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## THE FUTURE OF OUR DIOCESE (2)

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We continue this week with excerpts from the summary of the February Pastoral Ministry session. The following reviews what Father Gilles Routhier had to say about the future of our parishes.

We must not think that parishes are a thing of the past. Here, one must avoid two pitfalls: that of steadfastly insisting on maintaining all parishes forever, or setting everything aside and starting over from scratch. In the diocese of Edmundston there are only about ten parishes in thirty-two that are over one hundred years old: this means that parishes have not always been there, that things used to be different. At the time opening parishes was the best way of living the mission. We would be bad inheritors if we did not work on our forebears' intuition. We must do as they did and find the best means for today. There is one risk: to maintain some kind of heroic position in supporting parishes with all of one's strength; this would direct energies to maintaining a formula that is not necessarily good. We would quickly experience a dwindling of strength by holding on to a formula that no longer works, while our energies should be used in ensuring the spread of the Gospel in our midst.

### THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

- How are our activities and organisations reaching and serving them? - What would we need to have, in order to reach the people? - What must we do, to make the Emmanuel present to them? - How are they affected by what we are actually doing? - To those priests who say that they are overburdened: Go through your calendar and cancel 25% of your activities. There are four ways of doing this: a) cancel all activities that do not serve the mission; b) cancel everything that could be done by others in your parish; c) carefully consider everything you are doing which could be done with others; d) look at everything there is, which could be the object of inter-parish collaboration - Look at the people: Who are we reaching? Who aren't we reaching? - Look at your calendar, your agenda, and your activities: Remember that the mission is not to be identified with our activities.

### REVIVING THE CHURCH

The aim is not to manage the decline but to set up a new dynamic, a new stimulus to push the Church forward. The task of restructuring is not an administrative measure but a project in which we shall all have a part to play. If we do not refocus on the mission, pastoral restructuring to the contrary, we shall see the group shrink and shrivel up, and that is a paralysing situation. When badly directed, readjustments can lead to paralysis, and this cannot inspire anyone. What will give new vigour will be your looking after the people. It is energising, to serve God and others, while patching up is a pretty discouraging exercise. We want to live in a Church with vision and life, and not in one over whose decline we are presiding. What do we do for the power of the Spirit to act? What new initiatives and organisations must be initiated in order to liberate the Gospel? Pruning is a life-long task, for the sake of strengthening the tree. It would be looking the wrong way to say, "There are fewer priests, so we shall replace them with lay people." This would just be a continuation of existing conditions, and real pastoral readjustments will not have been made.

## NOT A SERVICE STATION

If we do not consider the mission, others will do it for us. The Church will be seen as a service, as distributor of rites when needed. People are used to grand public services: people sometimes come to the rectory according to their needs. But our parishes are more than a public service. It is the Father who sends His Son and His Spirit. It would be to marginalise the Church if we were to consider it as a dispenser of rites. What's the Church for, in our society? It is there to proclaim the Good News. The parish enterprise is based on the Gospel. One must not confuse the means (the parish) with the end (the mission). What is basic is the mission.

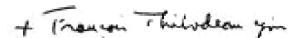
## PARISH STYLES

A synod in France stated that "The parish is to be closed where there are fewer than forty practising families. "A parish - all of Christian life for all" - has two characteristics: a) it has everything needed for Christian living, and b) it is for everyone. And this requires many people and more energy than most other groups of people. Our aim should not be to "parish-ise" all Christian groups, because it would lead to their demise. At first we used to say that it would really be bad if a parish stopped being one. It would destroy the existing group. Today we are saying the opposite. Ask anyone whose energies are drained, to keep a parish going, and you will quickly see how this can bring down the entire church community structure. It is often like giving oxygen to a milieu when it is given the demanding mandate of becoming a parish.

## A SESSION PARTICIPANT'S PRAYER

*« Come, Lord Jesus! Let us proclaim your return! In this year especially consecrated to you, O Holy Spirit, bring us a new vitality. Renew us in prayer and help us enter more deeply into intimacy with Christ Jesus. May prayer well from our hearts like water from a spring! May we all have the same missionary spirit, the same desire to build up the Kingdom. 'Father, may they be one.' And may the Father's will be done in us. May tensions and conflicts melt before you, and may peace gain a solid footing in our hearts. In seeing us, may others be able to say, 'See how they love one another!' O Holy Spirit, may our beloved diocese be in the image of the Beloved! »*

Have a good week!



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