

Retirement Thoughts

After 29 years of working with the Roman Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Moncton, Monday, September 19th I will officially retire. I'm not sure where those 29 years went, yet I am filled with gratitude that I have been able to spend them doing something as meaningful and rewarding as being part of the ministry of catechesis.

This part of my life's journey began in 1990 when my husband transplanted me from NL to NB after he took a new job – a move and a job I was not terribly excited about. As a young mother, with three children under the age of 7, I was recruited by Rita Arsenault to become a catechist at Immaculate Heart of Mary as soon as I registered our oldest. Unknown territory for our family having left a province with a Catholic school system still in place. Still, I said yes. Three years later, I was encouraged to apply for the position of catechetical coordinator by my good friend Janet Patterson, and my sister who was visiting from Montreal. Ten years later, I was approached about taking the position of catechetical director of the English sector at the diocesan level ...

Now here I am, retiring from a job that has led me to places, people, experiences, and encounters which have amplified my understanding of the need to have a relationship with God – a relationship that has developed mostly because of you, the people of the Archdiocese of Moncton, who have nurtured me in countless ways you will never know, and I can barely comprehend.

The Church has frequently frustrated, disappointed, angered and saddened me. The Good News she should be to her people is occasionally replaced by power-mongering, political influence, corruption, grand-standing, greed, control, mistrust. But still ... when the Church follows the Gospel values she has been asked to share, when she remembers her wise teachings, when she lives the over-riding commandment to love, first God, and then your neighbour ... that is the Church I love, and the one I have experienced so often in my life.

Working in both volunteer and paid capacity for the Church has been sometimes rather challenging and tiring. Even so, it has always been a privilege. I have met so many beautiful people – some of whom have become close, personal friends; **all of whom** have affected me in ways that would surprize you. Through those I have worked closest with I have learned that the parishes of this diocese are blessed beyond measure.

It is not easy being a woman in the Church, in a position of leadership, but not always one with a voice. And yet ... I have been on holy ground with you. I have experienced God with you. I have grown through your wisdom and insights. I have come to know how God is working in my life through watching God work in your lives. I have come to appreciate the value of good liturgy. I LOVED my work, and I am filled with gratitude for the many aspects of my life that work impacted, which I would never have expected. I have been touched watching parents with their children; hearing adults share their stories; seeing priests being pastors; and having children teach us all how easy it is to let God love us.

It is always risky to name specific folks in situations such as this, but I will take that risk. The dedication and commitment of the catechetical coordinators of the English sector are an

inspiration to me. Karen LeBlanc, Lorella Dunnett, Eileen Caissie, Cathy Crinnion, and their predecessors, are, for many families, the face of the Church. They work the hours needed, to not only to get the job done, but get it done well. They have amazing relationships with parents and children and are excellent catechists and women of faith. They are a team in the true sense of the word – collaborating with one another, supporting one another, venting with one another.

I have had the great honour to work closely with three archbishops: Daniel Bohan who hired me at Immaculate Heart, became a mentor, teacher, and good friend, opening opportunities for formation that helped me become more effective in my work. André Richard who hired a unilingual English woman to provide catechetical support to English parishes of this French diocese, taught me the importance of community, prayer and fellowship and allowed me to become involved in bigger conversations. Valéry Vienneau, who during his entire tenure with us has been dealing with tough issues for the Church and the archdiocese, taught me that sometimes it is necessary to face and respond to difficult questions head on because God is with us in whatever we are living, however we are living it. He is also the only man wearing a collar who has ever brought a bottle of wine to my home when invited for dinner. 😊 Those three men encouraged and affirmed not only the work I do, but also me as a person, helping me to feel I was a valued and trusted colleague.

The parishes of the English sector made we feel welcomed during the many initiatives the Office offered during my tenure. They, and especially the secretaries and admin staff, went above and beyond over and over, responding to countless requests for help during my time. The Ladies Society, Catholic Women's League and the Knights of Columbus give so much of themselves to the parishes; never once did I reach out to these organizations and meet with rejection. So much gets done by custodial staff in parishes that is taken for granted – the set up and take down of all those workshops, over all those years could never have happened without the assistance of custodial staff. In this archdiocese we are blessed with some excellent facilitators and presenters, who have repeatedly given of their time, and I want to make particular mention of Dr. Fiona Black, Claudette Derdaele, Rev. Dr. Hugh Farquhar and Dr. Andrew Wilson who have helped adults of this diocese deepen their understanding of Scripture and of God. My colleagues at the Diocesan level, most particularly Trevor, have made it a pleasure to come to work each day. The pastors of our parishes, especially Fr. Allison Carroll, who listened to lots of ranting in my office about a multitude of topics, and Fr. Phil Mulligan, my own pastor, and the only member of the Adult Faith Commission with no expiry date, have offered unqualified support and affirmation. And a very special shout out and thank you to Claudia McCloskey from St. Bernard's – can we be any more blessed than we are to have you in our midst? The members of the Adult Faith Commission, both past and present, do the hard work called on to share the Church's message to adults, dreaming up innovative ways to get the message out, using resources already in place in the community to ensure we are Good News to those who need to know they are loved. Thanks to everyone of you, so very, very much. It has been an honour working with you all for the past 29 years.

Finally, and for me, most importantly: if you are going to be a woman working for the Church then your life is made more bearable by the presence of a Wayne. He gets me through life, one day ... sometimes one hour ... at a time. And while he finds it impossible to accept that the

Church will never be run like a corporation, he, and our children are ample evidence every day of God's love and blessing in my life. Sheila, who is convinced she doesn't believe in God and yet behaves like Christ most days; Marc who is God at his most vulnerable; and Jordan, who has the full energy and generosity of the Holy Spirit, all fill my heart with the sure and certain knowledge that I am a deeply loved child of this God I lean on all the time.

Faith is something I know many struggle with, don't understand, find impossible to grasp ... but for me, it has been a lifeline all my life. Without doubt, I know that the 29 years I worked for the Church in the Archdiocese of Moncton have provided me with ALL the high points of my professional life, and I am eternally grateful for the phone call that began it all, and the encouragement, each time, to move forward. As it is for all of us, I'm not sure what the future holds for me, but I know whatever it holds, I will have the continued love of a God who has always carried me. I wish you God's abundant blessings as I move now toward a different path. I know God is present in all of you because you have shown me again and again the face of God in the way you have accepted and welcomed me. Thank you and Godspeed.

As always,

Ellen Bennett