
NEW YEAR'S BLESSINGS



We do well always and everywhere to praise the Lord, but especially in these days that mark the passing from one year to another. Hence, deeply united with all of you who praise the Lord early in 1999, I want to give thanks for all that was beautiful, good, and holy in our diocesan Church in 1998.

SOLIDARITY

From January to December, 1998, a strong current of solidarity swept through our diocese, as it came to the help of the ice-storm victims, then to those of Hurricane Mitch, and finally to those afflicted by the awful floods in Central America. Responding to these emergencies, generous financial and material aid was provided. An example: the truckloads of firewood that made their way to the Montérégie region of Québec, and the many boxes of clothing shipped to Honduras. And what about all those other gestures of solidarity made by individuals, local business people, sponsors of social and community events, and all the volunteers who were involved in these aid events and activities?

SUFFERING

If people elsewhere had hydro-electric towers tipped over by the ice storm, while others had their homes carried away by flood waters, our people, too, had their share of difficulties: illness, deaths and other troubles; but thank God, and thanks also to the courage and prayers of all the faithful, we were able to overcome these painful trials and carry on. Once again I bless the Lord for the support received, for all the prayers offered, and for the collaboration given.

BAPTISMAL MISSION

On the occasion of the huge operation of diocesan and parish pastoral readjustments, all the baptised and confirmed have been called on to deepen the sense of our baptismal calling and to gradually discover those new paths we must take in order to continue the mission of Jesus. The 1998 pastoral session was like a send-off of this consultation process. I thank the Lord for the sustained interest and marvellous participation evidenced throughout this long examination. Beyond special interests, our population has been challenged to a vision of the whole Church. The January 6 and 7, 1999 session will point the direction to be taken; there will then remain the difficult stages of decision and implementation.

WONDERFUL LEGACY

Following in the wake of the first two Eucharistic Congresses in the Restigouche and Southern Victoria Deaneries, we were invited to actively join in the one hosted by the Upper Madawaska Deanery, in June. What a wonderful diocesan Congress, both in its preparation and realisation: outstanding grace-filled times, wonderful inter-parish collaboration, contagious enthusiasm, and high points of fervent prayer. The theme itself, *Eucharist*

and Family: A Heritage to Rediscover, is a real challenge to us all, for the future. With you I bless the Lord for those momentous times in the life of our diocese.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

It seems to me that 1998 will have been for several places a year marked by a better understanding of the challenges facing parents and children, and religious educators and pastors, in the field of religious education: review of the state of religious education in each milieu, investigation of the content and teaching methods and approaches, and confirmation of appropriate resources in personnel, times and teaching aids. This work is not over yet, it must continue in the months to come. I bless the Lord for this demanding daily work on behalf of our children and by our children, parents, religious educators, and pastors.

FAMILIES

In these blessed days I invite you to give thanks in a special way for all of the beauty and goodness evidenced on a daily basis, in each of our families. We cannot measure minute by minute the growth of a plant, of a flower or a tree; the same must also be said of all the growing that goes on in our families. Each member must therefore watch over the effective growth of one's family: it is a priceless legacy. With you I bless the Lord for the 17,000 families of the diocese.

COUPLES

At one of the marriage preparation meetings I pointed out the similarity between a bishop's mission and that of the couple married in Christ. Through our whole lives, our words and especially our actions, we are to witness as a Church to the goodness of our God. With you I want to bless the Lord for showing himself to us through all the young and older lovers who remind us of the infinite goodness of Jesus.

GRATITUDE

In gratitude and appreciation for all that you have been and all you have done in our beloved Church, I bless you and yours and call down on you the abundant divine blessings. May 1999 bring you Peace, Happiness, and Health. Happy New Year!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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