



From A Bishop's Journal (730)

A Happy and Holy New Year 2008!

With a grateful heart for the year 2007, despite the many difficulties encountered over the months, I welcome the new year with wonder and hope, with a child's heart, despite my 68 years of age! As a child of God, how can I fear the days and weeks to come? We are in the hands of a loving God.

Pain and Joy

I am totally united to all those who, during 2007, have had unsurpassing joys as well as to those who have experienced difficult times, trials of all kinds, illness, death, unemployment, or loss of jobs. I would very much like to tell these people affected negatively words of understanding and compassion, just as Jesus knew how to do: "Come to me, you who labour and are heavy-burdened, and I shall give you rest." God who is love speaks only words of peace, and He wants all of us to have life, life in abundance. However, there are social, physical, cultural, and psychological contingencies that can change his heart-felt projects, because "His love is from age to age." I am sure of this, and I would like to repeat it to my dying breath. As the Christmas liturgy expresses it, it is not an all-powerful God that we celebrate, but a God who has taken on our human nature in order to experience our joys and sorrows, and walk with us on the human highway.

Beyond Statistics

On December 31, 2006, the total population of the people living on the territory of the Diocese of Edmundston was 52,073; the 48,695 Catholics, constituted into 17,225 families, were grouped into 32 parishes. I thank God for these faithful and for the 27 diocesan and religious priests who are with us, for the 94 sisters and 12 pastoral agents who witness in our midst to God's wonderful love for us. I join in the joy of the parents and families on the occasion of the 494 baptisms, 398 confirmations, and 101 marriages that were celebrated, and I join those families that have been tried by the 529 funerals of loved ones; fine collaborators are among them..., three of them were priests: Father Armand Plourde, Father Ronald Bellefleur, and Father Gaétan Bernier. I am certain that through this communion of saints they continue to watch over our beloved Church of Edmundston. In a diocese like ours, no statistic is ever a simple number: we see them bodily, each one of them, and our family extends from the Madawaska, Restigouche, Victoria regions to the very heart of our Father in heaven. To all the newborn, the newly confirmed and newly wed,

especially with the newly ordained Voluntas Dei Institute priest Father Gilbert Doddatto, we wish them all happy and unforgettable days in God's earthly garden, they are all sparks of fire and promises of life, capable of setting fire to our whole country. Members of Jesus Christ, marked by the Spirit of God, signs of His love, we have among us "sacraments of life" of the Risen Jesus: to him be glory and honour forever!

Gratitude

As I review the year 2007, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have carried out a mission in our Church, whether at the parish or the diocesan level. Without the help of these thousands of baptised people whose desire is to build vibrant communities energised by youth, it would be impossible to see progress in our Church. However, the Holy Spirit was there well before us and he works the human heart without cease. I want to thank those who have been working to implement some of the 2006 Diocesan Pastoral Congress resolutions. Despite my medical leave in the beginning of 2007, the excellent care of the medical and nursing staffs and of the pastoral staff at the Centre several recommendations have already been implemented: three new pastoral units have been created, twelve pastoral units have been renewed, liturgy and catechetics sessions have taken place, several catechetics programmes have been carefully revised, adult formation sessions have been held in all the pastoral zones of our diocese, diocesan guidelines for the baptism of children have been issued, the pastoral agent training programme has continued to progress, youth ministry has had exciting experiences, after year of ups and downs: over 80 young people spent two days in Québec City to visit the Major Seminary, the shrine at Ste Anne-de-Beaupré, and Cap Tourmente. A Youth Forum was held, last March. A meeting for families was held at the Diocesan Centre, and another took place in the Restigouche. And new projects are in the works! There is even one for those who would like to experience mission life in Guatemala.

Financing

The 2003-2004 Major Financial Campaign continues to receive generous gifts and the Foundation continues its work of dispensing the monies received according to the Campaign objectives: the parishes have already received well over \$800,000, the cathedral has received \$800,000 from gifts from companies and associations; and the diocesan services receive well-appreciated help in the amount of \$80,000 for religious education, pastoral formation, family and youth ministry.

Publications

I end this review of our pastoral year by stressing the quality of the catechetical documents placed at the disposal of all the parishes, for all six levels of education. On my part, every week I have written "From A Bishop's Journal" which *Le Madawaska* journal has been regularly publishing [in French] for over 14 years, and which Father Leo Grégoire, I.V.D., has been translating under the title "From A Bishop's Journal," of which this is issue 730. Last April I published *Au jardin de Dieu, c'est plein de joie* ["In the Garden of God it is Full of Joy"], a book of testimonies by those who received the sacraments of Christian initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist). Last May I published my fourteenth pastoral letter, this time on the sacrament of confirmation. In December, finally, I published a fifth book, titled *Au jardin the Dieu, éclate l'Évangile de la Paix*

[“May the Gospel of Peace Break Out in the Garden of God”], as well as a CD of four of my songs, interpreted by the members of *l’Ode à l’Acadie*. In these days of grace I pray the Lord to grace you with His choicest blessings. Happy and Holy New Year 2008!

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

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Bishop of Edmundston

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