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## TO BE ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE

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If there is any directive from St. Paul that appears to me as being of major importance for my pastoral visitations it is the one to be all things to all people, to sing with those who sing, to weep with those who weep, to pray with those who pray, to reflect with those who are reflecting, and even to go snowmobiling with those who are doing it!

On Saturday, March 1, I had the pleasure of making a parish visitation to the century-old St. Joseph Parish in Tilley, a small parish of 210, whose pastor is Father Curtis Sappier who was ordained last May. Thanks to the generosity of the brothers John and George Baker who ceded some land in 1894 for the construction of a church, thanks also to the agreement of Father Edward Wallace, pastor of Drummond, St. Joseph Parish was established along the Saint John River. Thanks to the untiring work of Father Frederick Ryan, of the Eudist, and Franciscan Fathers, and of the Voluntas Dei Institute, the community grew in unity and faith for one hundred years. After visiting three of the 64 families in the parish I was invited on a snowmobile ride across the beautiful region all the way to Blue Bell Mountain. What a ride! Our caravan was made up of seven snowmobile enthusiasts who were most attentive to their bishop, along with Father Curtis. I can readily understand why the Franciscans remained in the region for 75 years: it is like entering a sanctuary. "Mountains and hills, bless the Lord, for his love is everlasting. Snow and frost, bless the Lord, and you waters above the heavens, bless the Lord. Forests and trees, bless the Lord, and all that exists, bless the Lord, for his love is everlasting."

### ONE FAMILY

Upon our return from the woods and fields, practically the whole population was awaiting us in the parish hall to greet their bishop and friends. A good portion of the parish family then sat down to a pot luck supper. And what a beautiful family! All ages were represented. Following a meeting with the parish pastoral council where we discussed the situation of the poor of the milieu and the future of the parish, I had the pleasure of meeting with the Confirmation class, their parents and sponsors, and to greet the Sunday School teachers and their substitutes, these committed volunteers who are ensuring our children's religious education; the teachers can now count on two and even three substitutes, in case of need. The celebration of the weekend liturgy and Confirmation took on a special character of fervent and soothing prayer, and the choir, through its beautiful songs, drew all into quality participation. Even the sweet grass that was used at certain times in the liturgy reminded the people of their priest's origin and of the traditions of our native brothers and sisters. And true to my reputation of setting out in winter storms, my visit did not come to an end without a heavy snowfall that nearly led us to forget the beautiful blue sky we had enjoyed throughout the day!

### BLUE BELL

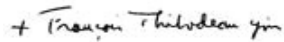
On Sunday, March 2, it was to Blue Bell's Assumption Parish that I travelled. The parish was established in 1925 and has a population of 580. It is now being administered by Mrs. Georgine Rioux, the pastoral agent, and Sunday Mass is said by Father Frédéric Poitras. What a beautiful visit this turned out to be! A full church, with twelve persons - 11 children and one adult - to be confirmed. Following Sunday Mass the 67 Sunday School children got together for presentations, a sign of their interest in the Sunday school and of their appreciation of

ongoing parent involvement. One finds here a strong and admirable involvement and creativity, in the parish. The entire church basement has been converted into classrooms for the deepening of the faith of both children and parents. Community suppers brought together a sizable portion of the local population: the Anglican rector joined us for this wonderful sharing. Following a meeting with the parish pastoral council to share on the future of the parish, I had the pleasure of visiting more than six families and to visit people from Blue Bell parish who are either hospitalised at Grand Falls or at the Grand Falls Manor. I thank all those who made these pastoral visits of mine possible; what vitality is found, in these communities! What concern for unity! What will there is to keep their parishes going!

### **MISSIONARY ZEAL**

Back from these two pastoral visitations I cannot help thinking of the "missionary zeal" that caused the founding of the Southern Victoria parishes. Despite distances and misunderstandings, there was at first a true desire on the part of the Church of Québec - the Church of New France - to be in close contact with the different local communities. The missionaries from Québec would visit St. Basile and go all the way down to Maliseet and further south along the Saint John River. Then when dioceses were established in the Maritimes, the pastors of already-established parishes showed concern for priestless communities. The priests in Drummond showed much concern for what was happening in southern Victoria County. Thanks to the Drummond parish priest, the Franciscans came to us and remained here for 75 years. Thanks again to the Drummond parish priest, the "multicultural" Blue Bell community experienced a remarkable development: Anglophones, Francophones, Danes, and Italians made up an outstanding community. As we shall be celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Danish community on June 19, it is well that we express our admiration and thanks for the remarkable work they have accomplished among us. It is my hope that we acknowledge the distinctive culture of these our brothers and sisters, as well as the exceptional gifts they bring to our milieu, especially the gift of Church.

Have a good week!



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