
A REVIEW OF MY PASTORAL VISITATION (4)



In this final article reviewing my pastoral visitation of the thirty-two parish communities of our diocese, between January 3 and April 4, 2004, I want to point out the two major needs I perceived, during these months: ongoing formation to the Christian life, and the need to improve communications even more.

ONGOING FORMATION

In a world that was so disordered and so bewildering, Jesus' disciples had to continually learn the "path of the beatitudes" given by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1-7:29). Day after day and year after year, this path has been forming countless generations of Christians. Realising that most of the "practising" Christians had no more than a few hours' per year to deepen their faith, my predecessor Bishop Gérard Dionne took the meritorious initiative of initiating with collaborators the francophone sector of the School of Faith in 1985, and its anglophone sector the following year. From the very beginning there was marked interest in gaining better knowledge of the Bible and of the Catholic Creed, of morality and of liturgy. Today we find several School of Faith "graduates" on parish committees and pastoral teams. Further steps could be taken, now, especially since the setting up of family- and parish-based religious education, the biblical renewal, and the needs of today. There is a felt desire that sessions and courses be gradually decentralised. Simple structures could well be established at the deanery level. For example, a deanery could organise a series of five courses or sessions on issues and questions of the day, and could ensure the implementation of this series in its milieu, at a favourable time. This approach could also enliven some of our parish missions, and could be a very welcome inter-parish project.

ACCORDING TO THE RHYTHM OF PARISHES

During my pastoral visits a provisional list was made of services available at the diocesan and the deanery and parish levels: an impressive list. However, it seems to me that of greater importance is the continuous interaction between the diocesan organisation and deanery and parish organisations. This interaction makes for an interesting experience. The diocesan team, with the aid of representatives of the five deaneries, is a unique meeting place for new ideas and interchange. The recent purchase of a conference-call system will allow for a multiple and varied presence. Each parish will be able to bring its input to the developmental process of the diocese. The 2004 pastoral visitation has been an opportunity for me to list topics and resource persons for our weekly [French] radio programme, "Au rythme de l'Église." It shall be my pleasure to share with pastors and others involved information on radio stations that consider what happens locally – and in our Church – a priority. You would have enjoyed hearing what I heard in each of the thirty-two parishes.

NEW RADIO STATION

While the question of culture has had a special place in our milieu, whether through the community channel or the inauguration of a new cultural network, it seems to me that we could push the religious dimension further. Regions like Québec and Montréal have developed their own religious radio stations – Radio Galilée and Radio Ville-Marie – I believe that these two stations could help in the Christian formation of our milieu. Our regions, especially around Edmundston, benefit from important modern installations. I believe that it would be a step in the right direction for us to "lease" antenna time on the giant towers decorating our hilltops, as valuable relays for dissemination of religious information and education. From the very beginning our diocese has benefited from the important services of our commercial and community radios. Our aim is not to diminish their wonderful services but rather to open up new avenues for us, in the spheres of faith and spirituality.

VIABILITY OF OUR DIOCESE

While there is parish restructuring throughout Canada, the same thing is also happening at the diocesan level. The curve is not in the direction of creating new dioceses! The recent creation of regional bishops' assemblies like the Atlantic Episcopal Assembly helps determine the timeliness and ensure the viability of our dioceses. The Diocese of Edmundston was created December 16, 1944: in doing so, Pope Pius XII's aim was to respond to the specific needs of the Catholic population of Madawaska, Western Restigouche, and Victoria counties. During its first sixty years, the Diocese of Edmundston has shown outstanding religious vitality. The marked decrease in population, priest shortage, and the lower religious "practice" are disturbing elements both now and for the future. The present major financial campaign shows that there is solidarity with and an exemplary generosity towards the Church; it also points to the fact that we have been able to move beyond immediate local interests and embrace all of the thirty-two parishes, and give our diocese the resources needed to continue its mission and implement specific recommendations of the Diocesan Synod.

AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The assurance of the presence of the Risen Christ stimulates our faith in the future. Jesus said: "Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world" (Mt. 28:20). This promise can revive our enthusiasm for the Christian life, whether personal or as a community. The renewal of our parishes and of our diocese as a whole can come from none other than Christ Jesus himself: "Jesus better known and loved, better proclaimed and imitated, to live in him the trinitarian life and transform history, with him, until its final achievement in the heavenly Jerusalem," Pope John Paul II stated in his apostolic letter on the new millennium. With you I praise the Lord for this 2004 pastoral visitation. I am convinced that through me, his bishop, Jesus has once again visited his people, in all humility and simplicity.

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