
THE NOTRE-DAME-DU-SACRÉ-COEUR CHURCH



By the time these words reach you, Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur Parish [In Edmundston] will have held a general meeting. For this reason I want to share with you the letter I wrote to the parishioners on April 9. On Wednesday, April 15, the Diocesan Council for Economic Affairs will hold its regular meeting.

IMPORTANT STEPS

On the occasion of the meeting you are to hold on Sunday, April 13, 1997 on the future of your parish, I first want to assure you of my prayers: May the Holy Spirit be with you to guide your discussions and be part of the recommendations which I request you to submit to your pastor and the members of your parish pastoral council. Secondly, I would like to clarify a few things regarding the steps already undertaken.

There have been numerous hearings on the future of your parish, over the years, especially due to the shortage of available priests, the low proportion of people involved in the parish's religious functions, and the parish's shaky financial situation. In 1995, the creation of the diocesan seminary to which is especially close to my heart, put the issue on the back burner for a while. Last fall, I asked the pastor - as I did to all the other parish communities in the diocese - to discuss with his parish pastoral council and economic affairs committee what they saw as the state of the parish in the next five years. Two concrete offers to buy the property in early 1997 accelerated the consultation and decision process.

If some discretion is called for so as not to give rise to unjustified interpretations, I still had to ensure that the different stages were properly reached.

On February 20 I called a meeting of the members of all the diocesan councils: Bishop's Council, Priests' Senate, Diocesan Council of Pastoral Ministry, College of Consultors, Diocesan Council for Economic Affairs. The object of this emergency meeting was to ensure myself of the solidarity of all these councillors in major decisions to be made regarding offers made and steps to be taken. Legally speaking, the Corporation of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Edmundston has only one member: the bishop legitimately recognised by the Holy See. Nevertheless, this bishop is bound by wise and prudent rules that are codified by Church legislation and adapted to our country's conditions. The unanimous counsel I have received in this important consultation will guide the decisions that I ultimately are mine to make.

Just as on the municipal level the mayor must ensure that counsel at every level concerned has had a voice, so must the parish and diocesan organisms concerned - parish economic affairs committee, parish pastoral council, duly convened parish general meeting on this particular question - be allowed to voice their opinions. After having heard the counsel of these groups I shall need the counsel of the Diocesan Council for Economic Affairs before signing an eventual formal agreement with the City of Edmundston. I have forwarded a copy of this proposed agreement to your pastor, the agreement sent to me on Tuesday, April 8, 1997. According to results obtained I shall have to ask the counsel of the Priests' Senate, according to norms established by Canon Law. This is therefore a long and demanding consultation process, but one that I plan on following closely. Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur church is not yet sold, steps are being taken one at a time according to plan.

It is now your turn to make known your opinion on whether or not to accept the offer made by the City of Edmundston, bearing in mind the short- and long-term pastoral and financial consequences. This is not an easy question to consider, since we are dealing here with a beloved religious heritage and an uncertain future which we nonetheless have to keep on building.

May the Risen Jesus who gathers us as a Church continue to bring us his peace. Above all, may love keep us united: persons are still more important than buildings, however venerable these buildings may be. Be assured of my prayers for you and my respectful feelings for you all.

DIOCESAN CENTRE

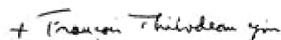
If Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur is not sold yet, the Diocesan Centre is even less so. It would be very difficult to find elsewhere what the Diocesan Centre actually represents and groups together: an outstanding site, numerous conveniences, a solid building, easy access, availability of meeting rooms and bedrooms, etc. I would be very happy to continue my living and ministry from there; several people from the diocese have expressed the wish that above all else the Diocesan Centre be maintained. In a letter to be sent out to its members, the Group of One Thousand states that not only does it want to maintain and develop the diocesan services but that it instantly wishes to maintain the Diocesan Centre.

We are pleased to write to thank you once again for your generous gift to the Diocese of Edmundston. Thanks to you and to more than 600 others, during our first year of existence, donations totalled \$66,108.00. This is a quite considerable amount when we consider that requests for donations are addressed to us from every quarter. We did not reach our objective of \$100,000.00, but we believe that we shall soon be able to do so. This contribution is of the greatest importance for the life of the Church, and it is also a privilege to take part in this vast undertaking.

We are once again calling on your generosity: your gift will help in maintaining and developing our diocesan services. True, steps have already been taken for the sale of the Centre and the restructuring of our services for the best possible use of our financial resources and buildings, but we can say that as of now there has been no major change to the 1996 diocesan situation. If changes do occur, it is our hope that the eventual revenue be used for the setting up of pastoral services that are best suited to our spiritual needs.

PASTORAL WISDOM

The proposed changes cannot take place overnight, or be the consequence of rapid decision. As the one who must strive, as an administrator, maintain a balanced yearly budget, as pastor I must ensure that the decisions I must make respond to the spiritual and pastoral needs of our people. These are trying times, but I am assured that with the aid of your prayers and the presence of divine Wisdom among us, we shall be able to pick up the challenges now confronting us. I am deeply indebted to all those who tirelessly devote themselves to our Church. Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (169) (16 April 1997)