
BUILDING THE CHURCH TOGETHER (1)



God's love for His people is really from age to age, from generation to generation. Many times since my coming to Edmundston in 1994 I have repeated this greatest of all revelations. My motto, which is also that of the diocese, constantly reminds us of this: *His love is from age to age!* This was true for our brothers and sisters of the First Nations who were so grateful for the precious gifts of the earth, water, and the forest. This was true for the first Acadian families who settled along the banks of the Saint John River at Saint-Basile in 1789. It was equally true when the parishes of the diocese were gradually established. It was true when, during World War II, Pope Pius XII erected the Diocese of Edmundston, December 16, 1944. It is true that God loves us: proof of this is found everywhere, every day, in new births and baptisms, in graduations and weddings, and in the midst of family and community celebrations.

THE CHURCH'S BUILDING-SITE

On May 1 of this year, following a serious feasibility study and the nearly unanimous vote of all the members of the different diocesan councils, I announced the launching of a major financial campaign in the coming months. The main reason for this decision was first and foremost the love which binds you all, and love of our Church. We must be in a position, in the decades to come, to say to all who surround us and to all those who shall come after us that we are infinitely loved by God and that His love is for them, too. But then, must one invest so much money to announce this message? I have no hesitations in this regard: my answer is, "Yes, we must!" And I shall repeat this in different ways, in future reflections with you. However, I must hasten to add that the financial campaign will require vast sums of money, but this is only one aspect we must work on as a Church community, to ensure for years to come that religious education really reaches everyone in the diocese, both young and old, that pastoral outreach really touches all families and youth, that there is really serious recruiting and training of new parish personnel deeply committed to promoting priestly vocations, and that pastoral restructuring proceeds prudently but enthusiastically. The financial campaign is only one dimension of what we shall have to develop in years to come. I hide nothing from you: this is a vast undertaking! It is also an undertaking which fires me with enthusiasm and which, I am certain, will also get your enthusiastic support.

A MUSTARD SEED

There are words which reassure me and draw me back to much more modest realities closer to home, and these words hold promise of wonderful growth... I am referring here to the Word of Jesus, a Word ever alive and inspiring, a Word that does good and brings to fruition according to the needs of the work at hand. To what shall we compare the Kingdom of God? By what parable are we to describe it? *"It is like a mustard seed which, when planted in the soil, is the smallest of all the earth's seeds, yet once it is grown, springs up to become the largest of shrubs, with branches big enough for the birds of the sky to build nests in its shade"* (Mark 4:31-32). It is in these hope-filled words that I would like to address you who have such a vital interest in the future of our diocesan Church of Edmundston, the great Work-Site we are called to work at. These days, the Word of God resounds in all its richness in our ears.

A WONDERFUL STORY

For those who have not had the chance, lately, to walk through our garden, or who have lost sight of the mustard seed sown in our diocesan field over the years, we could refer them to the wonderful story of the Kingdom of God which was established in the Madawaska, Victoria, and Restigouche deaneries, a story unlike many others. It is a story well worth hearing from the mouths of the many privileged witnesses who were there for the first sowings of the seed, as twenty of our thirty-two parishes are not yet a hundred years old. Our diocese itself will only be 59, in December of this year. Several local histories tell of the enormous challenges which our ancestors picked up in faith, hope, and courage: the sowing of new seed marked important milestones. We still have several more sowings left to do, especially in the areas of family- and parish-based religious education, family and youth ministry, the training of new pastoral agents and personnel, and adequate parish restructuring.

DIFFICULT BEGINNINGS

As an introduction to these new sowings, these new work sites of 2003, a few questions can remind us of these beginnings and re-beginnings. How many Catholics were there in Connors when the parish was founded in 1950? How much money did Monsignor Conway dispose of when he undertook the building of Immaculate Conception Church in 1927, at the onset of the Depression? When was the Baker Brook church ravaged by fire? The one in St-François? The one in St-Basile? The one in St-Leonard? The one in Kedgwick? How long did the parishioners of Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs Parish have to attend religious services in Immaculate Conception Church? What was the name of the first priest-coloniser in the Restigouche? How many Eudist Fathers came to the Tobique, in 1904? What religious order came to the mother-parish of the Madawaska, 130 years ago, and under what conditions? Who was the first Franciscan missionary in Southern Victoria? What major trial affected the fledgling Diocese of Edmundston, in 1948? And so on. Answering these questions means recollecting the courage of our pioneers, and the difficult sowings of the seed. It is a recalling how the Word of God took root among us. Despite considerable obstacles, our forebears were people of faith. Down the years and in the unfolding of events we can discern and measure the precious heritage they left us. Who will tell of the tenacity and courage of those who built the Church we are so rightly proud of, working in the shadows, amidst the drudgery and dreariness of everyday life? They did this so that we might have life, and life to the full. It is now our turn to continue working on the construction site of the Diocese, so that those who come after us also have life and life to the full! We who were baptised and confirmed were given the spirit of strength and not a spirit of fear. "Let Us Continue Building Our Beloved Church! Let us sow Love! Tomorrow begins today!"

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (505) (10 September 2003)