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## NEEDS OF YOUTH IN FRENCH CANADA

The four French-speaking Districts of Canada are in the process of rethinking the role of the Brothers of the Christian Schools today. They are asking themselves what kind of image do they project and what the reality behind the image is. They are also asking what are the most pressing needs of present day youth which call for their concerted apostolic efforts. An inter-district meeting was held at Cap Rouge to consider the type of Brother required to meet the needs of Canadian society at the present time. Another meeting was held later. More than one hundred Brothers attended, including five young Brothers. These young Brothers and the four lay resource persons told the assembly what they expected from the Brother of today.

The following are brief sketches, by the members of the inter-district committee, of their vision of the ideal Brother who would meet the expectations of Canadian youth:

The Brother should be "a man of the people", prepared to share the life of the working classes, living in more modest surroundings and capable of giving real, not token assistance.

A man in work clothes i.e. a person who is not satisfied with a comfortable boring existence, a man who spends more time in work boots than in patent leather shoes, a man who thinks of something other than his personal comfort and wellbeing and who rejects the consumer mentality.

A "radiant" person, idealistic, dynamic, in love with life, having a positive outlook, happy to be himself. This does not mean to say naïf, simple minded, childish, short-sighted or light-headed. He should be convinced that he is the depository of the salvation brought by Jesus Christ, in other words, a man who radiates the joy of life.

A man independent of structures, capable of improvisation, able to live with a variable time-table, with insecurity. He is, nevertheless, not absolved from attention to the Word of God nor from community life, for otherwise his life would have no meaning.

A man of God who radiates Jesus Christ, a man of faith nourished on the Word of God and by the sacraments, who sees everything with the eyes of God and who expresses his faith in terms adapted to the circumstances of modern life.

A man "free and inspired", not a slave to hypersensitivity which results in paralysis, a man capable of changing his view of things and his way of acting. Nothing in this life is cast in concrete. A broadminded person, ready to accept new challenges and attentive to new needs. In effect, a man freed from himself.

A man who is not afraid to show affection, tenderness, warmth, tolerance and mercy. A man full of the joy of life, not a "wet blanket".

A man who can "work in harness" i.e. as a member of a team, who carries out his commitments, who accepts responsibility and who inspires trust. A man who can involve young people and work with them.

A prophetic person who can take a wise view of things and who looks to the future. An interior person who sees things in the light of faith, not superficially, and who gives a meaning to life.

Let us now compare this ideal image of the Brother as envisaged by the Brothers themselves with that of the five young panelists aged from 18 to 22 who were invited to the Collège Marie-Victorin on 29th September 1984 to tell us what they expected and what they considered the most important needs of modern youth. We quote the following extracts from their most significant observations:

"The young person needs love and affection. You are a free person and I am so happy that you freely chose me as your friend."

*Johanne Gravelle*

"Young people want to feel themselves active members of a society which includes adults and young people. They need to be valued, to have concrete projects, to have aims in order to develop. They need to feel useful, to have a job, to be listened to with respect and to be allowed to run their own lives."

On the human and Christian side, young people must have the means of discovering and sharing real values: love, friendship and mutual aid. This presupposes certain changes in the world of education and recreation. They need forms of prayer and celebration more adapted to their needs as well as facilities for meeting other young people.

The young expect from adults open-mindedness, help in satisfying their needs, freedom to choose for themselves and no harking back to "the good old days".

*Marie Bourgault*

"In the matter of faith they want to be made acquainted with the Word of God. They would like to know Jesus Christ but without undue pressure. They expect adults to commit themselves to the welfare of the young and ask them to teach by example as well as by word. They will not accept the 'Don't do as I do but do as I say' mentality.

I would ask you, above all, to act towards the young with sympathy and love. They will remember what you are more than what you say."

*A. Marois*

"A major problem is the lack of communication between young people and adults (parents and educators). Young people are afraid to say what troubles them. In Québec the suicide rate is very high. We must listen to young people but in order to do so we must reach them. The way to reach them is to provide a meeting place where you can engage them in conversation, make friends, listen to their cries of distress and discuss their problems with them. Jesus gave his message to the people through the things that interested them! He was able to make friends and disciples among them. He was one of them.

Young people need to believe in something. They seek the light but find only drugs, alcohol and the new sects. Brothers, where were you when they made their choice? You who should be the teachers ready to light the path of your neighbours.

The young do not feel at home in the Church. Pope John Paul II reminded you that you should help us to find our place in it because the Church can exist only if we form part of it. Help us to bring our dynamism to the service of the Church.

You have asked me what kind of people we need, people who will help us to make society our own. We need inspiring leaders, men who can take us out of ourselves and make us interested in others. We need counsellors to help us in the choice of a career. We need youth centres where we can meet, find amusement and get to know one another. We need people who will help us to a better knowledge of our faith and of our Christian vocation. And lastly, we need men and women of good will to create a world of peace and love."

*Réjean Dicaire*

"A young person needs to be somebody in the eyes of someone. He or she needs to feel loved, cared for, noticed. 'Look at me' said a little girl to me one day. We must take time with them over simple things. We must trust them and believe in their good qualities. I myself decided to meet young people on their own ground, where they, not I, had the upper hand, that is to say, in the street, in the school playground, in the home, in places where adults were not in control. We must undertake projects with them and in doing so we must live in an evangelical manner. We must radiate Jesus Christ because the young need a 'spiritual master'.

Young people make gestures and ask to be allowed to commit themselves. They need models to identify with; adults who will treat them with respect and take them seriously. They need people of real love, of truth, of depth, of simplicity, of daring, of patience and of openness. They need people who are father, mother, brother and sister to them, different from but at ease with them.

Helping young people to really live the Gospel values, to organize their lives, to find solutions to their problems, to love as Jesus loved, and to enjoy themselves together is quite an education for an adult. It is impossible without God and without the presence of people who lead an interior life and who are capable of helping young people to grow. What is clear is that young people want something solid. It is not the easy and the superficial that they are seeking."

*Sister Jacinthe Quévillon, P.S.S., Social worker*

The following are the results of a poll of 282 students taken by Brother Gautier, FSC, on the needs of the young, together with the questions asked.

A group of educators wishes to hear your opinions on the present situation of young people so as to be able to respond to their needs. You can help them by answering the following questions:

- 1) What is, in your environment (school, family, society) the biggest problem and the greatest need of young people today?
- 2) What is, in your environment (school, family, society) the factor which prevents you from being as happy as you would like to be?
- 3) If, in your milieu (family school, society, friends) an adult were prepared to do something for you or for other young people, what would you ask him to do?

To questions 1 and 2, 136 answers mentioned the lack of love and affection, of attention, of understanding and of a willingness to listen on the part of adults. 70 mentioned problems related to drugs and drink. About 70 spoke of problems of adolescence: lack of self confidence, lack of freedom, too many pressures, the fact of not being treated as adults. 41 spoke of unemployment, lack of money and fear of the future (nuclear war).

In answer to question 3 which concerns our role as helpers, the young want us to be more attentive, more available and more affectionate. If adults would put themselves in young peoples' shoes fewer young people would be rebellious.

Brother André Gautier ends his report by stating, "Having read these answers I feel more and more the desire to do something for these young people."

The last adult to give his opinion is a lawyer, with three children of his own, who looks after a centre for young people in trouble.

"A young person needs understanding and complete acceptance. He needs hope and he needs Jesus Christ. The Brother is well placed to respond to the needs of today's youth. In the matter of education, make use of your experience and skill. Concentrate on the young people whom society has given up as hopeless:

- 1) Provide a training centre where 'drop-outs' and illiterates can learn a trade.
- 2) Take prompt and effective action with trade schools, unions, and other organizations to ease the transition from school to work.
- 3) Contact social workers and guidance counsellors with a view to helping young people in trouble. Provide temporary lodging, spiritual guidance etc.
- 4) Give direct and sustained help to young delinquents...

I invite the Brothers to profit by the International Youth Year to reflect on their role as educators in our society and to examine seriously the possibility of adopting a general (inter-district) policy of action and participation in the social, religious, and community life of the area in which they are called to work. They must do this if they are to respond to the pressing needs of the young in the spirit of the evangelical counsels and in such a way that they may be seen as representing Jesus Christ, the Saviour."

**Brother Jacques MONGEAU**  
MONTREAL