

## **PASTORAL RENEWAL - A CHALLENGE FOR EVERYONE**

*A Letter to Parishioners in the Diocese of Antigonish*

My dear friends,

In the last decade several studies have looked at ways of renewing pastoral services in our diocese to meet changing conditions. As a result of them some steps have been taken already to make better use of parish resources and personnel. Today we need to take a fresh look at their recommendations, both to see what may have changed, and to form a concrete plan for the best use of resources in each area of our diocese.

To do this, we need the involvement of all: laity, religious and priests. The best plans will come from the grass-roots up, for people at the local level who look honestly at their own situation and needs will be able to assess what resources and personnel are necessary. They will also know what we can realistically support, while providing not just for the maintenance of buildings, but even more importantly, for the many forms of pastoral outreach so essential today, such as catechesis, youth ministry, adult formation, evangelization, charity, and social justice.

For this I have asked each deanery or area of the diocese to convoke meetings of representatives of the various parishes to consider their own situations, with a view to promoting both greater cooperation and the renewal of pastoral services. People are asked to suggest immediate steps, and to begin to think also of the longer term. The reports from each area will go to a coordinating committee which will try to bring them together so that a diocesan wide plan can be formed.

There is a need to consider several factors: geography, population, finances, administration, the number of Sunday

Masses, language and cultural traditions, the amount of travel involved, and the varying abilities of priests to handle larger and smaller parishes. There is also the need to look at new models: the possible use of deacons, religious, or lay persons as parish pastoral animators, with Sunday Mass being provided by a priest; the greater use of priests from abroad; the consolidation of parish administration; the sharing of a whole variety of resources.

In putting these matters before you, I would want to thank our priests for their wonderful spirit of service and dedication in their pastoral duties. I would also like to thank the vast numbers of laity and religious who are so active in their parishes, and those also who take part in the renewal movements that are such an important feature in our diocese. With the help and cooperation of all I am confident that we can go forward in making an even more effective use of our time and talents.

Finally I would ask your prayers and support for vocations to the priesthood and to religious life, and likewise your support of the many laity who enter programs to help them serve the needs of God's people. For the health of our parishes we need them all.

May God bless us with a Lent of renewal and an Easter of rejoicing.

Yours sincerely in the Lord,

*Raymond J. Lahey*  
Bishop of Antigonish

March 15, 2004