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## THE FUTURE OF PARISHES

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We have good reason to give thanks to the Lord for the four new priests He has given our diocesan Church, in recent years. However, to human eyes these four cannot compensate for the number of priests who have died or who are retired. If until quite recently parish direction and administration rested for the most part in the hands of the parish priest, today we must accept the challenge of the new situations we are experiencing. We shall need the courage of new beginnings and an optimistic view of the future of our Church. I mentioned in one of my recent "Journal" messages regarding the founding of St. Patrick Parish that at the time of foundation of Assumption Parish in Grand Falls (1860), there were only seven diocesan priests for the entire northern part of New Brunswick, for the whole of the new diocese of Chatham. In the weeks and months to come we shall have to decide on the pastoral restructuring necessary, considering the number of priests and pastoral agents available; this will require us to make difficult decisions so that through the setting up of new structures and services we be able to continue to be signs of the presence of Jesus in the midst of our world. "And you, how do you consider the present and future of our Church so that it become, for coming generations, a sign of the presence of Jesus at the threshold of the new millennium?"

### SOCIO-POLITICAL COMMITMENT

At the onset of his papal ministry, Pope John Paul II urged us not to be afraid and to open our doors to Jesus: "*Open! Open wide the doors to Christ! Open up the borders of countries, the economic and political systems, the enormous sectors of culture, civilisation, and development to his power of salvation.*" Are we sufficiently aware that our social, cultural, and economic commitments are extraordinary places where the presence of God is at work? Thus in electoral campaigns, whether they be municipal, provincial, or federal, it is possible for us to pave the way for Jesus. "And you, what door are you opening to Jesus, at the heart of the events lived by our society?"

### AT THE HEART OF OUR DECISIONS

It was in a spirit of fellowship that I wanted to share these convictions and questions with you: the conviction that the Risen Jesus is truly the Word of God, Good News of the Father; the conviction that the Risen Jesus is really in the midst of people and communities, at the heart of sacraments and events. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, it is in faith that we can discover this presence and recognise The Living One. I have also shared with you some of my questionings: in small groups, in parish communities, it will be important to find answers to them. Fidelity to Jesus induces us to carry out today what he himself would do: here again it is with faith in the Risen Jesus that we walk towards the future. Just as there are many rooms in the Father's house, I believe that there are many avenues leading to Jesus who called himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

At the end of this pastoral letter I share with you a hymn I composed in the context of vocation ministry activities. By choosing one or another of these paths may we, through the Holy Spirit, encounter The Living One in the midst of our world!

*We want to free humankind  
And lead it to the Father.  
We want to travel with Jesus.*

*Perhaps the road to Bethlehem, the glory of God, the promised peace;  
Perhaps the road to Nazareth, manual labour and the happiness of the poor;  
This road is the call of Jesus.*

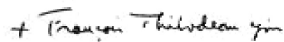
*Perhaps the road to Jacob's well, Messiah and people, and living water.  
Perhaps the Mount of Transfiguration, the dazzling Son, the pitched tent;  
This road is the call of Jesus.*

*Perhaps the road to the Upper Room, washing of feet and love sought;  
Perhaps the road to Golgotha, the raised cross and the blood shed;  
This road is the call of Jesus.*

*Perhaps the road to Emmaus, hope regained and Friend recognised;  
Perhaps the road to Galilee, death overturned, Christ raised up;  
This road is the call of Jesus.*

Through these suggestive verses may we, through the Spirit of Pentecost, recognise the Risen Jesus and follow him. May this year dedicated to him be truly an encounter with him. May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, help us discover how *the love of God is from age to age*.

Solidarity and blessings in the Lord.



+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

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