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## A MOMENTOUS EVENT FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCH (1)

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The Edmundston clergy Annual retreat will take place at the Diocesan Centre between April 22 and 26. This event does not only concern the priests but everyone in the diocese. A major part of our Church's pastoral life hinges on this retreat. You continue to hold our clergy in high esteem, with your unflagging support and daily prayer. I thank you and compliment you. Keep it up! Let us carry the year 2002 priests' retreat in our prayer.

### A TIME OF GODLY FAVOUR

What is a priests' retreat, really? We can recall Jesus inviting his disciples to "come aside and rest awhile". We can consider the unforgettable prayerful experience on Mount Tabor when Peter, James and John witnessed Jesus in all his glory. I myself consider the priests' annual retreat as a concrete expression of Jesus' Pascal Event. The Lord Jesus had desired to celebrate the pascal meal with his disciples, and he had sent them to prepare the feast of the Covenant, the feast of the Great Passage, the Passover. I believe that even today Jesus wants to celebrate the Passover "with his friends," as he calls them. Through the washing of the feet of his disciples, he shows them the great example of humility and service. He institutes the Holy Eucharist and the priesthood: "Take and eat, this is my body... Take and drink, this is my blood. Do this in memory of me." He spends much time in prayer with them, and he teaches them a new commandment. Truly, all of these elements are found in a priestly retreat where pride of place is given to Jesus who has invited, who loves, and who gives himself to his friends in a very special way. These are times of conversion, communion, and solidarity. By focussing more on Jesus the Saviour and Messiah, each priest rediscovers how much he is loved, and how much God the Father loves all humankind.

### UNDER THE SIGN OF LOVE

This year's retreat theme is really timely: "So that the love with which the Father has loved me be in you also." This is a major theme of priestly life and spirituality. I am certain of this: Mrs. Huguette Leblanc, facilitator for Missio-Canada and editor of *Revue Univers* will surely be able to expand on the theme. It is not true that the priest is a pastoral official. Rather, he is a very special "revealer" of God's love. He so feels in his entire being the love of God revealed in Jesus, that in his entire life, in his words and actions, he contributes in building up the Body of Christ which is the Church. Through the quality and depth of his spiritual life, the priest contributes in "shaping Jesus" in the hearts of those in his pastoral care. By acting in the very person of Jesus Christ he is, in his entire being, by the Word he proclaims and the service of prayer he takes on, a very special sign of God's love for everyone. His whole being was consecrated in baptism. Through ordination, he shares in a very special way in the mission of Jesus, to proclaim the Good News, to celebrate the sacraments of the New Covenant, and to gather the members of Jesus Christ into one people.

### A MISSION OF LOVE

Before giving to Peter his pastoral charge, Jesus asked him three times whether he, Peter, truly loved him. Before ordaining a candidate to the priesthood, in the Church's name the bishop asks him whether he is disposed to take on fully the priestly charge he is about to receive. It is as if Jesus asked him then as now: "Friend, do you love me enough to continue being a priest, a collaborator of the bishops in the priesthood, to

tirelessly serve and guide the people of God, guided by the Holy Spirit? Friend, do you love me enough to continue doing wisely and with dignity the ministry of the Word, by proclaiming the Word and expounding the Catholic faith? Friend, do you love me enough to continue celebrating with faith the mysteries of Christ, especially the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacrament of reconciliation, according to the Church's tradition, to the glory of God and the sanctification of the Christian people? Friend, do you love me enough to keep on imploring the mercy of God for the people in your care, by always remaining faithful to prayer? Friend, do you love me enough to continue living in communion with your bishop, in respect and obedience?" Love alone can explain this kind of commitment. The retreat is truly the place to rediscover or deepen this love of the Father.

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