
VISITATION OF THE UPPER MADAWASKA DEANERY (4)



I would like to draw provisional conclusions to the Upper Madawaska Deanery report which I have shared with you these last few weeks. To my mind a pastoral visitation is a means for an important exchange between the people and their bishop. This process allows for pastoral contacts that help us grow in faith, hope, and charity.

A HISTORY TO BE LIVED

When Father Thomas Albert wrote his *Histoire du Madawaska*, he wrote, « *It is by remaining faithful to one's glorious past that the Madawaska region will flourish. It is by being master in his own home that the Madawaskan will be respected. Madawaska to the Madawaskans!* » These words were written around 1920; Father Albert had not taken too kindly to the fact that the Madawaska region had been cut up into two parts, north and south, east and west, and parcelled between the United States and Canada, Quebec and New Brunswick. To his mind, everything should have been done to keep the region whole and entire since family, social, cultural and economic ties were so tightly entwined. And I strongly felt this spirit of unity throughout my visitation, and the people are proud and rightly so of their common heritage. I was very happy to see the pleasure marked on the faces of the young and not so young when I distributed the diocese's 50th anniversary commemorative album. History is the mother of wisdom, and it is there to guide those who engross themselves in it.

A DIVISION TO BE AVOIDED

If it is important to preserve the precious heritage of our history and the identity of every group, it would nonetheless be risky to multiply communities and parishes. Social communications being what they are now, we must rather create vital links between communities, and this includes sports and social organisations. Keeping in mind the extent of the territory and the actual population density, we must continue to try to find ways of helping one another and to accept twinning of parishes within the deanery.

JOBS TO APPRECIATE

It is good to have jobs and the people are happy in them. While employment is at times tenuous and marked by low wages, as it is elsewhere also, the Upper Madawaska has very little unemployment. While it is true that due to market globalization there is some fear of rapid moves elsewhere, even down South, I had no feeling of that in the Madawaska region. Quite the opposite. There are a good number of jobs, the workers are keen to produce, and municipal officers work at bringing in and creating interesting and better paying jobs.

NATURAL BEAUTY TO HOLD ON TO

Everyone knows how beautiful the Madawaska region is in every season but especially in the fall. The people there are lovers of nature who appreciate the beauty and richness of the lakes, rivers, woods and fields. From

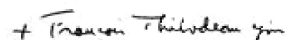
Riceville to Baker Brook by way of Val-Lambert the scenery is exceptional. And what can we say of the Saint John River and its snowmelts? I was invited to Glazier Lake for lunch: this is one of the most beautiful spots to contemplate. What I also admired in the Upper Madawaska Deanery were the people of the Atelier des Copains workshop, who show their love of nature by recycling paper and cardboard, glass, metal and plastics. Because of their work these people last year saved upwards to five thousand trees. Congratulations!

A CHURCH TO BE BUILT

The faith of those who came before us was greater and bolder than ours, notwithstanding more difficult times, severe economic periods, and long distances to travel. They left us traditions that we must renew and pursue, otherwise we run the risk of watering down our most precious identity. Our forebears left us beautiful churches that we must value, and parishes that we must continuously energize. We ourselves are the handiwork of God, His Temple. This is the main thing, which we must always keep in mind. What matters are the people to whom we must show the tenderness of God, even if through the years we have distanced ourselves from one another. We must remind our fellow brothers and sisters that God's love is from age to age: this is the main challenge of our Christian communities. Religious education, preaching, celebration, and sharing together are all means of proclaiming loudly to all the passionate love of a God who loves us so tenderly, unceasingly.

THANKS

I am deeply grateful to all those who were involved in making my 1998 pastoral visitation a success. I especially thank the pastors, parish pastoral councils, persons and groups that welcomed me with open arms. May the Lord bring to fruition what has been so generously sowed, of beauty, greatness, and holiness, during these weeks.



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