



PROPOSING JESUS CHRIST TODAY

as the way to freedom
and responsibility

A DIOCESAN FAITH EDUCATION
PROJECT FOR ALL AGES

Adapted translation of the French text

MAY 31, 2003

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF MONTREAL

May 31, 2003

My dear collaborators,

In April 1998, I presented Pastoral Orientations, which emerged from our synodal process. A pastoral plan of action was submitted in October of the same year. It presented six major priorities. The first of those priorities concerned the transmission of the Christian heritage to the younger generations, and faith education for adults, within the context of a new evangelization.

Since that time pastoral workers have laboured extensively throughout the diocese, and have experimented with ways of reaching out to people of different ages and stages of life. These new approaches were directed as much to young people as to those who are not so young, that some might be awakened to the faith; that others might be reached, who wish to be initiated into Christian life, and still others might deepen their faith.


The programs which were used, whether they were developed here at home, or elsewhere, all had one goal: to facilitate the encounter with a living Person, Jesus Christ, who is the way to freedom and responsibility.

Based on the experience of these last few years, I now present to you our diocesan Faith Education project which has been developed for the missionary needs of our present Church. After careful consideration, I am presenting six orientations to guide and unify our pastoral action over the next five years.

Like Mary of the Visitation, I invite you to embark on this journey, with a profound missionary spirit and in apostolic solidarity. I am placing much hope in this evangelization project. I count especially on the dynamism of the different pastoral collaborators of our Christian communities, who are called to become women and men of the Visitation.

On the occasion of our diocesan feast day, I officially promulgate the text of 'Proposing Jesus Christ Today: As the way to freedom and responsibility'. It takes effect immediately.

I invite you to be confident, creative and daring. May the Holy Spirit be with us as our guide.



Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte

JJEAN-CLAUDE CARDINAL TURCOTTE
Archbishop of Montreal




Mgr Michel Parent, E.V.

Mgr MICHEL PARENT, E.V.
Chancellor



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Note: In this text, the masculine is understood to include the feminine.

GETTING INTO THE PROJECT, THE VALUE OF : LISTENING AND ENCOUNTERING

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations!” (Matt. 28:19) The command to go out on mission has resounded in the heart of the Church since her beginning. It is the reason for her being. The Church exists to evangelize¹; to proclaim, like Jesus did, that God is a loving God, One Who wants to communicate love and who desires to be encountered personally. This revelation is so wonderful to hear, that it can transform humanity from within and make it new.² For this to continue to happen in our time, our Church wants to move ahead with a renewed catechetical presentation of the faith and Christian life. This shift in catechetical approach becomes vital if the Gospel is to echo in people’s lives, and nurture their quest for meaning. It is necessary in order to lead people to a life-giving encounter with Jesus who is the way to freedom and responsibility.³ The launching of this enterprise therefore concerns all Christians, of all ages; it concerns all those who are called to become Christians, and even those, whose numbers are steadily increasing, who may not even be aware that they are being called by Jesus Christ.

There is an expectation among many people today for something new; they are looking for meaning, they seek some kind of coherence, of consistency, between what people say and what people do; people everywhere hope for a more human and peaceful world. More locally there are also indications that something new is needed. The present diminished religious practice among Catholics, the rise of diverse religious sects, the breakdown of family life, as well as parish life, which were essential components of our society, and when we add to this the end of pastoral animation in our schools, these are all

¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, no. 14

² *Idem*, no. 18

³ AEQ, *Proposing Jesus Christ : a way to freedom and responsibility*, leaflet for parents looking for answers concerning their children’s education into the catholic faith, January 2002



telling signs, that the time has come to proclaim, awaken, and nurture the faith in an innovative way. For all of these reasons, our diocesan project needs to be characterized by a missionary zeal for the new evangelization.

In this task of evangelization, the key attitude required is to listen! It is necessary to be attentive; to open our ears to even the slightest sound of what is going on around us. (1 Kings 19:12) Before we can proclaim the Good News, one must be tuned in to the times. It is obvious that today, one cannot proclaim the Gospel effectively in the style of a town crier. In order for the Gospel to be heard today, it must be received in a personal encounter similar to the experience and in the spirit of the Visitation. In fact this was the first Gospel mission of the New Testament, when Mary visited Elizabeth. (Lk. 1:39ss)

The city in which we live is made up of diverse social elements. It is a cultural, multi-religious environment, where availability, competition and performance are the signs of urban living, and where the media exercises a great deal of influence. It is in this context, that God continues to call out to the people of our times. Consequently, we are challenged today to listen for the voice of the Spirit. *“Listen to what the Spirit is telling the Churches”*. (Acts 2:7) In order for us to hear what the Spirit is saying, we must be close to the reality of daily life; we must be in dialogue with people in order to grasp and understand what their needs are. To listen to the Spirit requires proximity with people, where they are, in their experience. It is this proximity and attentiveness, this capacity to listen, which will translate our mission to evangelize, into a personal encounter.

REFLECTION :

*When you actively
listen to those
around you,
what do you hear?*

Getting into our diocesan Faith Education project and assuring its successful implementation, revolves on the real life found at the heart of each of our Christian communities, with all their distinctive features and facets. In fact there can be no catechesis where there is no faith community to support it, or to give witness to its truth, for this is the way that the encounter with Jesus Christ takes concrete form. It is through the community of Christians that the benefits of encountering Jesus Christ are reaped. The *“see how they love one another”*, which marked the beginning of the Church remains key to our times and has not lost any of its power of attraction.

The practical and hands-on application of this catechetical project will be left to each parish community as it works out its 'local plan of action', as the Catechists attend to the needs of the various age groups, from young people to adults; and as the community rises to the magnitude of this evangelical enterprise.

It is hoped that the revitalization of our parish communities, and perhaps even the emergence of new faith communities will occur as a result of this catechetical project, capable of mobilizing and bringing so many people together.

The urgency to find alternative ways of presenting the faith and its implications for Christian living, stems from the serious soul-searching and questioning brought on by our times. This context requires that we touch again the foundations of our faith; we must nurture the convictions which will sustain and give substance to our project, and we must help those who will implement it to understand its content.

This diocesan catechetical venture rests upon three theological convictions, serving as anchoring points for the whole project. These theological convictions are particularly consistent with the experience and findings of the Synod of our diocesan Church,⁴ and correspond with the ideas put forth by the Assembly of Quebec Bishops.⁵ The inspirational possibilities of these three theological convictions also correspond to some of the expectations of our contemporary culture. Consequently, building on these convictions, we will combine our strengths and resources in bringing this Faith Education project to fruition. It will be part of the process to respect those whom we will encounter. We will become companions on the journey of faith, as we hope to awaken and nurture their faith commitment, their skills, and whatever may be their gifts, in order that the Kingdom of God may come.

This document, but more importantly, the adventure which it proposes is intended for all those who hope for the success of God's plan for His people. The text is comprised of four parts :


- Reflection on three theological convictions
- Presentation of the main thrust of the project :
The Catechetical Journey
- Strategy for implementing the project
- Pastoral objectives to guide our decisions

⁴ *Plan d'action pastoral, dans la foulée du synode diocésain*, Diocèse de Montréal, October 1999.

⁵ AEQ, *Annoncer l'évangile dans la culture actuelle au Québec*, Fides, 1999, *Proposer aujourd'hui la foi aux jeunes : une force pour vivre*, Fides, 2000 et *Orientations pour la formation à la vie chrétienne*, version provisoire, October 2002

A PROJECT EMBEDDED IN THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS

FIRST POINT : INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

 The Spirit speaks to us through human experience, in events, in the reality of every day and in the cultures of our times.

A missionary Church is a Church on the move, whose pilgrimage may be compared to the spirit of Mary's "going out, in haste, as quickly as she could" (Luke. 1:39) This sort of missionary boldness is rooted in the promise that Jesus will not leave us orphans, (John 14:18), that He will not leave the responsibility for building the Kingdom to us alone. **We have the help of the Holy Spirit.** Vatican II tells us that it is the Spirit which leads the Church to take up her missionary task⁶, and Pope Paul VI tells us that the Spirit is the principal driving force of evangelization.⁷ The prophet Joel reminds us that the Holy Spirit is sent upon all people. (Joel 3:1) The Holy Spirit, therefore, can be found in all situations, in all circumstances and it is up to us to search for the Holy Spirit where the Spirit can be found.

Different ways of encountering and experiencing the holy spirit.

The catechetical shift which we are going through in our Church should be viewed as a gift from God. This is a spirit-driven opportunity to concretize the aspirations expressed in our diocesan Synod, as well as many of those found in past projects to which we have dedicated our energies. The challenges of this catechetical turning point will no doubt be a wake-up call

⁶ Vatican II, Ad Gentes, no 5

⁷ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, no 75



for many of our people. Our strengths will be tapped and our faith communities will have to unify their resources, in order to respond to this new reality.

The humble beginnings of the Church illustrates for us how God can surprise, entice and transform vulnerable servants and poor instruments into wonderful works, reflective of God's image. Our Church began with a few fragile human disciples. However, they were open to the power of the Holy Spirit working through them. This is what made them effective then, and what has remained true throughout the centuries. For those of us, who are experiencing a certain depletion of our human resources, or struggling with a sense of loss because of the passing of 'Christendom', it is clear that we are 'earthen vessels' (2 Cor. 4:7), at the service of an equally fragile humanity.

However, weakness may, all the more, bring us together, and allow God's power to become even more transparent and visible, (2 Cor. 4:8ss). Weakness helps us to see God's infinite discretion and sensitivity towards people. It allows us to see how God respects the freedom of persons to subscribe to His plan and to do so at their own rhythm. In today's culture, which holds personal freedom in high esteem, there is an almost allergic resistance to any form of pressure or imposition. Consequently, the poverty of our available means, is an invitation to work together by discovering in ourselves and in our peers, new strengths which will make up for what may be lacking in individuals by creatively complementing one another.

The Church of Montreal has been around for some time, it is true, yet God continues to be present among us. In recent times God has been particularly active in our midst through the arrival in our Church of people from foreign lands. For the Church of Montreal, the youthfulness of these cultural communities is a source of new life. Whether they realize it or not, these communities bring with them, their direct contemporary experience of the reality of the exodus, their particular understanding of being in 'exile' and their personal basis for appreciating the Pascal mystery of Jesus Christ.

The cultural communities are presently speaking to the Church of Montreal what the prophet Isaiah in his time proclaimed to God's people, "*Widen the space of your tent...lengthen your ropes, make your pegs firm; for you will burst out to right and to left.*" (Isaiah 54:2) This is a prophetic call to make room for others, but primarily, it is an appeal to open our hearts to the grace of the Visitation, where an encounter with others can break forth into a celebration of praise. By being open, in this way, the Church testifies to the unity of all humanity, to the glory of The All Other, and thus continues to be the Church of Pentecost.

The Spirit is waiting to be experienced by the Church of Montreal, in **ecumenical dialogue** with our sister churches. Each of these faith communities embodies and upholds some specific aspect of Christ's heritage. By encountering one another, the totality of Christ's message is supported. In the

face of mounting religious differences and unbelief, the prayer of Jesus, *“that they may be one so that the world may believe”* (John 17:21) takes on particular relevancy.

The religious pluralism present in Montreal can resound as a polyphonic expression of those who are seeking God. As this complex reality touches us, it can surface in us the desire to know better who we are, as well as, to become more familiar with the multiple manifestations through which God’s Spirit can speak and inspire. The first effect of inter-religious dialogue is that it leads everyone to appreciate the best in each other; it highlights that which in each religion is most humanizing and it can diminish that which is most intransigent. By being cordial and welcoming to each other, it may be possible to encounter the Spirit of God. Provided the various religions help human beings to grow, one can see in them authentic manifestations of God’s care and concern. This does not however take away the Christian’s mission to proclaim Christ’s Gospel to all, because we believe that in Jesus Christ, God has entered the human sphere and affected all of humanity.

Secularization with its capacity to strip away layers of accumulated cultural baggage, is a contemporary reality which can also be helpful in our catechetical project. The context of secularization, in which we live can actually help us to reveal a Christianity characterized not by self-interest, but by gratuity and freedom. In this context it is possible to see the relationship between humanity and God as one of unconditional gift;

where Christian life may be seen as the joy-filled experience of sharing with others, the faith which they hold together.

The Church which presently exists in Montreal, is comprised of many elements. It is now a crossroads for people of many nations, who have arrived here with their particular problems. These combined with the suffering which was already here, means that the cry of the poor, the rejected, the tormented and the lonely can be heard very loudly. The words of the prophet Isaiah continue to be relevant "...if you give your bread to the hungry, and relief to the oppressed, your light will rise in the darkness, and your shadows become like noon." (Isaiah 58:10) In our Church, those involved in the pastoral care of the sick; in the promotion of social justice or working with prisoners are bearers of light and their actions are not only essential to the life of the Church, but must also be part and parcel of the proclamation of the Gospel. Consequently, to awaken someone to the Gospel and to initiate someone into Christian life, cannot ignore becoming involved with some kind of hands-on experience of social action. Out of this will come an encounter with the luminous presence of Jesus, and it will verify the truth, that Christians are bound together by a radical spirit of fraternity. For those concerned with justice and peace to work together, is to make way for the Kingdom of God. It is also an occasion for one to personally experience the Gospel.

Another significant place where the Holy Spirit can be found is in **people's personal experience of daily life.** Pope John Paul II

REFLECTION :

In reflecting on the Christian community, can you recall an intervention by the Holy Spirit and its effects?

reiterates what Vatican II stated in *Gaudium et Spes* that “...every person is offered the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery”⁸ by the Holy Spirit. This reminds us that all human experience, carries within it the pattern of the paschal mystery, the passage from birth to death; from chaos to genesis. When one is in the throes of life’s testing, that is when the Word of God resonates and the Holy Spirit can be heard. As the Church of Montreal deals daily with its people, and encounters the 'neighbour' in the bitter sweet aspects of life, the Holy Spirit will surely be experienced because, as Pope John Paul has often reminded us, the human person is the way for the Church.⁹


Getting in touch with what is real, focusing on human experience, being open to the diversity of peoples and cultures, in short, going out to all of these elements of life, in the spirit of Mary’s Visitation, is to give the Gospel a chance! It is the challenge of inculturating the Gospel for our time and place. It is recognizing new and original expressions of the faith which are being offered today, as gifts of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Expression by Jean-Paul II, quoted three times in *Redemptoris Missio* and inspired by *Gaudium et Spes*, no 22

⁹ Jean-Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, no. 14 c


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SECOND POINT : FAITHFUL TO JESUS CHRIST



To encounter
Jesus Christ is
the heart of the
Good News

A defining experience



In order for the Church to be missionary, she must faithfully present what is at the heart of the gospel. Today, as it was for the first disciples of Jesus, this involves an experience of being personally touched and captivated by encountering the person, who is Jesus Christ. Such an encounter demands of the disciple, a disposition of attentive listening. In time, this encounter changes into a commitment to work hard for the Lord; into a readiness to displace oneself, along with a capacity to withstand necessary losses.¹⁰ The cost of discipleship is rooted in the hope and desire for new beginnings, and when one hears and listens, together with others, the outcome can be new and unsuspected ways of responding to the Lord. “It is urgent to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with intellectual assent. Rather faith is a lived knowledge of Christ. It is an encounter, a dialogue, a communion of love and of life between the believer and Jesus Christ, the Way, and the Truth and the Life”.¹¹ This then is the aim of all our efforts at evangelization. It must give rise, as well as nurture personal encounters with Jesus.

Of course in these encounters, Jesus is not seeking anything for Himself. On the contrary, Jesus leads everyone to His Father, (John 14:10), as well as to all His brothers and sisters. (John 13:35) Some consequences of personally encountering the Lord are:

¹⁰ Maurice Bellet, *La Quatrième hypothèse*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2001, p.31.

¹¹ Jean-Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 1993, no. 88

the creation of a network of solidarity and communion; a call to commit oneself to the cause of justice and to sharing one's wealth; the readiness to hear and receive those radical critiques which the Word of God will make of our idolatries such as money, power, pleasure, image, success and false freedom. To encounter Jesus is to take up the way of conversion.¹² At the heart of the process of evangelization therefore, we find a catechesis which involves an active knowledge of Jesus, which brings with it such transforming effects as the maturity of the believer, and the freedom to say, "*Here I am*"! to God, to self, and to others. This is what St. Paul had in mind when he said: "When Christ freed us, He meant for us to remain free." (Gal.5:1) The experience of salvation and liberation awakens in us an awareness of our responsibility and partnership with God. We realize that we participate in God's desire to regenerate all people in glory. The Quebec bishops have pointed out that the encounter with Christ reveals that God Himself takes part in all work of humanization and in all efforts to resist that which is inhuman. And so to encounter Jesus Christ is an experience which leads one to get involved in God's work and in the service of others, by helping men and women to fully live their humanity.¹³

REFLECTION :

*When and how
did you encounter
Jesus Christ?
Share this experience
with others.*

The Gospel of Jesus : A revelation of the human

In Jesus is revealed what being human could be. Given the contemporary crisis which concerns and affects the meaning of both the human and the divine, the Gospel of Jesus is a force capable of constructing a new humanity and regenerating our societies. "*The encounter with Christ, the New Adam, the new man, helps one discover the sublimity of the call to be human. It is a vocation which consists in being called to self-realization by participating*

¹² Françoise Darcy Bérubé, *Quel avenir pour les parcours et les programmes de catéchèse ?*, Lumen Vitae, no. 3, September 2002, p.334.

¹³ AEQ, *Orientations for the Formation for a Christian Life*, October 2002, p.10

*in the paschal mystery. It is also a call to be guided by the Spirit, in the discovery of a life, in communion with the love of the Father.”*¹⁴

The Gospel is a path to fullness of human growth, providing a creative tension between freedom and commitment, as well as a balance between self-fulfillment and self-transcendence. The Gospel is a journey where the human person becomes increasingly the subject of his/her spiritual life and experience.¹⁵ In a society which is so taken up with all that is therapeutic, “*where individuals pursue without end their self-identity*”¹⁶, the Gospel’s revelation of what being human is all about, becomes particularly relevant for our time.

A Catholic community which wants to be faithful to its mission; to appropriately speak to people of our time, requires an appreciation for and an attentiveness to those aspects of daily living which constitute abundant life. It is also necessary for such a community to be aware of all that might dry up or pollute the sources of abundant life. Evangelization today implies an approach where we come to search for the faith together; where we walk together on the same road as companions for the journey, where we create together a shared sense of communion. This Church, one which is open to the world around it, is a partner with others, in the humanization of the world. In this process, the Church can be proud of her efforts to bring to light those aspects of reality which would render commonplace human dignity or which would have contempt for it.


The fruitful outcome of this diocesan project in faith education will depend on each faith community’s capacity to mobilize itself around the Gospel, as well as that community’s conscious responsibility to spread the Good News to people of all ages.

¹⁴ AEQ, *Orientations for the Formation for a Christian Life*, October 2002, p.6

¹⁵ Cf Paul- André Giguère, *Catéchèse et maturité de la foi*, Novalis/Lumen Vitae, 2002, chap. 4.

¹⁶ Jacques Grand’Maison, *La manie du refus global*, La Presse, February 16, 2003

THIRD POINT : A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY BY THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

 The mission to evangelize and catechize is the responsibility of every member of the community.

The world in which we find ourselves today, requires an approach to evangelization where those who have been personally encountered by Jesus Christ will commit themselves to work for the Kingdom. It belongs to them to *“long for the day of God to come...the new heavens and the new earth, the place where righteousness will be at home”* (2P. 3: 12-13) By baptism all share in the mission of Christ who is Priest, Prophet and King. As a result the followers of Jesus Christ are empowered to be mediators, witnesses and servants each according to his/her gifts and talents. Where this occurs, the community of faith becomes an environment where discernment is possible; where light can be shed on the way the various gifts of the community can most effectively be used to produce a hundred fold. By bringing together the diversity of gifts found in a parish, the words of the Lord find fulfillment when He said, *“...whoever believes in Me, will perform the same works as I do myself, He will perform even greater works”*. (John 14:12)

In this reflection on theological convictions, and particularly on the role of the parish, we are describing a major shift in the way of undertaking our pastoral catechetical ministry. We are shifting from the concern of passing on an inherited past to proposing a daily commitment to walk the way of the Lord. If this is true, how can we insist so much on the faith community,



at a time when the Church as an institution, is facing a real crisis? The answer is because we want to be realistic and we want to build upon solid ground. It is because we want this catechetical adventure to be associated with, and identified to real people whose faith and Christian life is a practiced commitment. If we insist on the role and importance of the community, it is because we want to be more attentive to each other; to favour more open conversation; to journey together; to develop a greater sense of belonging and participation in the work of promoting the Kingdom of God. We want to discover, through our inter-relatedness, and in our common action, the creativity of each member of the parish community.¹⁷

Apart from parishes, there are also other types of faith communities, like those which gather around the various shrines found in Montreal. How can these contribute to the faith education project? These shrines are sacred places for many in search of personal spirituality. They are focal points of faith and so those who gather there regularly also share in the responsibility of proposing Christ's way of life; of passing on the faith, and of promoting the pursuit of justice.

Each community of faith, whether that is a parish or shrine, will be expected to develop its own local plan of action for implementing this faith education project. Such an action plan should call upon everyone to become involved. The plan should also make room for the various facets and dimensions which are essential to the experience of Christian living in order to see what this way of life is all about; to share in it, to celebrate its high points, and to bring about the transformation

¹⁷ André Fossion, *Catéchèse et éducation de la foi*, Institut de pastorale des Dominicains, September 4, 2001

promised by the Gospel.¹⁸ It is clear, therefore, that our diocesan faith education project is the concern of each of our parishes, and it challenges each of them to become both catechizing and catechized.¹⁹

In the context of a community enterprise like the one being proposed, what needs to be highlighted is not so much each individual's gifts and talents, but more importantly, it is the discovery of how everyone's contribution complements everyone else's, in a spirit of communion.

REFLECTION :

When reflecting on the Christian community, what signs are there to indicate that it is a missionary community?

The enormous task of gathering up this plentiful harvest will require the vibrant strengths of all the available labourers; especially of those who have become keenly aware of our present catechetical need, because of their personal commitment to Jesus Christ, whether these labourers are priests or laity. This diocesan project of proposing Jesus Christ to people of all ages, is a catechetical campaign, where each member of the faith community, is expected to be a disciple and witness of the way to freedom and responsibility.

¹⁸ Guy Paiement, s. j., *La parabole de la roulotte : les quatre portes de la pratique chrétienne*, Église Canadienne, April 17, 1980

¹⁹ Luc Aerens, *La catéchèse de cheminement : pédagogie pastorale pour mener la transition en paroisse*, Lumen Vitae, no. 14, 2002, p.9 - 22

A PROJECT BASED ON THE WAY OF THE CATECHUMENATE

The culture in which we live has given rise to new ways of relating to the realm of the religious. As a result, if people today are to hear the marvels of God being preached in their own language (Acts 2:11), then the language which we use to proclaim the Gospel will have to be adjusted, as well as our thinking and our ideas. For instance, if the theological convictions which we just dealt with, are to be adequately considered in our faith education project, then a major new way of presenting faith must be reclaimed, and that is the way of the catechumenate. This is an approach to catechesis which goes beyond suggesting what to say or what to do in presenting the Gospel. The catechumenate is above all, an experience and a journey of faith which needs to be re-discovered for our times. It further supposes that a new spirit will be present in our parishes as they assume the responsibility of awakening people to the Christian faith, and a way of life which flows from it. The way of the catechumenate, which goes beyond specific courses and programs, is a demanding communal enterprise, but one which offers great promise for the future.

What follows is a set of guideposts which may be helpful in choosing our actions; it can help us to evaluate our attitudes as well as identify some of the pastoral shifts which have to be made.

An Undertaking

A presentation of the Catholic faith modeled on the experience and the way of the catechumenate, involves a process which is both personal and communal. In and through various



catechetical and liturgical experiences, as well as the diverse pathways which are presented, a person can appropriate the creed and grow in the faith. This process will unfold at a person's own pace; yet not in isolation, but in the company of others. In this undertaking, there is a conscious and deliberate effort to move away from "believing like" others, to "believing with" others.²⁰

Open to All

The catechetical approach being proposed is not one directed exclusively or even primarily to one category of people. In fact this approach addresses itself to all categories of the people of God, and in a manner which is age-appropriate. Our catechetical undertaking seeks to include everyone who is searching for the Lord; it is not reserved to children. It concerns youth as well as the elderly; it speaks to singles as well as those with families and it takes into account the different stages of human development. In short, this catechetical approach aims to overcome any restrictions or limitations in order to be open to all, as it tries to nourish people's faith.

Inter-generational

In a society where family breakdown and vulnerable relationships abound, a catechesis which wants to be open to all, must be characterized as being inter-generational. Being inter-generational means seeking out new solidarities within a given Christian community. It seeks to insure that people of different ages can meet together and that they will help each

²⁰ André Fossion, quoted by Henri Derroitte, *Peut-on, penser une catéchèse pour les tout-petits?*, January 7, 2003, at the Institut de pastorale des Dominicains

other in the task of passing on their experience of faith. Through the encounter of the different generations, people can exchange the hope which sustains them as a source of Christian life. The interaction of the different age groups will no doubt point out possible new ways of facing the future. By zeroing in on this inter-generational dimension, and its importance in this catechetical enterprise, what hopefully will stand out is the value of 'experience' in the matter of faith. The quality of personal encounter with the Lord is more of a priority than the capacity to assimilate a set of notions or ideas.

Emphasis on the Person

The way of the catechumenate, with its stress on experience and encounter clearly intends this catechetical process to be person-centred. This emphasis corresponds to what the bishops of Quebec hoped for, when they called for a catechetical process which would support the person on his/her journey in faith. They wanted a catechetical process which would go beyond transmitting a series of predefined contents.²¹

In the General Directory for Catechesis, a similar point is made when it states, "*In the catechetical process, the recipient must be an active subject, conscious and co-responsible, and not merely a silent and passive recipient.*"²² Focusing on the person signifies that a person's capacity to be catechized and the pace at which the process unfolds, will largely be determined by the person. It is the person's needs and interests, as well as the person's ability to take in the content of the catechesis, that will give shape to what is received. To ignore these

²¹ AEQ, *Orientations pour la formation à la vie chrétienne*, October 2002, p.42

²² Directoire général de la catéchèse no. 167

aspects is to risk saturating the person with more than can be processed and is contrary to a person-centred catechesis.

Our efforts to transmit the faith today, borrows from the early Church's rite of Christian initiation, which addresses the whole person, body, mind and spirit. This is the path which transforms an individual into a disciple, who is ready to collaborate with fellow disciples in the building of the Kingdom. Compared with other possible approaches, this multi-dimensional undertaking, which emphasizes the person, seems to promise a better development of the full Christian possibilities of the one being catechized.

An Ongoing Concern

From infancy to death, the life of faith, like life itself, is an ongoing concern. In order to grow, the life of faith needs to be stimulated and nourished. At times it will undergo testing and at other moments it will give rise to questions. At all times the life of faith is a relationship. We are reminded by our reflection that the process of initiating someone into Christian life, is just that. It is only a beginning, it is not the end. Consequently, catechetics must be concerned not only with the first stage of the journey, but also for the rest of the pilgrimage, including the ongoing conversion which must encompass someone's entire life.

Modeled on the Baptismal Catechumenate

The faith education project which concerns us is inspired by

the model of the baptismal catechumenate. This was the way developed by the early Church, which proved particularly fruitful in a non-Christian environment. Its effectiveness is found in helping someone become familiar with Jesus Christ slowly and in steps. A catechumen is led to Jesus Christ by starting with His death and resurrection, and by highlighting the centrality of the Paschal mystery for one's faith. The way of the catechumenate and the rhythm of the journey are marked by various liturgical moments. These steps serve as occasions for praying and as pauses for resting after which one can continue with the rest of the journey. In this process, time is important and must be respected if maturity is to be attained. Equally important is dialogue with supportive people from the community. Out of these conversations one will discover what is essential to the life of faith. One can see from all this that celebrating the sacraments of initiation is not the goal of catechesis, it is merely a starting point. Consequently, after being newly introduced into the Church, it is appropriate that those who have been baptized and confirmed should be accompanied to a greater experience and appreciation of what being a Christian is about.

Christian maturity is the result of a lifetime of work, and the Church makes this point by presenting the Catholic faith as a lifetime concern. During the past 35 years, the Church of Montreal has gained some skills in this matter through its work with the diocesan Catechumenate and the R.C.I.A. programs which exist in our parishes. This source of experience and wisdom, will surely inspire our parish efforts to face the new catechetical challenge.

Capable of Constructing a Christian Community

REFLECTION :

From a personal perspective, what do you know about the catechetical journey? As a process, this project is presented as one which brings the community together. What is being drawn together, and under what conditions can the Christian community be better integrated?

Family life is essential to faith transmission. In fact it is in the family that the seeds of faith are sown. Where there is also a strong parish life to uphold our catechetical mission, there will be a welcomed support of the family's efforts in this regard. The interaction between families and parish community will facilitate the sharing of time and talents. This in turn will ensure not only that faith education will flower, but it will build up a loving Christian community; it will re-vitalize the parish and give it new energy, as families and parishioners take up the challenge to catechize the next generation of disciples of Christ. By responding to the present catechetical challenge, the parish community will itself be transformed and experience new life. The diocesan priority to educate in the faith, people of all ages, serves as the integrating force around which, not only the life of a parish, can be structured, but also the life of the diocese. All our parishes can find new purpose in our catechetical enterprise.

²⁵ Paul-André Giguère, *Catéchèse et Maturité de la foi*, Novalis/Lumen Vitae, 2002, p.144.

A PROJECT TO IMPLEMENT

The time has come to implement this project and if we want to succeed then we must get on with it together. We must be concerned about faith education, and care about what has to be done. We must consult, but also be patient in bringing about the shifts which this project calls for. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the “morning coming” which will be followed by night, (Isaiah 22:12) and so the rhythm of time must be respected in all that we do. Nevertheless now is the time to do what has to be done, with care and patience.

The project which concerns us is a very exciting project since it involves us not only in passing on the life of faith, but also in helping it to grow to maturity. Implementing the challenge of faith education engages us in the process of giving life and support to a whole new generation of disciples of Christ. The task, however, is both complex and demanding. Because of its demands, we can easily fall back on past patterns of proposing the message. Nevertheless, what emerges at the end of this reflection are guidelines suggesting how to proceed. Initially we will need a time of transition. If it is well planned and if it takes into consideration what is already taking place in our local parish communities, then the transition required by our catechetical mission will be positive. Taking the necessary time to shift from one catechetical approach to another is also a necessary step for all concerned; for those organizing this project, as well as those who will be called upon to join in this catechetical task. The spirit with which this project is to be implemented, requires that we be particularly attentive to those whom we wish to reach, so that the pastoral decisions which will be made will be directed to the needs of children, of adolescents, and of adults.



From Knowledge to Experience

A primary shift required by this diocesan project, is to focus on faith experience. This then should be followed by reflection on the meaning of one's experiences. This catechetical approach moves away from the logic of learned responses towards a pedagogy of raising questions which open up to new experiences. In this context what one retains is not judged by one's capacity to repeat a given content, but rather by the way everything comes together in a personal experience. This way of doing things is less concerned with integration and repetition,²³ and more with presenting that which is life-giving, which sharpens the desire, as well as the journey to move towards a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and His followers. In this first shift therefore, we hope to move from a conceptually constructed knowledge of the faith to the practiced faith of the disciple of Christ.

From Preparation for Sacraments to Initiation in the Faith

Another shift which will shake up old habits, is moving from the practice of preparing to receive the sacraments, to one of getting involved in a lifetime process of education and growth in the faith.

In our present context of evangelization one of the difficult tasks is how to manage the requests for sacraments. This of course, needs to be done with care and dialogue. Clearly, those who want to receive the sacraments express the desire to go through a ritual. When this happens, it may be the occasion to

²³ Françoise Darcy Bérubé, *Quel avenir pour les parcours catéchétiques et les programmes de catéchèse?*, *Lumen Vitae*, no. 3, September 2002, p.346.

help individuals deepen their appreciation for the sacraments and for what stands behind their request, but it can also be the occasion to point out some other avenue for them to follow. In every instance however, these requests must be managed with respect and with dignity, even if what is requested may not be fully mature.²⁴ Preparing individuals to be sacramentally initiated into the Church must necessarily become part of a larger goal, which is the proper and adequate presentation of what Christian life is about.

From a Catechesis for Children to a Catechesis for All

The parish communities of the diocese will be called upon to significantly invest in the faith education not only of children, but also in the faith education of adolescents and adults. This requires the presentation of the life of the Church, as a lifelong experience intended for all. This experience begins when faith is awakened. It continues to take form when one is initiated into the life of the sacraments, and throughout one's life the Church is a context where one's faith matures. The life of the Church also needs to be presented as getting involved with, and being committed to various aspects of Christian service, such as helping individuals in their search for meaning; or providing people with witnesses of the Gospel. To present the life of the Church as an experience is a challenge for faith education, for it must go beyond books, to seeing in the assembly of Christians, a true commitment to social justice, and in the gathered community, the Body of Jesus Christ at prayer.



REFLECTION :

How will the Christian community experience this period of transition and change?



²⁴ André Fossion, *Catéchèse et éducation de la foi*, Institut de pastorale des Dominicains, September 4, 2001

Those parishes which have already started on this project have discovered some hidden strengths upon which they can count. One of these is TRUSTING the desire expressed by young parents for spirituality; another is to trust the concern of grandparents to pass on the Christian heritage. It is also a strength to be able to call upon the experience of all those who have been involved over the years with baptismal preparation and who have generated a variety of pilot projects in different parishes. All of these strengths are sources of hope, but one which is particularly significant and worthy of note is the desire expressed by many pastors for something new to be done about faith education. This is a strong source of hope because these priests have given their lives to serve others. These priests were not ordained to be curators of museums or to manage the downsizing of an institution. They want to guide God's people to living waters.

Given the time and circumstances in which we find ourselves, can we not imagine this project as a great source of encouragement for all priests, whether active or retired? Perhaps priests can rediscover in this faith education enterprise, a renewed understanding of their ministry; and a new awareness for pastoral motivation. It could even be the occasion for priests to find, again, the joy associated with their original call from God!

The strength of any parish comes from those who have untiringly practiced their faith, and who have attended Church regularly. These cannot be taken for granted, but recognized and valued as well as all the volunteers who are

always there to serve. These people are the salt of the earth, and they surely have motivations and insights to share with a new generation. They can particularly pass on suggestions on how one can endure the journey of faith to the end. The religious history of our diocese points out how this Church has sent out many courageous missionaries. Some of these men and women are now returning home, and find themselves in our midst. They have a different experience of Church; they have seen the many varied faces and cultures of other countries, which now are also present in our diocese. These missionaries can bring us their knowledge, their help and provide a sense of serenity to us, as we make our way in our own missionary task. Similarly, there are many religious communities in our Church whose charism is faith education and whose members keep that charism alive. They too can help us and we can count on them.

Another supportive element of our faith education project is the presence of qualified and mandated individuals who are working in our parishes at the regional level, as well as in the various sectors of our regions. The task which has been entrusted to them is to coordinate and lend a hand to what has been undertaken in parishes for the faith education of children, adolescents and adults.

We are not starting this project from square one. We do have some foundations upon which we can build. Our past experience with pastoral animation in schools had already introduced us to the pedagogy of learning from doing, of the importance of dialogue, and the use of workshops and study groups, to make known the content and practice of the Gospel.



REFLECTION :

Sources of hope have been highlighted. Do you recognize the presence of some of these sources of hope in your Christian community?



In the past, when we prepared school children for the sacraments, we had to develop some creative approaches with which to present them. This was particularly true for the sacrament of Confirmation. What we did, and what we learned from the past, is now a useful experience which supports our present efforts, and when all is considered, the future bodes well. As for the future role of schools in the religious education of our children, of course, they plan to continue offering some input by fostering an interest in spiritual matters. The school can still introduce students to their Judeo-Christian cultural heritage and propose basic guidelines useful for moral discernment. In fact as the school promotes values supportive of the common good, this may give young people some incentive to further pursue their specific spiritual tradition.



Getting on with this project presupposes an openness to diverse approaches to catechesis and a readiness to accept diversity as a given. For instance, there is diversity in catechetical presentations, and diversity of age among the groups to which these programs will be addressed. There is the diversity of religious movements to which someone may belong in the Church. There is also the diversity of time, place, and instruments available for implementing our diocesan project. Added to this, there is also the great diversity in the population which makes up a large diocese like Montreal.

Obviously in such a context, uniformity is impossible! Consequently the only way to manage all this diversity is by establishing a local action plan which will be tailored to the needs and the reality which is found at the local level of the parish.

In setting up their action plan, local parishes will have some guidelines available, which will help frame and support their respective faith education efforts. There will be some regional coordination of activities by someone designated to look after whatever needs to be done for children, youth and adults. Archdiocesan services will be available to collaborate in local efforts to reach out to adolescents, through the Youth Ministry Office. A network of Bible study groups is in the works to promote faith sharing. It is hoped that these might become cell groups to awaken people to the faith and help them grow in their faith.

This catechetical venture which focuses on listening and on personal encounters, calls for the development of certain key attitudes such as: respect, a welcoming disposition, a spirit of dialogue, and especially an openness to learn and speak the language of our present culture. The development of these key attitudes is not just for individuals; the entire community of faith needs to become involved in acquiring them. Formation therefore becomes essential with particular accents being placed on identified areas of need. Those who have indispensable jobs in this project, like the parish priests, as well as those lay leaders who will share in the responsibility of implementing this project, will have to develop an

appreciation for the theological convictions which underpin this project.

It will fall on them to support others on this journey to a more mature faith. This kind of accompaniment cannot succeed if it is not rooted in a positive vision of the human person, where the search for meaning and the desire to live a spiritual life are important. All concerned with this catechetical process, whether as leaders or learners, need a theological vision which can nurture, and the conviction that God always makes Himself evident in encountering the human person. Leaders need to be convinced that the Holy Spirit is at work in human history and in the lives of individual persons.²⁵

Those called to be catechists will require a solid university level, theological formation, with a catechetical component. This training, along with their experience and commitment to the faith, will contribute inner consistency, personal credibility, and pastoral stability to the catechetical task.

With regards to the training of volunteer catechists required for this project, the parishes can count on the support and competence of mandated persons such as the D.R.E's, and the Office for Faith Education, who at various intervals will offer training sessions for volunteers. To support volunteer catechists, as well as those who will be more permanently responsible and involved in this project, there must be a missionary vision and spirituality. This is a spirituality which sees the value and importance of being present to people, which expresses itself by being attentive to the diverse aspects

²⁵ Paul-André Giguère, *Catéchèse et Maturité de la foi*, Novalis/Lumen Vitae, 2002, p.144

of daily life and to see in it, all that is good. Such a missionary attitude involves being present and being patient; it means preserving in the faith, as well as taking the time necessary to bring about the shifts called for by our project. A missionary spirituality also requires that the wisdom, which we may have attained, along with the meaning which life has for us will be shared with others as they deal with significant faith questions.

A missionary spirituality is one which goes out to others, because it recognizes in such an encounter a thirst for the spiritual. Beyond the surface of people's lives, the missionary spirit sees a desire for something more, and perhaps even the footprints of the One who has already walked the spiritual path before them. This missionary perspective calls for a spirituality where dialogue is important, and where the Word is proclaimed and made known in a context of self-disclosure; where we go out to another and take the risk of sharing our experience about God.



REFLECTION :

How will your strategies for implementation help you to put in motion the faith education project for people of all ages in your parish? Do you see other strategies to be developed?



A PROJECT TO BE BUILT IN STAGES

PASTORAL ORIENTATIONS IN FAITH EDUCATION FOR 2003 - 2008

Out of all that has been stated in the three preceding parts of this document, there are 6 pastoral orientations to guide us for the next five years.

First orientation : Between now and December 2003, each parish community will be expected to develop a local faith education project intended for all age groups. This action plan should draw upon the content of this diocesan proposal, as well as the pastoral guidelines which it proposes.

Each faith community will be asked to take up the missionary task of faith education as part of the new evangelization. For our times, this is an approach which is bold and courageous, requiring a major shift in the responsibility for faith education.

Second orientation : As parishes and faith communities go about planning and implementing their faith education project, they can count on the help of diocesan services.

Third orientation : Between now and June 2006, each parish should have in place a new program for evangelizing people of all ages. The choice of catechetical programs must be from among those authorized by the Office for Faith Education. There should be room for the community's creativity, which will be expressed in the way people's needs will be dealt with; in the way that the programs will be implemented; as well as in the effective use of their available resources. It is hoped that in each region there will be adequate centres where children and young people may be catechized. Obviously, all this is to be done in consultation with pastors.



Fourth orientation : It is expected that between now and June 2006, those who will be working as master catechists will obtain a letter of appointment to this effect and also hold a university level academic training in theology.

As for volunteer catechists and occasional helpers in this project, it will be necessary to insure an adequate 'on the job' training. For both the 'professionals' and the 'volunteers', it will be especially important to provide occasions for spiritual renewal, so that they may become effective leaders.

Fifth orientation : By Autumn 2004, sacramental preparation, particularly of children and young people should be part of a larger context of initiation into the Christian life. This supposes that in time, (by June 2008), there will be in place a catechetical program modeled on the experience of the catechumenate and more specifically on the 'rite of Christian Initiation for Adults' – R.C.I.A. This will allow us to move from a catechesis intended primarily for children to one which is age appropriate, and intended for all.

Sixth orientation : This diocesan project has a price attached to it, and it is expected that all parishes will be self-financing. For those parishes unable to cover all the costs, the diocese will have to find ways of lending a hand, by calling upon the generosity of all members of our diocesan Church.

To support and facilitate the implementation of these orientations, a series of events will be proposed, spread out between 2003-2008. Some of these events will be of interest for parishes, others will have a regional character, and others will be specifically diocesan in nature.

AN ADVENTURE IN FAITH

To Encounter and to Listen

A heartfelt cry was heard from our diocesan synod. It said that we needed to embark on a missionary journey, not to some far away place, but right here in our own diocese. This present project in an effort to answer the call of the Holy Spirit. It is a way of responding to what was heard and welcomed by our Church. The awakening of our diocesan Church to her responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel will no doubt lead us on unfamiliar paths, but that is when God's creative action is at its best. Sarah, the wife of Abraham had her doubts and she laughed when God's messenger stated that she would soon give birth to a child. She was too old, it was not possible! (Genesis 18-11)

It is not surprising therefore that we, like Sarah and Zachary, Elizabeth's husband, may also have our doubts. We too may want to be reassured before we set out on a journey of faith. As we face the magnitude and the unfamiliarity of the road upon which we are embarking; when we consider our limited resources; when we reflect upon all the resistance and hesitation that we may encounter, it is understandable that many of us may be overcome by misgivings and doubts. We can identify with, and appreciate Mary's reaction to the Angel when she was told that she would give birth to a son. She responded with, "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34)

As we reflect on Mary's question, part of the answer may be found in the network of relationships we are creating among ourselves. Hope for the future lies in how well we cultivate



these relationships and how we let our faith generate new life. It will also rise up from our coming together and, by the way we live out the mystery of the Visitation. Some parishes in our diocese already have a head start on the renewal of life which can come to a faith community, as demonstrated by the Faith First Program introduced in the English-speaking parishes.

A Look at Our Roots

If we look into the history of Ville Marie and at the roots of the Church which is in Montreal, we will find there examples of bold initiative inspired by the mystery of the Visitation. Empowered by the Annunciation, and the mission to proclaim the Gospel, the founders of our Church set out in haste like Mary did when she visited her cousin Elizabeth.

Those who came to Ville Marie did so wishing to visit their Amerindian cousins and culture. However, reality quickly touched them in the harsh living conditions of New France, and in the difficulties of bridging the different cultures. In spite of this, a true encounter occurred, a Visitation did take place, and we today are the fruit of that meeting.

An Inspiration

The account of the Visitation expresses well how we might view the mission of evangelization today. Evangelization starts from where we are, and goes out to others. Because of the Gospel, we find ourselves with a message in the midst of a culture which places high priority on the values of reciprocity

REFLECTION :

Re-read the Visitation passage (Luke 1: 39-56). How has involvement in your local faith education project been an inspiration for you?

and of personal encounter. It is in this culture that the Holy Spirit must be heard, in the dialogue between people, and as a result of our personal openness about Jesus Christ.

It is amazing to note in the story of the Visitation that while Mary went out to her cousin, Elizabeth was not only the recipient of Mary's good news, she was also the bearer of some good news to Mary. Elizabeth, the one towards whom the mission is directed, also has a role to play in the process of evangelization by her response to Mary's greeting, when she contributes her insights into the identity of Jesus and the identity of Mary. We can say that Mary in the Visitation was herself visited and evangelized, even as she went out to share her Good News.²⁶

Perhaps there is something for us to reflect upon in this mystery of the Visitation which can inspire us. It may even confirm the intuition that a community which sets out on the road of evangelization will itself be evangelized and benefit from the process. Can we not imagine a community of faith which evangelizes and at the same time is evangelized? Is this simply a utopia or is it the story of the Gospel?

A Hymn of Praise

Mary proclaimed the glory of the Lord, and in the Magnificat she reviews the occasions when God visited His people. This review of God's visitations is a source of comfort for us. We see the beauty and fidelity of God revealed in the way that the poor and the powerless are transformed and raised up.

²⁶ Lorraine Caza, c.n.d., *La Visitation dans notre Église d'aujourd'hui*, conference, Troyes, November 12, 1993, p.13.

The challenge for our Church is to recognize in our present poverty an opportunity to let God become more evident; to let our vulnerabilities signal the resurrected life which may be found in our day-to-day experiences, and every time we experience liberation and newfound freedom.

As our Church faces the implementation of this faith education project, our parishes and communities may draw inspiration from Mary's hymn of praise. Even if our actions are humble, they carry within them a powerful potential for renewal, for God will continue to work His marvellous deeds, and give new meaning to the words, "Now I am making the whole of creation new." (Rev. 21:5)


Illustrations & Photography

- 03 Laurence Labat
- 05 Inuit Art
- 09 Rolland Roy
- 15 Svetla Velikova, *Icon*
- 18 Rachel Gaudreau
- 21 Rémi Tournus, *Trésors de la foi, Lyon*
- 38 Rachel Gaudreau, *La Visitation*

Graphic Design

Fabiola Roy, ValseUrbaine.com



 The catechesis of adults is the principal form of catechesis, because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form. The Christian community cannot carry out a permanent catechesis without the direct and skilled participation of adults, whether as receivers or as promoters of catechetical activity.