
PASTORAL VISITATION TO NOTRE-DAME-DES-SEPT-DOULEURS (1)



It would be difficult to explain the founding of the parish of Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs without reference to the expansion of the Christian faith in our milieu and the demographic growth of the population despite the disturbances of the economic crisis. 1792 was marked by the birth of the first parish in the Madawaska Region, Saint-Basile. 1859 saw the birth of the Saint-François-Xavier Parish, the second in the region. Ten years later - in 1869 - Saint-Hilaire Parish came into existence. In 1880, it was the turn of Notre-Dame-du-Petit-Sault (Edmundston), followed by Saint-Jacques (1892) and Saint-Joseph (1919).

A FRESH BREEZE

It is a pleasure to read in the parish's fiftieth anniversary volume these words of my predecessor Bishop Gérard Dionne, who was the parish's second pastor: *"A fresh breeze blew over the city of Edmundston when the first pastor arrived at Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs Parish on June 19, 1938. Until then, there had been but one parish with three priests for the entire city: Msgr. Conway and two curates. The new pastor was all of 32 years old, and he was given the working-class section, the rather poor part of the city. But the 400 families were believers and well-disposed to collaborating with their priest. The economic crisis was still being felt, and the war which was declared soon after changed many things, with many departures for the army. Father Numa Pichette, the young pastor, soon cut himself a solid reputation as preacher, administrator, pastor, and builder. He needed to wear all these hats because everything had to be organised, with limited means."*

A HUGE BUILDING SITE

Bishop Dionne continues: *"The physical stamina and the organisation skills of the new pastor were quickly supported by the parishioners who had long been asking for a parish in the city's east end. By fall, a large temporary church had been built, as well as a rectory, along with the establishment of as many parish organisations as proved necessary: League of the Sacred Heart, Ladies of St. Ann, Children of Mary, Scouts, etc. Shortly after, a school was built next to the church for the education of children being born at a rate of 200 a year."* Started in June, 1951, the new church was blessed December 10, 1953. After Msgr. Numa Pichette's retirement in the spring of 1971, Father Gérard Dionne became the parish's second pastor August 1, 1971; he would remain there until February 4, 1975, when he was appointed auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Sault Sainte-Marie, Ontario. Father Arthur Godbout was the third pastor, from August 3, 1975 until his death September 21, 1983. Father Normand Godbout arrived July 3, 1984 as fourth pastor, and remained there until August, 1995. Father Bertrand Ouellet was then appointed fifth pastor of a parish comprising 5 063 persons in 1582 families. In January, 2000, Father Ouellet was relieved of his pastorship for health reasons and given leave until August 15, 2000. The actual pastoral team is composed of Sister Jacqueline Poirier, F.M.A., coordinator, Fr. Ghislain Rémillard, interim moderator, Mr. Louis Riverin, pastoral intern, and Mrs. Charline Charette, Murielle Porter, and Liette Thibault. The interim chair of the parish pastoral council is Mrs. Julie Arsenault and the parish economic affairs committee chairman is Mr. Paul Arsenault.

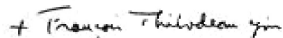
A CHALLENGING NAME

In the decree of erection as a parish, in 1938, Bishop Patrice Chiasson does not say why he gave the new parish the name of Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs: [English: Our Lady of Seven Sorrows] we were on the eve of World War II and besides, the Bishop of Bathurst was going through difficult times. Whatever the reason, the name assembles all who are in solidarity with those who suffer. Intimately united to the mystery of Christ Jesus, the Virgin Mary, who is celebrated under this title on September 15, continues to inspire all of Jesus' disciples: we are invited to pause and meditate at each station of the cross in the church, the artistic creation of Mr. Claude Roussel, to better understand the meaning of suffering. For example, *Le Madawaska* newspaper of September 9, 1954, describes the fourth station thus: "*Mary, very plain and fully veiled, looking at her son. They understand one another. She suffers, too, as he suffers. We are a long way from dramatic fainting and hysteria.*"

AN UNFORGETTABLE SUNDAY

On Sunday, April 9, the first day of my intensive pastoral visitation to this parish strangely resembled a first visit to the place, there being so many warm and welcoming people. Keeping for the last the visitation of the cathedral parish, the mother parish, and the parish I live in day after day was like capping all the visits I had done to date. I celebrated the two Sunday Masses with joy, and it was with gratitude that I joined in the community meals prepared by the Knights of Columbus and waited on by the Daughters of Isabella who served nearly 300 people. It was in faith and hope that I confirmed 64 children who had asked. I was grateful to meet with the pastoral team and the parish council, with whom I had supper. In another communique I shall tell you of the many activities which were carried out in the course of the visitation, thanks to the pastoral team.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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