



Pastoral Letter

Longueuil, May 21, 2020

Dare to Come Closer

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And Jesus said to him, "You have given the right answer, do this and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"
LUKE 10:25-29

This excerpt from the Gospel, which is the setting for Jesus' presentation of the parable of the Good Samaritan, illustrates in its own way some of the challenges that we will have to face in the coming weeks as we gradually emerge from the lockdown linked to the serious health crisis that has affected the entire planet. Like the lawyer, in recent weeks we have shown our love of God and neighbour through our many gestures of solidarity and mutual aid; like him we have read the Scriptures; like him we have wished that our words and actions bear witness to Life and open us to eternal life. But like him, we still have to learn and to go beyond our first view of a situation; like him, we have to allow ourselves to be challenged by the words of the Teacher and to discover the depth of the commandment of love.

On the evening of January 10th, in the homily at the celebration of the inauguration of my episcopal ministry, I recalled that:

*our mission is (...) to proclaim the Gospel to the world. It is to humanize, to **transfigure humanity through the love of God**, by proposing and practising the great commandment of love; by restoring dignity to every human being, especially to the little ones, to the poor; by relieving suffering and misery; by working to build a more just, more fraternal world; by communicating Life, Life in all its forms to the people on our journey. To achieve this, we must be authentic witnesses of Christ, witnesses of his Love, his Hope, his Joy.*

It is in this spirit that I address you today and share with you some reflections to guide our pastoral action for the coming months.

Findings and reflections

The COVID-19 pandemic will long be remembered. We are experiencing this crisis perhaps as a time of suffering and mourning, of lockdown and self-isolation, of daring and creativity, of anguish and discouragement, of unemployment and insecurity and of solidarity and fragility. The names and faces of women, men and children illustrate each and every one of the consequences that illness has at the heart of our society: physical, social, emotional, economic and spiritual repercussions.

In my letter on March 24th, I reminded you that the pastoral personnel is remaining active and that we must *use all our resources to offer to our society what we know how to do best: to place ourselves at the service of one another*. In this regard, I particularly called upon each community to help and support the organizations in their neighbourhoods or cities. At this point, I would like to salute the efforts that are being made in many parishes to support our fellow citizens. I also commend all the initiatives that have emerged from our pastoral outreach in order to provide spiritual support to the members of our communities. Despite the suffering caused by the closure of our churches - and whose reopening depends on public health authorities - I am proud to note that our Church remains a community open to the world and in solidarity with it.

That letter ended with these questions: *When the crisis is over, what will we be able to say about our Diocesan Church? What will be remembered of our actions?* These questions are still with me as a new phase is taking shape. The upcoming end of the lockdown will seriously challenge our usual ways of doing things. We must not let pastoral attitudes that were expressed in our desire to craft community ties become obsolete as soon as better days return. To commit ourselves to a "return to normal" that would make us forget what we have been undergoing and learning in recent months is a temptation that we must resist. Rather, we must see this trial as an opportunity to continue our commitment **to the emergence of a wholly missionary Church**. The impatience in wanting to resume parish activities must not lead us into a spiral that would make us mechanically reproduce certain ways of doing things, without taking into account the learning that we have accomplished in the last few months. Rather, we must let ourselves be inspired by this and discover how the present situation calls us to **reach out in a different way**.

The Samaritan in the Gospel text opts for a bold gesture in order to reach out to the wounded man he meets on his journey. He does not succumb to fear nor does he conform to convention, like the priest and the Levite. **He is daring**. A boldness rooted in what this encounter has aroused in the most intimate part of his being. *Moved with compassion*, the text tells us, he **dares to come closer**. I believe that it is the same feeling that has dictated our actions over the last few weeks. It is the source and the motor of the missionary dynamism that must continually dwell within us in order to "transfigure humanity through the love of God."

At a time when social distancing has become the norm, when fear of the other, especially of the outsider, the sick and the poor, risks to develop, when fatigue and discouragement await us, the Gospel dares us to come closer, to encounter, to convert. To make this daring our own, I wish to associate you with an exercise of reexamining the latest events.

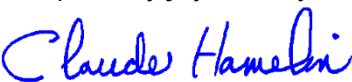
The next phase

Perhaps it would have been simpler to dictate my wishes for the future to you; but that would have been to know me badly. As we have been doing for many years, and as we have done in the development of our mission statement for example, I wish that what should guide the Church of Saint-Jean-Longueuil be discerned by the Church of Saint-Jean-Longueuil.

In solidarity with the Leadership Team, I therefore propose to each pastoral team a grid for reexamining the events of the past few months based on the attitudes and actions of the Good Samaritan of the Gospel. Three questions will punctuate this process: What have we been living through? What are we learning? What shall we do? You will find in the appendix an approach to be practised as a pastoral team, but which you can open up to your close collaborators and other partners. It is not a survey or a vague consultation. It is a real exercise in examining co-responsibility. Together, we will face this crisis, and together, we will develop avenues of discussion for the future.

However, I am well aware that there is a certain urgency to this work. Nevertheless, I am betting that together we can listen to what the Spirit is saying to our Church between now and this summer. Afterwards, the Leadership Team will feedback your reflections to develop pastoral orientations that will take effect in the fall. Formation activities will support the process of implementing these orientations.

I repeat my joy and my hope to be with you and for you, your bishop.

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Claude Hamelin,
Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil

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