

Document on Diocesan Orientations for Social Pastoral Care

In May 2012, the Comité des affaires sociales [Social Affairs Committee] of the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops (AECQ), after consultation with the Table de pastorale sociale des diocèses du Québec [Social Pastoral Care Panel of Quebec Dioceses], produced the document « *Les fondements de la pastorale sociale au Québec, Document d'orientation* » [Foundations of Social Pastoral Care, an Orientation Document]. This document, rooted in the Word of God and written in light of the social teachings of the Church, updates these teachings in a very valuable effort which, as we are reflecting on the basic essentials of the mission, comes in at a very opportune time. These new Quebec orientations in social pastoral care are quite welcome in our Church of Saint-Jean-Longueuil.

In “Catholics in a Pluralist Quebec”, the bishops called to us recently:

“Thus, for Catholics, practising one’s religion means concretely serving the needy and abandoned. This can be done through individual initiatives, or by creating organizations for mutual assistance, sharing and charity that may – even in a pluralist society – be explicitly Catholic and acknowledged as such. Putting the Catholic faith into practice can also mean speaking out or getting involved in movements, to transform institutions, laws, and living or working conditions that are unworthy, unfair, or otherwise contrary to the values of the Gospel.”¹

If, in the past, the Church played an important social role and quite naturally carried out its activities through social institutions, this is no longer the case. The secularization of Quebec society has marginalized the institution of the Church and forced it to develop and increase *ad intra* [from within] initiatives to revitalize the pastoral, liturgical, sacramental and, more recently, catechetical aspects. Despite all these very worthwhile efforts, it appears that it is quite difficult for us to mount significant missionary and social activity.

Therefore, with the agreement of the Conseil épiscopal de la direction de la pastorale (CEDP) [Episcopal Council for the Administration of Pastoral Activities], the decision has been made to adopt, in view of the current situation, the text of « *Les fondements de la pastorale sociale au Québec, Document d'orientation* », as the prime basis for the social pastoral care project in the diocese. This document, actually, given the active part played by our diocesan representative, Daniel Pellerin, in its writing, seems to us to be in line with our reality and, at the same time, to be pertinent, appropriate and addressed to us. However, two points for the time being should be stressed for the implementation of our project.

First of all, in the Evangelization effort, which we have made ours, with whole community catechesis, several people have emphasized that the initial proclamation of the Gospel² is often flawed and thus the missionary dimension to which the Church is called is found to be diminished, weakened and even reduced to nothing. Without a doubt, the social commitment to mutual assistance, equity and justice is situated exactly in the domain of this initial proclamation. It suffices to remember the large numbers of people who regularly come to our social services and who are open to receive and readily welcome our witnessing as Christians personally committed to their faith in the Gospel. That is indeed an initial proclamation! It is up to our Church, as a parish and diocesan institution, **to acknowledge, guide and**

¹ Pastoral Message from the AÉCQ, *Catholics in a Pluralist Quebec*, November 2012, p. 12

² I.e., the missionary activity which, animated by charity and characterized by witnessing of the faith, contributes to transforming the world and constitutes a call to conversion to Christ's Message of Love.

support the work of the members of our Christian communities in their witnessing of the faith in its social aspects. Their social work could give the people in our milieus a thirst for Christ.

The second point relates to the very dynamism of the Gospel. In fact, a genuine belief in the Christ of the Gospels is expressed inevitably and essentially in and through a lifelong commitment to justice and charity. In his letter, didn't Saint James say: "So,...of faith itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone may say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works." (James 2:17-18) In our often ageing communities, it isn't so much a question of dropping current activities but instead of **integrating the social dimension of the faith in our catechetical journey and our liturgical and sacramental activities**. The authenticity and credibility of our faith are at stake. The orientation document incidentally suggests other paths.³

In order to attain the objectives sought, we are counting on our resources in social pastoral care: the parish and diocesan pastoral services, particularly related to social pastoral care, the Table diocésaine de pastorale sociale [Diocesan Social Pastoral Care Panel], movements and institutions with a social vocation, etc. Our initial task is for us to adapt the content and the spirit of the document entitled « *Les fondements de la pastorale sociale au Québec, Document d'orientation* ». In this way, we hope to develop a diocesan Church ever more radiant with Christ, who is animating it already.

In witness whereof, signed at Longueuil, 15th April 2013.

† Lionel Gendron
Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil

Jean-Pierre Camerlain, Episcopal Vicar
Chancellor

³ A.É.C.Q. / Table de pastorale sociale des diocèses du Québec, *Les fondements de la pastorale sociale au Québec, point 4*.