



Diocese of Thunder Bay

Newsletter

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Heartfelt Memories. *By Fred J. Colli, Bishop of Thunder Bay*



The title of our diocesan newsletter is a wonderful title to prompt some reflection. Pope Francis has often mentioned how memory is so important and how our memories can show us God working in our lives.

The Holy Father said that we should always memorize the circumstances in which God has been present in our lives, and this helps to strengthen our faith. He said we must memorize both the beautiful things done by God as well as our obstacles and rejections, because God accompanies us and is not frightened off by our bad deeds.

These thoughts have led me to share in some memories as I write this article and as I prepare for my coming retirement as the bishop of Thunder Bay Diocese this coming summer. Memories are great things, and I remember when, some 25 years ago, then Pope St. John Paul II assigned me to be the bishop of our diocese. I had never been to Thunder

Bay and wondered what it would be like. I remember the long drive from Ottawa to Thunder Bay in February of 1999 when I saw only snow all around me for miles and miles until I finally found the city. From then on, a special journey began for me.

Meeting the priests and people, sharing thoughts and ideas, looking at the need to visit all the parishes and visualizing the long drives to far off towns, was all a part of the journey for me. Being the bishop of the diocese, I felt the important need to be a 'unifier' and make sure that even the far-off parishes and missions felt a part of our diocesan family. I remember the many miles I spent on the highways as I travelled to celebrate Confirmations and special events in all the parish communities and how I was very watchful for any 'moose' on the road.

The journey for me continues even now, as I await word from Pope Francis about my retirement in June. The memories are truly 'heartfelt' as I learned to be the bishop of a diocese, as I learned to work with the many priests and deacons who serve in our parishes, and as I learned to govern a diocese as the



bishop or 'ordinary' as the Church calls us, to help us to learn more about our Church, to build stronger relationships with Jesus, to make sure people were nourished with the sacraments and to grow as a Church or diocesan family in northwestern Ontario.

I guess the heartfelt memories lie mostly in the many wonderful and faith filled people I have met and admired especially for their dedication to their parishes and to their parish priests. The journey has not always been easy. There were struggles with personnel issues, with legal difficulties and with abuse cases, in maintaining a strong bond among the priests and deacons even when we did not always agree on certain things, and in making daily decisions for the good of the Church and the diocese in our area. There is much learning on the journey. As Pope Francis said: *"It's good for the Christian heart to memorize one's Journey, a personal journey: just like the Lord who accompanies us and holds our hand along the way... we must memorize our past and be a memorial of our own lives and our own journey. We must look back and remember and do it often. 'At that time God gave me this grace and I replied in that way, I did this or that... He accompanied me.' And in this way, we arrive at a new encounter, an encounter of gratitude."*

Two special moments I recall most vividly and most appreciatively. The first was in April 1999 just after my arrival in Thunder Bay. I accompanied the bishops of Ontario on their *ad limina* visit to Rome and I met with Pope St. John Paul II. I asked him for some advice since I was a new bishop to Thunder Bay. He gave me some very mature pastoral advice which has guided my episcopacy for these past 30 years. The second moment was in 2017, again on an *ad limina* visit to Rome when I met with Pope Benedict XVI. He asked me so many questions about our diocese, and I was thrilled that he wanted to know about all these things. I was able to return to Canada and mention that the Pope himself had asked about our priests, our people and places in Thunder Bay diocese, which formed a special connection to the Holy Father and our diocesan family.

So, as I share this brief article for our newsletter, I think of the many memories of my journey as the

bishop of this diocese for the past 25 years. I think of the times my heart was so moved by the faith and generosity of the people of our parishes and of the people of the community as a whole. I think of my journey with you and how it has shaped my life. As Pope Francis said, my heart is filled with "gratitude" because these special memories shape our lives and help us to encounter the Lord in all our experiences and challenges. All is truly heartfelt, and all is truly blessing. †



Welcoming reception at St. Andrew's church on Sunday March 10, 2024. Reception in honour of Bishop Colli's retirement this summer.

"Lord God, we ask that you guide and strengthen Frederick Joseph whom you have called to be a bishop in Your Church. Give him wisdom and grace to guide Your people to You, through the faith they profess, and the service they share. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."



80th Anniversary of Holy Saviour Parish.



On Sunday September 10, 2023, Holy Saviour parish in Marathon celebrated its 80th Anniversary as a parish community. A special guest at the celebration was Bishop Douglas Crosby OMI, the bishop of Hamilton. Bishop Crosby grew up in Marathon. He was the main celebrant at the anniversary Mass along with Bishop Colli and Fr. Jerome. A special dinner was held on Saturday evening with many parishioners attending along with some sharing of local talent at the end of the dinner. Bishop Crosby made a generous donation to the parish from the Diocese of Hamilton. Everyone was very happy to see this local boy – who is the bishop of Hamilton. †

Bishop Fred Colli is pleased to announce that St. Andrew's Cemetery has added a new section for interments. The area, named Holy Cross, now has available outdoor crypts and niches as part of Our Lady of Charity Mausoleum. If you have any questions or would like more information about these and other available interment options, please contact the Cemetery Office at (807) 343-9289.



Priest Memories.

Msgr. Stilla

One of my most cherished memories I have from being part of the Thunder Bay Diocese is when Bishop Colli asked to see me in my office after an Ash Wednesday Mass in 2005 at the Cathedral. It was then that he announced to me that the Holy Father had named me a Monsignor, at his request and that he wanted to appoint me his Vicar General. Both announcements came as complete and unexpected surprises for me and I was moved by his friendship and by his generous affirmation of my ministry as a priest.

Fr. Doug McClure

As a former ordained Anglican minister, I will forever be grateful for Bishop Colli's willingness to ordain me and support me as a priest in the Catholic Church and in his Diocese. He has been most welcoming and sensitive to the needs of my wife and family. This will be a memory that I will always hold close to my heart. Bishop Colli is an amiable and kind bishop.

Rev. Alan Campeau.

One of my most profound heartfelt memories is one that equate as a 'spiritual awakening'. It didn't actually take place in the diocese, but rather in Cologne Germany at World Youth Day 2005. I was one of the three priests along with Bishop Colli who accompanied the youth representing the Diocese of Thunder Bay. One of those events that we took part in was "praying the Stations of the Cross". All those who gathered for WYD were divided into manageable groups according to language, to walk together through city parks and along 'foot-paths' as we followed the designated leader of the prayer service, who was in the back of a pick-up truck with a microphone and a portable speaker. My heartfelt moment is rooted in my spiritual awakening experience as I (we) prayed the Stations. On this particular night, it was raining and dark which made the whole experience uncomfortable, but, at the same time, very real. It allowed me to share in

the discomfort that Jesus endured. My discomfort of course was far less than that of Jesus, but non-the-less, profound compared to any other time I've prayed the Stations. Although I was one among many in the crowd, I felt as though I was Alone. I was able to remain focused on the prayer despite the chatter of those ranting about the rain and the cold. With my attention solely on each station, I was able to connect with deeper 'spiritual awareness' the power of the prayer and procession. Being from a foreign country I really didn't know where I was going, other than to a simulated Calvary. But that didn't matter. We moved in unison like a stream of water to settle at the foot of the cross. The rain streaming down my face, stepping into puddles, clothing saturated, and the chill of the night allowed me to share in Jesus' suffering. I felt Jesus on the streets of Cologne that night and now each time I pray the Stations of the Cross, I cannot help but cherish that memory.

Rev. Fr. Allen B. Abadines

It feels like only yesterday when Bishop Colli welcomed me into the Diocese of Thunder Bay. It has been almost 20 years since my first step into the diocese. Bishop Colli's decision to welcome me has filled me with a profound sense of gratitude, belonging and has given me so many heartfelt memories that I will cherish forever. His openness and acceptance have provided me with a spiritual home where I can grow in faith and community. Bishop Colli's leadership is an inspiration and I am honored to be part of this Diocese under his guidance.

Fr. Varghese Devas

In my last 38 years of Priesthood, I have come across with many Bishops. There was no Bishops like our Bishop Most Rev. Fred Colli. Our Bishop Fred Colli is very Fatherly and very caring. It seems small however most of my favourite memories are the times I truly felt cared for in the Diocese; if Bishop Colli knew I was traveling, he would advise, "Drive carefully". If I went overseas, he would say,



“don’t forget to take all your documents with you”. His fame is beyond our Diocese. I myself have heard from a priest of another Diocese, saying similar things about our Bishop Fred Colli.

Fr. Gino Mathias

2017, May 11, Thursday, I arrived at Thunder Bay airport around 11 am, to begin my ministry in the Diocese of Thunder Bay. I knew nobody in Thunder Bay, until that day. There was Bishop Colli standing at the airport waiting for me. He joyfully received me and gave me a welcoming hug; helped with the bags into his car; took me to Applebee’s for my first ever lunch in Canada. After a couple of days, he drove me all the way to the Holy Saviour church at Marathon. These impressions are etched in my memories forever. I am grateful to Bishop Colli in perpetuity. I wish him joy and good health forever. †



St. Margaret’s CWL.

At our St. Margaret’s CWL Christmas Social Luncheon, Carol Lavitski, Marguerite Morelatto, and Rose Marie Doliska received their 40th, 50th, and 60th Catholic Women’s League pins. Congratulations Ladies on your long service to our League. †

40th Celebration of Fr. Donnelly’s Ordination.

St. Margaret’s Parish hosted a 40th celebration of Father Donnelly’s Ordination which was on December 16th, 2023 and it was well attended by many appreciative parishioners. Here Bunny Dornan (far right) and Betty Beckingham help serve the cake for Father. †



Knights of Columbus Memorial Mass.

The Knights of Columbus Memorial Mass, was held at St. Peter's Church, on January 23, 2024. Bishop Colli with priests concelebrated the Mass and the deceased members from the past year for various Councils were remembered. †



Travelling Chalice for Priestly Vocations. By Fr. Terry Sawchuck



During the holy season of Lent, parishioners of St. Martin of Tours Church in Terrace Bay welcomed a chalice into their home as part of a “travelling chalice” prayer campaign for priestly vocations. The chalice used for the campaign was acquired by a cousin of Fr. Terry who, while visiting a scrap metal yard, noticed a man attempting to sell the chalice to the scrap dealer. Where it originally came from or how it came into the man’s possession is not known. But now restored to sacred use, the chalice has become a symbol of our desire to cherish, preserve and promote the sacred, which is otherwise so easily lost or discarded. Our Lord Jesus said, *“the harvest is plenty, but the labourers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest that he may send labourers into his harvest”* (Matthew 9:38). And in faith, that is what we do. †



Saint Casimir. By Edward Borowiec

Saint Casimir is the patron saint of Poland, Lithuania and young people. He was born in Krakow on October 3, 1458, the third of thirteen children and the second son born to Poland's King Casimir IV and his wife Elizabeth Habsburg of Austria. A Polish prince in the line for the throne, he rejected the life of power and pursued a life of prayer instead. The young prince was trained in spirituality and displayed holiness at an early age. He became known for his devotion to God and generosity towards the sick and poor. St. Casimir was a polyglot and knew Lithuanian, Polish, German and Latin languages. St. Casimir died at the age of 25 after ill with a lung disease and was buried at Vilnius Cathedral in Lithuania on March 4, 1484. Canonized in 1521 by Pope Adrian VI. After his death, devotion to St. Casimir quickly exploded. People prayed to him and many attributed miracles to his intercession among them the healing of the sick and blind. Five hundred years after his passing Pope John Paul II recalled how St. Casimir "embraced a life of celibacy, submitted himself humbly to God's will



in all things, devoted himself with tender love to the Blessed Virgin Mary and developed a fervent practice of adoring Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament." Showing how impactful his devotion to God truly was. Today, there are churches around the world named after St. Casimir. In Poland 50 churches, in Lithuania 12 churches, in the United States 36 churches. In Canada churches named after St. Casimir are located in Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto, Port Neuf, Ripon and of course Thunder Bay. Known for his life of simple devotion and heart for the poor, St. Casimir will remain beloved by all. †



In honour of Saint Casimir, the patron saint of St. Casimir's Church the parishioners, together with the parishioners of St. Mary Our Lady Queen of Poland Church celebrated his feast day with a Mass. The mass was performed by Father Piotr Dudek OMI, and Deacon Larry Kurec on Sunday, March 3, 2024 at St. Casimir's Church. Following, the mass everyone was invited to the church hall for a special lunch named "Kaziuki" which is a diminutive of Casimir.





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