

---

## ALREADY TWO YEARS AMONG YOU!

---



Looking at the pectoral cross that Pope John Paul II gave me on the occasion of my first visit to Rome following my appointment as fifth bishop of Edmundston, I see engraved there symbols of the three principal functions of my mission among you: proclaiming the Word, celebrating the sacraments, and governing the Church confided to my care. And at the centre of the cross is Jesus asking Peter, "Do you love me? Take care of my sheep." It is while looking at this cross that I want to remember this second year among you. It is while thanking you for all of your collaboration and begging your forgiveness for failing in my pastoral charge that I wish to remember a bit these last twelve months.

### PROCLAIMING THE WORD OF GOD

The Jubilee Year marking the fiftieth anniversary of our diocese will have been a singular time to proclaim the marvels of the Lord in our beautiful region of Madawaska, the Restigouche, and Victoria. Not a week went by without having to share the Word in a homily, a conference, or a simple talk. Throughout the Fiftieth it was my design to emphasise our milieu's great traditions and the major characteristic of the People of God. Each week, through these weekly writings I have sought to reflect on the events of the day as seen through the eyes of the Gospel and of the Church; I thank those in charge of the mass media for having made these 52 texts available; I heartily thank Father Leo Grégoire for having done the translations as soon as the texts were ready. On June 4, 1995 I published a pastoral letter for a second year in a row, this time on the importance of having parish communities concerned with the future of all its members. I consider it a major grace to have been invited to preach the annual retreat of the priests of our diocese, last May, and to have joined them in meditating on the extraordinary relationship we entertain with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Meeting with several families, organisations and groups in our milieu I was able to share a bit on the Gospel. I want to thank the Lord with you for all these moments.

### CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENTS

Except for the Sacrament of the Sick, I celebrated all the other sacraments. What a joy to celebrate a baptism! Last winter, in the framework of the Fiftieth Anniversary festivities, I baptised Mikaël, baby son of Nancy and Roch Ward of Rivière-Verte; at the Easter Vigil I welcomed another new member into the Christian community. But it was especially for the Eucharist and Confirmation that I was the most often invited; the Eucharist, the sign of unity and summit of the Christian life, and Confirmation, gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples of Jesus. I celebrate Mass in one or another parish just about every Sunday. It is for me a happy occasion to meet my brothers and sisters, in this fashion; the Sunday gathering is so suffused with deep meanings. As for Confirmation, I remember the community celebration that took place for all those being confirmed in the Southern Victoria Deanery: an unforgettable celebration of the Holy Spirit animating our Church. And on May 26 of last year I presided at the diaconate of our friend Curtis Sappier: with the grace of God, He shall be ordained a priest in the spring, probably on Saturday, May 25 of this year. I also celebrated the beautiful sacrament of Matrimony at St-Martin, the first wedding I've had in New Brunswick. For all these actions of Jesus among us I bless the Lord with you.

## GOVERNING THE PEOPLE OF GOD

It would be better to use the verb "to be," in designating all that pertains to pastoral ministry, the organisation of parishes, deaneries, diocesan organisations, and the financial administration of the diocese. There, too, there was plenty of work to be done! Looking at all the initiatives undertaken in each parish I can't help but thank God for such devotedness and commitment on the part of our people. Each parish will now have a parish pastoral council to animate the Christian community according to the four great traditional dimensions: faith education, celebration and prayer, fellowship, and transforming one's milieu. Each parish will also have its own economic affairs committee and several other committees: for sacramental preparation, liturgy, inter-parish aid, mission, etc. At the deanery level, there is a whole stock pot of ideas and projects simmering, on how to gradually transform our milieu. At the diocesan level, I can't help but thank all the councils, offices, organisations, and committees that very often in a hidden and volunteer way strive to generously respond to the expectations of the People of God. The pastoral session that took place last January allowed us to deepen the meaning of renewing Sunday as the Lord's Day by renewing our Sunday gatherings, consolidating our parish pastoral councils, marriage preparation, and the pastoral and financial situation of our diocese. Preparing and implementing the three pastoral statutes affect large segments of our daily life: relationships with our brothers and sisters, relationship with God, coresponsibility, and concern for all members of the community. The continuation of the École de la Foi, the setting up of a Training Programme for future pastoral agents, and the opening of our Diocesan Seminary are as many ways of ensuring the appropriate formation of good Gospel workers.

## OTHER TASKS AWAIT US

Many second year as bishop began in Mexico during a mission of solidarity and peace to the people of Chiapas. My third year will often call on me to work on social issues at the Bishops' Commission on Social Affairs: we shall try to soon set up an office for social and family issues in our diocese. The planning of five Eucharistic Congresses in preparation of Jubilee 2000 and pastoral visits to each of the deaneries will be as many fine moments to carry on together the mission of Jesus. For all of this life in our young fifty-year-old Church, I thank God with you!

Have a good week!

*+ François Thibodeau*

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

« From A Bishop's Journal » (101) (03 January 1996)