



**BISHOP'S RESIDENCE**  
DIOCESE OF BATHURST

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 29, 2018

## **Pastoral letter in this Easter Time**

*"Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road ..."*  
(Luke 24:32)

Dear Faithful of the Diocese,

This proclamation of faith by the disciples of Emmaus, whose hearts were still burning from having met Him on the road, is also our proclamation! Like them, we also have a chance to feel the presence of the risen Christ close to us on our road. And the joy that transported them then is the joy that lives in us today, a joy that for the entire Church, is a source of hope.

In this Easter time, I wanted to join with you and ask the Lord to bless you on this beautiful feast of the Resurrection. Like the disciples of Emmaus, our hearts burn when we hear the Word of God and in receive the communion of His Body and of His Blood during Eucharist. Like them, we also want the presence of the risen Christ to accompany us on the roads of our lives. Present at the heart of the Church by His Word and by His sacraments, He is also with our other brothers and sisters in the world, thanks to the testimonies and actions we show humanity as Christians. Let us assure that on the road they have chosen their hearts burn as greatly as the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus!

I would also like to take this occasion to briefly present to you all the life bursting forth at the heart of our diocese. It is apparent to us how important is to share with you just and accurate information because, as you may suspect, all sorts of news circulates on the social networks or in the media, and most of the time this information is inaccurate or just plain false.

Having criss-crossed the Diocese to pay pastoral visits to our 54 Christian communities over a period of three years, I was amazed by all the good accomplished. I can affirm that there are thousands of you, serenely and passionately carrying out all sorts of services for our Church, in particular to the poor, the sick, the young, families, seekers of God, as well as faithful parishioners. I am keenly impressed your commitment and devotion in the name of your faith. Without you, our parishes would not exist. I extend my thanks to you for being witnesses of God's love in each of your communities.

The year 2017 marked the end of the process of reorganization of our Diocese, a process that was undertaken some 15 years ago. So much energy, so many meetings

and actions have been necessary to conclude this reorganization; but finally, we made it. Now that it has a more simplified organizational structure, the Diocese can calmly look to the future and thus avoid a massive closing of churches.

We currently have 12 large parishes comprising 54 Christian communities. Thanks to the efforts of each and every one of you through volunteer work, donations, picnics, bazaars, raffles, meals, etc. our Christian communities are, for the most part, in good financial standing and our Diocese is as well. The churches and buildings are in good condition and very well maintained. You have reason to be proud and I wish to congratulate you all for the cleanliness of your churches and church halls. Over the years, some places of worship have unfortunately had to be closed (most recently : St. Arthur, Richardville, Nash Creek, Benjamin River). Our prayers accompany the parishioners who, in spite of their sustained efforts over many years, have had to accept the closing of their church. This is a loss they must mourn, however a community is not merely a building, it is much more than that, and the Lord will not abandon them.

The ice storm that hit the Acadian Peninsula last year was source of many torments. Happily, the acute suffering experienced has practically disappeared today. The generosity and the fraternity that it aroused, however, have remained and grown stronger among you. I would like to highlight the work done by the Christian communities of Saint-Pierre parish, whose influence continues to be felt. I cannot neglect to mention their "*Chase the Ace*" event, which required a lot of commitment and generated a success that surprised us all. The profits have been allocated to the communities and various projects to benefit the poor, the sick, young people and other charitable organizations.

Sacred Heart Cathedral, our central diocesan church, is undergoing a complete renovation thanks to this lottery and to the financing campaign of its parishioners. After the renovations are complete, there will not be any need of major repairs for at least the next 75 years. Many dioceses would like to have the same outcome for their cathedral!

Recently, the small choir of Lamèque, which had won the "People's Choice Award" two years ago during our diocesan "*Musical Challenge*," had a chance to participate in the Gregory Charles concert at the Bell Center and to spend a weekend in Montreal. This was an unforgettable moment for them! This is why, in order to encourage choir singing and support fellowship among our young people, our Diocese has become a member of "Pueri Cantores of Canada," an organization that brings together children's choirs from all over the country. Our youth choirs will be able to maintain relationships with other youth choirs from around the country and take part in various training sessions offered. In addition, this movement is planning to hold its National Congress in our Diocese in 2020. For several days, some 250 children will gather in Bathurst and the surrounding regions to sing in together in harmony.

I want to thank all our priests who devote themselves tirelessly to their ministry. As good shepherds, they make Christ's presence felt among you. However, the pastoral task is often demanding and the weight of years is felt for many of them. That is why some of them have requested a well-deserved retirement, while remaining available for occasional assistance. Others have requested, or have had the need, to take a temporary leave in order to restore their health in order to return and assume their

ministerial obligations to the communities more effectively.

Now that we are fewer in number, and without any seminarians of Acadian descent, we must ask for assistance from the outside. After numerous attempts, young missionary priests of the community "*Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy*," have generously responded to our call. Fathers Vitus and Father Jude, as well as Father Damien, have left their families and their country (Nigeria) to come lend a hand to our parish priests and to answer to the spiritual needs expressed by the students of the Community College of Bathurst, especially the numerous students coming from Africa. They will also be able to practice their ministry with the indigenous communities of our Diocese. Other missionaries will soon be coming from Cameroon to join them.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all our nuns who, by their prayers and their actions, bring forth the tenderness of God in our midst. They have given a great deal to our Diocese and they continue to do so even today. Some of them will be celebrating this summer : the "Religieuses Hospitalières de Saint Joseph", will be celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of their community in Tracadie, and the "Religieuses de Jésus Marie", for their part, will be celebrating 100 years of presence in the region of Lamèque and Shippagan. We will join them in order to share their joy and give thanks to God.

Life goes on, and other communities of sisters will soon join them. Five young sisters from the community "*Sisters of Mary Mother of Mercy*" will establish themselves among us in the spring. They will practice their apostolate in various projects aiming to provide help to the poor children and families of the region. They will provide assistance with catechism and help at our Resource Center, which is currently being refurbished to better accommodate the various prayer groups and the persons on retreat. Other communities have also been approached to come, one day, to support our pastoral and sacramental life. I would also mention that the members of the diocesan services continue to do everything possible to respond to your needs. Certain positions remain to be filled and steps are being taken to find the best candidates.

Recently, during a special celebration at the St. John Bosco church, Mr. Christopher Kingston officially received his admission as a candidate to the permanent diaconate, a first in our diocese. He is undertaking this path along with three other candidates who also plan to be at the service of our Church as permanent deacons.

For his part, Mr. Anthony Fyk, a seminarian currently studying in Rome at the Venerable English College, will come back this summer to do a pastoral internship in the Restigouche region. He intends to pursue his training in order to become a priest for our Diocese. I pray to the Lord that one day I may be able to accompany young people from here who will have answered the call of God to become priests in the service of our Church. For I am certain that the Lord never ceases to call.

Since his arrival, Pope Francis has unceasingly asked the bishops, the priests, and the faithful to be a "*Church that goes out*" to help those who need to feel the love of God at the heart of their trials and sufferings. Many pilgrims visit the Sanctuary of St. Anne and come throughout the year to pray and light a candle. On several occasions, some have expressed the desire to meet with a priest or a mandated layperson in order

to be heard, consoled and counseled with the Word of God. Still others have indicated to us the importance for them to meet the Lord in sacraments in order to be strengthened spiritually by them. That is why Father Jean-Yves Molinas ensures a presence in the name of the Church so that, as desired by Pope Francis, our sanctuaries may become meeting places for those in society who are seeking God and us the faithful of the Church. As for the members of the management committee, they will make an effort to carry out this ecclesial mission and also maintain and beautify this historic site. I thank all the volunteers who, coming from the four corners of the Diocese, make the novena a clear success for the happiness of all.

As a Church, life continues and several challenges await us. In the months to come, all of us, priests and lay people alike, must join together to provide the necessary pastoral support our Christian communities need. Several questions have recently come to our attention such as : How to meet and respond to the spiritual needs of the younger generation and of their families? What can be done to rejuvenate our teams of volunteers? By what means can we help our young people hear the call of the Lord to serve His Church as a priest or religious? How can we be evermore present to the poorest in our society (the sick, the lonely, etc.)? What are the steps that one must carry out in order to encourage more unity, and more collaboration among the Christian communities of a parish, and among the various parishes of the Diocese?

Christ entrusted us with a mission: *“Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)* We must never forget this mission, but always carry it forward. Pope Francis suggests that we become true missionary disciples in order to communicate the joy that inhabits us. The joy of being in communion with Christ, source of love, strength, peace and hope; and the joy of knowing that the ties of love we weave among us today will never die, thanks to the risen Christ. That is our great challenge as disciples of the Lord.

In closing, let us all remain united in prayer with Mary, Mother of the Church, the one who always watches over each and every one of us with tenderness. With her help, we continue to be joyous witnesses of the risen Christ on the road of all of those who hunger for God and thirst for love and hope. So that they, too, like the disciples of Emmaus, feel His presence and have their hearts burning within them.

May the risen Christ bless you and all the members of your families.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daniel Jodoin".

+ Daniel Jodoin, your bishop