
WHY DO WE NEED A DIOCESAN CENTRE?



Located at 60, rue Bouchard in Edmundston, built by the Oblate Fathers in 1953 and dedicated by Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon on August 29, 1954, until 1970 the retreat house welcomed close to one hundred thousand people to different “closed retreat” activities. Acquired in September of 1971 by the Diocese of Edmundston, the building was transformed into the “Diocesan Centre” and for the past thirty-two years, it has housed the bishop’s residence, the diocesan services, and the renewal centre.

WHY NOT MOVE ELSEWHERE?

People sometimes ask why it is not possible to move the diocesan services into the cathedral rectory. This would demand major transformations, and the building is such that material transformations are hardly possible. Besides, if we want to respect the fact that the rectory is meant first and foremost to be at the service of the local parish, there would be room for no more than five or six diocesan offices, and not the entire services. This could prove to be a costly, inefficient venture. Besides, there would be a risk of paralysing parish activities, and the risk, too, that the bishop and the pastor would not enjoy the freedom necessary to the proper exercise of their ministries: discretion and autonomy must be respected on both sides. We should never forget Monsignor Conway’s words to the effect that it would not be wise for the bishop to live at the cathedral rectory! We could never afford to have the space and services offered at the actual Diocesan Centre. Because services are not unified as at the Diocesan Centre, some dioceses pay four times more than we do for services related to the bishop’s housing, the diocesan services, and the renewal centre. Our setup is the envy of many dioceses, we do not have to defray the cost of three administrations, three different personnel services, and three sets of equipment and supplies.

MORE THAN A CHURCH SYMBOL

Since the 1971 and 1984 restructuring, the Diocesan Centre has become a very functional building with no luxuries attached. We would be hard pressed to find elsewhere and at a comparatively low cost such accommodations, without mentioning the beauty of the site! No other building of the diocesan Church could accommodate room and board for the bishop and three other priests, fifteen offices and meeting rooms, and room and board services to accommodate sixty people at a time. We can consider ourselves lucky to have such a centre that is called to be, besides what it actually is, an essential facility for the needs of family and youth ministry, adult faith education, home-based religious education, and formation in parish ministry.

FIGURES

After the Oblate Fathers deducted from the sale price the amount received as gifts from the faithful of the Diocese for the retreat house’s construction (\$125,000.00), they sold the house to the Diocese for \$200,000.00. As the old bishop’s residence on Queen Street was sold for \$80,000.00, the Diocese succeeded, with \$120,000.00, in setting up new episcopal quarters, in bringing together under one roof all the diocesan services scattered throughout the city, and the opening of a renewal centre. Bishop Fernand Lacroix wanted in no way to “mortgage” the future of our diocese for the renewal of the old residence or the building of a new one: he left to his successors the task of ruling on the September 19, 1971 decision. Far from putting this

decision into question, Bishop Gerard Dionne inaugurated important restoration work to the Diocesan Centre in 1984. In my first year as bishop I established a committee to evaluate the situation and make appropriate recommendations. While the committee made judicious recommendations for maximum use of our rectories and particularly for the grouping together of the parish clergy, it neither proposed the transfer of the diocesan services to another place nor major transformations to the building because of the high cost involved and the specifics of the milieu: in other words, we were not to compete with motels, hostels, and bed and breakfast services. It was at that time that the Group of One Thousand was established, then the financial support campaign which is an important aid in balancing our diocesan budget. We are debt-free. We must mention that besides the annual collection for the needs of the Diocese, which yearly brings in approximately twelve thousand dollars, each one in the Diocese is asked to make an annual contribution of three dollars – called the “diocesan per capita tax” – to help defray the cost of having a bishop, and for the diocesan services. This “tax” has not increased in five years. I am deeply grateful to all in the Diocese who help maintain its services for the welfare of all.

BUT WHAT GOES ON, THERE?

As mentioned above, the Diocesan Centre houses the Bishop and three priests, the diocesan services (chancery, pastoral services, Centre Sérénité Counselling Centre), and welcomes many activities of a mostly pastoral nature. Each year, the École de la foi – which is now in its nineteenth year – has over fifty adults who come to learn about their religion. The School of Pastoral Formation [French] gives the training required to minister in parishes to more than twenty-five candidates. Family and youth ministries are also in the process of setting up. The priests’ annual retreat allows our priests the spiritual renewal they need. The [French] Charismatic Renewal and Marriage Preparation Service, and Development and Peace hold their annual meetings at the Centre; committees and services such as religious education, missions, liturgy, and vocations hold their meetings there, etc. At present, there is not one free weekend available until June of next year! Some union and community meetings are also held here, a consequence of recommendations made in 1971!

FORTHCOMING DEVELOPMENT

The development of parish- and family-based religious education, pastoral ministry and youth ministry, adult faith education, and the formation of new parish leaders will require greater use of meeting places which are plain, functional, and easily available. Even as we are decentralising services, it is important to have a place that is readily available. For example, volunteers teach free of charge at the École de la foi: they should not have to worry, also, about having to seek elsewhere for classroom space. I would like to end this note with words one often hears: “The Diocesan Centre has been from the beginning a providential building. It bears in a way the heart of the Diocese.” May we remember these words, for the greater good of our Church!

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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