
INAUGURATING THE 1997-1998 PASTORAL YEAR (3)



On August 20 the diocesan pastoral team and the deanery chairmen met with the Bishop's Council to look at the situation of our diocesan Church. Last week I wrote about the positive points made, which we want to actively follow on. This week I am sharing with you those important points which were indicated as urgently needing improvement. The reflection such as we made at our meeting will also be carried out at the deanery and parish levels in the months to come. You too will be invited to point out those areas needing improvement.

SOLIDARITY

How do we preserve and strengthen solidarity, throughout our Church? The creation of parish pastoral councils has become a source of solidarity, in most of our parishes. Monthly deanery meetings have been catalysts for much favourable dialogue. Could we not, then, go on to a new stage? For the past two years, meetings between parish pastoral councils and their deanery have proven to be most fruitful. Is it too much to hope that in each deanery priests, pastoral agents, and CPPs meet regularly and frequently so as to better respond to the spiritual and pastoral needs of their people? Regularity in attending these meetings, adequate attention to topics brought up for discussion, sincere prayer, and ties with the people in the deanery are all pledges of a successful endeavour.

FORMATION

Our Church is blessed with numerous resources for ongoing formation. We can count on the École de la Foi, the Pastoral Formation Service, the diocesan services and the many parish-bound preparation teams [for baptism, marriage...], and community groups that offer high-quality sessions and workshops. In a few weeks a very dynamic Pastoral Agent Formation Programme will be launched for the benefit of our anglophone brothers and sisters. Each year, the winter pastoral session allows one to deepen one's understanding of some aspect of the Christian life. Retreats and congresses are there to help us shed light on our Christian undertaking. These programmes will be continued if response to them continues to be positive.

MISSION

By calling on us to go out to meet others on their own turf, the diocesan services and the deaneries are attempting to rekindle our mission spirit. We shall have to be very resourceful, here, but we already have the means to do so: All that is needed is for us to reach out to others where they are, to encounter them in their own life experiences... As much as possible, accepting every invitation made. Opportunities for this do not lack: births, weddings, sickness, mourning. It is not a matter of meddling in other people's affairs but of expressing our solidarity and friendship, our presence and openness to them. Sure, there are difficulties to overcome; each one has his or her own culture and personal experience. But our diocese is like a big family, and it will be relatively easy to find opportunities for journeying together.

COURAGE AND CREATIVENESS

Two words always seemed to crop up, at our meeting: courage and creativeness. Very dynamic words. Courage to deeply live our baptism, creativeness to meet others where they are. To become once more as courageous as our forebears. In his *Histoire du Madawaska*, Father Thomas Albert writes: « *It is by remaining faithful to her glorious past that the Madawaska region will live. It is by being master of its own household that it will be respected by its neighbours.* » These words were written in 1921, and they express the pride we must have in one another, pride in the vitality welling up within us, and in the noble ideal that must continue to inspire us. If we look around and take in everything that has been created or invented in the course of this century, we can infer that we shall continue on with the same creativeness. The changes wrought in our Church should help our faith, hope, and charity, to grow. There may even be other changes that we have not yet dared to implement... Aren't the 400-odd recommendations of the Edmundston Diocesan Synod there in order to help us make our beloved Church more vibrant, more beautiful, and more zealous?

PARISH RENEWAL

In the months to come, each PPC, deanery, and diocesan office will be requested to find those means that are the most conducive to reaching out to the baptised people of our Church. We can do this through the mass media, radio, community television, and even the Internet, as well as through those simple means still at hand, such as the telephone, neighbourly visits, and the parish bulletin. The means are there, all we need to do is employ them. Reasons for celebrating together are not lacking, either, and they allow us to reach people of all ages. Community meals, brunches, and pot luck suppers make for wonderful opportunities to share together in all simplicity and solidarity. It is not rare for these meals to take place on a monthly basis. Together we shall find ways to help revitalise our communities, with respect for everyone.

A SONG

At the end of the inauguration of the 1997-1998 pastoral year I would like to offer you a song I composed with Fr. Armand Chouinard:

Together we enthusiastically build together the Kingdom of Jesus.

We shall lovingly build together the Kingdom of Jesus.

Together we pray, in the midst of the world,

Together we pray to the Lord-among-us.

Together we are bearers of the Good News.

Together we are bearers of peace, love, and joy.

Together we make up the new Church.

Together we form the Kingdom of God.

+ François Thibodeau ym

+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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