
« WELCOMING ONE ANOTHER »



During the past summer the cathedral-parish of the Immaculate Conception welcomed the parishioners of the former parish of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur, but on Sunday, September 21, there was an official welcome extended to them at the Sunday eucharist and a community meal following. Here I would like to share with you excerpts from Father Roger Dionne's homily, on that occasion.

A HEARTBREAKING CHANGE

« The church of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur closed its doors on June 29, and the parish was annexed to our parish of the Immaculate Conception. This critical change was very difficult to make and was for many heartbreaking and sad to have their parish closed; it was all the more heart rending for those who had worked so hard to build the parish at a cost of much commitment and many sacrifices. How have we come to the point of closing parishes. I say parishes because Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur is not the first parish in our diocese of Edmundston to close. In 1992, the church at Red Rapids closed its doors. The question we must seriously ask is: Will these two be the last? »

A SAD CONCLUSION

The parish of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur was the last one founded in our diocese, in 1950, along with those of St-Georges [Grand Falls] and Connors. Sacré-Coeur was a small parish, with its 650 parishioners. As with all parishes, this one too had its share of elderly and sick people who could not actively participate in the life of their Christian community. Besides, regarding all the other still active people, following a survey made by the parish pastoral council, we have had to reach the sad conclusion that hardly one hundred persons were ready to take part in and support their parish. This is very little if the proportion of the so-called 'practising' was not any lower than elsewhere in the diocese. Still, there were in the parish Christians who were most devoted and who accepted to fill more than one position, and they did this for a number of years because of the small number of people who were willing to implicate themselves. For these people who were so attached to their parish, the closing of the church has doubtless affected them.

COMPLEX QUESTIONS

I do not want to belabour the past, even the recent past, but we must still look at it long enough to ask ourselves questions that reach beyond the case of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur Church. Are all these Christians who hardly or no longer participate in their parish aware of the consequences incurred by their lack of participation? Will we long be able to maintain all the existing services, especially for those who approach the Church solely for requesting a baptism, a marriage, or a funeral for one of their own? Must we continue to distribute the sacraments of baptism, first communion or confirmation to those who practically do not participate any longer in their Christian community? How must we reorganise our pastoral ministry to respond to the realities of today? Questions such as these (as well as other questions) are complex and there are no simple answers to them, but it is certainly not too early for us to ask them and reflect on them.

MUTUAL WELCOME

We have waited until now to welcome you officially, because first of all we wanted to wait for the end of the summer holidays, and also because we wanted to give our friends of Sacré-Coeur sufficient time for mourning their loss, since mourning there is over the closing of their parish. But we should not think that the welcome is one-sided, because the people of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur too must welcome their new parish. They will doubtless need time to adapt and adjust, but we ask them to welcome their new co-parishioners. As for me, I ask them to welcome me as their new pastor. I pray the Lord to help me, with my qualities and despite my limitations, to be of service to our entire expanded community. May we welcome one another. May we welcome together Jesus himself who is present in each and everyone of us, especially in the more needy among us. »

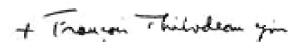
GRATITUDE

I thank Father Roger who accepted to share this homily with us. I subscribe to his sentiments of welcome and understanding. May the pastoral session planned for next February 4, 5, and 6 aid us in coming up with partial answers, at least.

APPOINTMENTS

The diocesan directory that has just been published contains much information, especially regarding recent appointments. I have appointed Fr. Gaëtan Côté in charge of pastoral ministry at the St-Louis-Maillet University Campus. Upon recommendation of their respective pastors I have appointed Mr. Harold Short-Evans and Mrs. Ann Campbell pastoral agents at Plaster Rock, Mrs. Georgine Rioux pastoral agent at Blue Bell, Mr. Robert Inman pastoral agent at Perth-Andover, Mr. Roger Thériault pastoral agent at St-Georges, Mr. Bertin Gervais pastoral agent at Assumption Parish, Grand Falls, Mr. Ivan Thériault pastoral intern at Notre-Dame-des-Douleurs Parish. I have also appointed Sister Claudette Ruest, S.M., coordinator of the formation team for future anglophone pastoral agents and pastoral aids, with Mrs. Joyce Shannon assistant coordinator, and Father Leo Grégoire, I.V.D., Mr. Harold Short-Evans and Mrs. Ann Campbell members of the formation team: the first course begins [October 25, with an orientation session on] October 15.

Have a good week.



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (195) (15 October 1997)