
"LET THE SPIRIT BURST FORTH!" (2)



On Pentecost Sunday I published a pastoral letter titled *Let the Spirit Burst Forth!* In the present excerpt from the letter I reiterate the marvels worked by the Spirit in the heart of our Church.

PASTORAL READJUSTMENTS

For over two years we had been searching for new solutions to unprecedented situations confronting us; the people of the diocese spared no effort to find the best means of pastoral readjustment. All diocesan organisms were consulted, as well as those at parish and deanery levels. Many proposals and recommendations were made to me, and proved to be invaluable in the decision-making process. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who were part of the difficult process of pastoral readjustment. On February 18, 1999, the Priests Senate adopted one of the most momentous recommendations in its history when it proposed as a major direction of the diocese the establishment of parish pastoral teams. This would be of major short- and long-term import and would modify the life and ministry of every priest. Every diocesan council ratified this new direction. The Priests Senate took a courageous and realistic position and invited the priests in active service to focus on their essential priestly ministry, proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and forming lay parish leaders.

A DYNAMIC AND PERMANENT PATH

Had we a choice to do differently? Yes, if all we wanted was a simple pastoral readjustment to cover a few months or years. No, if we were seeking a more durable way of doing things by taking into consideration the conclusions of Vatican Council II and the possibilities of the Church's actual legislation. Should we create mega parishes, new parishes, one or two pastoral zones or deaneries? Of course it could be done, but at what human cost? Suppress parishes or places of worship? We could certainly do this, but at what cost to the community? Have one priest minister to several parishes? This could be done, but what priest would have accepted this, and for how long? We had to be careful lest we exhaust the priests still in active ministry. So, what could be done? How should we act, considering the fact that actual legislation requires that there be one priest per parish, and that it be the same regarding parish pastoral teams?

AN APPROPRIATE SOLUTION

We thought it advisable that the most immediate solution, the one which would allow us to look at the longer term, was the implementation of parish pastoral teams to minister to one or more Christian communities, a team of three to five on whom would rest the responsibility of the parish, rather than on one person alone. The team would include a priest who would be discharged as much as possible from all administrative tasks in order to devote himself to his specific ministry. This is the process we have been going through, these past few years, and which has brought us to where we are today. This was the choice we made together, and I hasten to congratulate all those concerned by these changes: priests, religious, and lay people who support these changes. I admire them and they have my unconditional collaboration. I know that this way of doing is not easy and that it challenges our practices in general. It does not happen overnight, to consider one's teammates as partners in a common mission.

15 AUGUST 1999

It was on August 15, 1999 that parish pastoral teams were officially established in our diocese. Nearly every parish - thirty out of thirty-two - took the risk of involvement in this new approach because of the need of safeguarding the present and preparing for the future. Still, it is one thing to commission a team, and quite another to experience the requirements of team work. The 1999-2000 pastoral year was more or less a learning year. In several places it was a joy to develop new-found strengths, while in others the going was more difficult. The sharing and requirements of the tasks involved are not always simple: to ensure that a community be given the possibility of developing its community prayer life, of developing the religious education of all, children and adults, sacramental preparation, concern for the poor... these are far from useless concerns. It takes quite a bit of courage, generosity, and faith. Then there is communication among team members, a particular way of being and doing. For my part, I marvel at what has been accomplished in ten months, a work of giants and worthy of our predecessors whose vision and courage are unsurpassed. My gratitude to the members of our parish pastoral teams: they are preparing the "garden" which will eventually bear abundant fruit! It is together that we can improve the instrument we have opted for.

FAMILY- AND PARISH-BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A new challenge was awaiting us, at the beginning of the 1999-2000 pastoral year: the promotion of religious education in all milieus. In the English Sector we had to ensure the continuation of Sunday School with revised and adapted programmes, and find teachers; the task is ongoing and will continue in the coming months. In the French Sector we had counted on the availability of several school teachers, but with the rise of new challenges their workload became too heavy and the time allotted to religious education during school hours was too short to guarantee quality religious education.

A NEW DEPARTURE

A catechetical session held in August, 1999 was a success. Hundreds attended, priests, pastoral agents, parish pastoral team members, teachers and parents who optimistically and enthusiastically welcomed the process of faith formation suggested for the children. Led by Sister Jeannette Bérard, F.M.A. of the Diocese of Gaspé and Brother Rosaire Girard, S.C. of the Bathurst Diocese, we made an in-depth study of the guiding principles of catechetics and were informed on available programmes. The suggested format is for parents to share with their child; it is neither a course in theology nor in religion, but a faith journey with the child. Just like religious education, catechetics seeks to promote the child's total development. The discovery and loving welcome of Jesus Christ and his message who shows himself to the child is the very centre of Christian experience.

A PROMISING CONCLUSION

It is more than encouraging to realise what has happened in catechetics, this year, in several families and parishes. It is generally parents taking back their responsibility as the primary educators of their children in the ways of faith. This responsibility is not to be abdicated, it cannot be delegated but must be fully assumed. Oftentimes, this leads both parents and children to a rediscovery of Jesus at the centre of their lives, and enthusiasm wells up from such an awareness. The diocesan directors of religious education will continue their work with teachers and parents. Gradually, suggested programmes will be made available, they will support the work already accomplished, especially in the area of sacramental preparation.

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