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A Missionary Turning Point

Quebec parishes seek to become missionary centres in a changing era

Philippe Vaillancourt
Catholic News Service

Catholic parishes in Quebec province have undergone transformation in recent years as most of them were merged into new entities. But perhaps the biggest challenge lies ahead as the Catholic Church promotes what it calls a “missionary turning point.”

The so-called turning point is detailed in a 30-page document published by the Assembly of Quebec Catholic

A missionary turnaround

Further along the St. Lawrence River, the diocese of St. Anne de la Pocatiere also is on track for such a missionary turnaround. The diocese had 200 priests in 1976; however, it has ordained just 8 priests in the last 40 years. Father Simon-Pierre Pelletier, the diocese’s vicar-general, said it would be irresponsible to let the 26 remaining priests maintain the status quo.

“What’s at stake right now is the inevitable death of an age-old model of the church. Nobody loves to see something agonize and die,” Father Pelletier said.

He expressed confidence that the diocese will eventually succeed in its parish reorganization plan. In a few years he expects that a diocesan missionary team will likely go to local parish communities supported by lay people.

Taking a step aside to contemplate the ongoing process in the aforementioned dioceses, Father Pelletier remains confident yet cautious about the missionary turnaround because some communities may not be able to go through the entire process.

“The missionary turnaround will most likely be a partial success,” he said. “Some local faith communities will probably vanish. The remaining Christians will gather together differently. The idea of the parish isn’t called into question, but its structure has already changed. It must change. And it will change again.” ■

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Bishops in January in which it is presented as the ultimate finality of the ongoing parish reorganizations.

For the assembly, the challenge far exceeds the closure and merging of parishes and selling of churches that have been occurring for many years. It is seen more as a spiritual challenge that demands church structures to be themselves converted.

“Yet, it must not be a top-down process. The decisions must come from the grass-roots communities themselves. That’s the whole idea of the process,” said Jasmine Johnson, director of communications for the diocese of Trois-Rivieres, where the process already is underway.

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