or not, the bishop's residence and the diocesan offices have to be taken into consideration. If the Centre were sold - hopefully not! - the diocesan offices would eventually have to be relocated in one of the city's rectories, according to the Committee members, and a private residence could be established for the bishop. I must tell you that if it were possible to maintain what we now have, my first choice would certainly be to keep the Diocesan Centre which seems to me to be most useful for the animating and administering of the Church of Edmundston. But how do we administer without an annual deficit? And how ensure pastoral activities? I know that in the past people of the diocese have always proved to be most generous regarding the Church. I am assured of this, that together we shall find short- and middle-term solutions to this...

Have a good week!



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

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