

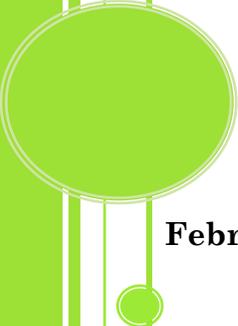
CONSEIL COMMUNAUTÉS ET MINISTÈRES  
Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec

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# The Missionary Shift of Christian Communities

becoming a “Church of outreach”  
after *The Joy of the Gospel*

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English Translation by Richard Bernier

Secrétariat des évêques catholiques du Québec  
3331, rue Sherbrooke Est  
Montréal (Québec) H1W 1C5  
Tél. : 514 274-4323 Fax. : 514 274-4383  
[aecq@eveques.qc.ca](mailto:aecq@eveques.qc.ca) [www.eveques.qc.ca](http://www.eveques.qc.ca)

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## BACKGROUND

Following the 2012 Synod on “*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*” and the Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii gaudium)* that was published in its wake, the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops (AQCB) proposed a study session on the subject to its members and their close collaborators, which took place in Trois-Rivières on March 12 and 13, 2014. Its objectives were to determine how *The Joy of the Gospel* supports or contributes something new to our evangelizing efforts, and to take stock of the choices to be made (or that had been made) to allow the Churches of Québec and our parish communities to live a missionary transformation.

A considerable volume of reflections and avenues for action were gathered with a view to redistributing them to participants. The AQCB’s *Conseil Communautés et Ministères* (“Council on Communities and Ministries”, CCM)<sup>1</sup>, which initiated the project, entrusted to Fr. Gilles Routhier<sup>2</sup> the task of organizing and summarizing these elements. We offer him our sincere thanks.

The present document results from the CCM’s work in collaboration with Fr. Routhier. It strives to combine the main insights of *The Joy of the Gospel* with the findings and reflections of the March 2014 study sessions. It is our hope that it can serve as a facilitators’ resource for ongoing reflection and decision-making, as much at the diocesan level as at the level of the parish community.

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<sup>1</sup> The members of the CCM are Bishop Raymond Poisson, chair; Ms. Marie Chrétien; Archbishop Paul-André Durocher; Fr. Alain Faubert; Bishop Jean Gagnon; Deacon Gérard Leblanc; Bishop Gaétan Proulx; and Mr. Germain Tremblay, secretary.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Routhier, a priest of the Archdiocese of Québec, is Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Université Laval.



## INTRODUCTION

A mighty wind shakes and fills the whole house...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit! Then those who, until that moment, had stayed in the upper room, went out and spoke “as the Spirit gave them utterance”. The miracle of Pentecost brings about a stunning reversal of the situation: from the upper room where they remained cut off, the eleven went out into the public square. Those who were silent “began to speak...as the Spirit gave them utterance.” A mighty wind shook the house and filled them, set them afire animated by the Holy Spirit.

*And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.  
– Acts 2:2-4*

The scene with which this account of Pentecost opens and unfolds is one that challenges us. It shows a Church of outreach, a missionary Church, a Church of the open sea, a Church rejuvenated by its boldness and the risks it takes; a Church that startled those who were there, leaving them amazed and perplexed (*Acts 2:12*).

Can the miracle of Pentecost be repeated? Can the Holy Spirit come animate the Churches of Québec and incite us once again to go forth and reach out to others? It may not be fear that imprisons us, as it was for the disciples in the Upper Room, but rather, as is remarked in *The Joy of the Gospel*<sup>3</sup>, it may be:

*“...pessimism, fatalism, and mistrust. Some people do not commit themselves to mission because they think that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort. They think: ‘Why should I deny myself my comforts and pleasures if I won’t see any significant result?’ ” (EG 275).*

This passage describes quite well what we experience on certain days, and puts its finger on the temptations that we face when we discover that certain challenges are too great and exceed our strength.

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<sup>3</sup> This is the English title of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. In the present text, the document will be identified with the abbreviation *EG*.

Following the example of Pope Francis, who shares with us the joy he lives in encountering the Gospel, the members of the *Conseil Communautés et Ministères* of the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops wish to invite their brothers and sisters to discover the joy of the Gospel. Despite the challenges of the present moment, we believe that the wind of Pentecost can once again fill the Churches of Québec and renew them, on the condition that we be disposed to welcome the mighty wind that shakes the house-church, and that we be ready to carry out a missionary conversion inspired by the Spirit itself. We cannot simply be satisfied with saying

*“that things are not as easy as they used to be, yet we know that the Roman empire was not conducive to the Gospel message, the struggle for justice, or the defence of human dignity” (EG 263).*

We cannot say that the circumstances of the present time are such that, compared to the old days, the proclamation of the Gospel has become all but impossible. It is helpful to remember those who sowed the seeds of the Gospel here in the Americas, notably St. François de Laval, St. Marie de l’Incarnation, and St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, but also many others who have contributed to establishing the Church of Jesus here. The challenges that they faced were immense and monumental.

*“Let us not say, then, that things are harder today; they are simply different. But let us learn also from the saints who have gone before us, who confronted the difficulties of their own day” (EG 263; see also 233).*

In the “new world” that we inhabit today, we should repeat what they did, with the same audacity, the same desire for adventure, the same faith; we should set out into the deep and become a Church of outreach, a Church that rediscovers its missionary character. It is with this conviction in mind, captivated by this call to the renewal of the Church, that we will examine, in the pages to come, what missionary conversion or ecclesial renewal might mean for the Churches of Québec.

In the paragraphs to come, we will attempt first of all to lay the foundations of the Church’s missionary outreach, before concretely identifying the deeds that need to be carried out in order to outline the face of a Church renewed by missionary conversion. The order of this presentation is not unimportant. Indeed, there is a serious risk of looking for a quick solution that would allow for the Church to grow and would limit the drop in numbers. Like Nicodemus, we wish to know what to do or how to do it, while we are instead asked to be “born from above” (*Jn 3:3*). That is, for the Church to return to its origin and source. This missionary character provides a particular outline of the Church that is expressed in its customs, organization, habits, language, style, and attitudes. Whenever this missionary DNA of the Church is not present in each of its cells and does

not contribute to structuring and shaping it, it then requires a *re-formatio*, a return to its original form.

The Pope speaks of “the reform of the Church in her missionary outreach” (EG 17). This will be the subject of the second part of this reflection. Finally, in a third part, we will propose to diocesan churches and to parish communities that they enter into a process of discernment that will lead them to make the decisions necessary in order for missionary outreach to be “*paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*” (EG 15) so that it may lead to the conversions and reforms necessary for them to proclaim the heart of the Gospel: the loving kindness and mercy of God.

## 1. Putting the Church's missionary nature back in the foreground

The Church is missionary. The Churches of Québec have never completely forgotten this truth: its birth right is signed by the deeds of great missionaries; its growth and buildup, until the mid-nineteenth century, depended on missionary activity that never slowed; in the twentieth century, it contributed with distinction in the realm of the mission *ad gentes*<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, people

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is missionary by her very nature,  
since it is from the mission of the Son  
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that she draws her origin,  
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Second Vatican Council  
Decree *Ad Gentes* on the Missionary  
Activity of the Church, n<sup>o</sup>. 2

came to believe that missionary work was finished here, that henceforth it would take place only in faraway countries and was reserved to “career missionaries”. One might have supposed that Christianity was a done deal in Québec, forgetting that the missionary vocation is inherent to the lot of every disciple and to the nature of the Church.

### 1.1 Renewing our missionary memory

Feeling confident in its “Christendom”, the Church in Québec at a certain moment, believed itself immune from being called into question. Contemplating the majesty of our church and convent facades and the sturdiness of their construction, we thought it was all eternal. Churches were at the centre of villages and of our urban neighbourhoods, and the Church had succeeded in carving a central place for itself in the life of society. There was nothing left to do but to dwell peacefully amid what we had proudly built, running the risk of becoming

*“a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures,”* running the risk of *“remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving”* (EG 49).

Today the era of “Christendom” is receding further and further. From now on it will be but a memory of elderly people, leaving traces behind in the landscape that the youngest among us will struggle to understand. It sometimes evokes gratitude, sometimes nostalgia, sometimes a bemused smile, and sometimes it provokes rebellion and aggression. Beyond a heritage of buildings and properties, the “era of Christendom,”

<sup>4</sup> This expression normally denotes missionary activity in foreign lands.

which deeply structured our Church and shaped mindsets, has left us with certain habits; it leaves us with ways of seeing the Church, with pastoral habits and reflexes, with ways of organizing parish communities, thinking about ministry, presenting Christianity, and living in the Church. If the repurposing of our built heritage and the conversion of buildings is a major challenge, the missionary conversion of the Church - its habits, its customs, its attitudes and its style - are an even greater challenge. The conversion of mindsets is demanding, requiring not only time but also a great deal of detachment and a great availability of spirit that can lead us to welcome the current situation of our Church as a gift and a grace.

The gradual phasing-out of this “era of Christendom,” and the obligation we face of rethinking the life of parish communities, brings us to reactivate parts of our ecclesial memory. During John Paul II’s visit to Québec in 1984, he considered the origins of the Church here and, after evoking the missionary figure of François de Laval, the Pope reminded us of the “many servants of God” who came “to build up the Church” in New France:

*“The Recollect Fathers, the Jesuits, the Sulpicians, the Ursulines with Marie de l’Incarnation radiating her incomparable spiritual experience, the Hospitaller Sisters of Dieppe drawn by the inexhaustible charity of Catherine de St-Augustin.”* He concluded: *“Your motto is ‘Je me souviens’. There are indeed treasures in the memory of the Church as in the memory of a people!”* (translated from John Paul II’s homily at the Université Laval, September 9, 1984).

Now that we can no longer live the certainties once yielded by the misleading prosperity of the “era of Christendom,” we must reestablish links with the missionary period that shaped our Church at a time when everything had still to be invented and created:

*“The memory of the missionaries sustains us at a time when we are experiencing a scarcity of labourers in the service of the Gospel. Their example attracts us, they inspire us to imitate their faith. They are fruitful witnesses who bring forth life!”* (Pope Francis, *Homily*, October 12, 2014).

### **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

#### **Avenues for action :**

- Rekindle among the baptized the missionary memory that marked our Church at its birth and throughout its development.
- Raise awareness among all members of the People of God that the Churches of Québec are living today in a missionary context.

## 1.2 The foundations of missionary outreach

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This awareness of the fact that the Church is missionary should not be inspired by the turmoil in which we currently find ourselves. The missionary condition of the Church would in that case be motivated only by present circumstances and by a context that we deem inhospitable. These circumstances may awaken our missionary awareness, but that awareness must be enlightened by a search for what is foundational; otherwise, missionary outreach will be misdirected, have shallow motivations, and be nothing more than a bustling around that is intended to recover what we feel we have lost – a vain effort at rehabilitation.

Thus the disruptions that our Church is living through demands of her a return to the source: *“The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father”* (*Ad gentes*, no. 2). We also call to mind the words of Paul VI: *“Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize”* (*Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 14).<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, to think of oneself as a missionary, to structure oneself as a missionary, and to live as a missionary, is not merely one choice among many; it is not a strategic option demanded by the need to recover lost ground, still less is it a passing fad:

*“This is not an idea of the Pope, or one pastoral option among others; they are injunctions contained in the word of God which are so clear, direct and convincing that they need no interpretations which might diminish their power to challenge us”* (EG 271).

Nor is this a matter of some new slogan, but rather it is a question of the Church putting down deeper roots into its very foundations, its proper nature, and its divine origins: the plan of the Father, the mission of the Son and Holy Spirit. It is also, first of all, a question of reflecting in depth on the purpose of this missionary outreach, and of discovering its origin and source.

The purpose of the Church’s missionary outreach can be none other than the life, joy, and happiness of the men, women, and children of today. In other words, the goal sought cannot be some kind of recapturing: what is fundamentally at stake is not that the Church should recover its central place in society or retrieve great numbers of Christians. The purpose is the same as the Son’s own mission: *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10). *“Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ”* (EG 49). This presupposes a Church that does not place itself at the

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<sup>5</sup> This document is an Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI from December 8, 1975.

centre: “*I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures*” (EG 49). This turning-away from the centre turns us toward “*people [who] are starving...Jesus does not tire of saying to us: ‘Give them something to eat’ (Mk 6:37)*” (EG 49). Further still, this turning-away from the centre turns us towards the One who sends us and goes before us (EG 162 and 298), towards the One who takes the “initiative” (EG 12, 24, 111, and 112) and who is the source and companion of all missionary outreach. As Pope Francis writes, “*I would like to dwell briefly on this way of understanding the Church, whose ultimate foundation is in the free and gracious initiative of God*” (EG 111).

Indeed, the initiative for missionary outreach does not come from the Church. If the word *mission* in the strict sense means “the act of sending,” the doer of this action is God who sends the Son and the Spirit. The Church does not have a mission in the fullest sense of the word; mission is not something the Church carries out or proposes to do, nor is it something the Church pursues as an intention and that shapes its actions.<sup>6</sup> Mission – a word we ought to reserve for the action of God-who-sends – is the action of another who sends, of a God turned towards the humanity whom he so loves. Indeed, at the source of mission we find the love of God and his desire for the world’s happiness. At the source of missionary outreach, we find love for others: God’s goodwill for humanity over whom he stoops so as to bind up its wounds. Our communion with this “immense love” (EG 11) that is at the source of mission releases us from the boredom, sadness, and darkness of our time and of ecclesial weakness. Indeed, Christ

*“constantly renews his faithful ones, whatever their age: ‘They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint’ (Is 40:31)...Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world”* (EG 11).

This love, wisdom, and folly of God surprises us and flouts our logic and our calculations. This love that is at the source of mission sets us in motion; it sends us where we did not expect to go, and even where we did not wish to go. As for the Church, sent by the Son and the Spirit, it is only the agent of an action that is God’s. The Church too

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<sup>6</sup> The missionary shift, in order to be solidly grounded and properly oriented, must be inspired by theological reflection rather than by the management sciences which have interpreted the word “mission” differently in recent years. Mission statements adopted by public organizations are popular today; they turn the organizations that formulate them into the agents of mission, and frame the mission in terms of their activity and the goals they pursue. What’s more, it is the organization itself that gives itself a mission. From a theological point of view, this cannot be the case for the Church.

must be attentive and available to the Spirit's initiative that goes before it and sends it, inviting it to go out to the margins.

The immense love of God, the source of mission, is the object of the Church's missionary outreach for it must announce and manifest this love to the world. The Church is also called to set forth "*from the heart of the Gospel*" (EG 34-39).

*"The heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ." (EG 11). "In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead" (EG 36).*

Missionary outreach aims to fulfill this proclamation through the love and mercy of God. In this way it seeks to "*concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary*" (EG 35). It is this "core", this "heart", these "essentials", which must preside over the development of all pastoral plans and serve as criteria for a community as it makes decisions and adopts certain orientations. This "heart" must serve as the standard by which all pastoral activity of a parish, diocese, or other ecclesial group is evaluated. If what we are as a Church (organization, approach, attitude, etc.), what we do (customs, behaviours, etc.), or what we say (words and speech), is identified with secondary aspects of the Christian message which, though important, nonetheless do not express the heart of Jesus' message (see EG 34), then we must convert these structures and ways of acting and speaking.

Thus, on one hand, the immense love of God – source and foundation of missionary outreach<sup>7</sup> – and, on the other, the world whose happiness God wishes, both lead the Church to a radical turning-away from the center. It is not simply a matter of going out physically onto another territory; 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 centered on itself in order to find its true center in what God does, and in the humanity to whom it is sent.

Situating the Church's activity in a missionary framework presupposes courageous choices, for this implies centering ourselves on humanity to be served rather than on the "self-preservation" (EG 27) of the ecclesial institution that must be saved from shipwreck. This entails a real "pastoral conversion" (EG 27), a conversion of customs and pastoral programs, a conversion of the Church's organization. It is the Church's "*customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures*" (EG 27)

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<sup>7</sup> As is done in the decree *Ad gentes* on the Church's missionary activity, we distinguish the word "mission" from the missionary outreach of the Church, refraining from conflating the one with the other, as is frequently done.

that will be affected. In short, the missionary shift will affect deeply the whole of the Church’s life.

### **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

#### **Convictions:**

- The Church’s outreach seeks the happiness of men, women, and children, and this takes priority over the self-preservation of the institutional figures of the Church.
- As an agent of God’s mission to humanity, the Church lives in a manner doubly turned away from the center: depending on the action of God who is its foundation, and serving humanity that it is called to serve.
- Understanding itself to have been sent to manifest the immense love of God for humanity, the Church must ceaselessly convert its activity to make that love tangible - that love that is the criterion by which to evaluate all that it does.

#### **Avenue for action:**

- To rediscover mission as the work of God who, in his immense love for humanity, sends the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## 2. The missionary shift in our communities

This missionary shift affects “*ordinary pastoral ministry*”, ministry that is directed to the growth of believers; to the encounter with persons who, though baptized, do not live the demands of their baptism, “*who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith*”; and to the missionary outreach properly so-called by which the Church proclaims “*the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him*” (EG 15). In this way, everyone is concerned, regardless of where they are involved or what kind of ecclesial service they are called to. Thus this missionary shift is as apt to renew ordinary pastoral ministry and its old or habitual customs as to bring forth new practices, intended for the baptized who no longer have a sense of a heartfelt belonging to the Church, or for those who do not know Christ and his Gospel. Adhering to the vision whereby “*missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*” (EG 15) means that all ecclesial activities, even “*ordinary pastoral ministry*”, has a missionary orientation. Our customs, our structures, and our pastoral habits will all be deeply affected. It is not a question here of creating a missionary component alongside or on the margins of our current activities, intended for those who do not know Christ; it is a question of conversion in all our pastoral outreach, to make it more missionary. Naturally, not all pastoral activities are named in this document, but the orientations provided are meant to encompass all such activities. The Pope spells this out clearly when he proposes a “*style of evangelization*” which he asks us “*to adopt in every activity which [we] undertake*” (EG 18). There is no activity that is immune to this missionary conversion or that is exempt from the review and renewal that is required.

*“I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are” (EG 25).*

Becoming a Church of outreach demands a conversion of hearts and mindsets, a conversion of customs and ways of acting, a conversion of legal and organizational frameworks, a conversion on the level of allocation of resources and assignment of personnel, and so forth. In the following pages, we will briefly consider three of these levels.

## 2.1 Conversion from “practices of Christendom” to “missionary practices”: the example of Christian initiation

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The *Lineamenta*<sup>8</sup> that preceded the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod on the New Evangelization cites the example of Christian initiation as a realm for the conversion of the practices proper to an era of Christendom to missionary practices. It can be lived as an evangelizing and missionary act when it is directed to baptized persons who have only a weak connection to the Church. It was also observed that “*changes in society and culture are posing challenges to Christianity today. Within the Church, the situation has caused an extensive process of reflection and rethinking in the approaches to be taken in initiating people into the faith and in access to the sacraments*” (*Lineamenta*, no. 18). The document continues by emphasizing that the practices of missionary Churches have inspired Churches of longstanding tradition in the missionary conversion of their practices:

*“In this process, local Churches, which can boast of a centuries-old tradition of initiation into the faith, owe much to the younger Churches. Both have learned to use in their programmes of Christian initiation an adult model which is not limited to infants. The Sacrament of Baptism has assumed greater importance through the adoption of the ancient ritual of the catechumenate as a way of devising a pastoral programme which, in the context of our cultures, provides for a more conscious celebration of the Sacrament, a more in-depth preparation and a greater possibility that the newly baptized will more actively participate in the Christian life in the future. Many Christian communities have embarked on making significant changes in their baptismal practices by reevaluating ways to involve parents, in the case of infant baptism, and by more clearly indicating the occasion as a moment in evangelization and an opportunity explicitly to proclaim the faith. They have also sought to plan celebrations of the Sacrament of Baptism which allow for the greater involvement of the community and show more clearly the support parents have in the task which is theirs, including Christian instruction, a task becoming increasingly more difficult. Taking into account the experience of the Eastern Catholic Churches has also led to an emphasis on mystagogy, namely, considering the process of initiation as not being completed at the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism but as an ongoing formative experience, thereby serving as a reminder that the goal of instruction is an adult, Christian faith”* (*Lineamenta*, no. 18).

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<sup>8</sup> The *Lineamenta* is a document featuring the broad outlines and questions meant to animate exchanges and consultations in preparation for a Synod.

This example, which is entirely relevant for the Churches of Québec faced with the challenges of Christian initiation, speaks clearly and concretely of what might be meant by the missionary conversion of the practices of “Christendom”, for it speaks directly to the experience we have had in our Church. There is a risk, however: that of believing that we have little to change, that we can keep things as they are since our old customs will have become missionary by the mere fact that we are encountering people who are far from the faith and the Church. We would be deluding ourselves, trying to assuage our conscience but shirking our duty, in the belief that henceforth, just because we are in a missionary context, all our baptismal preparations, baptisms, and funerals are intrinsically missionary. Unless we revise these customs, they will remain nothing but practices proper to “Christendom” transposed into a missionary context and, by that fact, ill-suited and often futile in terms of evangelization. With the *Lineamenta*, we can state that “*the features of Western Christianity in the future and the capacity of the Christian faith to speak to western cultures will very much depend on how the Church in the West will deal with examining baptismal practice*” (*Lineamenta*, no. 18). Missionary conversion demands a serious review of these practices and many others: of the way we welcome grieving families and celebrate funerals, prepare for marriage, preach during the celebration of various sacraments, and so forth.

In all instances, we must seriously examine whether our pastoral activities have become truly missionary. If so, it means that we have adapted our approach, revised certain content, and so on. Above all, we must ask ourselves how we deal with requests and how people are welcomed:

*“...if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes...looking for God, he or she [should] not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself “the door”: baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems” (EG 47).*

Neither is the Church a bureaucracy, with habits, rules, procedures, and timelines that attempt to force people’s requests into pre-established pigeonholes. “*‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’*” (EG 25). There is no question of being content with managing

requests. Pastoral ministry cannot limit itself to contacts filtered through a front office and an answering machine, through registration forms or:

*“sophisticated equipment...screens and systems which can be turned on and off on command. Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction” (EG 88).*

### **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

#### **Questions for further reflection:**

- In what way has the “baptismal catechumenate” inspired a review of sacramental preparation, making it into a journey of Christian initiation, capable of actively involving different members of the community (especially adults) and not just the individuals directly concerned? (Cf: *Lineamenta*, no. 18)
- How do parish communities situate themselves with respect to parents, in that duty of passing on the faith that has become more and more difficult? (Cf *Lineamenta*, no. 18)
- Are there other realms of pastoral ministry to explore so as to live the missionary shift (e.g., popular devotions, social commitment, etc.)?

#### **Avenues for action :**

- Examine attentively, as a pastoral or local team or parish council, whether our practices in the realm of sacramental ministry are truly missionary, that is, whether they are the practices of a Church of outreach to others.
- In particular, make a careful review of the way people are welcomed and the way their requests are received.
- Administrative procedures linked to requests for the sacraments must be reviewed in-depth and undergo a suitable missionary conversion.
- Christian initiation must be informed by the catechumenate, not be carried out as it was in an era of “Christendom”; where this is not the case the practices of Christian initiation must be revised in depth.
- Catechesis – everything that surrounds it (sign-ups, schedules, formats) as well as its content – must likewise undergo review in the light of the life of the Gospel, and must lead to that missionary conversion.

## 2.2 Missionary conversion of legal frameworks, church organization, and administrative practices

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*The Joy of the Gospel* refers frequently to the structures of the Church, its procedures (EG 49), its rules (EG 43, 49, 94), and its administrative practices (EG 63). If we wish for the Church to be lived and perceived as a “mother with an open heart” (EG 46-49) and to be a Church with “doors wide open” (EG 46-47) where “everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church” (EG 47), a Church that is not a “tollhouse” but “the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems” (EG 47), we cannot afford not to undergo a missionary conversion and a review of administrative practices, institutional figures, and legal frameworks.

*“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory” (EG 33).*

In keeping with this line of reasoning, we cannot pursue the new evangelization as a goal, without a review of the means we employ, including structures, styles, and methods. Otherwise, we will remain stuck in dreams, imaginations, and wishful thinking. A Church of outreach that adopts missionary outreach as “paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity” (EG 15) must adapt the means it uses, its style, and its institutional forms to this paradigm. It must even go so far as to abandon certain customs or ways of proceeding:

*“In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them. At the same time, the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people’s lives” (EG 43).*

We must return to the heart of the Gospel, and it is from there that we must carry out a discernment that will lead to a rethinking of rules, structures, legal frameworks, administrative practices, and church organization. We see here the three key elements of his statement: returning to the heart of the Gospel (the immensity of God’s love); carrying out a discernment in accordance with this criterion; and, finally, transforming everything that requires conversion so as to be oriented toward mission.

*“The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself” (EG 27).*

This must be taken into consideration particularly in the areas of catechesis, Christian initiation, and sacramental ministry.

What is needed, then, at the level of diocesan Churches and parish communities, is to conduct a missionary evaluation of all structures and administrative practices to ascertain whether they express the heart of the Gospel, the welcoming of every person, and missionary outreach.

*“There are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church’s ‘fidelity to her own calling’, any new structure will soon prove ineffective” (EG 26).*

Thus it is not a question of dismantling all structures and freeing oneself from all rules, but rather of returning to the cardinal principle that must be the basis for every law and its application: *“the salvation of souls, which in the Church must always be the supreme law”*.<sup>9</sup> While structures are necessary, they must not lead the Church to be turned in on itself. They must always be open and welcoming structures that allow for missionary outreach.

### **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

#### **Questions for further reflection:**

- Pastoral ministry is founded mainly on personal connections, while major public services are founded mainly on administrative and bureaucratic practices. Have the ways of operating that are proper to large public administrations influenced our pastoral approach?
- In addition to their taking on of administrative responsibilities, what steps can we envision so that the laity might take on pastoral responsibilities as well?
- How can our parish communities become more than just worshipping communities so as to be communities of prayer, handing on of faith, and charity as well?

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<sup>9</sup> This rule is found in the final canon of the *Code of Canon Law* (Can. 1752).

### 2.2.1 *The parish*

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The section of the Apostolic Exhortation devoted to the missionary review of pastoral structures specifically addresses one such structure, the parish. This question is extremely relevant to the Churches of Québec that are reorganizing the pastoral frameworks that have been put into place over the course of their history. From the outset, its judgment is clear: *“The parish is not an outdated institution.”* The Pope hastens to add that its strength rests precisely with its flexibility that allows it to take different forms:

*“...it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be ‘the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters’” (EG 28).*

This whole paragraph deserves to be quoted as it provides criteria to direct the reshaping of parishes and to assess the consolidations that have taken place so far. The first criterion is nearness to the people. If a parish wishes to be the Church living among the people, this

*“presumes that [through the pastor and the community] it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration” (EG 28).*

Here we have the criteria for the missionary conversion of parishes, a conversion that is even more urgent than the issue of the number of priests, or financial resources.

*“New parish communities and those responsible for them pastorally must take care to live among the people entrusted to them, to be in touch with them, to be ‘near to people’ and their concerns. In short, parishes must be environments of living communion and participation, ...completely mission-oriented” (EG 28).* The parish must not see itself as a purveyor of public services in the religious realm, nor take the organization of public services as a model. Far from being a distant and aloof administration, it must be involved in the life of its environment and offer a real presence of the Church on its territory. We must keep this salutary warning in mind:

*“If part of our baptized people lack a sense of belonging to the Church, this is also due to certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of our parishes and communities, or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems, be they simple or complex, in the lives of our people. In many places an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach, as does a concentration on administering the sacraments apart from other forms of evangelization” (EG 63).*

In evaluating our workings and the pastoral practices we have in place, we must ask ourselves honestly whether the new realities that we have developed help to bring us closer to people and bring us into regular contact with them or whether, instead, they have separated us and have created distance between us. The Pope insists on a ministry of nearness as a necessary condition for evangelization:

*“An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’” (EG 24).*

The Church “*gets involved*” (EG 24) by kneeling down before others, following the Master’s example, to wash their feet. This is not irrelevant to our parish “restructurings”. As our parishes became administration and service points, this has perhaps caused us to lose our proximity to the people thus distancing us from ordinary daily contact with parishioners in a variety of contexts.

For its part, the *Instrumentum laboris* prepared for the Synodal Assembly on the New Evangelization features a whole section on the transformation of the parish. Let us take this example as it is concrete and goes right to the heart of our present concerns:

*“Many responses describe a Church strongly engaged in the work of transformation by being present among people and within society. The younger Churches are working to enliven parishes which are oftentimes extensive, animating them internally through a programme, depending on geographic and ecclesial contexts, called ‘Basic Christian Communities’ or ‘Small Christian Communities’. Their stated purpose is to foster a Christian life which is better capable of sustaining the faith of their members and illuminating, through their witness, various areas of society, particularly in large, sprawling cities. The older, more-established Churches are reviewing their parish programmes which are being administered with increased difficulty as a result of a decrease in the number of the clergy and a decline in Christian practice. They are seeking to*

*avoid the danger that their work become merely bureaucratic and administrative and lead to undesired effects, namely that particular Churches, already too busy with operational problems, might, in the end, become exclusively concerned with themselves. In this regard, many responses refer to the idea of a 'pastoral unity' as a means of combining a parish renewal programme with a cooperative endeavour among other parishes, so as to create a more community-minded particular Church" (No. 80).*

This example shows us very concretely what might be meant by the conversion of institutional figures and legal frameworks. Our Churches have invested much of themselves in this area, but we must ask whether the current reshaping of parishes is truly inspired by a missionary conversion of the structures that were inherited from the past, or whether instead it is simply a re-engineering, demanded by a concern to save and preserve resources.

### **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

#### **Convictions :**

- The missionary shift requires us not to settle for the status quo. Missionary outreach likewise requires us to review the parish network that dates from an era of Christendom.
- To be near to and live among families and individuals must be the main criterion whenever we are assessing some pastoral arrangement or preparing a new arrangement.

#### **Questions for further reflection:**

- Have we done no more than build administrative structures that make use of multiple ritual points of service, or have we fostered the relationships that build up the People of God?
- Does the clustering and restructuring of our parishes allow us to be more missionary?
- In the process of reconfiguring our pastoral ministry, have we developed a pastoral vision or an overall pastoral project, medium- or long-term, that is "evangelizing and missionary"?
- What collaborations (among parishes, dioceses, movements, institutes of consecrated life, shrines, and so forth) can permit various ecclesial entities to become involved in the missionary shift?

#### **Avenue for action:**

- Rethink the ministry that is exercised in new pastoral structures to safeguard its nearness to the life of that particular milieu.

## 2.3 Labourers sent out to the harvest

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In several places, *The Joy of the Gospel* addresses the question of labourers sent to the harvest. Here we will limit ourselves to offering a few guidelines to be developed and adapted locally.

### 2.3.1 *Every member of the People of God in an active participant in mission*

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The People of God in its entirety is the agent of the Church’s missionary activity, which thus depends on all baptized persons.

*“In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: ‘We have found the Messiah!’ (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him ‘because of the woman’s testimony’ (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, immediately proclaimed Jesus’ (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?” (EG 120).*

Evangelization is thus everyone’s responsibility. If some carry out a specialized ministry that falls under the heading of evangelization (ministry to the sick, youth ministry, social justice ministry...), it is in order to remind all members of the People of God of their responsibilities in this domain, to call forth each one’s charisms, to commission all members of the Church and empower them to carry out their role. The Church’s missionary shift thus entails a mobilization of all members of the People of God so as to make them all truly active participants in the life of the Church. This applies equally to young people: they are not only to be formed in Christian life, and must not be seen merely as beneficiaries of the Church’s pastoral care. There is an “*urgent need for the young to exercise greater leadership*” (EG 106).

Taking up the question of pastoral leaders, the Pope directs our attention to the contributions of many women in the field. Their participation in missionary outreach is significant, for “*many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection*” (EG 103). This is not the time to relax our efforts, however, and “*we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church*” (EG 103).

### **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

#### **Conviction :**

- The missionary shift requires that all the baptized become active participants in evangelization - proactive and enterprising members of the People of God.

#### **Questions for further reflection :**

- In this consumerist society, what can we do to help all members of the Church discover that they are originators and active participants in this mission?
- Are there roles, duties, or services that are currently carried out by mandated personnel (ordained ministers, lay pastoral workers) that could be entrusted to other baptized persons?

### 2.3.2 Formation

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The formation of missionary disciples, especially by means of catechesis, is a major source of concern in our Churches. It concerns all of us because “*all of us are called to mature in our work as evangelizers*” and “*we want to have better training*” (EG 121). On this point it would be worthwhile to re-read the recommendations contained in *The Joy of the Gospel* (EG 160-168). Here again, we reach the heart and centre of the Gospel: “*All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which... express[es] God’s saving love*” (EG 165).

Thus just as the forming of authentic missionary disciples cannot be limited to initiatory catechesis, the initial formation alone of lay pastoral workers will not be enough if we wish them to persevere in their commitment with enthusiasm and an unflinching fervour. We are called, therefore, to blaze new trails in formation and growth and to attach great importance to personal accompaniment in the processes of growth (EG 169-173). The formation and accompaniment of missionary disciples will be at the heart of the work of lay pastoral workers involved in full-time pastoral ministry. We must also ensure that these pastoral leaders be better supported and trained.

Formation must be based first of all on a re-reading, undertaken in the light of Scripture, of missionary outreach. Indeed, the Word of God is the basic nourishment for all formation: the preached and proclaimed Word, but also the heard, meditated, and shared Word. Along with the celebration of the sacraments leading to a mystagogical catechesis (EG 166), the reading of the Word must be at the heart of formation. The things said about preparation for preaching (EG 145-154) applies as well to the formation of missionary disciples and pastoral leaders.

A reading of *The Joy of the Gospel* leads us chiefly to two formative experiences: regular contact with the Word of God, and proximity to the poor. These two paths lead us to encounter Christ, the Master who forms missionary disciples, and this suggests orientations that must be resolutely embraced.

This entails formation in the reading of God’s Word, which presupposes formation in *lectio divina*, creation of groups to share the Word, and Bible-study circles. It also entails formation in preaching, especially the preaching of homilies (EG 135-159) and revisiting the question of catechesis, especially kerygmatic and mystagogical catechesis. This first area of formation must be pursued in a defined way.

The second area of formation just mentioned consists in an encounter with the poor and in attentiveness to their circumstances:

*“They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*<sup>10</sup>, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (EG 198).*

It is not merely a question here of involvement, of *“activities or programs of promotion and assistance”* (EG 199), which would leave us in the high state of being the ones who have and who give; we must place ourselves in the lower condition of being the ones who receive and are taught by the poor through whom *“salvation came to us”* (EG 197).

These two privileged paths of formation as missionary disciples involve meeting Christ in his Word and in the poor, and they demonstrate clearly that the reform that is needed is not only institutional but truly spiritual.

An entire section of the Exhortation is devoted to *“personal accompaniment in the processes of growth”*, especially spiritual accompaniment (EG 169-173). This hints at the kinds of formation that we should focus on: formation tied to missionary outreach and to experiences that allow for a reflection upon and deepening of it; formation that places emphasis on accompaniment, that is to say on coaching or mentoring, without neglecting spiritual direction. The latter must *“create spaces where pastoral workers can be helped and healed, ‘places where faith itself in the crucified and risen Jesus is renewed, where the most profound questions and daily concerns are shared, where deeper discernment about our experiences and life itself is undertaken in the light of the Gospel’ ”* (EG 77). In a word, the missionary shift demands a serious review of the shape of formation as it is currently available - as much the formation offered to future priests and pastoral leaders as that offered to all the baptized.

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<sup>10</sup> The *sensus fidei* is the “sense of the faith,” deeply rooted in the People of God who receive, understand, and live the Word of God within the Church (see *Lumen gentium*, no. 12).

## **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

### **Convictions :**

- Together, the Churches of Québec must ensure that the necessary Institutes of Formation are made available for their development.
- The Word of God and the encounter with the poor are the two privileged means to be placed at the heart of formation because they allow for an encounter with Christ.
- All formation must give an important place to experience, mentoring, and spiritual direction.

### **Avenue for action :**

- In a rapidly evolving situation with dwindling resources, we must urgently rethink not only the models of formation in Christian life offered to all the baptized, but also the formation of pastoral leaders and ordained ministers.

### ***2.3.3 Resisting an inward-looking attitude***

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In many places, there is a very rapid dwindling of mandated human resources (priests, deacons, lay pastoral workers) available to work in the mission. In such a context, there is a strong temptation to allocate remaining resources solely to maintain the network of parishes.

Though this aspect is not developed at length in the Apostolic Exhortation, it is clear that a true missionary option must also guide the reassignment of pastoral leaders and church employees and not simply maintain them in structures arising from the era of Christendom. This is an important issue at a time when the number of ordained ministers and laypeople carrying out pastoral roles is dwindling.

*“Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society” (EG 102).*

#### **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

##### **Conviction :**

- Animation of the parish network must not monopolize all ministerial resources.

## 2.4 Conversion of real estate holdings, means of financing, and investments

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The current situation has opened a broad debate about Catholic Church real estate in Québec. The question is often raised in connection with an accounting problem: we no longer have the financial means to support the buildings we have inherited from the past.

This question can be asked from a different point of view to help us get beyond accounting logic alone. Once again, we are invited to take our starting point from the people. “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor,” the Pope writes (*EG* 198). This ought to spur us to reflect, in light of this criterion, on the buildings we own. Indeed, our way of doing things in this realm is an integral part of our ecclesial witness: it can either contribute to or hinder the proclamation of the Gospel. The Pope takes his starting point from the poor (*EG* 70), families (*EG* 70), and youth (*EG* 105). Both our pastoral structures and our buildings can sometimes fail to be hospitable places where people feel welcome and at ease. The Pope invites us to be “*a Church whose doors are open*” both in the literal and the figurative sense (*EG* 46-47). The lack of welcoming spaces can be a cause for breaking away from Christian life (*EG* 70).

### BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION

#### **Conviction :**

- The assessment of which buildings are necessary must not rest on financial considerations alone (without, of course, neglecting them) but must consider the people and the needs of the mission.

#### **Question for further reflection:**

- Is the upkeep and preservation of buildings now preventing us from availing ourselves of the human resources needed for evangelization?

### 3. Starting a process of ecclesial discernment

The purpose of this text is not to formulate a series of propositions that are to be put into practice; that would be an infringement on the role of diocesan Churches and parishes. In three different places, the Apostolic Exhortation refrains from offering the final word on all the questions, considering that *“it is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory”* and wishing thus to encourage a *“sound ‘decentralization’”* (EG 16, 184). Moreover, rather than proposing solutions, it offers *“something much more in the line of an evangelical discernment”*, reiterating that *“it is not the task of the Pope to offer a detailed and complete analysis of contemporary reality”* and so we *“exhort all the communities to an ‘ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times’”* (EG 50 and 51).

It is with this in mind that all the baptized, all Churches and communities are invited to discern the paths that they should follow. After having recalled that *“all of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth’,”* the text concludes that

*“Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel”* (EG 20).

Further on, the Pope adds that

*“To make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform”* (EG 30).

With attention to this invitation to discern, locally, through a synodal process, the shape that the missionary shift will take in our particular environment, as well as the reforms that it will require and the review of pastoral practices and structures for which it will call, the present document does not seek to offer solutions applicable across the board. Instead, it identifies certain areas of ecclesial life and pastoral action, structures and practices that are called to undergo an evangelical review of life in order to implement concretely the missionary shift. Henceforth it is the duty of each sphere (dioceses, parishes, or other groupings of the faithful) to extend this exercise, on the basis of the following guidelines:

*“As I mentioned above, I have not sought to offer a complete diagnosis, but I invite communities to complete and enrich these perspectives on the basis of their awareness of the challenges facing them and their neighbours. It is my hope that, in doing so, they will realize that whenever we attempt to read the signs of the times it is helpful to listen to young people and the elderly” (EG 108).*

Following this, we invite every diocesan Church, along with every parish community and other grouping of the faithful, to enrich and develop the reflections begun in this present document, and to translate for the local reality what it might mean to become everywhere a “Church of outreach” that takes the missionary shift seriously.

If we wish, in the context of a synodal undertaking, to carry out a missionary review of ecclesial structures and practices, it will be important to listen to young people. This means that we may frequently have to listen to people outside our usual circles.

*“Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future, lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today’s world” (EG 108).*

This discernment, which will allow the youngest as well as the eldest to be heard, may take place by means of existing entities (diocesan pastoral councils, presbyteral councils, parish pastoral councils, or local teams) as well as by means of processes or gatherings held specifically to accomplish this purpose.

## **BRINGING ABOUT MISSIONARY CONVERSION**

### **Conviction :**

- The heart of the Gospel, which is God's immense love for humanity, must be expressed by the Church to the world, and must be the central criterion bringing to fulfillment the discernment to be carried out in every environment.

### **Avenues for action:**

- Swiftly undertake a process of discernment, at the diocesan and local levels; a process of discernment leading to an evangelical review of life and of the practices and functioning of the Church.
- Every process of discernment should be of a synodal kind and should not neglect to involve young people.
- Ensure that all members of the People of God are aware that a process of discernment is taking place and are informed of its proceedings and its results.
- The fruits of this discernment should be shared among different ecclesial environments, both within each diocese and among dioceses.
- Following this discernment on the current situation, and on the most suitable means to arrive at a new proposal of the Gospel, courageous decisions must be made in order to achieve the Church's missionary shift.

## CONCLUSION

Pope Francis’ call is incisive and urgent: “we ‘cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings’; we need to move ‘from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry’” (EG 15).

The discernment process that he is proposing to us is not a delaying tactic to gain us some time and put off the needed changes until tomorrow. He hopes “that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are” (EG 25). Not only is it the pre-condition for a new proclamation of the Gospel, but it is the way to rediscover joy, enthusiasm, and dynamism, in contrast to “selfishness and spiritual sloth” and “sterile pessimism” (EG 81-85). This missionary renewal of our communities and diocesan Churches may seem like too great a challenge – almost insurmountable. The Pope says, rather, that “this task continues to be a source of immense joy for the Church” (EG 15). This renewal will thus be stirring and exciting, especially if it is lived with the spiritual depth to which it invites us.

We may find, during this process, that it “does not bring the satisfaction we seek, results are few and changes are slow”, and we may be “tempted to grow weary” (EG 277). We must recall at such times that “‘mere administration’ can no longer be enough” (EG 25), that we are contributing to building up the Church, the People of God on the move, and that “in every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit” (EG 12).

Let us remain united always to Christ, close to all, “close to people’s lives,” and let us rediscover the “spiritual savour of being a people” (EG 268-269).

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