



EMBARGO UNTIL SPEECH DELIVERED

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Testimony

Participation, responsibility and authority The role of the bishop

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When the Apostolic Nuncio to France told me that Pope Francis had appointed me Bishop of Troyes in Champagne, since he was not in Paris and did not have the dossier on the appointment of the Bishop of Troyes with him, he only gave me two indications before asking for my acceptance. The first regarded the financial difficulties of the diocese, which required bold choices. The second point concerned arranging the liturgy; anticipating that this celebration would take place in January, he warned me that the cathedral would be very cold. He wasn't wrong! In addition to the bitter cold that gripped all those who had come to pray in this magnificent cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, I had to face the financial question.

When I arrived in Troyes, I found on my desk a financial audit that called for some courageous decisions to reverse the financial balance and open up a perspective for the future. The first major decision to be taken was to change the future of a major property complex whose financial management had been increasing the deficit every year for more than twenty years, and which was going to require substantial work. The auditor had invited me to decide to sell the building as soon as I arrived, "to show that I was in charge". Well, in the end...

The future of this religious building, whose history dates back to the thirteenth century and which was taken over by the diocese after the Second World War, aroused a great deal of emotion, and opinions on the subject were as different as they were irreconcilable. As the choice ultimately concerned the whole diocese, I felt it was essential that the decision was made together, even though I would be taking the final decision. We all know the saying: "What concerns everyone must be examined by everyone".

One of the pieces of advice I was given was not to put economic issues on the table, but to work on expectations and hopes, to give people the opportunity to express their fears and anxieties, and above all to build a real pastoral project.

I brought together a group of Christians with different skills, under the leadership of a woman who I felt was capable of leading a team and taking on a joint project. This group worked hard to establish several possible and realistic scenarios for building a new diocesan house, either in the current buildings or in another location. Its mission was to take into account not only the pastoral dimension, but also the economic dimension and the inevitable reality of the real estate situation. This committee was able to put forward concrete proposals, specifying the real estate and financial consequences.

I then invited all the Christians in the diocese to the presentation of these scenarios. Following the advice I had been given, I gave a vision of working together and of diocesan life. Then, the

Christians met together, priests, deacons, consecrated persons, religious and lay people to answer the question: "What does the Church in Aube - the department that corresponds to the boundaries of the diocese of Troyes - wish to live and say to the people of the twenty-first century through its diocesan house?" To extend the discernment process, each parish, community and Christian group was able to pick up the elements of the presentation to extend the discernment process in different parts of the diocese.

This enabled us to highlight priorities, expectations and a concrete and exciting pastoral project. The fruit of this process of discernment and all the contributions were made available. I then brought together a new committee made up of people with completely different visions, but who were able to work together. While working on the final discernment with this last committee, I was stunned: the first person to speak was one of the great defenders of the conservation of the building at all costs; she expressed her conviction as follows: "However, with the work of discernment, it seems obvious to me that the diocesan house needs to be established in another location if we want the Church to live and dare a new path of pastoral conversion today, a more humble, joyful, community-based project, a house that breathes life". The whole committee was unanimous. This enabled me to take the decision peacefully, with the consent of the councils and colleges provided for by canon law. Even though a small group was opposed to the decision, on the one hand the decision was obvious and not the fruit of my personal judgement alone, but above all it was accepted by all the faithful who said: yes, we regret giving up this place, but we understand why and this decision gives us enthusiasm for what our Church is living and building today. The building will be sold to the city to continue its vocation as a place of learning and heritage enhancement.

I would also like to share with you something new in my diocese. When I consulted the priests, deacons and various lay leaders in the diocese to find out which new vicar general to choose, some of the responses were that a deacon or a lay person should be the vicar general, which is not allowed under canon law. This last sign convinced me to call another person alongside the vicar general, a delegate general. The Bishop's Council, or Episcopal Council, already included two priests, a deacon and two women, but it seemed to me that the time had come to go further. The diocese was already experiencing a great deal of co-responsibility and I wanted to continue along this path. A faithful laywoman had recently become available and was recognised by all for her commitment and competence in the service of the diocese. She is now part of the executive trio, working in concert with the vicar general, and in deep communion with me. She now acts as the Curia's moderator for the diocese's pastoral services and oversees the diocese's pastoral and missionary transformation. The presence of a woman at my side, a woman recognized by all and well accepted in her mission and responsibility, brings a very positive outlook to the running of the diocese. The link between the vicar general and the delegate general is gradually being built up. This allows a valuable circularity between the three of us, even if each has his own mission and his own degree of responsibility.

Thank you very much.