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OUR WORK OF FOSTERING VOCATIONS

As the one responsible for fostering vocations in the District of Quebec, I should like to tell you what the vocations situation is like here, describing some of the difficulties we experience, and the efforts we make, with faith and hope, in spite of the lack of candidates.

Fostering vocations in a difficult situation.

Because of our social and religious situation we feel a certain unease when it comes to recruiting vocations. Families in Quebec, ever fewer in number, are being destroyed as they struggle with separation and divorce. The fall in birth-rate is becoming more and more noticeable. Religious practice has its ups and downs, in spite of the praiseworthy efforts of charismatic groups and others, and spiritual renewal centres. Our young people are the victims of our society and live in a difficult situation dominated by unemployment, suicide, and selfishness. As for us Brothers, our average age is high, and fewer and fewer of us work in schools. And so the age gap between us and students grows steadily wider, and the reality is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to establish contact. Perhaps we no longer dare to offer them a challenge. At times we feel incapable of speaking about ourselves, of suggesting to others the ideal which has inspired our own lives for so long. In short, we are asking ourselves questions about our visibility, our witness and our presence among young people. The least one can say is that fostering vocations is for us a very complex business, difficult to come to grips with and assess in our Quebec context.

Are we then in a hopeless situation?

In the depths of our heart we all ask the same questions: Lord, what do you want me to do? We know that prayer is a priority, and we are making a great effort in this area. At the level of our local communities, we notice that the novena for vocations from the 16th to the 25th has returned. Several Brothers say the rosary privately for the intention of good vocations. In our own community of St. Joseph's, sick and retired Brothers join together in their prayers and sufferings for this same intention. During the course of the year many Masses are said.

We have to remember that the Lord's call comes by way of intermediaries, through us. Our apostolic work, in all its diversity, produces no vocations: inter-District secondary schools, remedial work centres for truants, pastoral centres which work with thousands of youngsters each year seeking to strengthen their faith, half-way houses for young people and families in trouble, etc. What is there still missing in what we do? We must find a solution. Yes, but what solution? Should we consolidate or try out something new? These questions are a constant part of our lives. And we cannot ignore the call to conversion made by our Superior General (January 1987).

The contribution made by our District.

The contribution made by our District in the area of fostering vocations is quite remarkable:

last July, a two day special Chapter was held, devoted to the fostering of vocations in our District, and to which outside speakers came to share their experience and suggestions. Of the 30 or so who took part, a good dozen were prepared to express their views in a short talk lasting between 5 and 10 minutes. Workshop sessions enabled all to say what they thought and to speak of their involvement. Of the decisions reached, the following are worth noting:

«That the inter-District school of Mont Benilde be a special place where young people have suggested to them the idea of following a vocation, especially the vocation of a Brother of the Christian Schools».

«That a team of Brothers, based on the community of Villa des Jeunes (a pastoral centre), be entrusted with the task of running youth groups with a view to forming a group of young people committed to a deeper spiritual involvement».

«That all Brothers, associating themselves with the efforts being made to find vocations for the District, show their solidarity by prayer, by the proclamation of the Word, and by the personal witness of a successful life».

A vocations committee, made up of 8 Brothers, with the Vocations Director as chairman, holds regular meetings for the purpose of thinking about the needs of young people, about how to make contact with them, about how to make Brothers more aware of their mission and make them concerned about vocations. The committee also seeks to make concrete proposals. The main concern of the committee is on the witness level: young people need guides and witnesses; they need someone to introduce them to a Jesus who

is close and personal. Our communities must open their doors to these youngsters and welcome them, because it is by showing them the way that we will find ours.

I should like to mention also the contribution made by the Vicar General, Brother Genaro, and General Councillor Brother Martin Corral, at a meeting with the members of the District vocations team. After a general survey of our vocations situation, our own study of it and our commitment, our distinguished visitor said they were edified by the serious efforts made in our District, taking into account the social and religious situation in Quebec. «The wealth and easy-going ways of Quebec society do not encourage your young people to make personal, Christian or vocational commitments», they said. In conclusion, they invited us to challenge the Brothers, to make them more aware of the mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, to make specific appeals to young people, and to continue to pray, because it is all God's work.

One final word.

«We are therefore convinced that, if you are full of zeal to work with these young people, if you are available to help them organise themselves, then God will have some really astonishing results in store for you». (Br. Superior General, Reunion, April 1987).

May Blessed Brother Scubilion obtain labourers for the harvest!

Brother Marcel Deshaies