
THE FUTURE OF OUR DIOCESE (4)



« Various types of ministry are necessary for the implanting and growth of the Christian community, and once these forms of service have been called forth from the body of the faithful, by the divine call, they are to be carefully fostered and nurtured by all. Among these functions are those of priests, deacons and catechists, and also that of Catholic Action. Brothers and nuns, likewise, play an indispensable role in planting and strengthening the kingdom of Christ in souls, and in the work of further extending it, both by their prayers and active work. »
[Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, No. 15]

MORE MINISTRIES

We are used to a Church based on only one ministry, that of the priest, and this has left its mark on us. When the number of priests is declining, there is a strong temptation on our part to replace them with another person and keep the 1950's model. But this is a far cry from St. Paul's teaching to the Corinthians regarding the Church-Body of Christ. All members must be active. It is important to actively involve everybody. The Church is not composed of only one person. (Cf. nos. 16 to 21 to the above-mentioned Vatican document)

NECESSARY MINISTRY OF THE LAITY

Let our starting point be the Church-as-Body and not the priest shortage, otherwise we are on the wrong track. The question is: How are we going to raise the quality of life of the Church body? and not: How are we going to replace the priest? It is necessary to foster a committed laity. We are sometimes too focused on our problems and not enough on the people. Who will do this or that? The laity are from their people. They also belong to Christ. Their main task is to witness to Christ in their own milieu. What is most needed in our milieus is a laity that belongs to Christ and which, through its social action, transforms its milieu and nurtures Christian values. This witness must be made by all the baptised, otherwise the Gospel and the Church become irrelevant. Through her children, the Church must be present in the world. Evangelisation will be made by Christians. The Church is a vast body, it is not composed of pastoral agents only.

PASTORAL AGENTS

What we must aim at is that the Church nevermore rest on the shoulders of only one person. The gifts of the Spirit are varied in number, and one person alone does not monopolise the Spirit. In a parish there are many and varied responsibilities. To replace a priest with a lay person may work for a while but it does not remedy the situation. Under the guise of modernity it is the most regressive solution. In this scenario there is no concern to diversify ministries, and the lay people are used as stop-gaps, as substitutes when we do not have any priests. This does not raise a lay person's self-worth, nor does it give the mission new impetus. It is both necessary and legitimate to have lay ministries, but to make of lay persons substitutes for priests is to short-change them, as it is a too short-term solution. From the moment a lay person exists only to the extent that there is a priest shortage, that lay person's status is no longer secure. The person exists only because of a lack, and this has been the cause of permanent conflicts between priests and lay people. Ministry must be based on something

more solid than this. If a status is based only on rivalry it causes permanent conflict rather than a desired partnership. How will that person's identity be defined? As a replacement for the priest who will never be there? A second rank minister. What is needed is a ministerial identity that is not based on substitution. Ministries are necessary because of their diversity. Each ministry must be specific to a certain extent. Priests are used to being the only ministers, and do not see this as being specific or limiting. No one should be allowed to say, "I do not need you." The priest is a member of the body, and he needs the others. Everyone must say, "I need the other." A necessary partnership, interdependence of ministries. All are needed, and indispensable.

NEW MINISTRIES

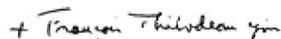
Starting from the viewpoint of mission, pastors of parishes in Ville d'Anjou, Québec, tried to find new ministries to respond to their milieu's current needs: family ministry, children ministry, ministry of support for catechist volunteers, for those fighting against poverty. These are critical ministries for the Church, and productive of self-worth. And this is what is needed in our Church, to tackle the problem from the viewpoint of mission rather than administration. But for this to happen we cannot work piecemeal at this, case by case, because it would just be a solution of substitution. If the starting point is the enlarged parish, there will be room for different ministries. We must promote the rise of the Church body. If a parish is composed of 6 different localities, it will be important for each one to have a core group, someone involved, for example, in the fellowship aspect, another, in the community's prayer life, another in religious education, etc. This core group or local pastoral team does not do all the work. This group needs the support of the parish pastoral team. One must work with the people who are there. Which lay ministries do we need in the pastoral team, to support local teams?

A PARTICIPANT'S PRAYER

« Lord, may those in charge of our parishes be more open to the restructuring, and may they calmly prepare the parishioners for the changes that are coming. Thank you, Lord, for also giving us the opportunity to share in this session, to make us aware of needed change. I ask you, Lord, to give to François, our chief pastor, the strength and courage to coordinate these changes in our diocese, and that he have the support and solidarity of the priests and lay people of the diocese. Amen. »

EDMUNDSTON DEANERY

As a follow-up to the February session, meetings will be held in each deanery. To begin with, in the Edmundston deanery members of the parish pastoral councils, liturgy committees, economic affairs committees, and parish committees of Immaculate Conception, Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs, Saint-Jacques, Saint-Joseph, Saint-Basile, Rivière-Verte and Sainte-Anne parishes are convened to a meeting to be held in the Godbout Community Hall (next to N.-D.-des-Sept-Douleurs Church) on Saturday, March 14, from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. The topic of the meeting will be the meaning of mission in restructuring. Father Roger Dionne, V.G., and Sister Claudette Ruest, S.M., will be the facilitators. Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau

Bishop of Edmundston

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