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## SUMMARY REPORT ON THE PASTORAL SESSION WITH FATHER GILLES ROUTHIER ON THE FUTURE OF OUR PARISHES EDMUNDSTON, JANUARY 6 AND 7, 1999

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The Pastoral Service Office thanks Sister Geraldine Brotherton, f.m.a., for authorisation to publish the personal notes she took throughout this pastoral session. We have only one aim in making these notes available to you: to pursue in all areas of the diocese what has been addressed throughout this assembly of prayer, study, and reflection.

In welcoming the 220 participants at this fifth annual pastoral session, *Bishop François Thibodeau* emphasised the two objectives of this year's meeting: to deepen our understanding of the mission of Jesus and the Church, and to confirm the appropriateness of the recommendations made and find the means of applying them.

### 1. Thanksgiving for Activities Carried Out in the Last Eleven Months

The session facilitator, Fr. Gilles Routhier, invites people from the different deaneries to share with us what they have learned from others, and to thank God for all that has happened. The first Christians were in the habit of relating what God had done among them:  
Acts 14:1ff - Paul goes on a mission tour of the Mediterranean countries.

Upon returning, he gathers the Church together to relate what has been happening.  
Acts 14:24ff - They started talking about everything God had accomplished among them.  
Acts 15:4 - They related all that God had accomplished with them.  
Acts 21:19 - Paul started describing all that God had done among the Gentiles.

A habit of getting together in order to share about what God had been accomplishing. Here at Edmundston, eleven months after last February's session, the bishop once again convenes the Church to look at what God has worked among us.

Map of the diocese...

#### Upper Madawaska (Fr. Claude Côté, spokesperson)

What has been happening in Clair, Connors, St-François For the last four and a half months we have been working at forming a team, at creating bonds and building bridges between the communities and the churches. Joint PPC, PEAC, and sacristan meetings.

New horizons are opening to us.

#### Restigouche (Sr. Albertine Cormier, f.m.a.)

Every Tuesday we work at forming a pastoral team (2 priests, 4 sisters, 4 lay persons) in view of establishing a pastoral unit.

There is light at the end of the tunnel.

## **Grand Falls** (Fr. Normand Godbout)

Grades 7-8: no religious education for three years  
Now, religious education at home for grades 7-9, in the deanery.

## **Southern Victoria** (Sr. Thérèse Mulherin, R.H.S.J.)

The needy: Good Samaritan Food Bank:  
in response to the growing number of needy people  
Hospital ministry

1 priest for 4 parishes

## **Edmundston** (Fr. Gaëtan Côté, Green River and Ste-Anne:)

The team:  
2 lay persons from Green River + 2 from Ste-Anne + pastoral agent + priest

Common services:  
- education in the faith  
- religious education for children  
- clothing depot

- There is wind in the sails!

## **Edmundston** (Mrs. Julie Arsenault, chairperson of ND-des-Sept-Douleurs PPC:)

What if the priest were to fall sick tomorrow ?  
People have realised that this would be a serious problem,  
if he were truly sick!

## **Grand Falls** (Fr. Ernest Dumaresq, C.J.M.; **Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy Award:**)

Support, working with youth in the liturgy:  
choir and liturgical plays; choreographies  
Many involved in this ... the future

Beautiful enterprise, very promising

## **Conclusion**

It is easy to realise that we are in the presence of a living body, and not in a crisis situation of stemming a tide of decline and managing negative growth. Understanding of the mission, and investing in it. Something is arising... Paschal mystery. Something dies, something else is born. Look at the work of God in this Church.

1 Corinthians: « I give thanks... this Church; you have been filled with gifts. »  
Let us bring to the surface the Church body with all its gifts.  
« We never cease giving thanks for the hope that is in you. »

Philippians 1: « I give thanks... »  
Our bishop also gives thanks to God.

The pastoral restructuring is not a management programme but a spiritual process.  
Let us thank God for what He has done, and ask the Spirit to send His gifts.

## II. Our Mission

### Main Objective: the mission

This is what should direct our restructuring, otherwise, loss of vitality.

We are not rearranging in order to live more miserably,  
but in order to reanimate the Church.

First orientation: the mission.

The word « mission » commits one to a relationship:  
it is the sending of one to another.

It is from the mission that one finds a place in the Church:  
sent by God, we look in the direction of God.

What does He want of us ?

What does He want to do with the Church of Edmundston ?

Sent into the world, we consider the world which God loves.

What must we do today ?

The world to which we are sent is not the same as the world of yesterday;  
hence, our way of doing things cannot be the same as in days passed.

To what conversion are we called, in order to serve the world of today ?

Parishes serve the mission.

Our objective: the mission, and not keeping parishes as they are now.

As means, parishes must be flexible, adjustable instruments,  
adapted to our world, capable of serving  
the project God has for this world.

Is the restructuring producing sullenness, defeatism, refusal ?

If so, we are not looking in the right direction.

On the other hand, if it produces new undertakings  
in the order of charity, liturgy, religious education,  
then we are on the right path;

it is really serving the mission.

Besides, if it calls forth a greater number of people  
and these people become involved,  
this enhances the life of the Church.

A necessary turning-point due to several factors,  
especially because the world of today has needs  
that are different from the world of yesteryear.

Many means can change, but one thing remains:

We are sent out to spread the Gospel.

As good inheritors, continue to carry the Gospel of God to the world.

Chief condition:

that the entire Church body become more involved ?  
responsibility of all the baptised.

For this to happen,

the process is activated at the parish, deanery, and diocesan levels.

In regards to this, refer to the detailed recommendations.

What happens to our parishes when new modalities must be applied ?

And what about leadership, in these new pastoral units ?

There have been tensions, these last eleven months.

We must act tactfully, gradually, and thoughtfully.

In such a process, there are, of necessity, knots that are hard to untie.

There are misunderstandings and recurring hurts, concerns and fears.

It would be a mistake, not to pay attention to them.

They must be recognised,

otherwise they will be obstacles keeping us from going forward.

## III. Our Fears

Challenged by the restructuring process, what are our fears ?

Fear is not to be scorned.

We all fear one thing or another... a human sentiment not to be despised.

Our fears can paralyse us, they can become an illness.

The Church must not become paralysed by fear.

To name one's fear helps offset and neutralise it. Take these fears into account, so as to liberate them.  
One cannot decree an end to fear.  
Fear is dissipated inasmuch as it is recognised as something real.  
"Do not be afraid. It is I." We see this in the book of Acts.  
It disappears only to the extent that we recognise His presence.  
He does not abandon us.  
Process of recognition  
(a ghost... We do not recognise him even if we do see him).  
Traditionally we identified the presence of God  
with the parish priest, the rectory, or the church.  
But are there other signs of « God-with-us » ?  
We can discern God's presence among us only by showing how God is present in this project or that  
activity.  
Otherwise, it is difficult to take away fear.  
Fears: of losing our church  
of financial demands  
of giving responsibilities to lay persons  
of changing the face of the Church  
of losing our identity.

#### IV. Our Hopes

In the process at hand, what hopes have surfaced ?  
youth  
commitment of lay people  
capacity for seeing the good in others  
young parents preparing their children for the sacraments  
new life will come with new groups  
success in being accommodating to others  
change in one's ability to work with others.

#### V. Our Questions

Questions remain.  
At this stage of the restructuring process, what are the questions raised ? Is it going to work ?  
Why not invite priests from elsewhere ?  
Losing one's pastor too quickly ?  
How do we encourage vocations? What will the Church do ?  
How many parishioners know about this ?  
How do we pass on the information ?  
How do we help people accept the fact  
of more people taking on roles of responsibility ?  
How are we going to function if the church is closed ?  
Who will be the contact person, in small communities ?  
Financially ?  
Will we be getting the same services as before ?  
What about « my » daily Mass ?  
Lose the rectory ?  
How do we convince people that no decision has been reached, at this time ?  
With what parish are we going to be ?  
« Pastoral restructuring: »  
How do we put this as simply as possible, so that all will understand ?  
Ordaining deacons ?...

#### VI. Father Routhier's Reactions: Steeple or Gospel ?

Despite the concerns expressed, the questions deal with  
« How do we do to keep things as they used to be ? »  
It is still hard to imagine that the primary motivation is the Church's « mission ».  
The belief is widespread that the main motive is the priest shortage.  
If the diocese had fifty more priests,  
we would still need to have pastoral restructuring,

because the world of today isn't the same as it was yesteryear.  
Parishes have always been in a state of flux.  
If they do not change,  
if we remain stuck in the 1950s, would it be possible ?  
This would not do.  
If we want to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today,  
we need to develop new pastoral approaches and new initiatives.  
Parishes were created by breaking down other parishes.  
The same process, also, regarding dioceses.  
So none of these structures is carved in stone.  
Like yesteryear, today we must find the best way  
of being signs of the Gospel in our milieu.  
The main thing: the steeple or the Gospel ?  
If the steeple is at the service of the Gospel, fine.  
But it would be a mistake  
if all the energies were dedicated to keeping the steeple repaired,  
if the Gospel is lost.  
What is the objective ?  
What means are employed ?  
We know of movements and associations that have disappeared.  
New creations at the service of the Gospel.  
Pastoral restructuring = defining the means needed today  
for the Gospel to be proclaimed to the world.  
Save the parish network,  
and in ten years you will have lost both network and Gospel.  
Call to conversion.  
Do we see ourselves as being sent out,  
as being servants of God to the people of today ?  
If we do... docility.

## VII. Learning How to Reprove, in the Midst of Tensions

What we have seen in the New Testament  
is Paul giving thanks for the beautiful things of his Church.  
However, we also have texts  
showing that Paul reprovved the churches he had founded.

Galatians 1: He expresses surprise...

« I am astonished that you are so quickly... turning to a different gospel. »

1 Corinthians 11:17ff, 28: Misconduct.

« I do not commend you, because when you come together  
it is not for the better but for the worse. »

« Now in the following instructions... it is not really the Lord's supper...  
Examine yourselves. »

The early Church also experienced tensions.  
This was part and parcel of the apostolic ministry, to praise but also to reprove.  
Have the courage to admonish.  
Not to allow things to go on, which are not in line with the Gospel.

There are things we can be proud of, and others that call for conversion:  
inconsiderate obstinacy, etc.  
One must reprove tactfully, but also firmly.

Develop the ability to change: have at least openness to change:  
rigidity, attachment to the past, are not life-bearing.  
Salvation is not attached to church pews.  
The Gospel takes precedence.

## VIII. Pastoral Units

Pastoral units are not to be considered sacred,  
they are temporary forms of organisation at the service of the Church.  
Well and good if they are the best means available;  
otherwise, let us find something else.

A pastoral unit: the pooling together of resources and projects  
belonging to several neighbouring parishes:

sacraments  
religious education  
aid to the needy  
closer collaboration

Taken individually, parishes do not have sufficient resources;  
this would be beyond their capacities.  
Inter-parish collaboration in carrying out all those pastoral projects  
which are essential to the Church's mission  
allows the performing of things that could not be carried out alone.

If every parish is asked to accomplish all the pastoral projects,  
this will not be possible,  
but with inter-parish collaboration, it can be done;  
cooperation will lead us to the realisation that a pastoral unit is being created.  
Another reason could be  
that our parish is too small to justify a particular pastoral project;  
hence, the need to broaden our base.

Projects fail for lack of people.  
Possibilities of change, of developing new missionary enterprises, fall through.

It is impossible to achieve all pastoral projects on one's own.

Certain needs are not met. Pastoral initiatives will not reach everybody.

Two essential points to be considered:  
age and shortage of priests;  
weariness of volunteers.

If the same things are duplicated in all the parishes,  
we end up concluding that « We're all doing the same thing »  
while it (they) could have been done by only one person.  
If the same operations are multiplied,  
we are not being productive, and we become exhausted.

We must « spare the beast » if we want it to take us beyond the year 2000.

Distribute the new energies for the new undertakings, if we want to start.

It is not a stupid thing to envision the creation of pastoral units.

Objection: Wouldn't that make for a lot of things:  
parishes, units, deaneries, diocese ?

Would we be conserving energy ? Not always.  
If units are helpful, they must be employed, otherwise, we do without.  
If they allow us to conserve time, energy, and invest in new projects,  
then let us use them!  
Would deaneries be necessary, then ?  
Shouldn't we rather structure our parishes, create new ones ?

Could we say:

« We had four parishes. Couldn't we create a new parish with several places of worship and more than one community ? »  
What is the best structure ? What better serves the mission ?  
It could well be that it is not the same throughout the diocese.  
Pastoral units allow new gatherings, help eliminate chauvinism.  
We might have only one parish, some day,  
serving more than one community, several places of worship.

What is the best means we have at hand, at this moment ?

Define what a pastoral unit is.

What does it mean, to create a new parish ?

A pastoral unit is composed of 3 or 4 parishes that opt to collaborate together more closely in order to open up new mission possibilities.

The pastoral unit can be a stage before the creation of a new parish.  
The wisdom of restructuring a new parish,  
with concern for the different communities forming it.

## IX. Pastoral Teams

We have been used to having « a pastor who does everything ». More and more, pastoral work will devolve to a team.  
We realise this fact because of the priest shortage, also.  
But there is more.  
If every member is not active (Cf. 1 Cor. 12), many gifts are not used.  
We need one another, and the team enriches the whole because of the variety of gifts of the Spirit that are used.

« The pastor is the shepherd... with the collaboration... and help of the lay people. »  
It is the team that will facilitate.

It is composed of:

one priest (who has a specific responsibility - he is not the whole)  
lay persons (4 or 5?)  
(trap : making oneself the owner of the parish;  
at the most, where there is more than one person  
all that one can be is a co-owner!)

The mandate and its duration must be specified.  
Rotation keeps people from appropriating the parish life to themselves.  
The exercise of power is always a delicate matter.  
It is better to protect oneself against it.

The lay people are  
volunteers or paid  
permanent or temporary

What do these people do ?  
- one can be the contact person  
- one looks after the parish prayer-and-celebration activities  
- one ensures the sharing and study of the Word  
(religious/faith education)  
- one is in charge of the charity and service ministry  
- This team sees to the carrying out of these different tasks and looks after the pastoral animation.

The PPC, for its part,

- 1) Listens to the concerns of the community and bring to the team their concerns, needs, fears, and desires
- 2) Plans the general pastoral directions in the parish.

It is not always easy to work as a team:

Coordination is necessary; gifts must harmonise with one another, for the Body to be coordinated.

If each one works, it [i.e., this work] must be coordinated; one must pull together and not in opposite directions.

How to discern this? Does the charism build up the community ? (Cf. St. Paul):  
Does it serve at building up the body ?  
If not, we must examine our motives.

Conditions for team work:

Roles must be clearly defined  
Information must be disseminated, otherwise the team will not function for long  
Not make oneself the owner of the parish  
Shared responsibility  
The entire ecclesial body must be involved.  
Arouse the responsibility of all in all sectors, and coordinate initiatives.

## X. Conclusion

The priest within the team: He is not there only for the sacraments.

Role of presider and overseer (« watchman »). Does not do everything, but ensures that things are done.

can confirm that here the mission is being implemented  
role of affirming  
role of confirming the gifts of others  
role of correcting  
ensures that the aims of the mission are observed.

## XI. Essential Components

The session discussion groups generally agree regarding the essential components

listed in the Working Paper titled « *Paths to the Future* ».

Comments by Father Routhier on the group discussions

### Pastoral Project

Critical importance of the mission which is effected concretely in the pastoral project.

This sending forth (mission) has been the same throughout the centuries  
but in practice  
the mission is expressed today through the pastoral project.  
Everything is to be found in the pastoral project,  
and everything flows from it.  
It is vital to equip oneself for the mission:  
means to take, and structures to put up for carrying out the pastoral projects.

There must be new pastoral initiatives taken together to open onto new horizons.

After looking at the world that God loves

we must see the urgency of having a pastoral project in this milieu.

God's loving kindness must be communicated through a pastoral project.  
This world that God loves, what is it composed of ?  
The poor ? The sick ? Religious education ? Youth ?

We cannot be content with being only vague signs of the Gospel;  
the Gospel must be signified in a concrete way by a pastoral project.

General direction: the world to which God sends us.

Project: Not out of our own needs and tastes  
but according to the world to which God sends us.  
So that, if there are 1500 college and university students in a parish,  
it will be necessary to have a pastoral project  
adapted to the needs of students in their twenties.

The One who sends ? MISSION ? the world to which we are sent

placing ourselves in the midst of the world  
the pastoral project: starting from the world where we are.

### Forms of Organisation

A fear is that it be only one more structure added on;  
we fear developing a disease called « meetingitis. »  
« We must alleviate our organisations. »  
Care in liberating energies for new pastoral undertakings Call to discernment.  
Either we serve people or we serve an organisation.  
We serve God and the world and not organisations.  
Deaneries could eventually disappear.  
Keep what serves the world.  
Be discerning in the restructuring,  
in order to conserve energy for evangelisation.

### Pastoral Teams

Necessity: consensus on this

Roles must be clear. Working as a team can be either a blessing or a curse!  
If tasks are well defined, there is less risk of conflict.

Important to anticipate rotation.  
It is a sign of wisdom to surrender one's position to another, one day.

A three-year mandate, renewable once, would be appropriate.

Clearly define the mandate from the start.

Specific role with specified term, in order to avoid a sense of ownership.

### Formation

Good will is not enough. Natural aptitudes help, but they are not enough.

Who and how to choose someone for the pastoral team ?

3 or 4 lay persons  
they must get on well, together, but they must not be alike.  
Ensure pluralism, balance

choose someone with the talents and aptitudes  
for carrying out the tasks at hand.

See whether there would not be other people than those we know well.  
The former have never felt that we needed them.  
Challenge - call - go after new blood  
Identify existing aptitudes, and those to be developed.

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