
VISITATION OF THE UPPER MADAWASKA DEANERY (1)



During February and March of this year I made an intensive pastoral visitation of the six Upper Madawaska Deanery parishes. It was a grace-filled experience, and I would like to share it with you. The visitation which had been very well prepared by each pastor with the help of the local parish pastoral council, allowed me to meet with many of the 4948 people of the deanery.

BAKER LAKE

In reading Mrs. Irma Lévesque's book, *Petite histoire de Lac-Baker, N.B.*, published in 1981, I learned that according to a well-founded tradition Baker Lake owes its appellation to John Baker, grandfather of Colonel Jesse Baker. This John Baker, who was born in the United States built a sawmill along the river that bears his name, in 1817. It is said that one day John Baker got lost in the woods and wandered several miles in a north-westerly direction until he reached a beautiful lake. By skirting the eastern shore of the lake he reached the spot where the waters emptied in a south-easterly direction. He followed the course which brought him back to his mill. It was due to this adventure that the lake got its name, 'Baker`s Lake,' and that is the way the place is referred to in the early parish records that go back to 1886. A few years later and with the agreement of the local populace, the name of the place came to be simply 'Baker Lake.'

The first chapel was built in 1876, at a time when the missionaries visited the colonisers three or four times a year. On September 10, 1886, Bishop James Rogers of Chatham founded the mission under the patronage of St. Thomas Aquinas; the mission would be granted parish status in 1904. The present church was dedicated July 13, 1902, and Father Martin Léonard Richard was the founding pastor; he ministered here thirty-three years (1904-1937). His successors were Fathers Félix Morneau (1937-1945), Lionel Daigle (1945-1951), Narcisse Gagnon (1951-1954), Urbain Lang (1954-1968), Adrien Martin (1968-1971), Benoît Rossignol (1971-1972), Benoît Bossé (1972-1989), and Lucien Lévesque (1989-1995). Father Jean-Marie Martin is the actual parish priest of a parish now comprising 660 people.

I was glad to meet with parish pastoral council and many parishioners. At the February 28 eucharistic celebration I gave the sacrament of Confirmation to six children of the parish. What a fervent and prayerful community! It was here at Baker Lake that I met all those in the deanery who are involved in sacramental preparation for baptism, reconciliation, Eucharist, confirmation, marriage, anointing of the sick, and holy orders. I was able to see for myself and appreciate the good work done by these volunteers aided by their pastors.

ST-FRANÇOIS D'ASSISE, CLAIR

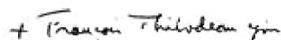
The interesting souvenir album of St-François d'Assise Parish, Clair (1889-1989) tells us the story of how this parish came to be, following the fire that completely demolished the 'red church' and rectory of St-François-Xavier, on February 3, 1886. The story also tells us of the ties between Clair and the other Upper Madawaska parishes, first as a mission and then as a full-fledged parish. The priests who ministered in Clair were Fathers

Antoine Comeau, Israël-Norbert Dumont, Georges Gauvin, André Bérubé, Téléphore Lambert, Louis-Armand Martin, Charles-Eugène Michaud, Xavier Daigle, Lionel Daigle, Benjamin Saindon Jr., Claude Clavet, and Alfred Ouellet. After serving for a year as pastoral administrator of the parish, Father Claude Côté, C.J.M., was appointed pastor August 15, 1997.

On Sunday, March 8, I had the pleasure of celebrating the Sunday Eucharist and giving the sacrament of Confirmation to thirteen children; it was an unforgettable, moving, and vibrant celebration. At a meeting with the Clair municipal councillors we talked about the ties that bind together the municipality and the parish. On the upper half of the municipal coat of arms is a rendition of the traditional Franciscan three-knotted cord. A visit to the Villa Bellevue gave me the opportunity to chat with the parish elders, and a meeting with the parish pastoral council was the occasion of a serious exchange regarding the indispensable presence of priests, pastoral agents, and leaders for the Church of tomorrow. Concerned about following up on the February diocesan pastoral session, we looked at a few possible ways of restructuring, with an eye on mutual assistance and cooperation at the deanery level, whether in the area of religious education, youth ministry, or pastoral care for the elderly. A fellowship meal was also the opportunity for recollecting a number of events that occurred in the parish over the years.

A surprise awaited me: a meeting with the steering committee and the 9 sub-committees of the Third Diocesan Eucharistic Congress that is to be held at Clair June 2, 13, and 14 of this year. Fifty-two volunteers attended this meeting where we could feel a wonderful vitality, creativity, and enthusiasm for the project at hand. All of them want to be ready by mid-May. All the committees and sub-committees are composed of members from throughout the Upper Madawaska deanery. A sharing on the Congress theme, *Eucharist and Family - A Heritage to Reclaim* made us realize the timeliness and the richness of these two realities. It is important for us all, both as individuals and as communities, to untiringly reflect on this extraordinary heritage of ours. At the threshold of the year 2000 it is good to discover the quiet and beneficial presence of Jesus. We can say together the prayer specifically composed for this eucharistic congress: Lord Jesus, when you were about to give up your Body and Blood for us, you prayed at length for the unity of all your disciples. May we, during this third eucharistic congress in preparation for the year 2000 discover the wonderful heritage you leave us in your Sacrament of Love and in our families. May our family meals and Sunday gatherings help us grow in unity and be forever a sign that your love is from age to age.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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