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## THANKSGIVING FOR 1996

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In looking back at everything we have experienced together that was beautiful, magnificent, and holy during the past year, I cannot help but invite you to join me in giving thanks to the Lord for 1996: births, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, etc. For those who lived days of sadness, of suffering, of unemployment, or of bereavement, it isn't easy to say "Thank you for 1996," but isn't Jesus most present to us, in these hard times? I am reminded of these words that have left their stamp on me: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine...? ...For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

### PAINFUL ILLNESSES AND DEATHS

You and I have been shaken by the deaths of loved ones. Four beloved priests died in the course of the year: Father Napoléon Michaud, Msgr. George Travers, Father Stanley Daigle, and Father Léon Gagné. Several confreres went through difficult periods: many had to be hospitalised. Members of the diocese, parents and friends have left us; each week I have special prayers for them and their families. May the Risen Jesus be our strength and our hope.

### NEW PRIEST AND SEMINARIANS

The year 1996 will be noted for having witnessed the ordination of the first native person to the priesthood, a first among us, and a first throughout the Atlantic region. With you and with the entire Maliseet Nation I rejoice at the ordination of Father Curtis Sappier. I also give thanks to God for the eight seminarians which our diocese already has, and with you I pray the Lord to continue sending labourers to his harvest. At the present, one-third of our parishes are priestless.

### SHARING AND SOLIDARITY

It seems to me that 1996 was experienced in sharing and in solidarity. The recent award of the Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy Prize is such an example: the 28 nominations submitted were major indications of the vitality issuing from our five deaneries. The three pastoral statutes that took effect January 1, 1996 are three important guideposts of our Christian living. They seem to me like three major priorities for each of the thirty-three parishes of our diocese.

### SUNDAY GATHERING

The Sunday gathering must be for the one in charge of the parish as well as for the faithful as a whole, the privileged time to be experienced together, as a community, on a weekly basis. I believe that some improvement has occurred in this area, and several parishes are now enjoying a new-found vitality. At least two parishes reorganised their Sunday schedules and have eliminated their Saturday evening Masses: Saint Léonard Parent and Clair; all their efforts are now geared to the Sunday morning celebration. Nonetheless,

vigilance and action are needed: hardly 20% of our population takes part in Sunday celebrations. A number of young and not-so-young people have forsaken the Sunday Gathering, and it is painful to live this situation. Projects for 1997 include the community rediscovery and revaluing of the Sunday assembly, the strengthening of the faith in the Risen Christ, and a rediscovery of prayer.

### **P.P.C. AND P.E.A.C.**

During the first six months of 1996 I visited every parish to introduce to them the members of the respective parish pastoral council and parish economic affairs committee. This greater participation of lay people in the administration of the parish is a sign of vitality and it holds the promise of a brighter future. The regular meetings held by these committees are a catalyst for co-responsibility. My gratitude and that of the whole diocesan Church are addressed to the pastors, to the pastoral agents, and to the hundreds and even thousands who are generously implicated in the Church's life, whether it be in one or the other of parish committees, in faith education or liturgical celebrations, or at the level of fellowship development or of transformation of one's milieu.

### **SOLIDARITY**

Beautiful gestures of solidarity were made, during the year: the Solidarity Caravan that went to the disaster-ridden Saguenay region of Québec. In this Year for the Elimination of Poverty, I like to recall the help and sharing which took place, the human chain that was formed by our youth and elders, to come to the aid of the needy. I think especially of all those in the diocese who, through the agency of the Group of One Thousand, help support the diocesan services. I am reminded of all the acts of kindness and sympathy that regularly take place in our parishes: visits to seniors' homes, hospitals, and funeral homes.

### **TOWARDS THE JUBILEE OF THE YEAR 2000**

Thanks to the Organising Committee of the Restigouche, we have been given training in preparing for the Jubilee of the year 2000: the first diocesan Eucharistic Congress which took place last June shall remain in our memory for the quality of its preparation, its actual celebration, and its follow-up. We discovered together the greatness of the Eucharist and how good it was to keep in mind the memory of Jesus. I hope that these weekly \*Journal+ articles I write to you, as well as the two pastoral letters I sent, during the year,<sup>1</sup> and the intensive pastoral visitations advance the cause of solidarity among us and help build in our midst a fully missionary and fraternal Church. May this short overview of 1996 incite us to gratitude and communion. Happy New Year 1997!

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