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## THE DIOCESE OF EDMUNDSTON TURNS SIXTY (1)

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While the Second World War was raging, Pope Pius XII erected the new Diocese of Edmundston on December 16, 1944, comprising Madawaska and Victoria counties and western Restigouche county; until then the territory had formed part of the Diocese of Bathurst. With you I thank God for everything beautiful and holy that has been experienced in our milieu these past sixty years, and ask Him forgiveness for everything that happened which could have been contrary to the Gospel of Jesus.

### A LONG JOURNEY

The fiftieth anniversary album of the Diocese of Edmundston recalls the main stages of our history, beginning with the period of evangelisation of the Native People in 1604. In 1651 Jesuit Father Gabriel Drouillette celebrated the first Mass in what is now Madawaska County. From the British conquest of 1763 until 1829, a few missionaries from the Diocese of Québec travelled the length and breadth of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Historian Father Thomas Albert notes the existence of the oldest church record book in New Brunswick where we find the name of Father Charles Bailly, another missionary priest and future coadjutor bishop of Québec. He presided 29 weddings, 79 baptisms and 14 funerals. He is also the one who inaugurated the first Saint-Basile register, in 1763. In 1829, the Diocese of Charlottetown was established for Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. In 1842, all of New Brunswick was formed into a single diocese, with 13 priests (8 francophones and 5 anglophones) for the entire province; the episcopal see was at Fredericton, but was transferred to Saint John in 1852. Eight years later, New Brunswick had two dioceses, and the entire French portion of the province was attached to Chatham. In 1938 the see of Chatham was transferred to Bathurst. Six years later, following repeated representations from the clergy and faithful of the Madawaska region, especially Mr. A.M. Sormany and Monsignor William James Conway, Father Benjamin Saindon, and Bishops Norbert Robichaud, archbishop of Moncton, and Camille-André Leblanc, bishop of Bathurst, the Diocese of Edmundston was created, becoming the fourth diocese in the province. Until now, Edmundston has had five bishops: Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M. (1945-1948), J. Roméo Gagnon (1949-1970), Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M. (1970-1983), Gérard Dionne (1970-1993); since 1994 I have had the privilege of being your bishop.

### REVEALING STATISTICS

On August 15, 1945, at the time the new bishop of Edmundston was consecrated, the Catholic population was 37,702, with 6,739 families, 427 of which were anglophone. There were 42 diocesan priests, 10 religious priests, 170 religious brothers and sisters (7 communities of women and 1 of men). There were 35 churches, 21 parishes, 14 missions, 12 schools operated by nuns, one hospital, two hospices, and one orphanage. According to our chancery statistics, in our sixty years' existence as a diocese, there have been 70,964 baptisms, 23,323 weddings, 82 priestly ordinations, 6 episcopal ordinations, and 25,121 funerals. Our diocesan directory indicates that for the same period 57 diocesan priests and bishop have died. As of December 31 of last year, our diocesan Church had a Catholic population of 49,839, out of a total population of 52,536, in 16,978 families of which there are 835 anglophone families and 271 Maliseet families. There are 36 priests incardinated in the diocese of Edmundston, including four belonging to the Québec Foreign Mission Society [Prêtres des Missions étrangères]. One priest from the Diocese of Yarmouth, and one from the Diocese of Boma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There are ten religious priests belonging to the Eudists (4), Marists (3), and the Voluntas Dei Institute (3). There are 103 religious sisters belonging to the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph (52), the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption (17), the Daughters of Wisdom (7), the Marist Sisters (8), the Sisters of Charity of Montréal (4), the Religious of Notre-Dame du Sacré-Cœur (8), and the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament (7).

## **A YOUTHFUL CHURCH**

Edmundston is not the youngest Canadian diocese: fifteen Latin rite dioceses and 8 eastern rite dioceses were erected after it. However, we can say that our diocesan Church is youthful in its existence and population, close to a third of which is younger than twenty. My hope is that with our present pastoral priority we can continue to build together dynamic communities enlivened by our youth! If we can continue to form our youth to the Christian way of life, if we can develop greater fellowship with them, if as a community we can respond to their expectations, if we can celebrate with them more and more, the youthfulness of our Church would just shine through! I thank the parents and grandparents for all that they are to our youth; the deep values which are theirs and those of our youth can surely harmonise! Justice and solidarity, truth and honesty, mutual help and love, freedom and hope continue to be the solid foundations on which to pursue the task undertaken.

## **CALL TO HOLINESS**

It may have sounded strange to you that on the occasion of our Diocese's sixtieth anniversary I should ask forgiveness for everything which could have been contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Like the Church itself, we are bearers of a most wonderful but also very demanding mission, that of revealing through His Son Jesus the Father's infinite love for the world. As baptised and confirmed, as members of a religious community, as ordained ministers, we are called to witness by the holiness of our lives, to the very holiness of God. And it is through the love we have for one another that we are acknowledged as disciples of Jesus. Sadly, throughout these 60 years we have not always loved God with all our hearts and all our strength, and we have not always loved our neighbours as ourselves. This is why we must ask forgiveness; brothers and sisters may have been hurt by our words and actions. May they, too, in the example of God's great mercy, forgive all these failures and weaknesses. Through the grace of God, our diocesan Church can and must always be a shining example of holiness. May all our parishes have fond memories of these giants of the faith and of holiness which several priests and leaders of our society, and parents and teachers were. I am sure that on the occasion of the sixty years of our Diocese, each parish can easily identify sixty individuals who have lived holy lives in their milieu. We must thank God for all that!

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (570) (08 December 2004)