
« THE VILLAGE FOUNTAIN »



The important intensive pastoral visitation that I have just completed in the Southern Victoria Deanery reminded me once again of the wonderful richness that a parish is. Pope John XXIII used to take pleasure in saying that a parish must be a house open to all, at the service of all, the village fountain where all come to quench their thirst.

ST. PATRICK

On Saturday, March 8, I had the pleasure of visiting St. Patrick Parish, inaugurated in 1887. At the present, the parish comprises 320 inhabitants in 101 families; Father Curtis Sappier is the pastoral administrator. It was Father John Joseph O'Leary, a native of Ireland, who started the mission while he was pastor at Grand Falls (1870-1889). His successors - among whom was the historian Fr. Thomas Albert - continued Fr. O'Leary's work. Fr. Raymond Pennafort Willey was the first Franciscan to celebrate Mass there (1923), after Bishop Patrick-Alexandre Chiasson, C.J.M., of Chatham, authorised the Franciscans to take charge of that mission; and this they did for over sixty years. In 1986, Msgr. George Travers became pastor of St. Pat's, and he was succeeded in 1988 by Fr. Leo Grégoire, I.V.D. A note of interest: At the time Father O'Leary became the first resident priest at Grand Falls there were only seven priests in the entire Chatham Diocese which comprised the entire northern part of New Brunswick.

PRESSING PASTORAL NEEDS

After having visited a few families in the parish, I had the opportunity to meet with the members of the parish pastoral council, regarding their most pressing pastoral needs. Three such needs were immediately identified: the importance of having a resident priest, the formation of an elected parish pastoral council, and recruiting future pastoral agents. Used as they are to looking after themselves, the parishioners share different tasks among themselves, but the risk is there that people rely on some among them who already have more than enough to do. For the life of the community new leaders must be found who can, for a specific term of office, contribute to the growth of community life, whether it be through involvement in catechetics, charitable works, celebrations, and bold community renewal efforts. To me, the parish pastoral council is like the « eyes, ears, hands, and heart of the Good Shepherd. » Following a meal together I was pleased to meet with those to be confirmed, as well as with their catechist and sponsors. The Sunday eucharist, followed by a fellowship period, allowed me to further sense the life of faith and charity of this very Irish community. The traditional Irish blessing goes with them: « *May the road rise to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm rays upon your face, the rain soft upon your fields and, until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hands.* »

ST. THERESA, ANDERSON ROAD

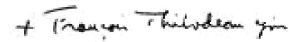
On Sunday, March 9, I embarked on another visitation at 9:00 o'clock in the morning. This time I was visiting Anderson Road and St. Theresa parish which has a population of 150, in 52 families. The pastoral administrator is Mrs. Ann Campbell and the priest celebrant is Father Frédéric Poitras. A very packed family-oriented programme, developed and carried out by the parish pastoral council, awaited me: Sunday celebration, in the course of which I baptised a 62-year-old man, and Confirmation of three other persons; a parish breakfast served

by the Knights of Columbus, followed by meetings with the Knights, then with the parish pastoral council, the youth ministry group, discussion of the parish project, followed by a parish 1supper enriched by local talent, without forgetting a short visit to the Romeo Rossignol sugar camp. All of this gives you an idea of the warm hospitality extended by this community founded in 1932, ministered to by the Franciscans for 25 years, and then by diocesan priests and by members of the Voluntas Dei Institute. Under the glorious protection of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, the parish looks very well after its pioneers. On that day of my visit, Eva, 88 years old, did not miss any of the parish's festive activities.

THE WORD OF GOD

One of the essential elements of a parish is certainly its ability to listen to the Word of God, to welcome it, ponder it, and share it. It is good to see that at St. Theresa's, a group meets weekly to prepare for the following Sunday's liturgy by sharing on the three readings of that day. From what I have been told, this is an unmatched source of renewal and marvellous and encouragement. According to Pope John Paul II, « *The parish is destined to ensure the great functions of the Church: prayer in common and reading of the Word of God, celebrations, especially that of the Eucharist, catechetics for children and the catechuminate for adults, ongoing formation of the faithful, communication conducive to spreading the Christian message, charitable service and services of solidarity, and the local activity of organisations. On the whole, in the image of the sanctuary of which it is a visible sign, [the parish] is an edifice to be put up by everyone, a body to be brought to life and growth, a community where the baptised respond generously in faith, hope, and love to the evangelical calls.* » A new church, inaugurated in 1986, is a sign of this vibrant and warm community. The adult baptism we celebrated together will continue to question the parish community as to what we become through Baptism. A family of baptised people: such a great privilege to experience, and what an abundance of grace to discover! More than ever, we can claim to be of the very race of Jesus. We are children of the Father, united to Jesus, animated by the Spirit, and sent out into the world.

Have a good week!



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