
INAUGURATING THE 1997-1998 PASTORAL YEAR



In the forthcoming weeks I would like to brief you on the meeting of the diocesan pastoral ministry team and the deanery chairpersons with the members of the Bishop's Council. The meeting was held at Clair on Wednesday August 27, to inaugurate the 1997-1998 pastoral year.

A BOLD LOOK

The object of the meaning was to look lucidly and boldly, in the light of the Gospel, at our diocesan Church, on the deaneries and the diocesan services. Should we describe this as taking an objective view? Some may doubt it, but it would be to their own disadvantage. As you will see, it is like casting a loving glance on one's spouse or on one's own family. The Church of Edmundston is first of all a grouping of some 60,000 persons in thirty-two parishes in five deaneries making up one diocese, a precious portion of the People of God.

« AND YOU, WHAT DO YOU SAY OF THE CHURCH? »

Just as Jesus one day asked his disciples, « *But you, who do you say that I am?* » [John 16:15] so is the same question being asked of us today, and so will it still be asked tomorrow. This process will lead us to specify at least the general pastoral directions for our diocesan Church, if not its pastoral priorities. Priests and lay people, pastoral agents, religious priests, brothers, and sisters can all, in their own encounters with others, genuinely share together regarding this vital subject. If we wish to achieve greater perfection, if we wish to dialogue in truth with the world, this 'conscience' of the Edmundston Diocese Church is essential. In the words of the Third Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions, we can earnestly say, in a spirit of solidarity: « *Keep your Church alert in faith to the signs of the times and eager to accept the challenge of the Gospel. Open our hearts to the needs of all, so that sharing their grief and anguish, their joy and hope, we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation and advance together on the way to your kingdom.* »

POSITIVE ASPECTS

If you carefully read the messages which the Spirit of the Risen Lord writes to the first Christian Churches, in the Book of Revelation, you will quickly uncover not only the praises that are addressed to them but also the criticism, the necessary corrections to be made and this, out of concern for fidelity to the Gospel and a profound desire for conversion. Today I share with you the positive points in these letters, points that we would like to keep and reinforce in the years to come; next week I shall share with you those points we have marked as urgently needing improvement.

WORD, PRAYER, AND MISSION

Our Church is first and foremost a Church of the Word, a Church of prayer and mission. The Church is convened by the Word of God, it is in the midst of the Church that we hear this word of life as it is brought into our homes, our

gatherings, our catechetical and apostolic activities. This life of faith, hope, and charity is supported by earnest prayer. And we rejoice for all these prayers coming from our communities, families, hospitals and health care facilities. Our Church strives to carry out her mission here and in other countries. From the very first, each Christian community endeavoured to pass on its new-found faith to its neighbours. Within our deaneries the feeling is growing that there is greater pastoral, social, and intercommunity solidarity. We sense more deeply the consideration, the availability, adaptability, the desire to contribute to a quality ongoing formation, of the diocesan services staff for the diocese as a whole. All of this is motive for praise: « *We praise you, Lord, for your life-giving Word, for prayer that sustains it, and for the concern it has to carry out its mission task.* »

EAGERNESS AND DARING

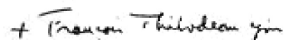
Realising the evident vitality of our Church - as evidenced from all that we have learned from the many organisations, associations and groups at the time of the awarding of the Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy Prize - we detect that from day to day, week after week and year after year there exists an eagerness and a daring that could be the envy of many other groups and organisations. There is growing interest in the different religious and social events taking place, as we discover the presence of the Risen One in the midst of our lives. There is growing close collaboration between Christian communities. And here, too, we say: « *We bless the Lord for his loving gaze upon each member of the Church, for the growing closeness of the Church to her people, for the enriching presence of the Good Shepherd who leads us to appreciate the Church.* »

LIFE, WELCOME, PRIDE

Our Church is to us a community of life signed with creativeness, a place where it is good to abide. Its smaller scale allows one to feel alive, here, and there is pride at belonging to it, coupled with the will to serve one's brothers and sisters, especially the needy. « *We praise the Lord for our small Church that wishes to grow in fidelity to the Gospel.* »

SOLIDARITY AND FORMATION

With hope that this solidarity continue to grow among all pastors, pastoral agents and ministers, the deanery chairpersons and the members of the Diocesan Centre team wish to pursue the beautiful work of formation already undertaken both at the parish, deanery, and diocesan levels. Periods of continued and diversified formation are a must if we are to be up to the challenges made to a Church that is present to the new millennium. The School of Faith, the Pastoral Formation Service, the Office of Pastoral Service, the Spirituality Centre, the Diocesan Catechetical Office, the sacramental preparation committees must continue the good work undertaken. Faced with the implication of so many in their communities, and because of a growing taking in charge of their own milieu, and because of the innumerable services rendered daily, « *We forever bless the Lord for the life beating within the heart of our Church.* » Have a good week!



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Bishop of Edmundston

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