
PASTORAL VISITATION TO IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH (1)



The centennial festivities held at Immaculate Conception Parish in 1980 were the occasion for publishing books and articles of major historical interest. The work of Mr. Guy R. Michaud serves as an important reference, along with the book of Msgr. Eymard Desjardins on the Diocese of Edmundston. Other references to the history of this parish are also to be found in the *Histoire du Madawaska* by Father Thomas Albert, and in the fiftieth anniversary album of the Diocese of Edmundston.

NOTRE-DAME-DU-PETIT-SAULT

Until 1872 the inhabitants of Petit-Sault ["Petit-Sault," of "Little Falls," as Edmundston was then known. Tr] attended church at Saint-Basile for Mass and reception of the other sacraments, but in that year Bishop James Rogers of Chatham authorised the building of a chapel on a piece of ground donated by the Francis Rice family. The chapel was dedicated to Notre-Dame-du-Petit-Sault - Our Lady of Little Falls - though in the bishop's letters and the Saint-Basile registers, mention is made of Notre-Dame-de-Madawaska. The first resident pastor was Father Côme D'Amours (1880-1908), who ministered 28 years in the parish. He built the first church; he was also the one who gradually designated the parish by the name of the Immaculate Conception, at the turn of the century.

MSGR. WILLIAM CONWAY

Upon the death of Father D'Amours on March 3, 1908, Father William Conway was appointed administrator, then pastor in June of the same year. He remained in that post 53 years. Msgr Conway left his mark not only on the parish but on the Church of Edmundston as a whole. He died January 16, 1961. A remarkable builder, he had the cathedral constructed in 1927, the cathedral rectory in 1934, and the Mont-Sainte-Marie Orphanage in 1952. At his funeral, Msgr. Ernest Lang drew the following picture of this outstanding priest: *"A man of great natural distinction, a zealous priest, a true model to his brother priests, idolised by his parishioners, respected by all, non-Catholic as well as Catholic, he came at a time appointed by Providence, to carry out great works."* To succeed Msgr. Conway, Bishop Roméo Gagnon appointed Father Eymard Desjardins, a curate at the cathedral since 1952, who served first as administrator and then as pastor until 1990. In its 110 years' existence, Immaculate Conception Parish has had but three pastors, a rare fact in our Church history.

RAPID CHANGES

The following years brought about rapid changes: Father Almer Levasseur was pastor from 1990 to 1995, Father Napoléon Michaud was appointed pastor in August, 1994, but he met with an untimely death on February 8, 1996. After a few months with Father Jeff Doucette as administrator, Father Roger Dionne was appointed pastor August 5, 1997, making him the sixth pastor of the cathedral-parish grouping some 2 300 families comprising 5 450 individuals. The actual pastoral team is composed of Father Roger Dionne as moderator, Father Gaëtan Bernier, curate, Mr. Patrick Laflamme, pastoral intern, Mrs. Mona Albert, Mr. Léopold Lang, and Mrs. Pauline Ouellette. Mr. Raoul Ouellette is chairman of the parish pastoral council and Mr. Roland V. Levesque chairs the parish economic affairs committee.

NAMED FOR THE IMMACULATE

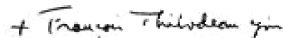
The devotion of the local population to the Immaculate Conception goes back to the history of New France. While seventeenth-century France was marked by the flowering of congregations dedicated to Mary, Bishop François de Montmorency-Laval was consecrated first bishop of New France on December 8, 1658, feast of the Immaculate Conception, and the first diocese in North America was dedicated to the Immaculate. On the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the Diocese of Québec Bishop Maurice Couture noted: *"One hundred fifty years and more after the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, it is difficult to weigh the audacity and faith which motivated the founder of the Canadian Church. Because [Mary's] vocation is unique, she was given a new name: 'Full-of-grace;' the Christian people sees in her an image of the Church to come: a foreshadowing of the heavenly Jerusalem whose gates are open to all peoples."*

REMARKABLE ACTIVITIES

A considerable number of activities were scheduled for my parish visitation of March 23, 24, 25, and 27 of this year; I am deeply grateful to the parish pastoral team for having planned this memorable visit; I thank all those who gave me a warm, respectful, and fraternal welcome. I celebrated Mass three times at the Cathedral and once at the convent of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters. At the March 25 Sunday Mass I confirmed 64 youths: a moment of profound faith. Meal times were conducive to interesting meetings: breakfast with Mayor Jacques P. Martin and councillor Mrs. Thérèse Martin, another breakfast with M.P. Jean Dubé and M.L.A. Mrs. Madeleine Dubé; and another one at Tim Horton's with the locals; lunch at the R.A.D.O. sheltered workshop, the Carrefour Assomption, the Foyer Montfort with members of the Foyer Plein Soleil and the Foyer Marie-Louise; lunch also at the Villa Des Jardins, at Marie-Jeunesse, and at the diocesan seminary.

NOTABLE VISITS

I have wonderful memories of the visits I made to the City Hall, the 9-1-1 Centre, the Fire and Police departments, NB Tel, Le Madawaska Printers and Publishers, the Maliseet Community Centre, the municipal library, radio station CJEM, Radio-Canada, St. Mary Academy, the Saint-François Kindergarten, École Sacré-Coeur, École Saint-Paul, École Cormier, Tournesol Sheltered Workshop, the Amitié, Sacré-Coeur, and Verret Golden Age Clubs, the Raymond and Morneault Homes, Place Laporte, the dependencies rehabilitation centre, the Maison des Jeunes, Fraser Company, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the Jocelyne-Desjardins School of Music. I have warm memories of the meetings I had with the parish pastoral team, the parish pastoral council, and the parish cells. On June 11 I shall confirm the young anglophones. I shall return to this in a later article.



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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