



Dialogue

Newsletter of the Fabrique de la paroisse Notre-Dame de Montréal

Vol. 4 No. 13 September 2002

The first part of our master plan

We developed our plan on the basis of Montreal's present and future needs, foreseeable in part until 2026, by projecting the number of deaths expected in the Montreal region and the evolution of funerary customs.

However, it goes without saying that this "vision" of our cemetery's future will require us to review the planned projects, as well as implementation methods, on a regular basis to ensure that they fit in harmoniously with future realities.

The main objectives that have been retained will enable us to establish the following orientations:

- Ensure the conservation and enhancement of heritage components of the property
- Ensure that future actions are compatible and consistent with the characteristics of the existing framework
- Acknowledge sites that can accommodate these future operations and their crucial formal characteristics
- Subsequently facilitate the analysis, approval and implementation of specific projects at the appropriate time
- Harmonize our efforts with those of the city to achieve an optimal enhancement of Mount Royal as a whole

For ease of comprehension, the primary reflections involved in the plan are described under various themes. In this first part of our plan, we will focus on the cemetery's spiritual and vocational elements as well as problems that need to be solved.

A. A particular, discrete and fragile natural component

Our cemetery is part of a larger natural surrounding that extends well beyond Mount Royal. Its current state results from the conjunction of natural and man-made items. It shares some of the moun-

tain's topography, plant, and wildlife, but is nevertheless different in several respects, given its specific orientation and incline as well as the landscaping designed to meet various objectives. The fact that the site's main characteristic is its natural essence is important

for two reasons: the first is intrinsic given the surrounding urban context; nature is also important in terms of the original founding principles for the cemetery. Indeed, those who designed the rural cemeteries around the middle of the 19th century were firmly convinced that nature played a role in the grieving process and contributed to comforting families. Accordingly, it needed to establish a balance between buildings and the environment.

B. A city of the dead in the heart of a city full of life

Our cemetery is a large oasis created more than twenty years before Mount Royal Park. It almost seems to belong to the park, yet it was created for different reasons and a different purpose. The site was of course chosen as a final resting place for the deceased but first and foremost to protect the living

from the epidemics they feared. Also, it was deemed more profitable to use old burial sites for other purposes. Of crucial importance to the living, the cemetery had become an increasing hindrance by the end of the 18th century. It was moved further away from the city twice, but urban development always finished by catching up with it. Originally positioned on



the outskirts, it is once again where it was at first – right in the middle of inhabited areas. Today, we are aware of the futility of this twice-repeated action: the city of the dead cannot in practice be excluded from the city of the living. The challenge consists of ensuring the right balance between the cemetery's occasionally conflicting functions, i.e., simultaneously meeting the needs of the deceased and the living and – more directly – the needs of the living who are the link between both worlds, i.e., the bereaved family and friends.

C. A consecrated place

Apart from the sacred nature that all peoples attribute to the sites where their ancestors lie in rest, independent of any religious institution, a Christian cemetery is a place of worship. An extension of the church, the cemetery is the place where the deceased gather to await the Resurrection and the Last Judgment. A place of passage and hope, the cemetery

holds a special place in the hearts of the faithful because it is intrinsically associated with the mystery of Redemption. Accepting the recreational nature of the park in which the cemetery is located is quite a challenge. This involves encouraging walking, contemplation and reflection while asking visitors to stop or move to other areas of Mount Royal for leisure activities which are ill-suited to the cemetery's religious character.

D. A place of great value in terms of heritage

Our duty is essentially to conserve and explain all of the elements that justify the cemetery's educational, aesthetic, historical, commemorative and symbolic value. In other words, our duty is to protect and raise awareness of the site's beauty, its geological qualities, its natural plant and animal life, the artistic dimension of its overall landscaping design, buildings and grave markers. It's definitely a question of conserving and

highlighting the cemetery's interesting aspects. The cemetery is an important part of the city's eponymous hero, i.e., Mount Royal.

In this respect, the main challenges are as follows:

1. Achieve the best possible results in the changing context of the living beings involved (wildlife, plants, users, visitors), of the cemetery's continued use and of the effects of natural forces (ground motion, erosion, pollution, accidents).
2. Raise awareness, mobilize and if necessary assist the owners of grave markers over which we have no direct control in principle.
3. Raise awareness of certain historical values that are now more or less eclipsed by the passage of time or more recent landscaping designs. ♦



Yolande Tremblay, General Manager

Cemetery Writing

Annie Dubé,
Theologian and Aaron Funerary Consultant

“A bouquet of red roses, wrapped in cellophane, has been fading for a few weeks on a grave near my father’s. It is tied together with purple ribbon, with letters on it from which the sun drains a little more colour every day, spelling one word: “Mommy.” When I walk in front of this grave and I read this word, I do more than read. I hear it like a cry, becoming smaller and more heart-wrenching with every day that passes.”

- C. Bobin, *Ressusciter*

A headstone is a testimony, a partial representation of the universe of the deceased, of his or her time, or even of a culture. It is a veritable work of popular art, witness to the death of beings that have passed through a society. The purpose of a headstone is to immortalise characters, fixing them for posterity, perhaps even for eternity, in a carefully constructed memory.

Through these monuments, a cemetery translates the collective

rituals of people, and makes a solemn vow about facts and acts of the past. Each stone gracefully assumes its position to begin the fight against forgetting, before forgetting begins. Our beliefs tell us that ice on a headstone speaks to us of the definitive absence of our loved one. When the sun has warmed the stone, it is evidence that the soul of our dearly departed is still active.

A person's grief reminds us that we are all exiles, from ourselves and from others, to varying degrees. A cemetery, with its hundreds of headstones, is merely an assembly of solitary beings. It is also, however, a final symbol of the membership of the departed in a community of solidarity and meaning. Indeed, cemeteries are often divided according to the urban model, into neighbourhoods, as though the deceased knew each other. Perhaps, if we are silent, we may hear the pain and cries of their loved ones. And perhaps, in an even more profound



By Johanne de Montigny, psychologist, McGill University Health Centre, Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal

Death Kills Neither Life nor Love

“The end of life does not necessarily coincide with the day we die: for some, it happens well before, but for those who are truly alive, it may never happen.”

(Christian Babin, *La Lumière du monde*, Gallimard, Paris, 2001).

We all know that it is impossible to avoid death. When it arrives, its harsh reality dislodges our denial, the challenges we throw in the face of death, and our feelings of invincibility, those things which otherwise occupy the psyches of most humans. Dispossessed of a loved one, the grieving person feels cruelly overwhelmed, confused and isolated from a world crowded with the living. The shock is violent, and digs a hole right through the body of the survivor, a hole made only bigger by the continued absence of the loved one. Death, whether sudden or expected, strips the survivor of certain capacities: he or she is able to intellectually understand the event, but lacks the ability to conceive of the dead body of his or her loved one.

Death calls on the survivor to face a task which requires a tremendous effort: that of carrying unanswered questions through a sterile time, towards a future that, at first glance, seems to be completely devoid of sense. An opaque shadow is cast over the time that comes after, shrouding the vision of a solitary journey that, we are told, is possible. The shadow blocks access to that part of the self that is still a complete stranger, that self who will

survive what appears to be a lifetime in the desert, a symbol for our inner self. Remaining confident and loving is the only anchor that stops us from going completely adrift. Staying on our feet after the death of a loved one is akin to a miracle, made possible by past love experienced and our residual capacity to love. Death does not leave everything destroyed in its wake, and even the difficulties that follow will not crush us. Death will, however, for an indefinite period of time, devastate and disorient us.

Many people who are in the process of grieving have told me: I will never be able to love again; the cost is too high when you lose. I urge them to read and re-read the lines of poet Félix Leclerc until they understand that the opposite is actually true:

“The verb to love weighs tons. Tons of pain, joy, worry, flesh, blood, doubts, ecstasies and screams. Do not run away from love. The verb to not love weighs even more.” (from *Le calepin d'un flaneur*)

At the beginning of life, we experience our first loss, our expulsion from

the womb. Our search for this lost fusion persists incessantly and will always remain unresolved. The death of a loved one reminds us of this first knowledge, and revisits the astonishment of the experience. This ancient pain manifests itself in the form of a huge crater in the pit of the stomach, bringing with it a sense of betrayal like that we felt the first day. Our initiation to total attachment and brutal detach-

Love exists long before the amorous encounter occurs; in the same way, love surpasses death.

ment dates from a time long past. *In the beginning is memory*, and this is why any sign of the initial loss is horrifying. The pain cannot be ignored, but it can be reversed. It must be so, since the very nature of this suffering obliges us to go beyond the sadness to redefine our own identity. As the ordeal begins to diminish in intensity, it also begins to help strengthen the person trapped in grief. An individual's emergence depends on numerous factors linked to personality, courage, individual potential, previous emotional experiences, determination, general health and instinct for survival. The relationship of the bereaved to his or her own life is also thrown into relief. Love exists long before the amorous encounter occurs; in the same way, love surpasses death, adding new paths towards unhelped-for relationships. For it is well known that the dead resemble the



Foto : Tony Stone Images / Ben Osborne

Sound the Trumpets!

Arriving through the main gate on Côte-des-Neiges Road, visitors are greeted by two trumpeting angels flanking a stone cross. As they advance through the various aisles and roads, they discover monuments topped by statues of angels. It is our Christian faith that allows us to become conscious of angels, and they form a part of our religious universe. The Christian cemetery is a place of rest, of waiting for the day of the resurrection of the dead. And appropriately, on every Sunday and at every baptism we attend, we end our profession of faith by solemnly declaring, *“I believe in the resurrection of the flesh and in eternal life. Amen.”*

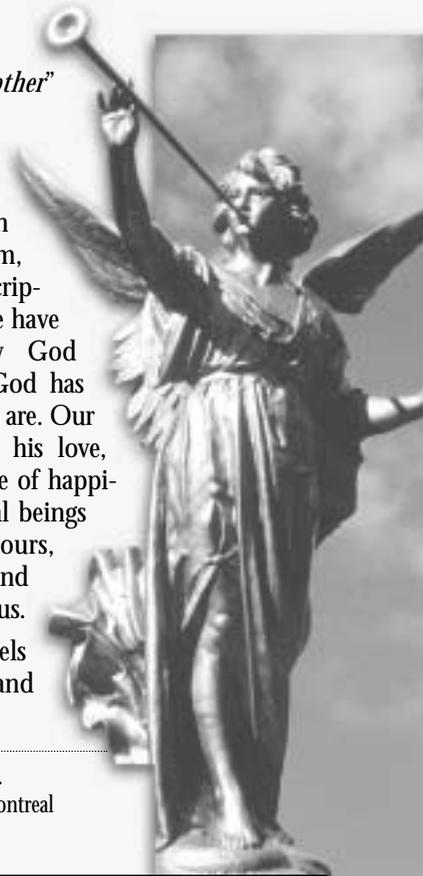
A Catholic cemetery is sacred in the way a Christian church is sacred, and bears the symbols of our faith, based on the Word of God. Here mention must be made of Saint Paul’s epistle to the Thessalonians: *“For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first”* (1 Thessalonians 4, 16). This can be taken as a parallel to Matthew the Evangelist when he said, *“And the Son of Man (Christ) will send His angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one*

end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24, 31).

These two texts are of a Jewish literary genre known as Apocalyptic, rich in imagery and symbolism, although not physically descriptive. They remind us that we have not been abandoned by God forever. On the contrary, God has eternal love for all of us as we are. Our Creator surrounds us with his love, and calls us to an eternal life of happiness. The angels are spiritual beings at His service and at ours, showing us the love of God and His mercy for each one of us.

The trumpets of the angels become trumpets of joy and happiness. ♦

Msgr. Yvon Bigras, p.s.s., C.S.S.
Priest of Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal



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living. A heart broken by loss is a heart opened. The hole becomes a window, a light to lead you out of the darkness, stepping out of a past of loss into a future to be rebuilt.

If the death of the Other psychologically kills the grieving person, then re-birth is inevitable, since nothing will ever be the same. The loss of the known is terrifying, but it is the only way toward the unexpected and hope. Death does not kill hope; rather, it is the birth of hope. We must refer to Bobin to imprint on our minds the truth in his words: *“I want to look in the face what I cannot bear. I am waiting for you to return, I cannot help myself. I am waiting for the unexpected, there is nothing else to wait for. I am hoping for the unhoped-for, what else can I hope for but life, life, life.”* (Christian Bobin, *La plus que vive*, Gallimard, Paris, 1996)

Death kills neither life nor love. It takes the loved one hostage, deforming and then transforming the deceased for that most inaccessible of mysteries, which urges us to ask again and again, “Why?” And “Where are you?” These questions can only be answered through our beliefs and convic-

tions, our ability to think in symbols, to create, to see patterns and to hope. We dream of the arms of God in a bed of the sky, under a crystal canopy protecting those once alive, those who once were warriors, with its clarity. They are carried by stars away from the earth, from the weight of suffering and the anguish of death, which is left for the living to feel. At the moment of their departure, the dying person asks us to believe – in what I cannot say, but to believe with them, and to hold on to this belief as something that binds all of us, living and dead.

Death teaches us how to love in a new way, to love the inaccessible, the impalpable, to savour contact with the wind like a caress on the cheek, with the message that even the invisible continues to live. It teaches us how to love the way a child had to learn after letting go of the placenta and leaving the known, taking its first real steps in the world. The grieving adult must learn how to walk again, holding on to passing time and his or her living memories. Loving, dying, only to be reborn. ♦

by Joseph Berchoud, *Pompes Funèbres Générales, France*

Léon Burdin, “*Parler la mort*” — One man, one book: two universes to discover

“Accompanying another means going beyond his pain to join him as he plans for greatness...”

This statement is not an excerpt from a philosophical discussion, but rather from the words of an unassuming man from the mountains, simple but rich in human experience.

During his mission at Gustave-Roussay

(Paris), Léon Burdin, a Jesuit priest, saw Humanity in all its suffering, hope and mystery. He spoke with those nearing the end of the road of life, stepping towards the Beyond, whose certainties lay in the unknown.

Having lost his mother at a young age, Léon Burdin has drawn from the spectacular setting of the Alps where he was born

and has justly measured the distance separating the material from the essential.

These are the reasons we appreciate the words and stories he shares with us as a frequent guest of our richly varied conferences on life and death.

The title of this work is “*Parler la mort, des mots pour la vivre*.” Published by Desclée de Brouwer, 1998.

Review of “*Parler la mort, des mots pour la vivre*” Léon Burdin

What can one say after reading Léon Burdin’s *Parler la mort, des mots pour la vivre*?

This book is beautiful and strong and true. It speaks with authenticity of intense moments in life, those quintessential moments that are the last days and hours of a person dying. It speaks for these people, and for those who love them.

This book is rich. Every page offers stories from a multitude of lives: men, women and children caught in the raw light of their own dying moments, or those of a loved one.

This book is an awakening. It is powerful testimony to how peace, reconciliation, transmission and, finally, the foundation for a sensible life can be dramatically created beyond the inevitable pain of separation between the person who is dying and those who survive.

This book is also original. Its author is not a doctor, nurse, psychologist, sociologist or historian (unlike all other French books on the subject), but rather a hospital chaplain. This book was written in one of the most famous cancer hospitals, the Institut Gustave-Roussay de Villejuif.

I could also add that this book is instructive for a health professional. It insists on the spiritual needs of patients, whatever their practices or religious beliefs. In other words, it insists on good values and common sense. It stresses the irreplaceable quality of true dialogue between patients and those treating them (doctor, nurse), and between patients and their loved ones. It shows how undertaking this dialogue—where the chaplain acts as catalyst—eases everyone’s anguish and can often lead to a fuller experience of the time left to live together. Léon Burdin also shows us the work he does on himself to enable him to bring what is needed to patients and their families: the looks, listening, presence, silences, and words they are waiting for. He describes how he “adjusts” his words and behaviour, and also how he “holds up,” or, in other words, how he faces each situation, without going too quickly,

without believing that he can do everything.

This book is also an example, we hope, for hospital chaplains. Léon Burdin offers them a magnificent example of what a chaplain—removed from what the author himself calls the “religious mish-mash”—can do for very sick people near the end of their lives and for their families.

What one finally sees in Léon Burdin’s book is the will to link grace with speech. He is concerned with those dying, torn between hope for a cure and fear of death, and sometimes also struggling with different chapters of their lives. He is also concerned with the dialogue between patients and their loved ones, the spouses, children and parents who survive them and whose grieving process depends so much on their last exchanges. He talks of the dying person’s last messages, words or gestures, from which children, the author emphasises, should not be excluded. He also stresses the importance of the togetherness of family members and friends during the solemn transfer of the body or the ceremony. Burdin is a man of speech, strengthening the bonds among people who are suffering, drawing from the original and fullest meaning of religion. At the same time, he offers light from a more modern source, adapting it with an openness to, and intelligence about, people and that remarkable moment, as well as the different family and social contexts he approaches.

“I do not share the faith that this man has. Nor do we belong to the same spiritual tradition,” writes philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy in his beautiful introduction to the book. This sentence also describes myself, and the theme of the book is not new to me. Nevertheless, I was captivated by Léon Burdin’s book. It may be because the sincerity of his commitment springs from a personal experience he shares with us: the death of his mother when he was 14 years old. It may also be because his book is very well-written, with a particular sense of expression which adds to the strength of the work.

R. Sagag-Lanoe

Our clientele services have expanded **to better serve you**

A few months ago, our team was enhanced by a group of consultants skilled to help and guide you in your choices for funeral pre-arrangements. We are pleased to welcome Suzanne Cabana, Marlène Bonneau and Pierre Maurais. The experience and knowledge they have acquired in related fields are assets we are putting to work to better serve our clients.

A team exclusively reserved for pre-arrangement services!

Whether you are retired or still working, have a little or a lot of time, our consultants are at your service every day including weekends, ready to introduce you to our products and services. They will be pleased to accompany you to the site so that you may see the plots available to choose from, and to give you a guided tour of our various pre-arrangement options.

All the surveys across different age groups have shown that the majority of the population prefers funerals to be held in one location, so as to avoid the displacement that can be difficult for



bereaved family members. Our team of pre-arrangement consultants can offer you complete funeral services and products: plots, burial, cremation, viewing, urns, flowers, and more, all available in one location.

Our consultants will take the time that is necessary to clearly explain the advantages of making prior arrangements, and answer any questions you may have to ease your mind. They will show you how freezing funeral costs and complementary product prices at the current rate in order to avoid inflationary increases can only work to your financial benefit. Our no-interest payment plan for up to five years is another interesting option that would allow you to work on a budget that is convenient for you.

New offer: group presentations

It is important that your family be involved in the important process of pre-arrangement planning. Whether you require a presentation of our products and services for a small family group or for a larger social one, we will create one adapted to your choice.

If you represent a social group or are responsible for a community home or residence for seniors, please do not hesitate to communicate with us. It would be our pleasure to meet with you and organise a recreational activity in order to make the presentation a fuller and more pleasant experience.

A calendar of activities will be included in the next issue of Dialogue. Use it to track the movements of our consultants and our schedule of presentations.

For further information, please fill out the answer form attached to this magazine. ♦

Johanne Duchesne
Director, Marketing

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silence, we may surprise a pair of lovers, once inseparable in life, now laughing in the joy of reunion.

Installing the monument is one of the last gestures of the funeral ritual. Throughout the months and years that follow the passing of a loved one, other commemorative gestures will help family members or the community to remember, to live with the death, and to heal their grief. Every year, the Chinese community of Montreal organises a sacrificial ceremony for their ancestors. This

celebration of memory performs a variety of functions: it shows respect for the ancestors of the Chinese community, it educates younger generations, and it reminds descendants of their duty to honour their elders and their community. This year, the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery and the Aaron Funeral and Commemorative Home offered their support to the Chinese community in this memorial ceremony. This day has deep meaning, and represents an opportunity to strengthen collective bonds. It will remain engraved in memory, just like the name of a loved one is engraved on his or her headstone. ♦

WINTER GRIEF, SUMMER GRACE

Returning to Life After a Loved One Dies

Author: James E. Miller - *The Willowgreen Series*

Compassionate exploration of feelings that come with a loved one's death. Simple, affirming activities for discovering renewal in the midst of grief. Inspiring passages of comfort and hope from the bible, poetry, and literature.

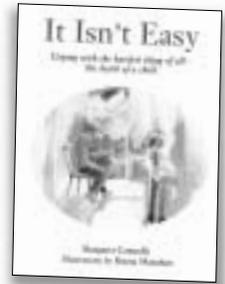


IT ISN'T EASY

Coping with the hardest thing of all-the death of a child.

Author: Margaret Connolly - *Oxford University Press*

It's never easy when someone dies. This is the story of a child, after his brother is killed in an accident. It follows him and his parents through their reactions, their feelings of sadness and anger and pain, and shows how they begin to come to terms with what happened.



A compassionate and sensitive approach to helping children understand about death.

A GARDEN
of memories



New Trends

The Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery has long been famous for its wide-open spaces and numerous annual flower beds. Over the last few seasons, however, more diversified plantings of shrubs and perennials are being developed, which are

more appropriate to the permanent nature of the environment. Perennials come in a number of species and types of greatly varied beauty. The frequently spectacular flowers often make way for highly decorative coloured foliage.

At Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, several types of Hemmerocallus (Stelle de

Oro, Summer Wine Bonanza) and Hostas (Albo marginata, Sieboldiana Elegans, Frances Williams) have been tested and have met with great success. The first criterion for selection is the length of the flowering period. Its hardiness and ease of planting and cultivation are also prime considerations.

Shrubs are chosen on the basis of similar criteria. Size, colour, hardiness and resistance are all desirable qualities for our gardens.

At the Cemetery, we know that carefully chosen shrubs and perennials will do honour to the environment, as well as aid in the conservation of the numerous bird species present.

Please do not hesitate to plant your own perennials: you will be in step with the new "trend."

Yvon Pagé

Superintendent, landscaping (514) 735-1361

Sextons and Sacristans of the Basilica

Ten people are employed as sextons and sacristans at Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal. Let us introduce you to the various tasks they undertake daily.

One of the main work areas of the sacristans is, of course, the sacristy. Generally, they prepare the sacerdotal vestments and religious objects required for daily services and particular ceremonies. These preparations require them to have knowledge of the liturgy appropriate for every circumstance.

The sacristans are also responsible for the maintenance of the sacerdotal vestments, sacred vessels and liturgical linens. They act a little like mothers, doing the laundry, starching, ironing, and sometimes mending these vestments and linens.

They also care for the sacred vessels (chalices, ciboria, etc.).



Finally, the sacristans gather and count the money deposited in the Basilica's collection boxes. Their contact with the clergy, visitors and tourists requires a great deal of discretion and diplomacy.

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The stained glass windows of Notre-Dame

The stained glass windows of Notre-Dame Basilica are relatively recent. They were ordered by the priest Olivier Maurault in 1929 for the centennial celebrations. Maurault himself chose the theme to adorn the windows on the first floor: historical aspects of the social and religious life of Montreal throughout the parish. A Quebec artist, Jean-Baptiste Lagacé, made the preliminary designs, and the windows themselves were produced at the workshop of Francis Chigot, in Limoges, France.

On one of the eleven stained glass windows on the first floor, witness Paul Chomedy, Sieur de Maisonneuve, carrying a cross. The window is in commemoration of De Maisonneuve's promise to plant a cross at the top of Mount Royal if the fort were spared from a flood near the Ville-Marie settlement. After the danger of the flood had been averted, on January 6, 1843, De Maisonneuve and his companions



climbed to the top of the mountain. Other windows provide glimpses into the lives of Marguerite Bourgeoys, Marguerite d'Youville and Jeanne Mance, as well as events such as the arrival of the first four Sulpicians in Ville-Marie, and the construction of the second Notre-Dame church.

Various saints appear on the windows on the first level, while those on the second floor feature patterns of flowers. We invite you to discover Notre-Dame Basilica on a guided tour, offered daily. ♦

Mireille Desrochers,
Assistant tourism activities

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Sextons work primarily in the church and its basements, but also participate in certain tasks in the sacristy, such as setting religious objects in their places for services (cruets, sacred vessels, etc.).

Sextons are responsible for the general daily maintenance of the church. They may undertake certain janitorial duties as well as building maintenance jobs (changing lights, painting, etc.). They also ensure that the church hall is ready for various events. They make sure that the exterior of the buildings on the Basilica site are always clean and attractive, taking care of flowers and general cleanliness. In winter, snow removal also becomes one of their daily duties.

Finally, sextons keep a watch over comings and goings in the buildings, and occasionally direct visitors. Their work site covers an impressive area, and no corner goes unnoticed. Their tact and professionalism is apparent in every task they perform. ♦

The Journey through Grief

The essence of finding meaning in the future is not to forget my past, as I have been told, but instead to embrace my past. For it is in listening to the music of the past that I can sing in the present and dance into the future.

Monthly Masses

Monthly masses will be held Saturdays, on September 7, October 5, November 2 and December 7, 2002.

They will be celebrated at the Chapelle de la Résurrection at 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

FREE PARKING

ACTIVITÉS

The ANNUAL COMMEMORATIVE MASS under the tent will be celebrated September 8, 2002 at 11:00 a.m. by Mgr. Yvon Bigras p.s.s. C.S.S., priest of Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal, Light refreshments will be served as of 10:00 a.m.

Come one and all!

Guided tour of the cemetery: September 8 at 1:00 p.m.