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## VISITATION OF THE UPPER MADAWASKA DEANERY (3)

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I would like to continue sharing with you about the pastoral visitation I made to the Upper Madawaska Deanery during Lent of 1998.

### SAINT-FRANÇOIS-DE-MADAWASKA

The excellent book published by Mr. Jacques Albert on the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parish was a major reference work I carried with me throughout the pastoral visitation; the book is called *Saint-François-de-Madawaska 1859-1984*. Using Fr. Thomas Albert's book on the history of the Madawaska region as reference, Mr. Albert starts by recalling that the arrival of some 20,000 American loyalists along the southern part of what was to become the province of New Brunswick had forced the French who lived around Sainte-Anne-des-Pays-Bas (the Fredericton region) to seek refuge elsewhere. And so, in June of 1785 a first group made their way up the Saint John River and opened the Madawaska. Seven years later, the entire Madawaska region was canonically established as a parish under the name of Saint-Basile-le-Grand. The new parish comprised both shores of the Saint John River, from Grand Falls to the Saint Francis River. The first two parishes to be detached from Saint-Basile were those of Saint Bruno (Van Buren, Maine) and Sainte-Luce (Frenchville, Maine).

Life was not easy, in the early years of the Madawaska colony. On May 1, 1797, Pierre Dupéré wrote to the Governor of New Brunswick: « *The undersigned takes the liberty of writing to Your Excellency to let him know about the absolute misery and the deplorable condition of more than thirty families of French colonists who are without food, the women and children dying of hunger, and they are in such a miserable state that they do not even have the strength to perform their daily chores. This state of affairs has not been caused through negligence on their part: the frosts of last season destroyed two-thirds of the harvest and since then they have had neither meat nor fish, and God knows what is to become of them.* »

The first French colonists to settle Saint-François-de-Madawaska arrived around 1826. They had to buy land from the Americans who were already exploiting the woods, there. The future parish was erected as a mission in 1849 and a first church, the `red church` was built in 1850. It would burn to the ground February 3, 1886. When Saint-François was erected as a parish it became the second parish of the Madawaska region. Since its inception, seventeen pastors have ministered there: Fathers Charles Swéron, Douglas Stanislas MacDonald, Joseph A. Roy, J.C. Éthier, C.S.C., J.B. Bazoge, C.S.C., Joseph Pelletier, Joseph Martin, Phydime Paradis, Antoine Comeau, Israël-Norbert Dumont, Téléphore Lambert, Msgr. Ernest Lang, Hilaire Daigle, Alfred Ouellet, Laurent Nadeau, and Jacques Gauvreau. Father Yvon Ouellet is the actual pastor of a community numbering 1367.

### NOTRE-DAME-DU-ROSAIRE, CONNORS

The beginnings of Connors reach back to the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The first inhabitants, wood merchants who for the most part were Anglican or Protestant, cut out a living space for themselves in the

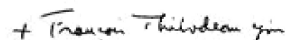
midst of a rich pine forest; they would soon be followed by French Catholic families. At one time a railway town of over a thousand inhabitants, the community has no more than forty-two families, now, in all, a population of one hundred forty-two. The Catholic mission at Connors was established in 1893 and was pastored by the Saint-François parish priest. The first resident priest was Father Urbain Lang who was succeeded by Fathers Benjamin Saindon and Alfred Ouellet. When the latter was appointed pastor of Saint-François he still continued on as priest-in-charge of Connors until 1975. In 1960 the Connors church was totally destroyed by fire, but in less than six months a new church was raised by the parishioners.

## **MANY ENGAGEMENTS**

Besides celebrating the Sunday Eucharist with Confirmation at both St-François and Connors on Sunday, April 5, I had the pleasure of making several visits, on March 6 and 13: the Nadeau Division of Shermag, Inc. the Nadeau Poultry Farm Ltd, CL Decor Ltée, Henri Nadeau, the École Mgr Ernest-Lang, the Saint-François municipal officers, the Foyer Lizotte, Inc., and the Atelier des Copains-Coop Ltée. What pleasure it was to meet with the workers and handicraftspeople, with the students and their teachers, with the senior citizens and their helpers, and with all who give of themselves unstintingly for the good of the parish community.

I also had the occasion to meet with the leaders of nineteen groups and associations from throughout the deanery: Knights of Columbus and Daughters of Isabella, Scouts and Guides, Richelieu and Republic Women Clubs, Women's Institute, Air Cadets, Cursillo Movement, Golden Age Club, UTANO, Self-Help Group, Ladies Auxilliary, Fire Department, Saint-François Library personnel, CIBLE Committee, Lac Glazier Foundation, Committee on Aboriginal People, and the Foyer Ste-Élizabeth volunteers. We must also mention the sports and leisure committees such as the hunting and fishing clubs, ASNO, and also those humanitarian groups like Foi et Lumière, the Chamber of Commerce, the Amitié Workshop, Katimavik, the Guignolée, and the Maison des Jeunes. They are all very vibrant and life-giving.

Have a good week.



+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

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