MINISTRIES
RENEWED
BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

A pastoral message of the Assembly of the Bishops of Quebec

A NEW REALITY

As a result of the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council and taking into consideration the evolution of the Quebec church and society in general, the dioceses and the parishes alike, over the period of the last twenty years, have made significant changes in order to adapt their pastoral services to the new reality.

Gradually, non-ordained members of the faithful have begun to participate in the exercise of pastoral responsibilities, and frequently, they have contributed to the establishment of original services to respond to the new reality. Ministries, flowing from baptism and confirmation, have appeared on the scene at the same time as the ministry of the permanent diaconate has been taking its place.

This evolution is continuing not based upon a systematic plan or preconceived ideas but rather as a response to new needs appearing at the grass-roots level. To say that there is no direction being given to this evolution is not true - it is always supported by reflection which includes the life of the Church, the demands of its mission and its involvement in the community.\(^{(1)}\)

The changes are not always easy. Priests and lay people work together to open up new avenues but, at times, they face resistance and misunderstanding within the milieu. With patience and love, flexibility and creativity, the ideas gradually make their mark and become reality. We want to express our thanks to those who are instrumental in contributing to this progress.

We feel that the time has come to examine the situation in order to become more aware of what has been accomplished, to clarify certain points and to look for more solid orientations for the future.
MINISTRIES THAT ARE AUTHENTICALLY NEW

Obviously, the new ministries, by their very nature, are not a solution to the problem of the lack of priests. We are dealing with a new awareness and the use of resources that already exist in the Church. This renewal applies also to the ordained ministries which must continually be adjusted to the new reality.

Approximately twenty years ago, the permanent diaconate was restored in Quebec. For the exercise of this sacramental ministry in our area, the Bishops opted for an orientation which emphasized the service of charity within the specific social reality of each milieu though they did not exclude service of the Word of God and of the celebration of the faith.

One of the major novelties in the life of our Church is the appearance of ministries being fulfilled by lay persons.\(^{(2)}\) The result is that there is a renewed clarification of roles, some of which are specifically proper to priests and others to lay persons. In the past, for a variety of reasons, these roles were somewhat confused. Lay persons and priests tended to fulfill the role of the other as substitutes. This may continue to happen, but in reality, lay persons do not replace priests any more than priests replace lay persons.

SOME REALIZATIONS

These new ministries give the priest the opportunity to establish the parameters within which his role is situated. This becomes clearer, little by little, with the help of theological reflection. Through ordination, the bishop, the priest and the deacon are entitled to exercise a role, such as the celebration of the sacraments, the pastoral ministry, the teaching of the faith. They are also a sign to remind us that the church is not a self-created reality, it is a gift of God. We must not lose sight of the sacramental dimension of the ordained ministry.

With the advent of new ministries, education in partnership and coresponsibility have begun to have their influence in the exercise of the pastoral mission. Male-female partnership in the work of the Church has become more visible. The human and spiritual resources, which otherwise might have become ignored, have been discovered and given their proper place. The ministry has been enriched by the experiences of the lay and secular world.

Today, there is less tendency to oppose priest and lay person and to make the priest the sole point of reference. The Christian community, its mission and the description of the different ministries required to accomplish this mission have become the primary focus. We hope that this
will continue. In a spirit of fidelity to the Second Vatican Council, the community dimension of the Church must occupy a place of priority.

A discernment has been exercised and now clarification is needed with regards to all that has been discovered with great imagination and generosity. In the Church, all ministry is service but all service is not necessarily ministry. Ministry is a specific service connected with the animation of a Christian community. It presupposes a true and recognized responsibility. A ministry is a commitment of a person in a stable manner after vocational discernment, adequate formation and a pastoral mandate or its equivalent. Even if a given service is not called a "ministry" it must not be underestimated. Every service in the Church is precious. Above all, it is the spirit of service that counts.

RESEARCH WITH A VIEW TO THE MISSION

We encourage the Christian communities to be open to new ministries. These must not be considered as a necessary evil because there are fewer priests who in the past were omnipresent. The Holy Spirit is alive in our communities and He is giving them new life. Each community must be ambitious enough to find and to form the ministerial resources which it needs.

Among these resources are the priests. They are and they will always be necessary in the Catholic church. Besides, a generous and intelligent development of the non-ordained ministries will, by force of circumstance, be instrumental in the promotion of vocations to the ordained ministry.

The concern of the Church to set up new and meaningful ministries must not be an occasion for it to turn in on itself and its needs. The ministries are not only at the service of its inner life but they are also at the service of its mission. They are an expression of the missionary life which animates our Church and we hope that this will continue to be so.

The research must continue with a spirit of gratitude and hope. We are not committed to withdraw from the challenge but we are rather committed to invest in new horizons that will be shown to us by the Spirit of Pentecost.

The Assembly of the Bishops of Quebec
Novembre 1993
NOTES:

1. The "Comité des ministères" of the Assembly of the Bishops of Quebec has followed this development. The results of its reflections appeared in two documents: "Les nouvelles pratiques ministérielles, a document of reflection, Fides, Collection l'Église aux quatre vents, Montreal, 1993, 165 pages; and "Communautés et ministères au Québec: situation, questions, défis, Fides, Collection l'Église aux quatre vents, Montreal, 1993, 36 pages.

2. Our definition here is: a lay person is one who is baptized and not ordained. Such a person might be also committed to an institute of consecrated life.