

# Catholiques unis au Saint-Père / Catholics United to Peter

## Conseil de Moncton Chapter

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Notice to readers!

Following the publication of our document on the establishment of a new Church model in the Moncton diocese, we were able to obtain a copy of the report on the diocesan consultation that took place in the Fall of 2006. This report, entitled "For a Church That Thrives", was presented to the Archbishop on February 21, 2007.

The report clearly confirms the establishment of the Communion Church in our diocese: **"It is a certain type of diocesan Church (hierarchical model) that is in the process of disappearing...to build a new one (communion model) better adapted to the women and men of today."**

We have done an analysis of this report and are pleased to present you with the results, attached. We strongly encourage you to obtain a copy of the report available at the Diocesan Center, 452, Amirault St., Dieppe (857-9531), since it is addressed to all the faithful of the diocese, in addition to the archbishop, and has been paid for by your generous donations. You can then judge for yourself on the orientation that our Archbishop intends to give to this portion of the Church that was entrusted to him by Christ.

Faithful to Christ and to His Church,



James Ouellet, Chair  
Catholics United to Peter/Catholiques unis au Saint-Père  
Moncton Chapter

## **Analysis of the Report on the Diocesan Consultation “For a Church That Thrives”**

The Diocesan Pastoral Coordinator of the Moncton diocese, Mr. Donald Langis, was mandated in September 2006 to carry out a diocesan consultation with the view to redefining the long-term vision, the orientation of the diocesan Church. We presume that the recommendations contained in the report are not Mr. Langis alone, but also those of the advisory committee (the members' names are not provided) as a preliminary copy of the report was first submitted to this committee presumably for adoption; moreover, he continuously uses the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural (**we** propose, **we** recommend). The final report, in its English version, was presented to the advisory committee and to the Archbishop on February 21, 2007. The next step in the process is to develop and adopt a plan of action to fulfill this vision, which may already have been completed.

Approximately 300 persons participated in this consultation. Some 270 lay people, mostly involved at the parish or diocesan level, and about 40 active or retired priests were interviewed.

What this consultation reveals:

- The diocesan Church **is in crisis** (p. 4). Its present situation is cause for concern (p. 2). We've reached the limit: there's no parish life. (p. 59). **“It is a certain type of diocesan Church (hierarchical and clerical model) that is in the process of disappearing...to build a new one (communion model) better adapted to the women and men of today.”** (p. 3 & 25) states Mr. Langis.
- The faithful are suspicious of the diocesan administration's intentions (some fear that the recommendations were already decided upon). They requested transparency and honesty in the process. (p. 5). “What can we expect?” (p. 4).
- There is polarization within the community of the faithful as to the type of Church that is envisioned: on the one hand, a “group<sup>1</sup> that search to fill church benches and a return to the Church of their childhood and, on the other hand, another group that attempts to be Church in a different way by favoring a Church of communion. (p. 4).
- The pastoral restructuring that took place beginning in the year 2000 left many wounds (p. 8), notably among priests, many of whom feeling they had been excluded from the process (p. 8). Few people had envisioned the scope of the restructuring. **“That was only the beginning of changes”**, says the author of the report (p. 7).
- The priests are exhausted. They have become “distributors” of sacraments (p. 26). They are no longer able to establish close relationships with parishioners. (p. 60)
- The Pastoral Ministry Teams (PMT) that were established in each pastoral unit to offer various services to parishioners are having difficulty working effectively (p. 24). They are good at suggesting but not at doing; they do not function as teams but as groups of individuals; they have difficulty renewing their membership and recruiting new members.
- The faithful must expect a certain number of parishes to be closed down in the coming years.

<sup>1</sup> This is a false and derogatory representation of numerous Catholics in the diocese who remain faithful to the Pope and to the Magisterium, including the constitution of the Church, which recognizes only one Church, model: the hierarchical model, “governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.”

## Here is what Mr. Langis and the advisory committee recommend to the faithful of our diocese.

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- A Church more intent on spirituality and **less on catechism** (i.e. to the deposit of faith and Church doctrine); we want more from religion now than rules (p. 15).
- A Church more welcoming to **gays** (p. 10).
- Each parish will be required to set up an ad hoc committee to reflect on its future and submit its action plan to the diocese by June 30, 2008, expressing its pastoral objectives. (p. 20). **“Each parish has to become a Christian community.”**??? (p. 35). This exercise will surely result in the closing of several parishes.

**Revisit the priestly functions** and determine which ones could be assumed by lay ministers, particularly the celebrations of baptism, funerals and marriages and Sunday liturgy of the Word (celebrations in the absence of a priest). “There are no theological or historical reasons why they (lay persons) cannot be authorized to anoint the sick<sup>3</sup>. There is ample precedent for them to hear confessions, and many actually do. The only “powers” that are refused them are presiding at absolving sinners and celebrating the Eucharist” states the author of the report, by way of quotations, adding that “present experiences compel us to rethink the complete organization of our ministries to put to rest **once and for all** this opposition between clerics/lay persons, often seen as a competition and a fight for power, as if what was given one was taken from others.” (p. 29). Parishes and pastoral units (the laity) will be responsible for funerals, weddings and baptisms when priests are no longer available (p. 37).

- Lay ministers will be hired to coordinate administrative and **pastoral** activities (mandated pastoral coordinators) in smaller parishes and wherever deemed necessary, thus allowing the recentering of the priestly vocation on its very essence: to teach, lead, and sanctify (p. 26).
- Develop a diocesan formation master plan to answer “the needs of the faithful”, “from cradle to grave” and, taking into account longer term needs, popular formation programs (p. 15).
- The implementation of a liturgy formation master plan to “**enrich**” the liturgical knowledge of the community (p. 17).
- Ensure a permanent place for the Sunday liturgy of the Word (p.17). Certain parishes will only have access to one Mass a month (p. 36).
- A diocesan reflection with the goal of defining objectives and preparing a diocesan action plan regarding Youth Ministry (p. 18)
- An annual one-day workshop and training sessions for members of Pastoral ministry teams, pastoral and economic affairs councils and liturgical committees (p. 25).
- The creation of an ad hoc diocesan committee with the mandate of assessing present initiatives, seeing what is being done elsewhere and recommending venues for encouraging and welcoming priestly vocations (p. 32).
- All PMT members, all lay persons engaged in pastoral ministry, should receive formation on the meaning of their baptismal vocation and **how they can exercise their baptismal priesthood**. This will allow them to “better understand where their gifts and aspirations can better serve. Out of this will also come a variety of ministries to service the mission of the Church. That’s how the Church will always be able to fill its various ministry needs.” (p. 32)
- The creation of an ad hoc committee to reexamine the question of the diaconate (p. 34).

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Priests are required to teach Catholic doctrine. (*Decree on the ministry and life of priests*, para. 4.)

<sup>3</sup>According to article 7 of the *Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful to the sacred ministry of priests*, published in 1997, the Sacrament of the sick is reserved exclusively to priests.

- The diocesan Pastoral ministry team will identify the important and indispensable formation needs that will bring the project “Being Church in a different way” (i.e. establishment of the communion Church) to fruition. (p. 36)

## Questions and concerns arising from comments found in the report

The title of the report “For a Church That Thrives” appears contradictory. A diocesan Church that plans to close down parishes is anything but thriving. The title, then, can only refer to the “NEW” Church that will “thrive” better than the current one, or so they hope.

It is regrettable that the diocese omitted to consult a sample of Catholics who have abandoned religious practice or have joined a protestant Church to determine the motives of their decision, as was done in Latin America. These people would certainly have something to tell us about the shortcomings and problems of our diocesan Church.

The author confirms the mistrust of many of the faithful regarding diocesan intentions. It is obvious that the concerns of those who “search to fill church benches and favor a return to the Church of their childhood” have not been taken into consideration. Those who expressed fear that the recommendations may have been decided upon before the start of the process may have been right. When the concerns of one of two groups of people in the diocese are completely ignored, one has to question whether this exercise should have been called a consultation in the first place.

Faced with the mistrust of numerous participants, the author attempts to reassure by asking people to trust those in authority, using expressions such as “God invites us to trust Him”... “the Spirit accompanies us”... “trust in the Holy Spirit,” etc. The problem is that some of those in key positions in the diocesan administration are known dissidents and are not necessarily infused with the Holy Spirit. The faithful certainly have reason to be suspicious of the orientation that these people want to give to the diocesan Church.

One should also be skeptical of the diocese’s intentions to establish a formation master plan to meet “the needs” of the faithful “from the cradle to the grave” and programs of popular courses. What will we teach in those courses? Certainly not the deposit of faith (remember the comment “**less catechism**”). Rather, maybe a doctrine “**better adapted to the women and men of today**”.

The author of the report quotes extensively from Joan Chittister, a relentless American dissident militating in favor of women’s ordination. She supports dissident groups such as ‘Call to Action’ (whose members from the Lincoln, Nebraska diocese have been excommunicated by the local Bishop, a decision that was confirmed by the Vatican in 2006), “Catholics for Free Choice” (pro-abortion) and Women’s Ordination Worldwide.” Mr. Langis also adopts Fr. Pierre Goudreault’s vision, which is none other than Marcel Légaut’s, a French dissident who died in 1990, and who called for a radical transformation of the structure and **doctrine** of the Church.

The author makes reference to the “vision” of Vatican II. Dissidents continuously refer to the “vision” and “spirit” of Vatican II without ever providing actual references to support their claim. So, what do Vatican II documents really say about this vision? The author also affirms that Vatican II proposes a new way of being Church (p. 2). This claim must be held as false until it is supported by exact references. No Vatican II document actually refers to a communion Church model, the only one actually recognized in conciliar documents is the hierarchical and clerical model, that dissidents want to do away with (doing away **once and for all** with the clerics/lay persons opposition). Mr. Langis’ statement (p. 36) that the project (of

putting in place this communion Church) aims to follow the teachings of the Vatican II Council is altogether false. This communion Church model is a construct of misguided and dissident theologians.

The low priority given to priestly vocations in the report is disturbing. The formulation of the recommendation displays a lack of enthusiasm in this regard. In contrast, the author gives a lot of importance to **PMT** members eventually assuming their “baptismal priesthood”, without explaining exactly what this actually means. Would we be making reference here to the eventual ordination of women or of a mandated lay priesthood in virtue of one’s baptismal priesthood?

The probable rejection of the diaconate, which the author, by way of quotations, finds “useless to solve the problem of the lack of priests” is also disappointing. The real reason for its probable rejection is that it does not form part of the communion Church model, which is based exclusively on lay ministries. It is obvious from the comments offered to guide the reflection on this issue that it is already excluded.

The recommendation concerning a liturgy formation master plan to “**enrich**” the liturgical knowledge of the community could lead to an increase in liturgical abuses, described in *Redemptionis Sacramentum* issued in 2004, because dissidents seek the modernization of liturgical language and encourage alternative rituals. Some abuses described in the Vatican document above are already occurring in some parishes.

Why should pastoral units have mission statements distinct from the diocese? Should the mission of the Church not be the same everywhere?

Despite the fact that evangelization is one of the most important aspects of the Church’s mission, nowhere do we mention evangelization programs such as Alpha that is aimed towards non-believers, non-practicing and non-catechized Catholics, other Christians, etc. This program, which has been offered for a few years in one or two pastoral units by lay persons interested in sharing their faith with others and bringing people to Christ, never received the necessary support from the diocese.

Will the Sunday liturgy of the Word be held even when priests are available as occurred and may still be occurring in certain parishes? The Church has established specific norms regarding these: before considering holding such celebrations, other priests must be called upon to celebrate the Eucharist, when available, and in the event a priest is not available, the faithful must be asked to proceed to another nearby parish where Mass is being celebrated. Sunday celebrations are to be considered altogether **absolutely extraordinary** in character (*Redemptoris Sacramentum*, 162-167) and **never satisfy** the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy days of obligation (para. 7, 2 of the *Instruction on certain questions concerning the collaboration of non-ordained faithful in the sacred ministry of priests* (1997)).

Although there is no specific recommendation in the report regarding the formation of small faith communities, the questioning on the nature of the parish and the references to “taking charge...to become a community (p. 11) could be a presaging sign of things to come.

The welcoming of gays, mentioned almost furtively (p. 10), is loaded with meaning and consequences, because the recommendation actually refers to the acceptance by the Church of the gay lifestyle, which is strongly condemned by the Magisterium. The existence of a homosexual agenda in the Church is indisputable: the open letter by 19 Quebec priests in 2006 rejecting the Church’s position on homosexuality serves to confirm this. The Church teaches that the homosexual act is intrinsically disordered (*Catechism*, no. 2357). The welcoming on a non-repentant group of people, in a state of grave sin, who would present themselves at Communion would be the cause of great scandal. However, all repentant individual sinners who seek the Sacrament of penance according to Church norms and who

respond to the invitation of Christ to “go and sin no more” will always be welcomed with open arms in His Church.

## **Conclusion**

This report confirms without a doubt that the establishment of a new Church called the Communion Church is being pursued. Under the pretext of a lack of priests, those who are left will be stripped of several additional sacramental functions. These reforms are reducing the priest to some kind of civil servant with a certain set of duties and stripping him of his true identity: an *alter Christus* (another Christ). These changes will continue to aggravate the “identity crisis” among priests, which will have far-reaching negative consequences on future priestly vocations: who would want to enter the priesthood when it is in the midst of an identity crisis?

The other group of people who stand to lose much from this locally-initiated reform are those, faithful to the teachings of the Church, who suffer acutely at seeing the Roman Catholic Church, the guardian of the deposit of faith for two millennia, gradually being destroyed and replaced by a dissident Church “**better adapted to men and women of today**”, with all that this entails in terms of doctrinal reform.