
BUILDING THE CHURCH TOGETHER (5)



An uncommon parish and diocesan work site opens for us, at the beginning of this new century and new millennium. Pastoral projects made possible through an outstanding financial contribution allow us to repeat to our brothers and sisters how much the love of God continues from age to age. Our work site is composed of three areas stimulating our apostolic zeal and mobilising our best energies. These areas are family- and parish-based religious education, family and youth ministry, and the training of new leaders for each of our thirty-two parishes.

COMMUNITY LEADERS WANTED

In his apostolic exhortation to the North American Christians, Pope John Paul II stressed the importance and the need of training new leaders for today's society: "America needs lay Christians able to assume roles of leadership in society. It is urgent to train men and women who, in keeping with their vocation, can influence public life, and direct it to the common good. In political life, understood in its truest and noblest sense as the administration of the common good, they can find the path of their own sanctification. For this, they must be formed in the truths and values of the Church's social teaching, and in the basic notions of a theology of the laity. A deeper knowledge of Christian ethical principles and moral values will enable them to be exponents of these in their own particular setting, proclaiming them even where appeals are made to the so-called 'neutrality of the State'." (n. 161) These words of the Holy Father, written hardly four years ago, still ring true today.

PASTORAL LEADERS WANTED

From the time of his historic speech to the Latin-American bishops in Haiti, March 9, 1963, until today, the Holy Father has never tired of bringing up the need for a new evangelisation, "new in its ardor, methods and expression." In the first place, he insists that the indispensable role of the priest within the local community must lead all the members of the Church in America to recognise the importance of promoting vocations. "The American continent has many young people, who represent an immense spiritual resource. Therefore, it is necessary to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life where they first develop, and Christian families must be invited to support their children if they feel called to follow this path. Vocations are a gift of God and they are born in communities of faith, above all in the family, the parish, Catholic schools and other Church organizations. Bishops and priests are particularly responsible for encouraging vocations by personally presenting the call, and above all by their witness of a life of fidelity, joy, enthusiasm and holiness. The entire People of God is responsible for promoting vocations, and does so chiefly by persistent and humble prayer for vocations." (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 40) Continuing the initiative of my predecessors, I have given form to this pastoral priority by dedicating the first Thursday of each month as a day of prayer for vocations, by opening our diocesan seminary, and by supporting initiatives of the diocesan committee on vocations, especially the *Called by Name* programme. My two pastoral letters giving the vocation story of thirty-five priests and thirty-eight consecrated persons, are an invitation to become workers in the new evangelisation promoted by the Holy Father. The results obtained so far remind us of Jesus' parable of the mustard seed, whose growth God alone can guarantee.

PARISH PASTORAL TEAMS

I thank God with you for the wonderful work accomplished by the parish pastoral teams. They have opened new and exciting pastoral vistas. It was only on August 15, 1999 that our parish pastoral teams were established, but they have greatly developed, these past four years. Today there are fifteen pastoral teams generously ministering to the thirty-two parishes of our beloved Church. "Composed of individuals mandated by the bishop to share in the pastoral charge of the priest moderator, the parish pastoral team receives recommendations from the parish pastoral council and executes the pastoral priorities. It is an action team to ensure the proper functioning of the community's pastoral activities and services. Along with the priest moderator, team members ensure an animation of the Christian community in all dimensions of its mission: faith education, fellowship, commitment to transforming the world according the Gospel, and prayer and celebration."

APPROPRIATE RESOURCES

The Diocese of Edmundston is privileged to have the services of the diocesan vocation committee and the Edmundston diocesan seminary, as well as the services of the School of Faith and the School of Pastoral Training [francophone sector]. These resources support and help, according to their specific objectives, those who come to us whom we judge apt to serve the pastoral needs of their respective communities. I am very happy with the wonderful results of the School of Faith which goes back to 1985. I am also happy about what our diocesan seminary has brought us. We must remain attentive to the words of Saint Paul: "One person sows, the other harvests." We must continue sowing the seed. We need to be more than ever "prospectors" in our communities... If the prospector must spend hours and days discovering new precious metals in the most hidden corners, so must we, as members of the Christian community, discover and support those through whom the proclamation of the Gospel will continue, in our milieus. They shall encourage the growth and development of our brothers and sisters in faith, hope, and charity, and affirm them who have been called in virtue of their baptism and confirmation, as they now take up new tasks in the Church, to ensure the new evangelisation.

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