
THE CALLED BY NAME VOCATION PROGRAMME



These next few weeks, throughout the diocese many activities will highlight the *Called by Name* vocation programme. This is a most important vocation project and concerns our Church's immediate future. I want to thank Father Pierre Thibodeau, Director of the Diocesan Office of Vocations, as well as the members of the Committee on Vocations and all those who are now involved in carrying out this programme: the priests, pastoral agents who accepted to preach on Vocation Sunday, members of P.P.C.s, parents, teachers, and members of parish committees on vocations.

The *Called by Name* programme is a special tool for making us sensitive to vocations in our midst; it was developed to help those in our Christian communities who might have a call to the religious life, the permanent diaconate, or the priesthood. It is an information tool for Christian communities, it gives them the opportunity to invite, and it helps in the discovery of persons who have the requisite qualities for a consecrated vocation. It also allows these persons to discover in themselves the possibility of a vocation in a supportive and prayerful atmosphere.

PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT

In this programme, parishioners are first invited to pray for vocations: before choosing his apostles, Jesus spent the night in prayer to his Father. We then encourage the parishioners to look around them in order to discern whether there are women and men who they believe have the qualities required to respond to the new challenges of the Church of today, to the needs of their brothers and sisters, as religious brothers or sisters, missionaries, permanent deacons, or priests. The parishioners are then asked to submit the name of these persons to their pastor, their P.P.C., or to the diocesan office. Those who are suggested as possible candidates will be personally invited to continue their reflection on vocations and if they so desire, to undertake a programme of vocation discernment. If baseball and hockey clubs hire scouts to search out possible players for their teams, is it not the responsibility of each parish community to discern in their communities who it is that the Lord is calling today to serve their brothers and sisters, so as to carry on the Mission of Jesus which he has entrusted to his Church?

" THE WIND BLOWS WHERE IT WILL. "

I am certain that the Lord is calling today as much as he ever did, if not more so! Our planet has never had more men and women. The Lord continues in a mysterious way to call all these people to discipleship. At the heart of this call, he wants to entrust to certain specific people tasks, offices, and special ministries. Here we can truly say, "The wind blows where it will; you hear its voice but cannot tell where it is from or where it goes..." [John 3:8] Consider the different calls that God made through the ages, to your parents, for instance: Ask them how their vocation to marriage developed, and you will realise how different is their story from that of others. Ask your parish priest: each person has a special journey to undertake. Just look at the Virgin Mary, at the Apostles, at Moses, Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, at John Paul II, at Jean Vanier... Different journeys, surprising routes, uncharted courses. The Spirit who is complete freedom can take routes known to him alone. Who would have believed that Saul of Tarsus had been chosen by God to be the apostle specially sent to the Gentiles, to those who were not Jews?... It is true that the Lord has his own special methods; he usually works within his Church and through this Church he works through the faith community made up of Christian families

and the parish. The Christian community has and must continue to have a very important role to play in raising awareness of vocations and actively encouraging them.

FROM ST-ODILON TO EDMUNDSTON

I am not ashamed of the call I received from the Lord. Quite the opposite. But it surprises me, though, and I am not finished being surprised. We who lived in extreme poverty, who could have known that I would be a priest, one day... At home, there was a fervent climate of prayer, family prayer was said each day. I remember Mom praying for vocations for long periods at a time, with arms outstretched to form a cross. I was just about twelve when the assistant in our parish invited me to take entrance exams to attend the Externat classique St-Jean-Eudes, in Québec [City]. I had never been to Québec in my life, I did not know what was an "externat" [day school] nor who was Saint John Eudes. This was around July 20, 1951. At that time, Mom was hospitalised with meningitis. On her sickbed she asked Dad whether he would let my brother and me take up studies for the priesthood, and she thanked him for his consent. Those were her last words. A few days later, on August 5, 1951, she died at the age of 44, leaving behind eleven children, the baby being two years old. A few hours before the funeral, the assistant parish priest announced that I had been accepted at the college. Throughout my life I would never cease feeling Mom's benevolent presence, especially in difficult times. On September 5, 1951, I entered Saint-Coeur-de-Marie Seminary which was an integral part of the Externat Saint-Jean-Eudes. The assistant parish priest, Father Lucien Ouellet, took charge of my room and board and tuition by asking the woodsmen he met to cut a cord of wood for a future priest... That is how, through the material support of others, and the prayers and efforts of all kinds that at the age of 18 I entered the Eudist Fathers' major seminary at Charlesbourg [Québec]. In 1965, upon being presented by my congregation's authorities, the Church officially called me to the priesthood... and 28 years later, this same Church called me to become your bishop... This call can be understood only through God's mercy which He showed me as He looked down on me and brought me to you.

WONDER AND PETITION

Despite the numerous changes in Church and society, despite also the burden of certain tasks and situations, I have never regretted for a single moment having answered the call, the calls, of the Lord. St. John Eudes wrote: "Let us have a great trust in him who has called us because he has very powerful graces to give us, graces that are proportionate to our vocation, and with his grace we shall be enabled to accomplish anything..." I could do absolutely nothing on my own, but I can do everything with the aid of His grace. In moments like these, words from a song by Robert Lebel come to mind: "You whom I created in love, you whom I have formed, you whom I have chosen, you whom I have saved, do not be afraid! If you are confronted with the sea and fearsome waters, you will cross them without drowning, I shall be near you, because you are mine. You have value in my eyes and I love you more than everything! You it is that I have chosen by calling you by name, in you I set up my abode, my shelter. I shall stand by you, because you are mine!"

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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