



**PASTORAL LETTER**  
**UPON A DIOCESAN SYNOD**  
**1987**



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To the priests and faithful of the diocese of Edmundston:

« You were chosen according to the purpose of God the Father  
and were made a holy people by his Spirit,  
to obey Jesus Christ and be purified by his blood.  
May grace and peace be yours in full measure. » (1 P 1.2)

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

This letter deals with the coming of a major event for our local Church: the celebration of a diocesan synod.

The history of the Church has always been marked by synods or councils. Even at the time of the Apostles a meeting took place in Jerusalem to discuss a point of doctrine and come to a decision. Since then, different dioceses or groups of them have held meetings called synods or councils. Of course, you have heard about general councils, the last of which being Vatican II (1962-1965) which gathered in Rome all the bishops of the Catholic Church. The aim then proposed by Pope John XXIII was to render the Church and her message better adapted to present times.

Truths do not change, but the way to present them, the language used can be rendered more palatable to the present generation of believers.

It was often said that Vatican II was like a new Pentecost for the Church. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church of God today as ever.

The Church is a family, a people professing the same faith, sanctified by the same sacraments, guided by shepherds that are successors to the Apostles.

Our diocese is a portion of that Church, endowed with the same gifts, the same mission that belongs to the Universal Church. What pertains to the Church universal, applies also in a certain way to a local Church, a diocese. That is why it seems normal that we should occasionally organize our own synods or councils.

The bishop is responsible for the ministry and apostolate in his diocese. He is helped by priests and deacons. But the needs of the faithful are so great that neither the bishop nor the priests alone can really know, and answer to, the needs of the flock. A synod is a call for help, a search for light from all categories of Church members. priests, religious, laity, as well as the different catholic organizations, groups of people - young or not. As Paul said: « There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit guides them; different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served; different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to everyone for their particular service. » (1 Co 12.4-6)

That is why having prayed and consulted; with the approval of the Priests Council, encouraged by the support of religious communities and concerned faithful, I have the joy to bring you this good news: we are about to celebrate a diocesan synod.

**Synod:**

According to Canon 460, « The diocesan synod is an assembly of selected priests and other members of Christ's faithful of a particular Church which, for the good of the whole diocesan community assists the diocesan Bishop. »

Our aim in holding a synod is to provoke a general consultation of all spheres of our diocese about what we

have, what we should have, what is useful, what should be changed or improved, abandoned or created.

Given the bilingual state of our diocese, a special organization, adapted to the English sector will be set, using the talents, the generosity and services existing, especially in the county of Victoria but also in the rest of the diocese.

As a preparation to this important event in the life of our limited family, I beg you to pray earnestly the Lord Jesus, Head of His Church, to lead us as he has always guided shepherds and faithful since the day of Pentecost.

A synod is an exacting exercise. We are all called to be generous in thinking, in sharing ideas, in allowing for time consumption and perhaps frustration. Our desire to improve our diocesan Church is worth every sacrifice.

Our synod will not try to settle everything overnight. We will take the time to deepen the many questions facing us. Right now, we should start praying and collecting ideas in view of our search for truth and the desire to accomplish the will of God on us. Our main purpose and aim is to rejuvenate the face of our Church, to renovate our language and mode of thinking, to revive our faith, increase our hope, strengthen our love for God and for one another. Relations with our brothers and sisters not totally united to us in faith will be part of our concern.

### **The family:**

Since the family is and remains the basis of society and Church, it should dominate our quest and pursuit for improvement. The weakening of family bonds, the numerous divorces, the problem of battered women and children, the distressing situation of so many unwed mothers, are enough to justify a synod. We will try and see what can be done, not only to avoid such situations by a better preparation to life and marriage, but also to insure a happier union to those who are already married.

« Since marriage and family constitute one of the most precious gifts to humanity, the Church wants to show her interest and offer her help to those who, 1) already convinced of the value of marriage and family, try to live faithfully their married life; 2) to those who, worried by anxiety and incertitude, search for the truth; 3) as well as to those who are unjustly prevented from freely living their family project. To the first, the Church offers her support, to the second, her light, to the others, her help. « The Church wants to serve all people anxious about marriage and family. » (Vat. II - Gaudium et Spes)

Every category of faithful: priests, religious men and women, adults and young will be invited to feel responsible for what the Church is, should be or could be for them.

### **The young:**

A special attention should be paid to our youth, to whom I say: realize how much important the present years are for you and for society. « Some people treat life like a slot machine, trying to put in as little as possible, and always hoping to hit the jackpot. » But I believe that you would be wiser, happier, and have more inner peace when you « think of life as a solid, intelligent investment from which you receive in terms of what you put in. » (Roger Hull)

The Apostle John tells you: « I write to you, young people, because you are strong; the word of God lives in you, and you have defeated the Evil one. » (1 Jn 1.14)

### **Organized groups:**

We have a certain number of catholic organizations that are of great support to the well-being of our people: the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Women's League, the Daughters of Isabella, the Diocesan Youth Committee, the scout-guide family, prayer groups, parish councils, the recently founded School of Faith and others, are all able to be the king-bolt, the mainspring of our synod in the English sector. The limited number of priests at your service, the absence of religious women in the area, instead of discouraging, should stimulate our laity to feel all the more responsible for the different fields of activities during the synod. In fact, you have already shown much leadership and abilities in the past years, which rests as an encouragement for the future.

Our diocese is small, the English sector counts about 1000 families. To your credit, I am proud to say that you do honour to your sector, and I am grateful to you all. With the prince of Apostles, I can say: « This fills us with a living hope, and so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for his people. He keeps them for you in heaven, where they cannot decay or spoil or fade away. » (1 P 1.4)

## Call to prayer:

Our undertaking will rely on your continued devotion and love for your Church. I count on your fervent prayers for the success of the coming diocesan synod. « Then you will receive praise and glory and honor on the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed. You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy which words cannot express, because you are receiving the salvation of your souls, which is the purpose of your faith in Him. » (1 P 1.7-9)

The material organization will be set in the coming months. May I ask you to consider the diocese in a « state of synod » from this day on. Our diocese is under the patronage of Our Lady, Immaculate in her conception. May she continue us her guiding help. Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Joseph. I, beg him to be our protector as he has been for Jesus and Mary.

For my part, I remain your brother and shepherd wishing to serve you better everyday.

+ Gérard Dionne  
Bishop of Edmundston

March 19, 1987  
Feast of St. Joseph

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## Prayer for the diocesan Synod

Lord Jesus,  
You established your church upon your Apostles and you continue to guide her by your Holy Spirit, direct our actions during our diocesan Synod, which we celebrate in your name, in order to serve you better and love you more everyday.  
Amen.

+ Gérard Dionne  
Bishop of Edmundston

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