
A FULL FIRST MONTH



Can one judge a new ministry, after only a month's existence? If so, mine will be an episcopal ministry of the greatest intensity. At the end of these first weeks, I want to once again thank all those who so warmly welcomed me. I have already been able to visit three hospitals and three senior citizens' homes, as well as eleven parishes: four in the Restigouche Deanery, the six anglophone parishes of the Southern Victoria Deanery, and St. Georges Parish in Grand Falls. In February, I shall visit seven more parishes. It is a great grace to meet these communities: they are very zealous and fervent.

This has been a month filled with warm welcomes, contacts, and learning; all of this arouses gratitude, hope for the future, and solidarity. I thank all those persons who facilitated my initiation to this new episcopal ministry. "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" like a friend, a brother, a father, a pastor. I thank you with all my heart.

THE MEDIA

On February 1 I had the pleasure of welcoming the mass media people at the episcopal residence, on the occasion of the forthcoming Sunday dedicated to social communications. It was a very friendly and uncomplicated get-together. It was suggested that this become an annual event; I most readily concur. This is a special opportunity for me to express my deepest appreciation to them for the constant professional job these people accomplish, to make available to us quality information. Thank you again!

FEBRUARY 11: DAY OF THE SICK

On the occasion of the World Day of the Sick, February 11, 1994, I wish to greet all those of the diocese who are sick, and assure them of my prayers and special devotion. Since my ordination as bishop, I have had the joy of meeting many of them, whether in Edmundston, the Restigouche, Grand Falls, or Perth-Andover. Everywhere I find among them a great courage in the face of suffering, uplifting generosity, and a lively faith in the Christ who died and rose again. Meeting them, I learn more about the meaning of things and events, as well as admiration for each person. Special good wishes and blessing to the whole medical and nursing personnel, as well as to the families of the sick.

CONFIRMATION

On February 11, I shall celebrate for the first time as bishop the sacrament of Confirmation. Seventy-two young people from the parish of St.-Jacques wrote, asking me to confirm them. It is with gratitude that I point out that on January 9, 1994, the day of my episcopal ordination, I abundantly received the Spirit of the Lord which came upon me and anointed me with the holy chrism. At the end of that celebration two young persons, James Béliveau and Marie-Pier Picard, greeted me and gave me a bouquet of flowers. They said to me, "We are happy that you are our captain. We shall pray for you. We love you very much." And young Eric wrote to me, saying: "For several weeks I have been preparing for Confirmation with my teachers and our pastor. With my parents and friends, too. I have prayed, thought about it, and decided to be confirmed. I am eager for it. I am happy to be confirmed by you."

BLESSED FAMILIES

On February 2, Bishop Jean-Guy Hamelin, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, published a letter of the Canadian bishops to all families, on the occasion of the International Year of the Family. The letter is titled "All the Families of the Earth Shall Be Blessed". The message is really positive: the bishops wish to express to families their admiration, their solidarity, and their hopes for them. A copy of this letter was sent to each parish: do not hesitate to photocopy it, read it and study it together in small groups. A few associations and groups have told me of their intention to study the text. I would like to see this letter circulated among the greatest number of people, that it be the subject of a homily, and that it be an important event at the beginning of this international year of the family. "We want to say what we admire in today's couples and families. So many of them are managing to cope in the midst of enormous economic difficulties as well as social and cultural upheaval. Many couples do find the courage and vision necessary to survive in a period when social values that once seemed unchangeable are being profoundly questioned. Innumerable families today live in fidelity and mutual support; they are open to life, forgiveness and common service, for their own greater happiness as well as for the well-being of all society."

Have a good week!

+ François Thibodeau ym

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Bishop of Edmundston

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