
The Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption Sisters (f.m.a.)



It we approach February 2 which Pope John Paul II dedicated as the World Day of Vocations, I invite you to pray for all those in our diocese who are members of religious communities. Their presence here is a real “gift” to the diocese. Last May I had the pleasure of writing a pastoral letter on the consecrated life. My hope is that it evoke wonder and awe, in us, as well as a response to the Lord’s calling.

“A SIGN APPEARED IN THE HEAVENS”

In the album *Sur les chemins de l'Évangile*¹ published on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, Sister Julie D’Amour, F.M.A., the former superior general, writes about the Institute’s beginnings: Empowered by the Spirit, with hearts filled with faith and hope, fourteen young women joined together in 1922 to commit themselves to an heretofore unprecedented adventure directed to the world and full of promise for the Church in Acadia. With courage and determination, these young women lay the foundations of a work marked with both greatness and humility. Practically despite themselves, they were the Labourers of the First Hour of an institute of consecrated life in the Church, the Filles de Marie-de-l’Assomption. With the passage of time we can sense the solidity of their enterprise, the resonance of their joy, the generosity of their commitment, the simplicity of their devotedness, the fervour of their prayer, the faithfulness of their attachment to Christ, and the beauty of their devotion to the Virgin Mary of the Assumption. Following their Master, they are teachers of youth and adults, they minister to orphans, and visit and take in the needy; they open their homes and share their resources. Where their Founder, Father Arthur Melanson –the humble pastor of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Parish at Campbellton and first archbishop of the new diocese of Moncton – had marked the way, they were lovers of the land, sown the seeds of education, catechetics, free service to others, love of Mary and the Church, and a preferential option for the poor.

IN OUR DIOCESE

It is in 1924 that the Sisters come to Saint-Quentin; they are in Saint-Jacques in 1925, Kedgwick in 1927, Saint-André and Edmundston in 1939, Lac-Baker in 1949, Red Rapids in 1971, Plaster Rock in 1972, Saint-Martin in 1977, Saint-Jean-Baptiste in 1987, and Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes in 1992. In all these parishes² they worked for the most part in area schools, but they also worked in homes for the mentally handicapped (Beth Shalom) or for the elderly (Green River, Mont Assomption, Grand Falls Manor, Villa DesJardins). In the Restigouche, Grand Falls and Edmundston deaneries, they collaborate in parish ministry. They worked for a while at the bishop’s residence in Edmundston and at the retreat house. They have also been (and still are) members of the diocesan services staff: at some time or other they have headed the offices of religious education, missions (especially through “Parrainage Tiers-Monde”), the École de la Foi, and pastoral agent formation. They are actually involved in a number of formation programmes in both Bible and catechetics, both at the parish and diocesan levels.

“FROM THE RIVER TO ITS SOURCE”

In her wonderful book, *Du fleuve à la source* [“From the River to Its Source”], Sister Yvette Arsenault, F.M.A., in sketching the spiritual itinerary of the Filles de Marie-de-l’Assomption and looking at the personality traits of Bishop Louis-Joseph-Arthur Melanson and words he wrote in 1925, writes that the words written then have a prophetic bearing: “The Institute will discover the mystical sense of its raison d’être in the mystery of Mary’s Assumption... And in the mystery of the Annunciation it will find ample example of all the virtues helping the Institute carry out its task faithfully.” The Incarnation is the mystery of the transcendent and the immanent, the mystery of a transcendent God taking on human form to dwell among us, immanent in human history. We never cease to marvel with Mary at the meaning of this reality which transcends all others, that of Jesus Christ hidden in humanity in order to reveal the face of God. Jesus Christ, hidden in Mary, who has fully revealed the

face of God; Jesus Christ, hidden in me, so that I may reveal the face of God; Jesus Christ hidden in the community, in the Church, so that we may, in communion, show forth the face of God. To honour Mary in her Assumption is to believe deeply that, through her, the open welcome of God by humankind is effected. Up to her, the welcome of God could only happen in God. With her, it is achieved in a creature. To honour Mary in her Assumption is to acknowledge that in the one who was radically redeemed the Resurrection was perfectly received. To contemplate Mary, fully associated with the life and mission of her Son is to allow ourselves to continually be illumined with the light of the incarnate Word, which is also the light of the Risen Christ.

AN OUTSTANDING PRESENCE

More than sixty Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption are natives of the diocese of Edmundston. Besides, more than 160 have worked in the diocese. Among the first of the Labourers of the First Hour, there were two from the Madawaska Region: Sister Edmée Martin and Sister Hélène Lang. Five superiors general were from our diocese: Sisters Edmée Martin, Andrina Dubé, Régina Bois, Marie-Paule Couturier, and Jeannette Leclerc. We presently have nineteen Sisters of the Filles-de-Marie-de-l'Assomption with us.

FERTILE SOIL

The zeal and the courage of these home missionaries have led the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption to bring their Gospel witness to different corners of the world. The poet-priest Robert McGraw, of the Bathurst Diocese, wrote the theme song for the Congregation's 75th anniversary celebrations:

*You choose us from the midst of the world
And mould us like wet clay.
May we be fertile soil
In the garden of the Church.*

+ François Thibodeau ym

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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