
SAINT-JACQUES PASTORAL VISITATION



It was a pleasure for me to do the pastoral visitation of Saint-Jacques Parish, on March 16, 17, and 18. Thanks to the schedule prepared by the pastoral team and to the friendliness of wonderful guides, I was able to meet a great number of people from this wonderful area.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Madawaska Centennial Album published in 1968 speaks glowingly of Saint-Jacques Parish. *"At the north-western corner of Madawaska County along the Québec border, Saint-Jacques Parish stretches its attractive hamlets across the Madawaska River's verdant valley."* Already in 1860, at the time of his first pastoral visit, Bishop James Rogers officially erected Saint-Jacques Mission along with that of Notre-Dame-du-Petit-Sault. *"Oral tradition has it that the early colonists had great difficulty in assuring a subsistence for themselves and their families. They had to 'make new land,' that is, clear the land with rudimentary implements. In order to provide themselves with such basics as flour, sugar, salt, molasses, as well as to buy clothes, they had to travel to Rivière-du-Loup. It is said that during the summer the children would also walk to Saint-Basile for religious education. Their instruction in other subjects was ensured by 'travelling teachers' who taught in private homes."*

NOTEWORTHY DEVELOPMENT

From 1880 on, Saint-Jacques became a mission of Edmundston, and in 1892 an autonomous parish, with the arrival there of Father François Régis Gagnon, the first resident priest (1892-1896). He was replaced in 1896 by Father Joseph Levasseur (1896-1903). It is quite surprising to realise that in 1900 the Saint-Jacques population comprised 624 adult communicants and 446 children. The third pastor, Father Maxime Babineau (1903-1929) and the fourth one, Father Grégoire Paquin (1929-1942) both left indelible memories of eminent holiness. The tradition of loyal service will be continued over several generations with Fathers Wilfrid Lagassé (1942-1945), Eugène Michaud (1945-1947), Louis Cyr (1947-1961), Camille Côté (1961-1973), Benjamin Saindon (1973-1980), Arthur Rossignol (1980-1990), and Gaëtan Côté (1990-1994). Father Rino Thériault is the actual pastor of this parish of 4435 Catholics in 1394 families. The pastoral team also comprises Mr. Jean-Louis Lang, Mrs. Ginette Bossé-Losier, Mrs. Sophie Roy, and Mrs. Laurette St-Onge. The Parish Pastoral Council chairperson is Mrs. Normande Turgeon, and the parish economic affairs committee chairman is Mr. Guy Lajoie.

SAINT-JACQUES [ST. JAMES] : THE NAME

Where does the parish's name come from? From the first name of the then bishop, Bishop James Rogers (1860-1902), bishop of the diocese of Chatham, to which this part of the province first belonged? I could not say with certainty. Saint James the Great [or St. James the Major], whose feast is celebrated July 25, was an apostle and confidant of Jesus, brother of John and friend of the apostles Peter and Andrew. He witnessed the transfiguration and the agony of Jesus. He is honoured in a very special way in Spain, at Santiago de Compostella, a high place of pilgrimage made especially famous during the Middle Ages. It was along the road to Saint James that the great pilgrimage traditions were developed.

PROMINENT ACTIVITIES

I had the opportunity to make a series of unforgettable visits, during my three-day visitation: the Caisse Populaire and the post office, the Economic, Tourism and Culture Bureau, Mont-Farlagne, the Alliance business, the Saint-Jacques School, the Botanical Garden, the Dynamic Fibre Truck Box Company, Karine Sportswear. I fondly remember the following homes for the elderly: Foyer Bossé, Foyer Saint-Jacques, Foyer Volpé-Bélanger, Résidence Grondin, Foyer La République, and Les Hirondelles sheltered workshop. Other highlights of this visitation were the confirmation of 58 youth, celebration of Sunday Mass, meeting the parish pastoral council, and the fellowship supper: all of these are hopeful signs pointing to the future.

MEETING THE DEANERY PEACs

On March 17 in the evening, at Saint-Basile, I had the pleasure of meeting the members of all parish economic affairs committees of the Edmundston Deanery. Since January, 1996, when we implemented the first PEACs, a long distance has been covered! On behalf of the diocesan Church I want to thank all those who manage the diocesan properties: buildings, grounds, financial resources, heritage. Times are not easy and challenges are many, especially when there is question of building repairs. We are justly proud of all these churches we have, they are visible signs of God's presence at the heart of our history. We are grateful to those in service to our communities: priests, pastoral agents, pastoral interns, catechists, sacristans, housekeepers, secretaries, organists, and collaborators. Together we help one another in the common cause of the Gospel of Jesus. By detaching the pastors more and more from administrative tasks, these PEACs are a wonderful sign of coresponsibility. Once again I say to them my deepest gratitude.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (326) (12 April 2000)