



DIOCESE OF LONDON
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
1070 Waterloo Street
London, Ontario N6A 3Y2
Canada

Tel: (519) 433-0658
Fax: (519) 433-0011

A LETTER FROM BISHOP FABBRO

August 24, 2004

My dear sisters and brothers,

On August 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption, I celebrated the second anniversary of my episcopal ordination. When I visit our parishes, people frequently ask me how I am doing. Without hesitation, I respond that it is a privilege and joy for me to be your bishop. Over the past couple of years, I have discovered what a wonderful spirit of collaboration exists in the diocese. As I write to you about the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, I will be appealing to this spirit, which is truly a diocesan treasure.

With the promulgation of our Pastoral Plan on Pentecost Sunday, we completed the first stage of the process. The second stage, which has now begun, involves making the six goals of the Plan concrete realities. Each of our parishes—as well as our deaneries, diocesan offices, and ministries—will take the goals and develop some very concrete, specific objectives for the next five years. For example, the first goal states: “we will respond to the call to personal holiness given to all by committing ourselves to opportunities for ongoing conversion and spiritual renewal.” A particular parish may decide to commit itself to the following objectives: in 2005, there will be a parish mission on the importance of prayer; in 2006, the liturgy committee will be responsible for organizing special teachings on the seasons of Advent, Lent and Easter. And so on.

The third stage of the Pastoral Plan concerns the implementation of the objectives, those concrete realities on which the parishioners are agreed. This stage requires that your parish determine exactly what needs to be done to achieve each of your objectives. The following questions will be helpful: What specific steps need to be taken? What is the time period for these steps? Who is responsible for carrying out the steps? What resources are available and needed?

This fall will be an important time for our parishes. Until now, priests and lay ministers have been directly involved in setting the goals. Now I invite you, the parishioners, to be at the heart of the process which makes the goals concrete.

As you think about setting concrete objectives for your parish, I am sure you will find that the Pastoral Plan affirms many good things that you are already doing. It should help you build on what you are now doing. It should stimulate your parish to think in new ways and to take on new projects. It also provides a valuable tool to review what is being done. As your parish considers taking on new projects, this may also be the time to discontinue some projects which have served their usefulness.

The Pastoral Plan, in other words, is not another program that the diocese is now adding to the things you are already doing. Rather, it is a means of assessing what you are doing and of making decisions. By looking at your needs and the particular challenges you face, you will set your parish on the road of deciding priorities and focussing energies.

Objectives are supposed to be concrete, practical and measurable. Once we have decided on our objectives, we should be able to measure the results: are we doing what we said we would? This stage will be particularly challenging, but a positive benefit is that it will help us to be accountable to one another, to determine whether we, as the Church here in this diocese, are doing all that we can to live and spread the Gospel in our world today.

Successful corporations know how important it is to have a clear mission and vision and to develop from these goals, objectives and implementation steps. Our Pastoral Plan, however, is more than an organizational strategy. It is centred in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, whom he promised to send. As disciples of Jesus, we are embarking upon a spiritual journey.

It is for this reason that the Pastoral Plan requires the active participation of each of us. We are trying to discern how the Holy Spirit is guiding us. This discernment is communal. It requires that we come together to share our faith journeys and how we believe the Holy Spirit is present in our lives and in our Church today. We need to listen to one another and reflect on the faith experiences of those who have gone before us—the rich spiritual tradition that our Catholic Church hands down to us.

The Pastoral Plan provides our diocese with a marvelous opportunity to come together as Church, as the People of God. I think this is what our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, had in mind when he instructed every diocese, at the beginning of the new millennium, to develop a pastoral plan. In implementing our plan, each of our parishes will have a sense of working together with our whole diocese, because we will be focusing on the same six goals. But more than this, our diocese will be united with the whole Church as we respond to our Holy Father's appeal.

The promulgation of the Pastoral Plan sets our diocese on a new course. I am excited by the possibilities that it offers us. I know that I myself will have to start developing the habit of thinking through the lens of the Pastoral Plan. We all need to keep it at the forefront of everything we do.

What gives me confidence in pushing forward with our Pastoral Plan is that strong spirit which I have observed among our people, who really want to be involved and make a difference in our world. The Pastoral Plan will enable us to harness the tremendous talents and resources that we possess. When we see good things happening, I think the enthusiasm will be contagious among our parishes. That will be the most convincing argument that our Pastoral Plan is not some impossible ideal, but is valuable and achievable, something that can and will renew the life of our parishes.

The Preamble of the Pastoral Plan states that as a people of faith we trust in the Holy Spirit who leads us. Prayer, then, needs to be at the very heart of our efforts to implement it. I thank you for your commitment to our Pastoral Plan and ask you to continue praying for this intention. We pray that our whole diocese may know more clearly the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that he may enkindle within our hearts the fire of his love.

Sincerely yours in this same Holy Spirit,

Most Rev. Ronald Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London