

Pastoral Day



Talk 2: Bishop Claude Hamelin

You have just seen the synthesis of the reflection you carried out as pastoral teams before the summer and the path followed by the management team in drawing up the three main focal points of action that we are putting forward for this pastoral year:

- Reach out to all vulnerable people;
- Develop our communications among ourselves, with the members of our communities and with the population as a whole;
- Deepen a spirituality rooted in the Word of God.

Following this presentation, I would like to share with you some of the deepest convictions that dwell within me. They are important in my view: they have coloured my commitment for a long time and the pandemic period has confirmed them even more.

I share them with you with a very clear intention: under no circumstances must the experience of the last few months be allowed to fall into oblivion, and we must not put the year 2020 in brackets, as if it were a trivial mishap. On the contrary, and this is the exercise I am undertaking with you today, what we are experiencing calls for discernment and a search for what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

First of all, I note that these three focal points are true to the mission of the Church and to the mission of the community of the Diocesan faithful of Saint-Jean-Longueuil.

They are faithful to the primary mission of the Church, which is to proclaim the Good News to every person. They are also faithful to our Diocesan Mission Statement, which was considered in a synodal process, and which I hope will always guide each of your actions, even more so in times of pandemic. Let me say it again:

...in God's plan and the mission of the Church...

*...we, who are baptized in Jesus Christ,
Let's go today,
with the joy and hope of the Spirit,
to welcome and reveal to the world
the Word that frees and gives life.*

I am therefore pleased to see that this review exercise positions us in line with the mission and this is in line with one of my primary convictions that dwells within me:

The Church of Saint-Jean-Longueuil is and must remain entirely in a state of missionary conversion, that is, totally turned towards the world and at its service.

If we speak of conversion, it is because we sometimes forget that the Church lives only to evangelize, only to be in a perpetual dialogue of revelation of God's love for every person.

Missionary conversion is as much about changing organisational structures as it is about changing our ways of doing things, as Pope Francis mentioned in *The Joy of the Gospel*¹. However, it can only be implemented if each and everyone of us agrees to accept to live it personally. As baptized persons, as pastoral agents, pastors and bishops, we are the initial subjects of missionary conversion.

I observe as well that, in my own pastoral practice, conversion is combined with other realities: the path of renewal passes through change, transformation, effort, death. This is unsettling and disturbing. The temptation to return to old ways of doing things, to the old recipes and the old good habits is never far away. How many times have I heard recently: when will we return to normal?

Do I need to tell you again: in everyday activities, as in our pastoral work, there is no longer any such thing as normal. There is no turning back or establishing a new status quo: conversion is the only option.

The current situation requires us to be inventive, creative, in short to have the audacity of faith. It is trust in our God that enables us to overcome fear and dread; it is He who sustains our conversion; it is He who calls us to be true missionary disciples.

When I read these signs of the times, I am inclined to see in them an evangelical challenge, that of the audacity of the Samaritan in the parable. Faced with a battered human being, left for dead on the side of the way, he dares, he reaches out: he chooses not to be indifferent to human distress. Unlike the priest and the Levite, he is ready to change his itinerary, his travel habits, his behaviour: he is ready to stop focusing on himself in order to reach out to others, he is undergoing a missionary conversion.

¹EVANGELII GAUDIUM, para. 27

This fundamental attitude is in line with a second conviction that dwells with me:

To be faithful to her mission, the Church of Saint-Jean-Longueuil must remember her preferential option for the poor.

I was recently rereading these words of Gregory Baum:

*As Christians, we are called today to follow Jesus Christ by standing in solidarity with the victims of injustice, analysing the roots of attitudes and structures, the sources of human suffering, and supporting the poor and oppressed in their struggles for the transformation of society. (...) Commitment to justice is an integral part of a life of faith, hope and charity.*²

Like the Good Samaritan, it is essential that we reach out to those who suffer or who are marginalized or excluded by their background. This was the very essence of my appeal last March: to leave our usual ways of doing things and put ourselves at the service of everyone.

I've seen you volunteering for community organizations in your neighbourhood; I've seen you making calls to people who are living alone; I've seen you at the drop-in centre for the homeless; I've seen you daring to reach out to people in all sorts of ways. Even when our churches have closed or attendance has been reduced, together we never stopped serving, in other ways and we must continue to do so.

As the baptized, as members of the pastoral personnel, we must constantly tell ourselves that when we walk along paths that are humanizing, we are evangelizing. Words and deeds that restore dignity to people build a more just and true society and transfigure the human being through the love of God: this is the contribution of our faith to the building of our society. I am asking you, let's continue to reach out to those who are the most vulnerable, especially those members of our society who have become more vulnerable as a result of the pandemic.

Chances are you are in the group of fragile people. I know how the pandemic weighs down on many. Some of you have to bear not only personal fatigue, but also cope with the burden of difficult family situations that have been exacerbated by the health crisis. I am also aware that many of our volunteers are having a very difficult time bearing with this period. As some have said, the current situation makes us run a marathon that requires long-term efforts. Take this into account in your decisions: don't lose sight of the fact that if we want to be of service, we must also take care of ourselves and our close colleagues.

²Personal notes from a lecture.

However, in the list of vulnerable people, I am sharing with you a situation that worries me more: the fate of young adults. A recent study by the Université de Sherbrooke³ showed that 37% of adults aged 18 to 24 reported anxiety or depressive symptoms caused by the pandemic. This is unprecedented. However, experts remind us that what would help the greatest number of people overcome this state of anxiety is the ability to make sense of stressful events. Isn't that one of our specialties, to accompany people in search of meaning? I would therefore like to see you explore concrete ways to meet the needs of vulnerable groups and, above all, not to forget them in your pastoral action plans.

We are not the only subjects of this missionary conversion: we must involve all the members of our communities. This ties in with my third conviction:

The animation of our Christian communities must rest primarily on all the baptised. All have a role to play.

Our communities have to convert. As mentioned in the February 2016 edition of *The Missionary Shift of Christian Communities* of the QACB [Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops],

*it is a matter, for the Church, of going out from its own world (its programs, its organization, its rules, its language), from its self-referential system, and to live less centred on itself in order to find its true centre in what God does, and in the humanity to whom it is sent.*⁴

The challenge is to look out to the world so that our communities become places of partnership and solidarity with others in building the Kingdom and let's face it, we may have nurtured certain "consumer" habits among the members of our parishes. As we saw earlier, the pandemic has revealed both our strengths and our weaknesses, but we are called to become artisans of change within our Christian communities.

Remember: our previous Bishop sounded a cri de coeur two years ago: *Enough!* he said about the sacrosanct work in silos and the lack of audacity to get out of the ruts of our repetitive pastoral actions.

The time has come to get down to brass tacks and make choices. We may have to live for a long time with the constraints that the health crisis imposes on us: are we going to resign, close the doors, extinguish our voice? On the contrary, I believe that we have a duty to move forward with confidence because the Spirit does not give up.

³ <https://www.usherbrooke.ca/actualites/nouvelles/nouvelles-details/article/43540/#:~:text=En%20juin%20dernier%2C%20l%27enquête,Sud%2C%20les%20États-Unis>

⁴ COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITIES AND MINISTRIES, Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops. *The Missionary Shift of Christian Communities*, Montreal, February 2016, page 12

Here again, we must dare. Let's encourage volunteer work, let's offer training to those who take on responsibilities, let's be attentive to the charisma of each person. Let's be trusting: the Spirit speaks through everyone.

Modern means of communication can also help us to reach out in a different way to all those in search of meaning. We are experimenting more and more with the presence of our liturgies on the Web and we must continue to offer this service, but we need to go further.

Let's engage all the baptized in our communities on the journey of listening and sharing. Let's encourage the formation of small discussion groups using social networks. Among our families, with our elders or with those who are bereaving, let's build together, for example, new spaces to celebrate life and faith. Let's offer times for sharing and listening to the Word, to all the words. Let's innovate by fostering true dialogue.

As well, let's dare to speak, as Pope Francis urges us, about contemporary issues such as the environment, the fate of the human race or the living conditions of families. There are many people who will probably not set foot in our churches, including our youth, but who are hungry and thirsty for truth and justice. Let's build bridges together, let's go to all the peripheries.

However, reaching out to others does require wasting time, listening to them and being very open. Not everyone has the same skills to go down this road. However, we have a duty to train ourselves to be relevant. The Diocesan Services team will help you do this. Thus, several training opportunities will be presented to you in the coming weeks to meet these challenges with our communities and to equip us to become more truly missionary leaders.

In conclusion, this is my fourth conviction,

our efforts, however numerous and lovely they may be, will be in vain if they are not nourished by a spirituality rooted in the Word of God..

This Word *that frees and gives life* must always be at the centre of our existence, of our ministry, of our commitment. It must truly nourish us. By hearing it, by allowing it to dwell within us, it will transform our lives and the lives of those we meet. I hope that you will find spaces in your daily lives to hear it, to share it, to celebrate it and to embody it.

This Word is alive and takes on its full dimension when we look at Jesus speaking, loving, forgiving, walking, and if the Word calls for conversion it is to allow us to enter more deeply into the intimacy of the Lord.

Being intimate with God: this is what I want to be said about each one of us, but also about each of the baptized in the Church of Saint-Jean-Longueuil. May we be recognized as women and men of all ages, capable of simply bearing witness to the One who lives in the most intimate part of their being and sent to the heart of the world to serve and love it.

These challenges are great and important: I place trust in us and I trust in the One who "is not far from each of us. For 'in Him we live and move and have our being' ". (*Actes 17:27-28*).

Let's go, together, in the joy and hope of the Spirit.

After viewing Capsule 2, take some time to discuss the following questions:

- What are your first reactions after having read the "synthesis of syntheses", the words of the bishop, Mgr Claude, and the presentation of the three poles of action in connection with "Dare to be close...differently! »?
- From what you have heard, what actions do you envisage? Which actions do you want to prioritize?
- To carry out your projects, do you have specific needs? (human resources, training, etc.)