



"O EDMUNDSTON, BELOVED CHURCH!"

December 8, 1994 to December 8, 1995 will be like a Holy Year for our diocese, as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our diocesan Church. It was on December 19, 1944, that His Holiness Pope Pius XII established the Diocese of Edmundston, composed of Madawaska and Victoria Counties, and the western part of Restigouche County, all parts which were detached from the Bathurst Diocese. Edmundston is a suffragan of the archdiocese of Moncton. I gratefully acknowledge the work accomplished by my predecessors: Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M. (1945-1948), Bishop J.-Romeo Gagnon (1949-1970), Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M. (1970-1983), and Bishop Gerard Dionne (1984-1994). I regard it as a grace from the Lord to have inherited from these illustrious predecessors by becoming the fifth bishop of this Church. Rest assured that I shall do my utmost to pursue task which was so well established.

Drawing from a song I had composed with Fr. Armand Chouinard on the occasion of the centennial celebration of my native parish of St-Odilon, in Beauce-Nord [Québec], I offer you the following lines¹ in honour of the Church of Edmundston. This is more than a mere transposing the words to fit our people here: it is an expression of the love I bear for the Church of Edmundston, and the profound ties which already bind me to it.

O Edmundston, beloved Church
You speak to us of peace and freedom.
Deep within us will you ever remain
A magnificent undertaking, a rendez-vous of love.

1. Praise we together all of life's moments
That today we celebrate in joy.
Sing we all as we join together,
Of the lively force animating our lives:
Gentleness, team work, persistence and faith.
We are proud of these which are part of our lives.

2. Sing we the fifty years of our story
Oftentimes woven with courage and hope;
Let us recount the efforts of ancestors
Who raised the Church as they sprouted life.
Glory and honour to these hardy builders!
We are proud indeed, of this our history.

¹ Free verse rendering of the original French. L. G., Tr.

3. Sing we together the forthcoming years
That are to us promises of life.
Let us recall the path of celebration
Leading on to new horizons.
In faith let us ever be committed.
We are proud: It is our grand undertaking.

A WONDERFUL COMMITTEE

A Coordinating Committee has been set up to look after the organising of our jubilee year. The Committee Chair is Mr. Jean Pilote, assisted by Sister Claudette Ruest, the coordinator of Diocesan Pastoral Affairs; and the following, from the different deaneries of the diocese: Fr. Jeff Doucette, Mrs. Jacqueline Clavet, committee secretary, Mr. Ernest Sirois, Mrs. Annette Plourde, Mr. Roger A. Guimond, Mr. Héliodore Côté, Mr. Maurice and Mrs. Nicole Babineau, Mr. Lucien Deschênes, Mr. Pierre Thibault, Mrs. Joyce Shannon, and Mr. Maurice Pelletier. Other people will be appointed, to complete the committee. Valuable collaboration has already been offered to us. Mr. Jacques Albert of the Madawaska Historical Society is planning a souvenir album which, besides telling the story of what led to the establishment of the Diocese of Edmundston, will also give brief historical notices on each of our 33 parishes. Before becoming a diocese, the various parishes were attached for a time to the diocese of Québec or those of Saint John, Chatham, or Bathurst; it is well to recall these different stages of our growth. We are also assured of the valued collaboration of the Foire Brayonne [Edmundston Fair] organisers: it is within the framework of the 1995 Foire Brayonne (August 2-6, 1995), that the principal diocesan activities will take place. A solemn open-air Mass will be celebrated August 6, 1995, to be televised on the Radio-Canada programme "Jour du Seigneur." Several bishops of the Atlantic region will be with us - or so we hope.

Besides, in order to ensure quality liturgical activities and spiritual renewal throughout this period of celebration, we have called on the services of Fr. Armand Chouinard [C.J.M.]. Founder of Alpec [French music ministry] and FideArt, Father Chouinard is known to quite a few among us for having given missions and retreats and directed community spiritual renewal in St-Léonard, Kedgwick, St-Basile, St-Joseph, and Edmundston. Parishes and deaneries will be invited to mark our diocese's fiftieth anniversary in a manner appropriate and meaningful for all ages. This is to be a wonderful time of celebration, gratitude, and interesting for all ages. Rooted in the soil of a very rich past, we turn to the future in confidence and hope.

COAT OF ARMS

A member of the Coordinating Committee remarked that the diocese does not have its own coat of arms and motto and so, with the committee's assent as well as that of the episcopal committee, I am pleased to offer my own coat of arms for the diocese to adopt. This coat of arms is by now very well known in most schools of the diocese; it was conceived with the Church of Edmundston in mind, and this is what it signifies:

The coat of arms taken as a whole signifies praise to the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit whose love is everlasting. The creation, a gift of the Father, is evoked by the symbol of the three mountains that indicate the duration of the divine love. They also remind us of the Saint John Valley, Mount Farlagne, the Appalachians and other mountains in Madawaska, the Restigouche, and Victoria. Ecological concern is a response to the gift made to us.

The star reminds one of the Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception to whom the Diocese of Edmundston is dedicated. Twelve parishes are dedicated to the Virgin.

God the Son made his love known to all humankind. Jesus gave his life for us. The symbol of the cross evokes the coming of Jesus among us, his life, ministry, passion, death, and resurrection. We follow him, we want to live as he lived and contribute to the building up of the Kingdom of heaven through evangelisation and the formation of good workers for the Gospel.

God the Holy Spirit is at work even today: He, sacrament of salvation for humankind, never ceases to renew creation and the whole Church. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22). The ship figure - also found in the New Brunswick coat of arms - is an evocation of the Church to which we belong, the barque of Peter, the People of God which we constitute and which must go out fearlessly, daringly and courageously into the open sea.

The water reminds one of baptism which made us the beloved children of God, members of the People of God and of the Body of Christ. It is also a challenge: "What are you doing with your Baptism?" Water of the great rivers irrigating our diocese: Saint John, Madawaska, Restigouche, Tobique, Green River, etc., all signs of life.

The motto: *SON AMOUR S'ÉTEND D'AGE EN AGE* (His Love Is from Age to Age) is taken from verse 4 of the Virgin Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:50). This prayer is a hymn from the heart of the Mother of love. Such a statement by the Virgin Mary is a source of hope for our world. the love of God is everlasting, it extends from age to age.

Have good week!

+ François Thibodeau ym

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

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