
IN BEAUTIFUL MALABEAM COUNTRY



It was in mid-May, 1686 that a bishop first came to what was to become Grand Falls, and 115 years would elapse before a second such trip would occur, in beautiful Malabeam country with, in between, passage from the French to the English Regime, the Acadian Deportation, and the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, in Québec.

MUTUAL JOY

It was not due to mutual ill-will that made the intervening years between visits were so long. As a matter of fact, Father Thomas Albert, the priest-historian, wrote in his *Histoire du Madawaska* about the mutual joy which Bishop de Saint-Vallier's visit brought to Grand Falls. Three hundred thirty-three years after this historic visit, the local bishop visits the region practically each month for a total of some twenty days, and experiences a similar delight. The reason for this is very simple: Lent of 1999 is also the time of the episcopal visitation in the Grand Falls Deanery which is composed of seven parishes grouping over 14,000 baptised people. These parishes are: Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, St-Léonard-Ville, Saint-Léonard-Parent, Assumption, St-Georges, St-André, and St-Michel (Drummond).

PEOPLE OF HEART

I inaugurated my visitation of the Grand Falls Deanery on Ash Wednesday, February 17, with a Sharing-Supper put on by Development and Peace; this was followed by an evening Ash Wednesday Mass setting us on our Lenten journey. The Grand Falls [Assumption] Parish is twinned with the Baie-de-Henne Parish in Haiti. What struck me the most on Ash Wednesday was the people's great-heartedness, their generosity, their readiness to give generously to their needier brothers and sisters, their willingness to volunteer in many humanitarian and Christian endeavours. Along our path to the year 2000 we could very well find people like the young heroine Malabeam who was willing to sacrifice everything for the welfare of her people. According to the story as recorded by Father Albert, the young Maliseet woman gave up her life in order to save that of her people at Ecoupag and Medoctec, by diverting her nation's enemies away from the settlements and over the Grand Falls on the Saint John River.

ASSUMPTION

A mission of St. Bruno Parish in Van Buren for thirty years, Assumption Parish was canonically erected December 8, 1868, feast the Immaculate Conception, by Bishop James Rogers of Chatham. The bishop named the church after the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, some 82 years before the dogma was proclaimed (1950) by Pope Pius XII. Father John Joseph O'Leary became the church's first resident pastor, and he served his parish 24 years. Then the following men succeeded him: Father Michael O'Keefe (1892-1904), Fr. Henry T. Joyner (1904-1921), Fr. Thomas Albert (1921-1924), Msgr. Georges Bernier (1924-1956), Msgr. Solyme Azzie (1956-1971), Fr. Claude Lévesque (1971-1982), Fr. Laurent Nadeau (1982-1988), Fr. Roger Dionne (1988-1996), and Fr. Jeff Doucette (1996-1998). Presently in charge is Father Leo Grégoire, I.V.D.; he is assisted in his pastoral task by Mr. Bertin Gervais, pastoral agent, and Mrs. Joyce Shannon, assistant coordinator of the pastoral agent formation programme. The parish has over 4,500 souls in 65 sectors. The parish pastoral council chair is Mrs. Gisèle McCue.

CONCERN FOR THE NEEDY AND THE SICK

I had the privilege of visiting the Grand Falls Food Bank. According to statistics furnished, the poverty rate in New Brunswick has increased 38 %. I met some of the Grand Falls General Hospital volunteers and visited a few patients. It was a pleasure to visit Sacré-Coeur Elementary School and chat with the teachers. At the Grand Falls Manor I was pleased to see the dean of our clergy, Msgr. Urbain Lang, a real inspiration to us all in his availability to the Manor residents and the sick at the hospital, while maintaining his chaplaincy of the Knights of Columbus. It was in Msgr. Lang's company that I visited the residents of the Foyer Nowland, following which I had a very pleasant visit with the residents of the Foyer Riviera, where I was pleasantly surprised: residents from other private home had congregated there to meet their bishop. The saying holds true that "the heart has no age."

72 CONFIRMATIONS

What an honour it was to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation to 52 francophone and twenty anglophone young people in two separate services at Assumption, before a capacity congregation. What reverence we could feel in the assembly, with its great number of young people. The letters I had received from the young Confirmation candidates showed how serious they were about their desire to be confirmed. Congratulations to the children themselves, their parents, catechists, and pastor.

NUMEROUS ENCOUNTERS

I could not begin to guess the number of people I met, during my visitation at Assumption; it was a real pleasure to greet each parishioner individually, including the MLA and the town mayor who is so justly proud of his new town hall complex. With the Sisters of Sacré-Coeur I gave thanks to the Lord for their 75th anniversary: our diocesan Church owes them an immense debt of gratitude for their unstinting devotion in our midst since 1924. I also had the chance to visit the Maison des Jeunes Mad.-Vic. and meet there some very dedicated personnel. This organisation's aim is to encourage solidarity among the different youth groups in the region by giving them the resources they need to involve themselves in their milieu; also to encourage responsible autonomy and looking after their own needs and projects. I shall report later on the deanery meeting with the local parish liturgy committees.

WATCHFUL FOR THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

The meeting with the Parish Pastoral Council made me realise how all the council members are concerned with the quality of the Christian community, the peaceful accord which exists between francophones and anglophones, the sharing of responsibilities at the parish level, the formation and training of those involved, the lack of priests, and the recruitment of new parish volunteers. The Sunday Eucharist remains for the Council the main tool in forging the Christian community. My gratitude goes to all the people who made this weekend a success.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (267) (02 March 1999)