
PASTORAL VISITATION TO IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH (2)



On March 23, 24, 25 and 27 I had the pleasure of making the pastoral visitation of the cathedral parish. The sizable number of activities which marked the event lead me to write a second article on this visitation.

MAJOR CHANGE

On December 16, 1944, His Holiness Pope Pius XII erected Edmundston as a new diocese in Canada, and designated Immaculate Conception Church as the new cathedral of the diocese. At the heart of every diocese, the cathedral church indicates a mystery which we must consider carefully. Every parish church is an image of the Church which we form; every church symbolically reminds us of the presence of God in the midst of humankind; every Christian is God's abode, a sacred dwelling in our world. The cathedral church is the house of the local Church as a whole. When we speak of a cathedral we call to mind not only a particular community within the diocesan Church, but the very diocese itself. The cathedral church is a church called to welcome the local Church in its unity, the Church as it exists in history. While the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is present in each local Church, the cathedral is a symbol of the whole Church, the Church in its totality. It is the church of the People of God, the bishop's church, the church of the bishop's "cathedra," not only the bishop's seat but also the bishop's altar: the cathedral is the place of unity, unity of the priests with their bishop, unity of all the baptised among themselves and with their bishop.

A TREASURE TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH

Through its meaning, history, and beauty, the cathedral church deserves our attention, and it is the reason why there is a long tradition in the Church of making pilgrimages to the cathedral. Our cathedral is a monument of faith and love of an entire people. Work on the building began in 1925 and ended in 1941; the church was blessed July 1, 1941, by Cardinal Jean-Marie Rodrigue Villeneuve. I invite you to visit this splendid cathedral, where treasures are to be found: 21 varieties of marble, oak and walnut wood, stained-glass windows relating the life of Christ and the glories of Mary. Make the round of the stations of the cross, a masterpiece of Jordi Bonnet. Come and listen to the organ with its 45 stops; artists or renown have already accepted an invitation by the Friends of the Organ for the Foire Brayonne 2000: Denis Bédard, Rachel Laurin, Raymond Daveluy - concerts that should be unforgettable.

NOTRE-DAME-DU-SACRÉ-COEUR

In 1950, part of the cathedral parish was detached to become a new entity, and for 47 years the parish of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur existed; the chapel of the Edmundston military barracks was its first church, and a modern building was erected in 1966. The parish had six pastors, Fathers Camille Côté (1950-1961), Arthur Godbout (1961-1975), Lewis Long (1975-1984), Rino Albert (1984-1995), and Michel Bouffard, S.M. (1995-1997). On June 30, 1997, following a parish survey and after consulting with all the parish and pertinent diocesan organisations, the parish of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur was reunited to the Cathedral Parish.

PRECIOUS LEGACY

On March 6, 2000, the church of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur officially became the Monsignor W. J. Conway Municipal Library. In donating a bible to the library I wanted to point out that this building was for thirty years the gathering place of a community to hear the Word of God being proclaimed. This holy book is a symbol of the deep faith of an entire people. This holy book, joined to all the others, will remind us who we are and what are our roots, as well as where we are going as a people. It will remind us of the covenant to which we are still attached. May this library dedicated to the memory of Msgr. Conway be a precious legacy, may it show to everyone the culture of the people of the Madawaska Region.

WORDS OF WISDOM

All through a visitation it is mostly the voice of the people which takes precedence. I shall remember the words spoken to me, such as those by a delegation of three students from the École Cormier asking whether it would still be possible to have religious education in their school: the diocesan directors will make it their duty to cooperate with the school's religious educators. Others requested special prayers, while still others shared with me about the values which direct their lives. For example, at the École St-Paul we are striving to create an environment of peace based on honesty. These are a few of their slogans: *"When we are honest we are loved!" "Be honest and you will not come out a loser!" "Honesty is like a flower: it smells good!"*

GRATITUDE

To express my thanks for this visitation, and thinking of all those I met, I would like to make mine the prayer of Father Lucien Deiss: *"Lord Jesus, we praise you for all those who give you a face by spreading love in the world. For all those who give you a mouth, Lord Jesus, by coming to the defense of the poor and the oppressed, we praise you. For all those who give you eyes, Lord, by admiring the least bit of love emanating from the heart of man and woman, we praise you. For all those who give you a heart, Lord Jesus, by choosing the poor over the rich, the weak over the powerful, we praise you. For all those who reveal you simply by what they are, Lord Jesus, because they reflect your beauty in their lives, we praise you. God our Father, You are God with a thousand faces and yet not one of them can reveal you fully except the face of the Child of Bethlehem. We pray you to continue in our lives the mystery of Nazareth, the mystery of Bethlehem. May your Son take flesh in us so that we may be revelation of your love to all our brothers and sisters."*

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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