
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE DIOCESE OF EDMUNDSTON



One of my major concerns as bishop of Edmundston, and one which I want to share with our children's parents and teachers and with those in charge of our Christian communities is to ensure that our children and youth get a solid religious and moral formation, so that they may become, in the midst of our world, like leaven in the dough of healthy living, communion, and commitment to their Christian faith.

DIVERSITY OF SITUATIONS

If religious education models differ from one province to the next, it even varies in different parts of New Brunswick and even within our own diocese. For example, in the anglophone communities of Southern Victoria Deanery, the long-standing custom has been for each parish community to look after the children's religious education in Sunday Schools, for grades 1 to 9. In the Moncton and Bathurst dioceses, for the most part religious education is done at the parish level in close collaboration with parents and catechists; so far, this has produced good results. Here in our diocese, the French sector is moving more and more in the direction of parish-based religious education, due in part to the teachers' workload, the new socio-cultural context, and the little time given for this education. Where it is still dispensed in the local school, time given over to religious education varies from 15 to 40 minutes per week. Since 1870, and despite difficult circumstances, the public schools in [the French sector] ensured quality religious education to our children, but now we must look for other ways of responding to the demands of the day: truly meeting and responding with Jesus Christ to our children; a concerted effort at participation in the religious education programme by our entire community, excellence in education, and finding the appropriate, available time.

A PARTNERSHIP TO SECURE

Faced with these new situations, harmonious relations between parents, teachers, school principals, school district authorities, and pastoral personnel are indispensable to ensure tangible improvements as well as fundamental revisions. It seems essential to me that those who are the most implicated in this - the youth themselves, their parents, catechists, and pastors - take the time and the means to guarantee Catholic religious education in their milieu. This will require major sacrifices, both personal and community. There might be times when evenings and holidays which could be spent otherwise will have to be devoted to this venture. These changes do not imply the disappearance of religious education from our midst but a new way of listening to and deepening the Word of God. At this time we already have a number of parents who are teaching their children themselves, while others offer their home facilities where groups of 5 or 6 students who want to learn more about their Christian faith gather; still others meet for an hour each Saturday with a religious educator. If the contents are the same, the teaching approach may vary according to group needs and ages. In this way, where in Grade one the accent is on discovery of the marvellous work of God in His creation, the parents are invited to take time for a hike in the woods with their child, to discover the beauty of the forest, the rivers, and the plant life, and praise God our Creator with very simple words and gestures.

THE PARISH COMMUNITY

According to the new *General Catechetical Directory* of the Catholic Church, "*The Christian community is the origin, the place and the goal of catechesis. It is always from within the community that the proclamation of the*

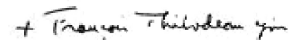
Gospel comes, to invite the men and women of our time to turn to and follow Christ. It is also this community that welcomes those who desire to learn about the Lord and to commit themselves to a new life." Just as every parish community has done for sacramental initiation, I hope that they will see to it that all our children have the possibility of getting a solid religious education.

THE FAMILY

According to the *Directory* quoted above, *"The parents are the primary educators in the faith. And with them, all the family members have an active role to play in the education of their younger siblings. The family is a space where the Gospel is transmitted and whence it shines forth. The family as place of religious education has a unique prerogative: to transmit the Gospel by rooting it in human values. On this human basis, initiation to the Christian way of life is deeper, awakening to one's sense of God: one's first steps in prayer, conscience formation and formation of the Christian sense of human love as a reflection of the love of our Creator God and Father. On the whole it is a matter of Christian education being witnesses to rather than taught, that is occasional more than it is systematic, and more lasting and daily, rather than designed according to periods. In this family catechesis, input from grandparents gains growing importance. Their wisdom and religious sense are often decisive in promoting a truly Christian atmosphere."* And I would add to this that one of the roles of godparents is to ensure that after baptism and confirmation their godchild continue to grow in the faith.

FOR A VIBRANT AND INTERESTING CATECHESIS

According to the above-mentioned *Directory*, the final aim of catechetics or religious education is to get one not only into contact but in communion, into intimacy with Jesus Christ: this is stated in the profession of faith in the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The basic tasks of catechetics will always be to help one learn about, celebrate, live and contemplate the mystery of Christ. This leads to an initiation and education in community life and mission. In these gatherings to which I cordially invite our youth, their parents, teachers and pastors, it would be beneficial to ensure that the means adopted for a solid religious education lead to such a goal. I gratefully thank those responsible for all that has been accomplished in the area of religious education and for all that will be accomplished. May the Year 2000 Jubilee show that Jesus is truly the LIVING ONE walking along our paths.



+ François Thibodeau

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