



ecclesia

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PEMBROKE

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Bishop's message to the people of the Diocese of Pembroke

Dear Faithful People in Christ,

1. For some time now we have been engaged at all levels of the diocese in discussions related to our participation in the mission of the Church and to the provision of pastoral care for our people. I am pleased to have this opportunity to bring you up to date on the pastoral planning process thus far and to share with you some thoughts concerning our future direction.

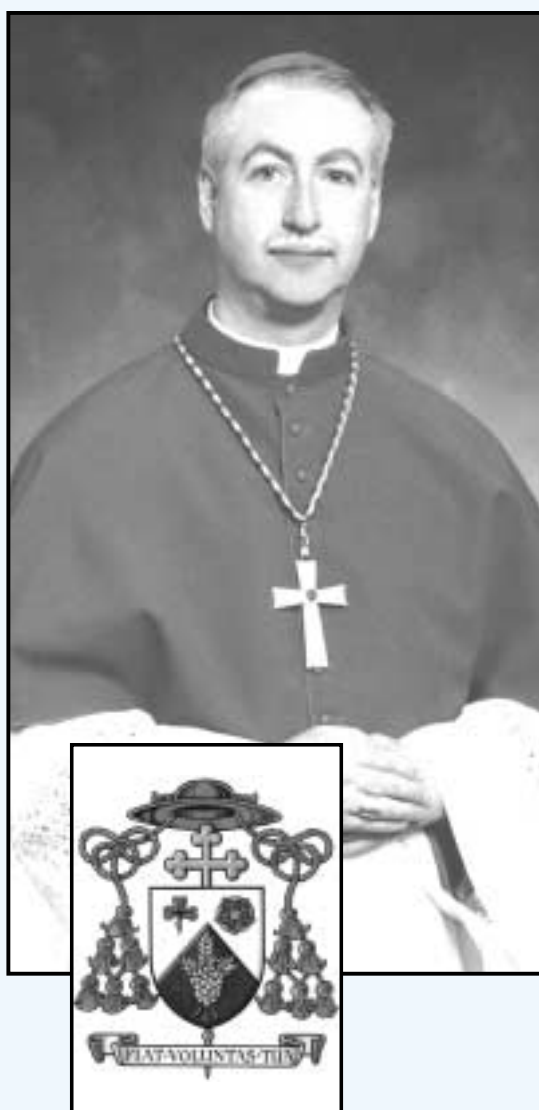
The Process to Date

2. Last Fall I announced the establishment of a pastoral planning committee, composed of clergy and lay representatives from the five zones of our diocese. This committee was charged with the responsibility of organizing and executing a process of consultation, whereby every parishioner of the diocese would have the opportunity to be informed of the challenges we face and given the opportunity to express his or her views and suggestions.

The process involved meetings of parish representatives in each zone, as well as general meetings of the faithful in every parish. Reports of each parish meeting were formulated, and from these a summary report was written for each zone. From the five summary reports, one general statement providing a synopsis of the views and suggestions of the people of the diocese was written. The general report is published in this special edition of *Ecclesia*. It is an accurate account of the sentiments of our people throughout the diocese. Anyone who wishes to view the zone and parish reports may contact the parish priest for a copy.

3. In June of this year, I met with the planning committee who presented to me the general and zone reports. In addition, I have received and read the accounts of each of the parish meetings. I am deeply grateful to all who participated in this process so far. It has involved a great deal of time and energy, especially on the part of those with the responsibility for writing the reports.

Most impressive is the high degree of readiness on the part of parishioners to embrace new ways of organizing our parishes and ministries as we adapt to present circumstances.



The Beginning of Changes in the Diocese of Pembroke

4. It is clear to all that, given the clergy resources we have at present and can expect to have in the years ahead, we cannot continue with the status quo. Change must happen, and people are ready to accept it. The challenge is determining exactly what changes to implement. Even a cursory reading of the various reports reveals a wide variety of suggestions concerning the re-arrangement of parish structures and the

establishment of pastoral initiatives. At our June meeting, in which I reviewed with the pastoral planning committee the multitude of ideas generated by our consultation process, it became clear to us that, in order to give them the serious consideration they deserve, time and reflection will be necessary. Consequently, our planning committee has now evolved into two groups: one will have the responsibility for weighing the many possibilities for parish re-alignment suggested by the people of each zone; the second will focus on the discernment of pastoral priorities and the necessary formation of people to implement them.

5. Our process of consultation thus far has revealed a difference of opinion among our people as to the timing we should follow in implementing change. Some are of the view that we should determine now all the changes that need to be made and institute them immediately across the board. Others hold that change should be introduced gradually so as to allow time for the proper consultation of parishioners who are affected by any particular move.

6. As a general principle, I have chosen the latter option. We have begun a process of consulting the people of the diocese, and, to the degree possible, this should continue as developing circumstances necessitate change. Furthermore, we cannot presume to know now exactly what our situation will be in a number of years. We can certainly make estimations, but we must humbly admit that what we thought a few years ago would be our reality today has already proven to be inaccurate. As Christians we must always remain open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, whose voice is discerned in the reality of the present, and, therefore, be ready to adapt to changed circumstances as they arise.

7. Indeed, our present circumstances necessitated that some changes take place even before our initial stage of consultation was completed:

In the Pontiac zone, the missions of Desjardinsville and Nichabeau have been closed.

In the Mattawa zone, the mission of Feronia has been

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closed, and the parishes of Mattawa, Bonfield and Astorville have each dropped a Sunday Mass so that the two priests in the Ontario portion of this zone could serve four parishes. Mass is no longer celebrated in Chiswick.

In the Pembroke zone, the four parishes in the city of Pembroke have reduced the number of Masses. The times for Eucharist in all parishes have been so arranged as to have a schedule that will both serve the people and enable the priests to offer assistance to one another as needed.

In the Renfrew zone, the two parishes in the town of Renfrew are each celebrating one less Mass. They have coordinated the schedule of liturgies so that one priest can cover the two parishes when necessary.

In the Barry's Bay zone, instead of two Masses in Polish — one at St. Hedwig's parish in Barry's Bay and one at St. Mary's in Wilno — there is now one Polish Mass for the region, celebrated at St. Mary's.

8. We must introduce further changes this Fall:

In the Pontiac zone, a new pastoral unit will be formed from five parishes, under the direction of Father Basil Tanguay. This will involve the faith communities of Vinton, Campbell's Bay, Bryson, Portage-du-Fort and Île-du-Grand-Calumet, grouped together because of their geographical proximity. Fr. Tanguay will lead the parishioners in a process of discerning how to serve the pastoral needs of the people and make the best use of the facilities of these parishes. There will be one central administration for the five communities. Given the number of parishes involved in this configuration, we shall look upon this pastoral unit as a pilot project in relation to other significant re-alignments that may need to be made in the years ahead.

From the parishes of Astorville, Bonfield and Corbeil in the Mattawa zone, a new pastoral unit will be formed under the direction of Fr. Jean-Marc Raymond, with the assistance of Deacons Albert Benoit and Frank Martel. Here, too, the priest, deacons and people are asked to discern together how best to coordinate pastoral services so as to meet the needs of the people. Similar processes of discernment will be taking place in two new parish re-alignments established for the Renfrew zone: (1) Douglas, Cobden and Osceola, under the direction of Fr. Ric Starks; and (2) Eganville, Golden Lake and Cormac, led by Monsignor Robert Borne.

In the Pembroke zone, we have now reached the point where we must discontinue Sunday Mass in two small communities: Stonecliffe and Rapides-des-Joachims. These communities of faithful people have been served by priests who travel one-half hour and nearly an hour respectively. Their populations have by now diminished to the point that only a few people participate in Sunday Eucharist. The numbers at Mass are so low that I have determined it is no longer reasonable to expect a priest to travel for the celebration. We hope to be able to keep the churches open for the occasional celebration of funerals, weddings and baptisms, but regular weekly Eucharist will come to an end, effective October 10th. The parishioners are naturally disappointed by this development but not surprised. I am grateful to them for their understanding and readiness to adjust to the current reality.

Orientations for the Future

9. It is important to recognize that these changes are just the beginning. In the next few years, as circumstances warrant, other parish re-alignments or changes will need to be undertaken. Many may be tempted to view these developments solely in terms of loss. In a real way this is certainly true; the letting go of habitual ways of doing things can be difficult. At the same time we can approach this time as a significant turning point in the life of our diocesan Church. We have been entrusted with a mission, and our planning is aimed at its faithful accomplishment.

10. Throughout this process I have emphasized the importance of remembering the underlying purpose of our pastoral planning process. All members of the Church have been summoned by the Holy Father to a new evangelization, that is, to a convinced and convincing proclamation of the truth of Jesus Christ in the circumstances of our day. Our mindset must be not "maintenance" but "mission". In other words, our deliberations with respect to our parish facilities and personnel must aim at discerning how we might best fulfill the mission of the Church. How are we responding to our baptismal call to holiness and witness? In what ways might we renew our efforts to reach out to those who have left the Church? What adult faith formation is needed in our parish and diocese? How might we best hand on the faith to our young people and celebrate it with them? Who are the poor at home and abroad, and how might we give them hope and concrete assistance? How do we contribute to the establishment of a culture of life and a civilization of love both locally and nationally? These are just some of the questions to address in our parish communities as we strive to participate faithfully in the new evangelization, which is so urgently needed in our day.

11. As we endeavour to respond to these challenges, the Holy Father has provided us with important guiding principles. These are found in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America*. By means of the former, the Holy Father has set the direction for all of the Church's activity as we move into the third millennium. In the latter, he focuses particular attention on the challenges facing the Church in "America", North, Central and South. These two documents provide us with the blueprint for the development of our pastoral initiatives here in the Diocese of Pembroke.

12. In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II addresses the issue of pastoral planning. He acknowledges the need for the development of various pastoral initiatives in the life of the local Church, and summons us to place all of our efforts "under the heading of holiness" (no. 31). This means that the pastoral plan, which serves as the foundation and context of all that we do, is growth in holiness. This growth is achieved by putting into practice, in the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives, the teaching that our Lord gave his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. *Matthew*, chapters 5-7). In order to accomplish such a pastoral plan, the Holy Father reminds us of some central tenets of our Christian faith:

The primacy of grace. We can do nothing without Christ, our Lord and Shepherd. Apart from Him, all initiatives are destined to failure.

The need for prayer and study of Scripture. Our

union with Christ, first brought about by Baptism, is deepened by a regular prayer life and nourished by the Word of God. Therefore, as the Pope tells us, "education in prayer should become in some way a key-point of all pastoral planning" (no. 34) and, as a people, we should be characterized by our devout listening to Scripture.

The centrality of the Sunday Eucharist. The Eucharist is the heart of the Christian life. We can do nothing without Christ, and the Eucharist is the privileged moment of encounter and communion with Him. Here He feeds us with his very Body and Blood. Therefore, participation in the Sunday Eucharist with the community of God's people is indispensable for growth in holiness through faithful discipleship.

The importance of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Growth in holiness requires honest self-examination and frequent recourse to the Father of mercies when we become aware of sin in our lives. The privileged place of encounter with the mercy of God, especially in situations of serious sin, is the sacrament of Reconciliation, which sets us free and restores us to life.

The witness of communion. The Church is fashioned by Christ and the Spirit as a communion of love. As such, we are meant to be a sign and instrument of the unity that God wills for all people. The nature and call of the Church requires that her members cultivate a "spirituality of communion". This means recognizing that our brothers and sisters in Christ are somehow a part of us and we a part of them, and that, consequently, we bear responsibility for one another. In terms of our diocese, the spirituality of communion is fostered when each parish community acknowledges that it is part of the larger diocesan family, and stands ready to work together with other parishes for the accomplishment of our mission.

The principle of solidarity. The Church's nature as a communion gives rise to another principle, which is shaping the life of the Diocese of Pembroke: the principle of solidarity. The pope holds out this principle to the Church in America in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America*.

There, he invites the Church of the Western hemisphere to view North, Central and South America as one continent, and to be conscious of the ways our communion in Christ summons us to care for one another. One way by which we as a local Church can put into practice this principle of solidarity is the twinning arrangement, or partnership, recently established with the Archdiocese of Lima, Peru. The auxiliary Bishop of Lima, Most Rev. José Antonio Eguren, and I have already exchanged visits. Our diocese has formed a committee of laypeople to explore how this relationship might develop. The Archdiocese of Lima will do the same. The goal is to have a relationship of communion and solidarity, in which each diocese will learn from and assist the other with its particular gifts. I am convinced that this will bear great fruit.

Vocational discernment. In the Church of Jesus Christ, there is a variety of vocations. Our pastoral planning must be attentive to helping one another live the call each receives from the Lord.

These principles, given by the Holy Father to guide

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the Church, will direct and shape our endeavours in the coming years. Given our present situation, in the remainder of this letter I would like to focus particular attention on the celebration of the Eucharist and the promotion of vocations.

Fidelity to the Eucharist

13. As the Holy Father teaches in his recent encyclical on this sacrament, the Church lives from the Eucharist. Our Lord is present in the Church in many ways, and supremely so in the sacrament of His Body and Blood. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from the Second Vatican Council teaches that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church's life and mission (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). The whole of Christian life, individually and communally, flows from the Eucharist as its source and is directed toward it as its highest expression. Fidelity to participation in the Sunday Eucharist must be of primary concern to all of us.

14. Our pastoral initiatives and parish re-alignments must keep this principle to the fore. We should always bear in mind that the Eucharist is more important than the building in which it is celebrated. Parishioners have made clear to me their love for their church buildings, and for the communities of faith formed in and around them. This is as it should be. At the same time, they have spoken of their love for the Mass, and of their willingness to travel in order to celebrate it, if for some reason it cannot be celebrated in their church. Many have spoken words to this effect: "If we are willing to travel fifteen or twenty minutes, or even more, to buy groceries, go to the doctor, attend a sporting event and so on, then why would we not travel to celebrate the Eucharist?" This openness on the part of our people gives beautiful testimony to both their love for the Eucharist and their appreciation of its centrality in the life of faith. Furthermore, people are aware that the bonds of communion they share with their brothers and sisters in Christ transcend parish boundaries. Wherever we celebrate the Eucharist, we are "at home".

15. I notice from the individual parish reports that a few people have asked if participation in a weekday Mass might serve to fulfill our Sunday obligation. At issue here is the importance of Sunday in the Christian tradition. Because it is the day of the Resurrection of the Lord, Sunday has been the day when Christians gather to celebrate the Eucharist in memory of his death and rising to life. For this reason, the obligation pertains to gathering on Sunday for Mass. On this point the Holy Father states the following in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: "I ... wish to insist that sharing in the Eucharist should really be the heart of Sunday for every baptized person. It is a fundamental duty, to be fulfilled not just in order to observe a precept but as something felt as essential to a truly informed and consistent Christian life." (no. 36.) As we know, for a serious reason the Church allows anticipation of the Sunday Eucharist with a celebration on a Saturday evening. Our churches are in such close proximity to one another that our people can honour this important principle of celebrating the Sunday Eucharist.

16. Another question posed in relation to the Eucharist has to do with the possibility of gathering on Sunday for a liturgical ceremony, perhaps presided

by a deacon or carried out by lay people, involving the Liturgy of the Word and the distribution of Holy Communion. In our circumstances, this would be neither a satisfactory nor a necessary solution. It is not satisfactory because such a ceremony is not the full Eucharist; in the full celebration of the Mass, Christ is present in his act of self-offering to the Father, so that the Church might offer herself to the Father through, with and in Christ. Neither is it necessary, given the relative ease by which our people can have access to a full celebration of the Eucharist in one of our churches. Only in rare and exceptional circumstances will permission be granted for this kind of a celebration on a Sunday (e.g. the priest becomes ill and there is insufficient time to find a replacement or inform the people of the schedule of Mass in nearby churches).

17. The Holy Father has declared a Year of the Eucharist for the universal Church. Its opening will coincide with the International Eucharistic Congress, held in October of this year in Guadalupe, Mexico. This special year will close in October of 2005, when a special Synod of Bishops will be held in Rome to discuss the Eucharist in the life of the Church. May this be a time when we grow by God's grace in our love for the Eucharist and in our openness to its transforming power.

The Promotion of Vocations

18. Our present needs have focused the attention of all parishioners on the importance of vocational discernment. The Lord calls His people in many ways to follow Him. There is, of course, the fundamental and common call to holiness. There is also the call to mission, which is lived in a variety of ways. Lay persons, in whatever their state of life, are called to inform and shape our society by the principles of the Gospel; religious men and women are called to give witness, by their total consecration to Christ in the Church, to the joy of communion with Him; deacons are called to serve the poor in the name of Christ; and priests are called to serve the community of God's faithful by acting in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church.

19. With respect to priests, I wish to say how heartened I have been throughout our pastoral planning process by the constant affirmation of our priests by the people of our parishes. It is clear that you love them and are grateful for their good work and dedication. I encourage you to pray constantly and to work actively for the promotion of vocations to the priesthood in this diocese. We need priests, because we need the Eucharist. We need wise and caring shepherds to guide us along the path of holiness. In these first two years of my service as Bishop, I have already met many young men who are demonstrating signs of a call from God to serve His people as a priest. Please pray for them and ask the Lord to give them hearts that are open to His call.

Conclusion

20. I wish to reiterate my profound gratitude to the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful of this diocese for their active participation in our process of pastoral planning. We have begun to reshape our diocesan organization, so that we might continue faithfully to live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our day. More decisions will need to be made in the years ahead. I am confident that, by

God's grace and with the goodwill and cooperation that have characterized our process to date, we shall see the way forward.

21. Let us entrust our present and future to the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church. May she, who was completely open to receive the Word of God, help us to obey the voice of Christ as He shepherds us toward the future. May her example of fidelity to Jesus inspire us to give faithful witness to Him in the new evangelization.

Yours sincerely in our Lord,

+Richard W. Smith
Bishop of Pembroke

*This letter may also be found
on our web site diocesepembroke.ca*

Diocesan Pastoral Planning Committee

BARRY'S BAY ZONE

**Carmel Rumleskie
Judy Shires
Rev. John Burchat**

MATTAWA ZONE

**Paul Lamothe
Joffre Ribout
Rev. John McElligott**

PEMBROKE ZONE

**Nancy McCluskey
Robert Tate
Rev. Bill Kenney**

PONTIAC ZONE

**M. Eugene Pigeon
M. Albert Collin
Rev. Basil Tanguay**

RENFREW ZONE

**William McAdam
Nancy Kelly
Rev. Peter Proulx**

WOMEN RELIGIOUS

(ENGLISH)

Sister Teresa Rice

WOMEN RELIGIOUS

(FRENCH)

**Sister Marthe Gisèle
Beauchamp**

Overview of the Summary Zone Reports submitted to Bishop Richard Smith by the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Committee

The participants in the meetings, which took place on both parish and Pastoral Zone levels, were most appreciative of the opportunity to respond to the two questions posed by Bishop Richard Smith in his video presentation regarding Diocesan Pastoral Planning.

At the second meeting held in each Diocesan Pastoral Zone, parish representatives submitted and commented upon their Parish Reports. The representatives of each Zone further summarized these Parish Reports. All Parish Reports and Zone Summary Reports were forwarded to Bishop Smith. The Summary Zone Reports and the discussions of the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Committee form the basis for this present Overview.

The Parish and Summary Zone Reports contain a wide variety of responses as part of a broad process of consultation. There is no indication in these reports which responses would represent a consensus and which were only made on the part of individual persons or individual parishes.

The Reports acknowledge that the process has increased the awareness among the lay faithful of the seriousness of the clergy shortage and the challenges of evangelization in the current social milieu. However, not all the lay faithful are entirely aware that ensuring access to the Sacraments with fewer priests is an acute pastoral issue that we have already begun to face on a case-by-case basis across the Diocese and with greater intensity in the Pastoral Zones of Pontiac and Mattawa.

In response to the increasing shortage of clergy, most Zone Reports indicate a variety of suggestions, which include parish twinning, clustering, amalgamation and closure. It is not always clear what people envision with such options and the exact nature of each would need to be clarified. Some Zone Reports record suggestions, which are more aggressive in this regard and propose numerous options or scenarios. Others tend to be cautious and reticent. It should be especially noted that the Mattawa Zone is already down to three priests with new pastoral configurations already in place.

Some Zone Reports suggest that the number of Sunday Masses could be immediately reduced in every parish to accommodate real need. Mass schedules could be decided upon with a view to the pastoral area in question to afford people alternatives and priests time to travel. This could also be done to provide an arrangement where a neighbouring pastor could more easily provide pastoral assistance in cases of illness or holidays. The task of the priests in the Zones in Quebec could be lightened by introducing bilingual Masses or alternating the language of celebration from weekend to weekend.

When faced with the prospect of change, many feel that we should continue to proceed on a case-by-case basis. For others, we should take the momentum of this present opportunity to move immediately towards new pastoral identities and configurations across the whole diocese.

As indicated at various times during discussions at the Zone Meetings, the talk of closing parishes or missions elicits a universally negative response. There is due concern regarding the repercussions of any decision because of its potential impact upon the practice of the faithful, especially the elderly, and the whole community wherein the church building is still a primary symbol of the presence of God. In the event that a parish or mission may eventually lose the regular celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, there was some indication of a preference to maintain at least the church building as place of occasional worship (i.e., baptisms, weddings, funerals).

In order to respect the natural affinity that exists between certain communities, the Zone Reports suggest that we may need to entertain the combining of churches across current Pastoral Zone boundaries, and possibly even diocesan boundaries. There was some indication that the financial viability of some parishes may eventually precipitate closure and amalgamation with a neighbouring parish community.

Where there may be new pastoral configurations of several parishes, there is concern that we also risk the well-being of our priests because of an increasing pastoral responsibility for fewer priests whose average age is also increasing. Though there is a decline in church attendance and support, the pastoral responsibility of overseeing administration, responding to the sick and the dying, celebrating funerals and weddings, and preparing those who request to receive the sacraments is remaining the same.

The Zone Reports also pose various questions in response to the shortage of clergy:

- what are the possibilities of inviting priests from other countries?
- what is the availability of priests from religious communities like Madonna House, the Companions of the Cross and the Society of Christ?
- what about bringing "home" priests who are serving outside the diocese?
- what is the possibility of "Sunday Communion Services" in the absence of a priest?
- what is the potential for an increased use of the Permanent Diaconate regarding administration and pastoral ministry?
- what of the possibility of using "married clergy" and "women priests"?
- why do we not transfer bilingual priests to the Mattawa Zone?

- could we form "Pastoral Units" of two or more parishes where a pastor, councils and resources are shared?

Many of the Zone Reports record responses, which are encouraging of a vision of greater shared ministry between clergy and the lay faithful suggesting:

- greater lay involvement in pastoral work using both volunteers and trained pastoral staff;
- the delegation of administrative duties to lay personnel;
- a greater sharing of resources among neighbouring parishes.

The Reports make numerous suggestions for ways in which we might respond to our current pastoral challenges. Some of the constant themes are:

- enhance the quality of our Sunday liturgies: music, lectors, preaching;
- encourage greater intensity in prayer with the Scriptures and the Eucharist;
- provide opportunities for ongoing marriage and family formation;
- be more creative and zealous in youth ministry and the promotion of vocations;
- encourage the hiring and training of lay faithful for pastoral animation;
- move towards a greater utilization of existing lay organizations for evangelization (i.e., Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League);
- encourage the promotion of movement-programs in revitalizing parish life and reconnecting with non-active Catholics;
- continue to work on the integration of family/parish/school as a way of reaching marginal Catholics.

The Zone Reports indicate a desire that we respond to the challenges at hand with changes that are creative and not merely reactive. The difficulties that we presently face provide an opportunity for the *New Evangelization* called for by Pope John Paul II, where we can:

- discern and create new pastoral configurations that realistically acknowledge changing population patterns and that respect the natural communities of each Pastoral Zone;
- discern and implement new pastoral approaches in responding to the needs and realities of faith that exist within our Diocesan Church as we continue to proclaim the Good News that is Jesus Christ.

*This article may also be found
on our web site diocesepembroke.ca*