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## REVALUING THE SUNDAY GATHERING

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### Document 1

#### A PRICELESS HERITAGE

When I succeeded Bishop Gerard Dionne as bishop of Edmundston, I inherited the 279 duly adopted Recommendations of the 1987-1990 Diocesan Synod, 145 recommendations from the French Sector and 134 from the English Sector. These Recommendations were like a summary of all the studies and reflections carried out with the guidance of the Holy Spirit by the entire Edmundston Diocese Church. It is in a spirit of faith that I want to join you in paying heed to what the Holy Spirit is trying to say to our Church: So many pastoral experiences are contained in these Recommendations. Published immediately in 1990, these Recommendations had an immediate real impact because they comprise the principal directions of the diocesan pastoral approach. But for these Recommendations to become Church law and bind members of the diocese, they must first be sanctioned by the bishop. In his usual wisdom, my predecessor deemed it important to allow a period of grace between the date of publication of these Recommendations and their being formulated in [canonically] legal terms. During this grace period have occurred the changes you have already experienced, notably the appointment of a new bishop. In the course of my episcopal ministry in your midst I shall have to periodically refer to these Recommendations and formulate certain laws, if pastoral exigencies require it.

#### THREE LEGISLATIONS

Hence, after consulting not only with diocesan councils but also with parish heads and their councils, I signed and promulgated on November 10 three new pastoral statutes that are to become law, one on the First Sunday of Advent, 1995, and the other two on January 1, 1996. Today I want to share with you the statute on revaluing the Sunday gathering. In subsequent Journal offerings I shall talk about the other two statutes regarding the necessity and obligation for every parish to have a parish pastoral council and a parish committee for economic affairs. I want to thank all those who took part in the drawing up of this legislation, especially these people who somehow had the intuition on the real risk of our Sundays turning into any other weekday, and that our traditional Sunday gatherings be left aside. Numerous initiatives have already been undertaken in support of this revaluing of our Sunday gatherings. Today I call on the parish as a whole, on the entire diocese to give back to Sunday the full significance it must have for us who make up the People of God and who believe in the great and marvellous event of the Resurrection of Jesus. In our Sunday gatherings we are already proclaiming the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and we await his return. Here then is the *Statute on Revaluing the Sunday Gathering*.

#### LEGAL BASIS

The Statute is based on the following twelve points: The resurrection of Jesus comprises the central element of our profession of faith; Through Baptism we become members of the People of God, a prophetic, royal, and priestly people; The celebration of the Lord's Day by a Sunday gathering is a major element of the Christian tradition; Vatican Council II focused once again on the celebration of the Day of the Lord; There is actually a very real risk of trivialising Sundays; Revaluing the Sunday gathering implies revaluing the Day of the Lord;

The Edmundston Diocesan Synod strongly recommended that the Day of the Lord be revalued, that celebrations not take place before 6:00 P.M. Saturday evenings, that the number of celebrations should be cut, and that the quality of celebrations should take precedence over quantity or number; The multiplicity of celebrations contributes to the splintering of the community and to a loss of the meaning of Sunday and of belonging to the People of God; The Church cannot live without the Sunday and must show itself to be a community that gathers together to celebrate; In my pastoral letters of May 21, 1994, and June 4, 1995, I personally strongly insisted on revaluing Sundays; Whereas last spring members of the priests' senate, the diocesan pastoral council, and the bishop's council have unanimously approved the following decisions, it belongs to the bishop to specify certain general laws.

## **SUNDAY GATHERING**

Therefore, as Bishop of Edmundston, I publish the present pastoral statute, notwithstanding any other prior legislation: 1) *In the Diocese of Edmundston, only those Masses that take place after 6:00 P.M. on Saturday are to be considered Sunday Masses.* 2) *The number as well as the hour of celebrations shall be periodically revised in each deanery so as to promote to the fullest the Sunday gathering, respond to the people's pastoral needs, and take into account the priests' situation.* 3) *Sunday celebrations shall generally take place at the parish church.* 4) *Celebrations in places such as senior citizens' or nursing homes, or camp sites are to be held during the week only; nevertheless, for pastoral motives or special reasons, with the express permission of the parish priest and the return of offerings received during these celebrations to the parish which will see to the payment of expenses incurred; care shall be exercised that these celebrations not take place to the detriment of the parish Sunday gathering.* 5) *Communities and institutions having their own mandated chaplain may continue to have Sunday Mass, although care shall be taken that the celebration not take place to the detriment of the Sunday gathering.* 6) *In general, neither funerals nor weddings are to take place on Sundays; if they are celebrated though, for exceptional reasons, these celebrations would be integrated into the day's liturgy, or else an appropriate liturgy of the word would be held.* 7) *Care shall be taken that Sunday celebrations be meaningful, beautiful, and accessible for participation by all; two extremes are to be avoided: choir concerts, and the absence of all singing; each celebration, even during the summer, must be well prepared by the liturgy committee: fraternal welcome, appropriate signing, consistent homily.*

*This present Statute, prepared and promulgated at Edmundston November 10, 1995, takes effect the First Sunday of Advent 1995.*

*+ François Thibodeau*

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

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