



From A Bishop's Journal (785)

Do You Know the Voluntas Dei Institute?

As we prepare to celebrate the World Day of Consecrated Life on February 2, I am happy to introduce to you the Voluntas Dei Secular Institute which was founded at Trois-Rivières, Québec July 2, 1958 by Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I. The Institute took roots quickly in our diocese – 1962 – specifically at Red Rapids in the Southern Victoria Zone, halfway between Plaster Rock and Perth-Andover.

Jubilee Year

To mark the first fifty years of this new secular institute that was marked with remarkable unpredictable growth and expansion, a great eucharistic gathering took place at the shrine of Our Lady of the Cape at Trois-Rivières, last July 5, presided by Bishop Martin Veillette of Trois-Rivières, in the presence of the Bishops of Amos and Rouyn-Noranda, Québec, and Edmundston. With humble beginnings in faith and poverty, the Institute now has, according to official statistics, 864 members including one bishop, 166 priests, 4 deacons, 56 single laymen, 94 seminarians, and 556 married persons. These members bring the Good News to several countries such as Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guadeloupe, Haiti, India, Italy, Japan, Laos, Uganda, United States, Scotland, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad. Founded in 1958, the Institute was officially recognised “of Pontifical Right” by the Holy See on July 12, 1987, and its Constitutions were approved by Rome in 1988. For nearly 25 years the Bishops of Edmundston were considered the Institute’s “protectors;” several members of the Institute were thus incardinated or ordained in our diocesan Church.

Unforgettable Names

Besides the name of Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I., the Institute’s energetic founder who is now 98 years old, and the four directors general who have succeeded him: René Désilets, Mario Laroche, Yvon Carpentier and François Hamel, the best known Voluntas in the Diocese is Father Leo Grégoire: he was ordained December 20, 1969 after theological studies at St. Joseph the Worker Major Seminary at Red Rapids. After a two-year stay in Baie Comeau, Québec as a teacher, he returned to the Edmundston Diocese in 1971 to minister as pastor in Plaster Rock, Red Rapids, Limestone Siding, Tilley, Perth-Andover, Aroostook, Assumption parish in Grand Falls, and Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs in Edmundston. He is presently vice chancellor of the

Diocese, translator, and supply priest for English language celebrations. He was instrumental in the setting up of the School of Faith, and founder of Beth Shalom, a home for mentally handicapped adults; he was also a member of the Southern Victoria Ministers Association. The Voluntas Dei Institute has worked and still ministers in the Diocese: Fathers Whalen Bossé (Saint-Hilaire, Baker Brook, and Lac-Baker); Roland Poitras (Saint Leonard, Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, and Saint-Léonard-Parent); and Gilbert Doddatto (Aroostook, Limestone Siding, Tobique First Nation, and Perth-Andover). Other names also come to mind: Fathers Germain Côté, Arthur Beaulieu, Michel Villeneuve, Jean Lacaille, Paul Boulay, Laurier Albert, Louis Pearson. The people of Southern Victoria will not soon forget the hundreds of seminarians who came from Haiti, Sri Lanka, the United States, etc., to pursue their theological studies.

Secular Institute

Secular institutes are a relative novelty in the Church, and this innovation was an initiative of Pope Pius XII. According to the Church's actual legislation, a secular institute is an institute of consecrated life where faithful living in the world, strive for the perfection of charity and endeavour to contribute to the sanctification of the world, especially from within (canon 710). The Voluntas Dei Institute has no special apostolic work: it is not a teaching institute or devoted to the care of the sick or of prisoners, but its work is evangelical. Each member must find his place in society and in the Church according to the charism God has given each one. What binds the members together is the spirituality. The vocation challenge is not to find someone to continue the works of the Institute, but to offer young people an opportunity to develop their gifts through living the spirituality of the Institute and living it in their milieu and workplace.

Spirituality of the Three Fives

Father Louis-Marie Parent has always impressed those around him by his enthusiasm in announcing Jesus Christ everywhere, and in discerning and respecting the presence of the Lord in his brothers and sisters and events. He formed and trained the members of his institute to develop an evangelical attitude of self-forgetfulness for self-surrender. This particular direction in formation was meant to develop in the members an attitude of service, and to make them peacemakers. As he so often said, Father Parent was only the Lord's mailman. He brought to each one a letter from God, and each one answered the call that was the letter. The "spirituality of the 5-5-5" has been and remains a response to a call to holiness. Besides the spirituality, Father Parent also gave his membership a set of values to cultivate: the spirituality, team life, positiveness, the present moment, and Christian contacts.

To Bloom Where One is Planted

I end this article by quoting from Father Leo Grégoire's account of his vocation: "I am happy as a Voluntas Dei priest, I am happy being a priest, I am happy to be part of the clergy of the Edmundston diocese. I believe that the greatest gift my Institute has given me was to form me to be a person of service. I have been a priest for nearly 40 years, and I have often said that I have never felt called to parish ministry but rather to teaching. Through it all, though, I believe that I have learned to "bloom where the Lord has planted me," and this, I believe, is the secret for being

happy along the road the Lord has set us on.” On behalf of our diocesan Church and in my own name, I thank the members of the Voluntas Dei Institute for being among us, and for their witness of life and quiet, persevering, and competent presence.

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

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01-28-09