

## **Open Letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet**

The "Groupe du Manifeste d'Ottawa" is a group of Catholics engaged for more than ten years in active involvement with the problem of the shortage of priests.

On the occasion of the International Eucharistic Congress, the group calls upon Cardinal Ouellet to take action to break the crisis that leaves hundreds of christian communities abandoned

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### **A Church Locked in Contradiction**

#### **A Church in Denial**

Will the International Eucharistic Congress simply provide a time for adoration, or rather a response to the distress of Catholics confronted with an increasingly critical situation of neglect? Will it provide hope to the thousands of Catholics who feel abandoned by their church? Will it provide a response to one priest who said, "Being the pastor for three parishes, I no longer know where I am. There isn't anyone with whom I have a meaningful pastoral relationship. It's as if I were floating somewhere out there without any significant personal ties." The small increasingly isolated communities within our pluralistic society no longer have pastors with whom to develop a significant life of faith.

On the occasion of this 48th Congress, can one hope for a Vatican declaration to bring it out of the contradiction in which it risks remaining entrenched? Can a new emphasis on the meaning of the Eucharist as the centre of Christian life bring about recognition that the shortage of priests, which has resulted effectively from Rome's fixation on outmoded rules, cannot be maintained?

#### **A call to Cardinal Ouellet.**

The forthcoming Eucharistic Congress is a privileged opportunity to be seized to open up the impasse. We call upon Cardinal Ouellet to take action. The principle is clear: if the Church cannot guarantee the celebration of the Eucharist in every parish, in each community, she must change the rules that control access to the ordained ministries. The classical call "to pray for vocations" will no longer suffice.

Events relating to the current crisis have brought nothing but disappointment - whether it be the May 2002 International Congress on Vocations, the October 2005 Synod, or the February 2007 Post-Synodal Exhortation. One is left with the same refusal, despite the persistent voices of the laity and the Bishops of Europe and Americas. The Canadian Bishops and particularly the Quebec Bishops who were represented have expressed themselves consistently on the current issue.

Never in the recent life of the Catholic Church have we witnessed such denial. Everything is happening as if the Roman "intelligentsia" had lost all contact with the reality of Western countries. An entire sector of Christianity is losing its soul, more or less betrayed by the Church which should be nourishing it. The latter would rather bury itself in rules, rather than respond to the needs of its people.

Will the Quebec Congress initiate long-awaited and now-urgent change? Many feel profound disquiet prior to a display which risks abandoning basic essentials. For many others, the upcoming Eucharistic Congress will just be a major distraction and a dramatic delusion momentarily obscuring the last gasp of a resistant institution stubbornly refusing timely reforms.

## **The Place of the Eucharist**

Yet, the Eucharist is at the heart of the life of Christians. It was vital and necessary for the first communities to experience what Jesus had lived with his disciples. The same event touches each of our Eucharistic celebrations, thus linking past and present. How otherwise could we keep alive the memory of Jesus and his work humanizing or making sacred the world which was handed over to us? But what can we do when there are fewer and fewer priests?

## **Another Kind of Church is Possible**

To end the impasse in which the church has become entrenched, Cardinal Ouellet in collegiality with the Canadian Bishops, should now take the clear and bold actions which are required - not in opposition to Rome, but in response to pressing and timely needs, knowing that thousands of the faithful support them.

Time is of the essence. We must endeavour to build a new kind of Church. The Vatican must re-assess the rule of mandatory celibacy. There is no theological basis in Rome's refusal to allow the priestly ordination of married men. It is time to invite back married priests who so wish to active ministry. It is time for dioceses, working closely with local communities, to identify married men and women suitable to become pastors.

The Vatican should look favourably on women's role in the Church; it is more than time to open the door for their priestly ordination. Let us not forget: thousands of parishes are still alive thanks to women's commitment. To count ourselves among religions which exclude women is a disgrace and a scandal.

If this International Eucharistic Congress does not result in necessary changes, it will have been another great display among the Church's series of disappointments for its people over many years.



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