1989

History of Ste. Agathe Parish

David R. Raymond

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalmaine.com/st_agatha_books

Recommended Citation
http://digitalmaine.com/st_agatha_books/1

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the Ste. Agatha, Maine at Maine State Documents. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ste. Agatha Books by an authorized administrator of Maine State Documents. For more information, please contact statedocs@maine.gov.
THE HISTORY OF STE. AGATHE PARISH

1889 — 1989

by:
David R. Raymond
It is difficult to begin writing a history of a parish church. On what does the author focus? Should the story center on the ecclesiastical institution which has and is still physically dominating the center of the community? Or should the story concentrate on the daily lives of the people of the community who were baptized, married, and buried on its holy soil. Is it not their service and sacrifice which kept the institution functioning and alive for a century? Is it possible to separate the two? After all, the institution is sustained by the people while, in return, that same institution gives comfort and hope of a better life. The institution provides a sense of identity which reinforces community. The building, church hierarchy, and the visible symbolism associated with the administration of the sacraments, provide a framework for the solidarity of the community. This was the dominate model of Roman Catholicism before Vatican II. This was certainly the central model viewed by the founding members of the Ste. Agathe Parish. The theology of the Church today embraces as equal the servant and community models of Church. The Church has not changed but its theology now emphasizes a more balanced view of its roles in its teachings. The mission of the Church is still to proclaim the Word of God in an organized and authorized manner, to reflect the Word of God in one's action and apply His word in the continuing quest and struggle for peace and justice in the world. The story of our Parish is therefore found in peoples interactions, united with the institution, in an effort to achieve the Church’s mission.

The first settlers to the area were certainly attracted by the beautiful Long Lake peacefully cradled between the rolling hills.

The abundance of timber, along with the presence of the lake, promised a bright economic future. In the 1840's, Menon Ouellette from New Brunswick, built a lumber camp on the shores of the lake. It was
situated roughly where Mr. Reginald Tardiff now has his homestead. Other settlers followed and soon the settlement was readily known as "Lac a Menon".

Daily life was hard for these pioneers. Land had to be cleared and sown. The closest "large" hamlet was Dionne Plantation, (Frenchville), some five miles to the North. Economic ties to Dionne Plantation was vital to the survival of our settlers. A road was soon needed connecting the two.

The settlers of Lac à Menon were also dependent on Dionne Plantation, for their religious needs. Ste. Luce boasted a priest in the person of Henri Dionne for whom the settlement had been named. He, and later in 1860, his successor Mr. Charles Sweron, undoubtedly made numerous journeys through the woods for the purpose of administer the sacraments of the people "du Lac". The presence of the priest in the area most certainly resulted in excitement and thanksgiving.

The story of Ste. Agathe cannot be complete without mention of Fr. Sweron's long tenure as priest in the valley. He was born in an aristocratic family in the European country of Belgium in 1828 and ordained in Rome. He arrived in the Valley in 1857 as a missionary under the jurisdiction of Bishop Sweeney of St. John, New Brunswick. After three years as priest in St. Francois, Maine, he replaced Fr. Henri Dionne in 1860 as priest at Ste. Luce. Fr. Dionne retired to Kamouraska, Quebec, where he died in March of 1861.

Reverend Father Sweron who served the mission along the lake while he was pastor of Ste. Luce. At one time we are told mass was said in the area of Mr. Valere Chamberland. The garage across the road from Valere is supposedly once was a chapel situated next to Valere Chamberland's house.

Fr. Sweron was a stern, pious, and devoted leader. He was not a great orator but was an excellent catechist. He was especially dedicated to the religious instruction of the youth. A few years after his arrival at Ste. Luce, he hired an instructor from Quebec Province to formally educate the youth in his jurisdiction. He was deeply opposed to the temptations of drinking alcoholic spirits. In the 1943 Centennial booklet of Ste. Luce, it states in reference to Fr. Sweron, "Apôtre de la tempérance, il a combattu le vice de l’ivrognerie par sa parole ardente. Et quand sa voix n’était pas écoutée, une première visite au domicile des délinquants en rendait rarement nécessaire une seconde". (Centenaire, Ste. Luce, 1943).

For several years, Fr. Sweron served simultaneously the missions of Eagle Lake, St. David, Mont Carmel, St. Bruno,
Caribou, Presque Isle, and of course Ste. Agathe. The growth of the individual communities in his jurisdiction would, after a period of time necessitate the establishment of separate parish. It would seem that the birth of a new parish and the subsequent arrival of a priest would mean relief for Fr. Sweron. However, this does not seem to have been the case with the establishment of Ste. Agathe.

The settlement of Lac a Menon was prospering. The rich soil and abundant timber provided for substantial revenue for the small colony. Msgr. Dugal in his notes writes, "Les colons du lac long s’étaient multipliés et leur terres fertile et bien cultivées leur donnait d’excellents revenus". (Dugal, 1922). For Ste. Luce this was very welcomed, for Fr. Sweron, along with maintaining a school, faced an unfortunate challenge in 1889. On May 19th while he was visiting a sick parishioner a violent thunderstorm ensued. A bolt of lightning struck the steeple of his beautiful church causing a fire to erupt. The fire spread to his "grand école" and both were razed. This proved a great disappointment to all parishioners as well as an immense financial setback for Ste. Luce.

Fr. Sweron immediately proceeded to rebuild. With the collaboration of architect F. X. Berlinguet of Quebec City, a new church was erected ready for Christmas Mass in 1890. Simultaneously, Fr. Sweron sought a congregation of nuns to establish a convent in the parish. His dream was to have the religious educate his beloved youth. The community had to meet one unconditional requirement, however. The congregation necessarily had to be French in speech as in mentality. His search took him to various parts of Quebec recruiting numerous religious congregations. At last, in 1898, after years of tenacious determination, the "Communauté du Saint-Rosaire" from Rimouski, Quebec agreed to send four of their sister to Ste. Luce the following year.

Today, we would refer to Fr. Sweron as an entrepreneur. His constant drive for the improvement of the quality of life for his people was foremost in his priorities. He probably had lived a more comfortable life in his native Belgium. He undoubtedly knew the importance of education for self and community spiritual enrichment. However, his dreams were also undoubtedly costly considering the unfortunate realities of frequent fires during the age.

The population "du Lac" numbered some 300 souls in 1888. The religious needs for this increasing population continued to be met by Fr. Sweron. However, the frequency and type of religious attention given the people of the Lake is unclear. Certainly, the saintly pastor would meet their basic spiritual need, i.e., comfort the mourning, visit the sick, feed the hungry, etc.. However, the frequency of these visits may not have been sufficient for the growing population of the Lake. We find various and contrasting historical accounts concerning the exact frequency and type of religious service administered to the parishioners of the Lake. Fr. Robitaille, in a 1941 "Church World" article on Ste. Agathe, writes that Fr. Sweron came to "Le lac a Menon" "now and then" to celebrate the Holy Mysteries or gave benediction in the afternoon. This was done in a small chapel located on Mr. Romain Chasse's farm. (Where Mr. Valere Chamberland is today). In the booklet celebrating the 75th anniversary of Ste. Agathe, it states, "Les premiers colon (du Lac a Menon) furent desservis de Sainte-Luces le pere Sweron y disait la messe irregulièrement dans la chappelle primitive batie sur le terrain de Romain Chasse. La aussi, mais plus souvent, il y avait Vepres et devotions, le dimanche après-midi." (Diamond Jubilee, Ste. Agathe, 1964). A July 15, 1955 "Church World" article is more exact as to the frequency of these religious services. "At first a mission of Frenchville, five
miles away, it (Le Lac a Menon) was attended by Fr. Sweron. A small chapel had been built on the Lake Road, on the land of Romain Chasse, where Mass was said monthly." (Church World, July, 1955). Nevertheless, it is definite that when the Holy priest from Ste. Luce could not come to the Lake, many of the good people of the Lake drove or walk to Ste. Luce to fulfill their religious obligations. It was a long way, but nothing could halt the determination of these inhabitants to render to God thanksgiving for their deep faith given by Him so freely.

Change results from the accumulation of certain events, the reality of necessity, and/or the normal course of time. All three acted as forces which resulted in the creation of Ste. Agathe parish. Change happens slowly. This is because the forces of change come in two varieties: those resisting and those supporting it. The increase in population around the Lake and the arrival of prosperity, coupled with the disastrous fire which destroyed their Mother Church in May 1899, advanced the desire for the inhabitants of the Lake to found their own parish.

Fr. Sweron did not readily favor splitting his parish. The timing was not the most appropriate for Ste. Luce. The parish needed all possible revenues to continue his dreams. A new church was being constructed and Fr. Sweron’s continuous interminable search for a religious congregation to establish a convent in his parish were expensive undertakings. Msgr. Dugal writes, "L'amputation faite a Ste. Luce etait considerable et fut surtout sensible au curé qui subit sans regimber." (Dugal, 1922). The statement indicates that the strong willed and saintly priest from Ste. Luce desired to maintain his parish expanse as one.

The people of Le Lac a Menon had another agenda in mind. This included the petitioning of Bishop Healy requesting that a new parish be created for the people of the Lake region. After a personal visit to the area, Bishop Healy sanctioned the foundation of a new parish. After the Bishop had consented to their petition, work began on the logistics of the task. First a name had to be chosen for the new parish. Bishop Healy baptized the new parish "Ste. Agathe". The name was fitting.

Agathe, a martyred Saint invoked in the Eucharistic Prayer, was born in either Catania or Palermo, Sicily, in the third century A.D. This was an era when being a Christian in the Roman Empire meant persecution. She valiantly resisted the tremendous challenges to renounce her love for God. The name Agatha, in Greek, means good. Early in her life, Agathe, vowed chastity in order to dedicate her whole self to God.

The Roman consul Quintian, longed to seduce Agathe. He used the persecution of the Christians as an excuse to have her brought to him. Resisting his advancements, Quintian ordered her beaten and imprisoned. Shortly after, he commanded the she be stretched on a rack. Still resisting to succumb to his evil intentions, Quintian ordered that her breasts be crushed before being cut from her body. She was again thrown in prison without food or medical attention. "Legend claims, however, that St. Peter, who himself suffered a glorious martyrdom, appeared to the heroic prisoner, filling her dungeon with a supernatural light, healing her wounds, and renewing her resolve. A few days later, after she had been rolled naked over live coals and broken pieces of pottery, Agatha died with a prayer on her lips. Her body is thought to have been transported to Constantinople at a later date." (World 1985).

After her martyrdom, Agathe was credited for obstructing volcanic eruptions and quelling fires. She is traditionally portrayed along a burning house or with a candle holding her breasts on a plate. Candles burned in her name are believed to ward off fire. During the Middle ages, loaves of bread were brought to the alter and blessed on her feast day, February 5. Fruits and letters were also blessed in her name. However, because of her miraculous recovery from her wounds Agathe today is honored as the patron of nurses. She is also regarded by some as the patron of miners and foundry workers, probably because bells were used to alert people of fires.

Bishop Healy’s choice of Agathe as the patron of the new parish is also tied to the historical and traditional relationship between Ste. Luce and Ste. Agathe in Church History. Luce, also consecrated to virginity, was born in Sicily in the late third century A.D. As a young girl, she accompanied her ailing mother to the grave of the martyr Ste. Agathe. There her mother was cured of her illness. Luce died a Martyr in 304 A.D. under the Roman emperor Diocletian; her eyes being extracted from her body.

His excellency Bishop Healy promptly appointed Rev. Ernest Etenaud as pastor of the new parish. Like Fr. Sweron, he was European. Fr. Etenaud was born in St. Martin, France, March 3, 1836. He was ordained to serve the Diocese of La Rochelle. While on a visit to his long time friend, Fr. E. M. Bernard of St. David, Bishop Healy asked if he would consider staying in the Valley as the pastor of the new parish of Ste. Agathe. Fr.
Etenaud readily accepted the challenge and immediately began his service.

Fr. Etenaud resided at the home of Mr. Malcolm Marin during the planning and actual construction of the church. There he said weekday Masses, heard confessions, baptized babies and performed marriage ceremonies. His first High Mass, and subsequent Sunday Masses, was sung at the home of Elzear Michaud, the present home of Mr. and Mrs. Rosaire Michaud. Fr. Etenaud never said Mass at Fr. Sweron's chapel on the Lake. "Des décembre, Mons. Etenaud disait sa première messe à Ste. Agathe, mais non dans la chapelle de Mons. Sweron dont les gens ne voulaient pas. Ce jour-là même, on résolut de demander à l'Évêque d'autoriser un autre site, à la tête du lac, ou convergeaient les routes des cantons voisins." (Dugal, 1922).

In fact, choosing a site for the church seemed to have caused some controversy among the parishioners. The people on the South shore of the Lake undoubtedly wanted the new church to be built on or near the site of Fr. Sweron's chapel. "After much discussion it was finally agreed to erect the House of God at the head of Long Lake, the center of the most thickly inhabited portion of the Parish." (Diamond Jubilee, 1964). A plot of land making up lot 58 was given to the Diocese of Portland by Mr. Israel Roy dit Voisine as the site for the new church. Part of lot 59 was furnished by Mr. J. Chasse for a cemetery. Fr. Etenaud undertook the task of chief architect and builder with the assistance of carpenters Mr. Edouard Lachance, Hilaire Ouellette, and Charles Baron. During the winter of 1889-1890 timber from the surrounding forests provided the lumber needed for construction. Part of the frame was then assembled.

The rock and mortar foundation of the church and the rectory were assembled with the arrival of spring. What excitement for the young Parish! A Cornerstone for the church, artistically sculptured—measuring eight square feet, was prepared by Mr. Edouard Lachance and his father-in-law Mr. Joseph Deschaines. "Another thing greatly aroused the people's curiosity: it was the bottle containing the History of the foundation. Father Etenaud himself had written the precious document and carefully sealed the bottle which he placed in the walls, near the entrance." ("Church World" 1941). There is no documentation as to the fate of this bottle. Speculation has it that it was destroyed in the fire of 1940.

The year of 1890 witnessed both the genesis of the church building and its inaugural Holy Mass. On September 8 of that year, Fr. Etenaud moved to his new rectory. Later in that year Mass was sung in the unfinished church. Bishop Healy, who was ill could not officiate at the dedication. "En l'absence de Monseigneur Healy, qui était malade, Monseigneur Rogers de Chatham, N. B. présida à la benédiction des travaux de Ste. Agathe." (Dugal, 1922). Despite the lack of a steeple, the parishioners were proud, as they had a right to be, of their major achievement.

There are certain obligations which are associated with realizing one's goals. Financial responsibilities are unfortunately ever present with new constructions. The various bazaars, fairs, and collections seemed to have met the debts incurred during the first years of construction. There is no record that indicates that Fr. Etenaud borrowed from the diocese before 1895. Besides fund raisers, the Pastor imposed a one hundred dollar obligation on each head of household to meet the parish's immediate liabilities. Parishioners who could not meet this could choose to pay in kind. He further requested, from the young people who could afford to pay, a sum of five dollars to aid in the purchase of bells for the newly completed steeple, the magnificent effort of Mr. Edouard Lachance, the cross painted by Mr. Simeon Oclair. Each contributor could then have the bells rung gratis for the baptism of five children. This project was successful. In 1893, the Parish boasted four beautiful bells: the Algelus bell; Marie Agathe, the main bell weighing eleven
hundred pounds; Berthe-Marguerite-Julienne, to be rung for baptisms; and Veronique-Rose-Elizabeth, the fire bell. (In 1927 the Angelus bell, having lost its tone, was replaced by a new one Jean Paul, "so named in honor of the Most Reverend Bishop John Gregory and Rev. Paul Buhrer, the pastor of Ste. Agathe at that time." ("Church World", 1941).)

The first part of the history of the Parish of Ste. Agathe is dominated by the ideology of the Church subsequent to Vatican I. The result of the Council was fundamentally based on the cultural philosophies of its participants. Traditional European philosophies were reaffirmed. In his "Syllabus of Errors" Pope Pius IX proclaimed that the Pope, "cannot and should not be reconciled and come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization." (McBrian, 1991). The Church remained a hierarchical community. The laity was not a participant but remained followers of the hierarchy.

Vatican II was attended by more than 2600 Bishops from all over the world all with their own unique cultures. Other than Bishops, attendance to the council was opened to virtually every Christian Church on earth. Its primary mission was to promote unity of all humankind. However, the result went beyond this original mission. It was the first truly ecumenical council in Church History. The institution of the Church was evolving, from a mainly European culturally dominated Church, to a global Church.

Not everyone in the parish seemed to support the imposition of the one hundred dollar mandated on each head of household to help pay for the construction of the church. In fact, in 1891, several parishioners took steps to avoid this request. Fr. Etenaud was greatly alarmed. Some of his parishioners were questioning his authority which he found most disturbing. He makes first reference to this challenge in a letter to Bishop Healy on November 8, 1891. "Un certain nombre de paroissiens, habitant ver les frontier de Ste. Agathe, transportent leurs maisons a quel que pas des limites. Ils conservent sur la paroissse Ste. Agathe leurs ter res, quel que uns iri&m e y ont leurs granges aavec leurs r^coltes, leurs etables avec leurs betail-tout cela pour eluder l'obligation de concourir aux depenses des construction de Ste. Agathe." (Etenaud, 1891). This was a direct confrontation to Fr. Etenaud's authority. He had probably never experienced this seemingly insubordinate behavior in his native homeland. The good people of Ste. Agathe were not used to any central authority. Political authority in Augusta, was still considered by the older people as "aux etats", exemplifying the distance, in miles and regard between our capital and the ordinary citizen. Church authority was likewise removed. Portland was a journey very few had taken. At home, the visits
from the pastor of Ste. Luce were, more or less irregular. Also, Fr. Etenaud may have been considered by some as an "outsider" not understanding the orthodoxed and customary ways of his people. In his letter to Bishop Healy Fr. Etenaud continues,"Je voudrais savoir Monseigneur, 1. a quel Cure/ces gens sont obligen de payer la dîme? 2. aux construction ou réparations de quelle église ils doivent leurs concours? 3. quel Cure doit le desservir pour l'administration des sacrements?" (Etenaud,1891). The letter is requesting the Bishop to reaffirm his authority as a pastor in the diocese. Fr. Etenaud affirms, later in the letter, that he is opposed to incurring any debts for the construction work in Ste. Agathe, however he needs the cooperation of all parishioners for that to occur. The Pastor, in his letters, sounds insecure about his own abilities to lead his parishioners.

Leadership is a talent that does not necessarily and automatically materialize along with the position a person happens to hold. An effective leader is one whose power base evolves from the esteem he receives from the followers. He earns this esteem by supporting his followers and possessing a clear knowledge base of the situations that confronts him. Fr. Etenaud had not acquired this referent power from a number of his parishioners. His leadership was, at times, based on a "do it or else" philosophy. This coercive power base does not work, at least not for long. The result of this type of leadership model is usually the alienation of the leader by the followers.

The conflicts in the parish of Ste. Agathe continued. In 1893 the controversy reached the apex. A group of parishioners, profoundly resentful at the authoritarian nature of Fr. Etenaud, who continued to insist that all parishioners pay their share for the completion of the construction of the church without question, seized the rectory and physically prevented the pastor from reentry. Ste. Agathe Church and rectory were occupied by men protesting, by what they considered to be, a valid method to force the pastor to resign. Relative calm returned, after two days, "devant les sommations repétées des hommes de loi". (Etenaud 1893). Fr. Etenaud returned to his rectory to continue his eclesiastic mission.

Another controversy, associated with the payment of tithes, developed. It was customary for people, in that era, to purchase their pews. In fact, very often, your social and economic status in the parish determined your proximity to the Blessed Sacrement. People who did not pay their tithes were frequently denied the purchase of a pew. As Antoine Maillet, author of La Sagouine states," pas de dîme, hors de L'église-point de salut". (Maillet 1974). The recent turmoil in the parish certainly did not aid in the voluntary remittance of the tithes.

The question of the tithes and the "bancs d'église" was serious enough to alarm the Bishop. Responding to "Sa Grandeur, L'Evêque de Portland", Fr. Etenaud writes, "Je n'ai pas de règle imprimée pour les bancs, mais j'ai un règlement manuscrit rédigé par moi dans l'unique but de créer dans cette paroisse naissante des revenus pour continuer, peu à peu les travaux, sans faire de nouveaux taxes d'église qu'il est réellement trop difficile de collecter ici, les gens étant persuadés, aujourd'hui, plus que jamais, qu'il ne sont pas tenus à les payer." (Etenaud 1894). In this letter he included a copy of his regulations:

1. Les bancs appartiennent à l'église. Ils sont loués à l'année aux enchères publiques, ou de gré à gré par M. le Cure.
2. Le prix de la location est payable d'avance en deux termes: au premier de mai et au premier de novembre.
3. A défaut de paiement au temps dit, le banc revient à l'église, il est loué à un autre.
4. Toute sous-location de banc est interdite.
5. Tout locataire de banc a la jouissance paisible et entière de ses place pour lui et ceux qui vivent avec lui dans sa maison. En cas de contestation il peut avoir recours aux constables.
6. Il est permis d'admettre dans son banc les étrangers à la paroisse de passage ou en visite.
7. Il est défendu de faire placer en son banc des personnes en dehors de celles indiquées aux art. 5 et 6 de ce règlement à moins qu'elles ne soient munies d'un ticket ou qu'elles versent immédiatement la somme de cinq cents entre les mains du constable.
8. Dans le cas de refus, les constables ont le droit de faire sortir du banc les personnes en contestation avec l'article
précédent. Dans le cas de trouble et de tappage, ces personnes seront mises à la porte de l'église et, s'il y a lieu poursuivies, devant la loi.

9. Tout paroissien qui loue un banc ne peut le louer qu'aux condition établis dans ces règlement, donc il peut demander lecture, qui ailleurs a été lu, explique par M. le Cure'où il reste affiché. Si après la location faite, le locataire ne veut pas se soumettre aux prescriptions de ce règlement, il sera dans l'obligation de payer les cinq cents refusés par les personne qu'il aura indument admises dans son banc.

10. Des ticket seront à la disposition des paroissien au presbytère. Ces ticket seront donné gratuitement aux pauvres; il seront vendus aux autres à raison de cinq cents l'un.

11. Pour avantager les petites familles, M. le Cure' pourra louer le même banc à deux familles.

12. Tout locataire est prié de veiller un bon état de son banc d'éviter toute dégradation. Il est en autre tenu, deux fois par an, sur appel de M. le Cure', et aux jour indiqués, de venir laver son banc.

13. Deux constable nommés par M. le Cure' sont chargé de la police de l'intérieur de l'église et de ce qui peut se passer de contraire aux convenance sur le terrain de l'église.


15. Les constable sont chargés d'exécuter, et de faire exécuter, les différents ordres de M. le Cure' relativement au règlement des bancs au bon ordre des Cérémonies, au silence, à la tranquillité, à la décence qui doivent régnier dans la maison de Dieu. Ils ont le droit, si cela est juge nécessaire, d'expulser des récalcitrant et les perturbateurs qui pourront ensuite être conformément aux lois en vigueur. Les constables pourront, en cas de besoin, demander main-forte aux gens qui veulent, avant tout, aix paix dans l'exercice de leur religion dans l'église et qui ont le droit de n'y être pas troublés.

Article 8 received considerable contention. In November, 1894, Fr. Etenaud, wishing to extend an olive branch to the disenchanished parishioners, repealed the contested article, with condition that if this experiment did not work the article would automatically reappear the following year. Futhermore, he allowed all parishioners, who had rented pews, the opportunity to abandon, trade, or relocate their pew. The experiment had disappointing results. Out of 154 pews in the church, only 54 were rented. Fr. Etenaud maintained that the parishioners could afford to buy the pews, at a cost of $4.50 per year, for many people squandered their money on useless expenditures.
The relationship with his superiors in Portland also deteriorated. Foreign priest were mandated to work five years in the dioese of Portland before tenure was granted. However, he immediately went to work and in less than one day obtained over eighty signatures. He attested to said documents before Eloi R. Michaud Esq. of Frenchville who is my authority."

(Burque 1897).

Fr. Etenaud, a missionary, dedicated to the perceived good of his people, was transferred to St. David of Madawaska in August 1899. Fr. Henri Gory, of St. David, friend of Fr. Etenaud; a person who Fr. Etenaud frequently visited in time of needed consultation and advice, replaced him in Ste. Agathe. Fr. Etenaud's heart, however, remained with the parish he founded. In 1907, he retired to Ste. Agathe at the age of seventy-one. It is Auguste Healy of Portland's Last Will and Testament which asks forgiveness of any whom he may have offended, and in return forgives all who offended him. This courageous, hardworking, sensitive and misunderstood founder of Ste. Agathe, remains to this day the only pastor buried within it's hallowed soil.

Fr. Henri Gory was born in Langeac, France November 15, 1855. He was ordained for the Society of Mary, otherwise known as the Montfortin Fathers, on June 14, 1888. He arrived in the Diocese of Portland in 1892 and Bishop Auguste Healy immediately appointed him Pastor of St. David du Madawaska. While in St. David he constructed the "old Rectory" which was torn down in the 1970's.

Fr. Gory had some mending of emotions to do before he could effectively carry on his mission. He faced tremendous obstacles. He also needed money to continue construction on the church and rectory which had virtually ceased in 1892. In January of 1902, Fr. Gory asked the Bishop for a $5,000.00 dollar loan to finish the construction of the Church. The Bishop's office in Portland were quick to accommodate. In March Fr. Gory received word that his loan had been approved.

Frequently in his letters, Fr. Gory alludes to his family, 3,500 miles away in France. He requested permission from Bishop O'Connell, who had replaced Bishop Healy upon the latter's death on August 5, 1900, to visit his dying mother in his homeland and, "reguler entre mon frere et moi, des affaires de famille". (Gory, 1902). He also asked the Bishop to grant permission to Fr. Stanislaus Guiheneuf of Montreal, also of the "Compagnie de Marie" to be his replacement during his absence. On the first of February, 1903, Fr. Gory left for France leaving Fr. Guiheneuf in charge of Ste. Agathe. Fr. Guiheneuf, thirty nine years of age, had never been responsible for his own parish. Most of his service, consisted of preaching retreats and missions in France. He longed to be able to stay in the United States as a missionary, or possibly, have his own parish. He did not feel confident that his English was fluent enough for his dream to be realized, except, possibly among the people of the Valley.

Fr. Gory returned to Ste. Agathe on the first of April. He communicated to the Bishop that his trip had gone well. Later in the Spring, he requested that the Bishop grant "les pouvoir ordinaire du diocese" to Fr. Guiheneuf to help in preparing the children of the Parish for First Communion. Fr. Gory undoubtedly
had something else preoccupying his mind. In August he wrote to Bishop O'Connell, "Une occasion unique se présente d'enrichir la paroisse de Ste. Agathe et d'un couvent pour l'éducation des enfants et en même temps d'un hospice pour les malades. Je suis en correspondance avec la Supérieure du Canada, où la congrégation possède une dizaine d'établissements dans le diocèse d'Ottawa. C'est la congrégation Des Soeurs de la Sagesse; congrégation puissante, datant depuis plusieurs siècles, possédant des maisons dans tous que toutes les partie du monde et ayant comme...protecteur son Eminence, le Cardinal Séraphins Vanutelle. Sur ma demande et prière, elles bâtiraient le couvent à leur propres frais. Je prie que votre Grandeur de vouloir bien m'encourager en m'accordant l'autorisation nécessaire pour le succès de cette entreprise qui aidera puissamment au bien spirituel de la paroisse." (Gory 1903).

The Daughters of Wisdom were founded in Poitier, France, on February 2, 1702 by St. Louis Marie de Montfort. De Montfort secured the help of Marie Louise Trichet, who changed her name to Marie Louise de Jesus, to work among the poor of the city. In 1716, there still were but four Sisters in the Congregation. But the prayers and service of the good Sisters attracted other girls who desired a life of service to others. Their primary mission became more defined. The Daughters of Wisdom would devote their lives to the care of the sick and the education of young girls. In 1759, the year Marie Louise de Jesus died, the Congregation held forty convents, all of which were flourishing.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the French government took control of Catholic schools in France. Teaching religion in school was thus prohibited. These laws encouraged religious congregations to seek missions abroad rather than face secularization at home. It is under these conditions that Fr. Gory negotiated for the establishment of a convent in Ste. Agathe.

In August, 1904, the Daughters of Wisdom closed a school in Cholet, France. It was these Sisters that were destined to fulfill Fr. Gory's dream of establishing a Convent in Ste. Agathe.

That same month, four Sisters, Mother Marie Therese, Superior; Sister St. Anselme, Cathchist; Sr. Victorine de St. Francois, Nurse; and Sr. Euphrone, Housekeeper; departed Le Harve on the transatlantic steamer, "La Bretagne", for New York. After a short stay in Montreal, the four pioneers arrived in Ste. Agathe on October 1, 1904. (Of these first four pioneers two, Sr. Annselme and Sr. Victorine, rest eternally in the
sisters’ cemetery in Ste. Agathe). "Le bon Curé, Mr. l’abbé Gory attendait les Soeurs au seuil de l’église; les quatre cloches sonnaient à toute voûte et disaient aux habitants que les Filles de la Sagesse faisaient leur entrée chez eux... Après une visite à Notre Seigneur dans l’église, les quatre Soeurs faisaient leur entrée au Presbytère où la meilleure hospitalité les attendait jusqu’à ce que le Convent fut construit." (Daughters of Wisdom, 1904). On May 1, 1905, construction of the convent began under the direction of Mr. L. Gagne of Edmundston, N.B. The main building, with a façade 100 feet long and four stories above the basement was nearly completed by the end of the year. The structure contained three divisions. The West end comprised the High School; the center, the Sisters quarters and Chapel; and the East end which was reserved for the hospital. An extension was added in 1912. This new section contained the music rooms, the auditorium, elementary grades with dormitories, and a new spacious chapel dedicated by The Most Reverend Bishop Walsh in 1913. The high school’s first commencement was held May 28, 1910 with State Education Commissioner Payson Smith in attendance. This institution was to become a bastion of learning not limited to the children of Ste. Agathe but indeed for the entire Northern third of our State as well as some from outside Maine. In 1929, the school boasted 180 boarders! In 1932, the Daughters of Wisdom had to refuse admittance to fifty students because of the lack of space. Fr. Gory’s idea of providing his parish with quality education undoubtedly surpassed his initial vision. The Daughters of Wisdom remained a visible example of total devotion to God. Their witnessing serves as models for all to emulate.

Fr. Henri Gory left Ste. Agathe in the Fall of 1910 to become Curate of the new parish of Notre Dame in Waterville. He was instrumental in healing existing divisions in the parish. His entrepreneurial nature established the educational system that made it possible for others to carry on his vision. He gave his life for his parishioners and their posterity. His native France should be proud of his contributions and missionary life.

Fr. Raoul Bourbeau succeeded Fr. Gory. He was a young priest of thirty-three when he became pastor of Ste. Agathe. A native of Victoriaville, Quebec, he became our first North American Pastor. He was ordained to the diocese of Portland on June 4, 1902.

The duties of service to a parish transcends the realm of uniquely meeting the spiritual well-being of the parishioners. This was so much more visible in an age with little medical resources at hand, few literate people in the community, and when family tragedies was a phenomenon that struck frequently. People’s faith in Christ was not one of convenience but of necessity. To have faith enabled families to survive great losses. One of his first concerns for the new pastor was dealing with a diphtheria epidemic in the parish. Fr. Bourbeau was pastor during "la Grippe Espagnole" that hit the valley so ruthlessly during the Fall of 1918. As leader of the Christian community it was he who attended to the grief of families, gave consolation in the eye of despair, and furnished encouragement when abandonment seemed the only explanation for the catastrophe.

Fr. Bourbeau simultaneously managed many routine pastoral matters as well. The story of a parish is not all sensational. It includes the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. Each year most parishioners would pay their tithe in kind; more frequently in the form of grain, potatoes, or wood. A parish priest could have great plans for his parish, however, if the price of these commodities were low in a given year the plans were rather difficult to realize. Fr. Bourbeau served in a time of modest prosperity and increased farm mechanization. The parish debt was small and the tithe, in 1911, for example, brought in some six hundred and forty

Rev. Raoul Bourbeau
Nov. 1910 to Aug. 1919

Mr. Leon Corriveau
and son Lawrence

20

21
dollars. Given to the parish to pay this tithe that year were wood, wine, "provisions", grain and of course potatoes. It was also a time of great advances in communications. For example, an individual, in 1913, could board the train from Van Buren at 7:10 AM and reach Portland in time for supper that same evening.

The Ste. Agathe school situation was unique. "St. Agatha presents once again a mongrel situation; the presence of a distinct public and private schools on the elementary level, and the presence of a public school with a few private school students on the secondary level. And once again it was the local pastor who took the initiative to secure sisters and who negotiated with town officials and with town people the public status of the elementary and secondary schools he sponsored." (Brassard, 1967).

The town of St. Agatha did pay salaries to the Sisters for teaching the children, however irregularly. The school quickly gained the reputation for quality. As early as 1924, the high school received a Class A rating from the State of Maine.

The Curriculum of the 1930's was extensive. Students could choose either a classical or a commercial course of study. Students in the former could select from courses including English (double periods including extensive readings in American and English Literature), French, Music, Art, Latin, Social Problems, Economics, Problems of Democracy, History, Algebra, Geometry, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, and Photography. The latter course of study encompass offerings such as Business English, Math, Commercial Law, Geography, Filing, Typewriting (which included shop work where dainty silk cushions, pictures, and various articles for the home were produced). The school had a library, which supplied fifteen current journals.

The question of school administrative jurisdiction, at times, seemed to be a question of concern. If the school had both private and public status, who oversaw the training, certification, and supervision of instructors? Bishop Walsh writes, "In regards to the relation between the State, Towns, Parish and local superintendents, the important thing now is to get a good idea of just where these things stand from the financial as well as from the supervision point of view" (Walsh, 1911). The Bishop, in the same letter, gave Fr. Bourbeau some advice in conducting the supervision of classes. He stressed the importance to see the daily work done by students, judge the qualification of teachers, the proficiency of each grade, and to discern the progress of children in both French and in English.

On January 4, 1914, the Parish received the services of its first assistant pastor (Vicaire). Rev. Father George Joncas, at 26, was in his third year of priesthood. He had spent the previous year as assistant in Fort Kent. His duties in Ste. Agathe would include serving as chaplain at the Convent. In fact, much of his duties centered around that position. His responsibilities went even beyond Ste. Agathe. Much to the chagrin of the Sisters, in April of 1916, their chaplain was sent to aid the ailing Rev. Alfred Pelletier, pastor of St. David. Fr. Etenaud, then retired and living not far from the Convent, celebrated daily morning Masses at the Convent. This arrangement lasted until July when Fr. Etenaud fell ill and could no longer carry out his duties. Fr. Joncas returned to Ste. Agathe where he stayed until October.

( The Daughters of Wisdom were served by many Chaplains during their long history. It is not the purpose of this particular short History of the Parish to review their records of labor. Perhaps one day a complete History of the rich story of the Daughters of Wisdom in Ste. Agathe will be composed.)

On July 23, 1919, Fr. Raoul Bourbeau received word of his transfer to The Parish of St. Louis of Fort Kent, effective
August 1. He was replaced by Rev. Fr. J. M. Chatagnon. Though he was in Ste. Agathe for only two years, his administration proved very interesting and fruitful.

Fr. Chatagnon directed the construction of a new rectory for the Parish. He and his newly appointed assistant, Rev. Fr. Wilfred Ouellette, requested permission from Bishop Walsh to borrow $5,000.00 for the construction project. "I have consulted one local and one outside contractor and both agree that it will take nearly $8,000.00 to do the work. In view of this fact, I request permission to borrow instead of $4,000.00. We have in bank $900.00 and I feel that we could not raise much than the balance, that is 2,100.00, during the year." (Chatagnon, 1920). The new rectory was to have hard wood floors downstairs, tin ceilings, beaver—board walls (except in the dining room and sitting room), and an asbestos shingled roof. The Bishop approved a $5,000.00 loan from the First National Bank of Fort Kent at some six percent interest.

That summer Fr. Chatagnon received a rather austere letter from Bishop Walsh. It seemed that the Parish had instituted an enterprising method of raising fund to pay off their recent debt. "I am informed that public dances have been organized at St. Agatha since the Month of May under the auspices of the Pastor for the benefit of the parish, and that announcements more or less direct have been made in the Church that you were authorized or had some way the permission of the Bishop." (Walsh, July, 1920). The Bishop warned that under no circumstances is the Church to sanction dances, public or private, for the profit of the Parish. The roaring twenties had arrived, even in rural Ste. Agathe!

The death of our founding priest personified that the Parish was maturing. In March of 1921, Palm Sunday, Fr. Etenaud was transported to the convent for intensive care. For several week he could not digest his food properly making him extremely weak. On Good Friday, eleven A.M., Fr. Chatagnon administered the Last Rites. The following morning his condition deteriorated further. The Sisters recited the prayer of the dying, "prières des agonisants", at 10 A.M. Fr. Etenaud lost consciousness that evening. At 8:45 P.M. Fr. Etenaud was called to his reward. His body was embalmed that night; Holy Saturday, the sacred night of the resurrection of Christ. The body remained at the convent on Easter Sunday; transported to the rectory on Monday morning. The funeral was held at ten A.M. (It had been a very wet winter in the Valley that Spring.) The River had flooded and the roads were virtually impassable. This prevented many Priest from the surrounding area from attending. Fr. Etenaud was buried in the small private Sisters' cemetery behind the convent. (Next to his niece.)

Fr. Buhrer became Pastor of St. Agathe upon the transfer of Fr. Chatagnon to St. Louis of Auburn on December 1, 1921. All of Ste. Agathe's pastors had interesting lives before and subsequent to their ordination. This is especially true of Fr. Buhrer. He was born in Lyon, France, May 7, 1877, the son of George and Marie Moiret. He was ordained on May 1, 1904 after an enriching education in Constantinople, in Jerusalem, and at Assumptionist College. He spent his first six years of priesthood in Jerusalem. Fr. Buhrer began his ministry in this country at Our Lady of Guadeloupe in New York. His pastoral mission then took...
him to Waterville, Old Town, Augusta, Limestone, before being appointed pastor of Ste. Agathe.

Fr. Buhrer had the privilege of welcome Governor Percival Baxter to our parish in 1922. "The Daughters of Wisdom had invited him as guest speaker at the May graduation. "Mr. le Cure's avance pour saluer le Gouverner et les enfant crient: Three cheers for the Governor!" Une de nos petites pensionnaires dit alors une petite adresse de bienvenue et offre des fleurs à Son Excellence; ...il rentre au Couvent tandis que la foule des curieux se écoute rapidement mais en bon ordre." (Daughters of Wisdom, 1922). This was not to be the Governor's last trip to Ste. Agathe. His love for nature and the hospitality given by the Sisters and parishoniers attracted Baxter to other Ste. Agathe High School Graduations. In his last will and testament, Governor Baxter gave Ste. Agathe High School 25,000 dollars as a testament to the warm feelings for Ste. Agathe.

Fr. Buhrer was pastor of Ste. Agathe during very difficult times. The stock market crash of 1929 devastated the nation. Ste. Agathe, during the 1920's, did not witness the strong economic boom that certain parts of the State witnessed. The farming realm of the economy did not enjoy the growth as did some other businesses. The crash deepened the already poor local economy. To make matters worse, a great fire destroyed most of what is today Cleveland road. "A week ago a fire destroyed a part of the village of Saint Agatha, in the vicinity of the Parish Hall; the hall itself is a total loss except for the basement in cement which I built nine years ago". (Buhrer, September 1931).

Fr. Buhrer was a man of vision. This vision included using the Parish Hall grounds to construct a parish school for boys. The plan was not very popular in the community; especially not with the Daughters of Wisdom. The Bishop visited Ste. Agathe to review the plans on September 21, 1931. Bishop John-Gregory Murray related to Fr. Buhrer that he could not support any plan that could possibly jeopardize the work of the Sisters. The plan failed.

In 1935, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal was at its height. Practically all money in circulation in the Parish resulted, in one way or another, from Federal aid. Potatoes sold for ten cents a barrel. The low price did not even cover the storage of the crop. In April of 1935, the public schools in Ste. Agathe closed because of unpaid taxes. The revenues collected by the Church suffered accordingly. It became necessary for the Pastor to ask the Bishop for a $2,000.00 loan to cover the routine Parish expenses.

Ste. Agathe was not the only Parish of the diocese to be in economic strife. "Were it possible for me to borrow this needed money, or to send it to you from the Chancery, most willingly and promptly would I do so. For long month, I have been laboring in different arrears in and out of the State, And I have not succeeded so far. I have tried to borrow loans as to come to the rescue of other priests, and every bank sends back work that we are already in the diocese borrowed beyond the limit." (J.E. McCarthy, April 1935).

Fr. Buhrer told his people of the terrible financial conditions of the Parish. He prayed to our Savior and asked....
the Blessed Virgin Her intercession. Eighteen days later his prayers were answered. A businessman from the Parish gave Fr. Buhrer a $2,000.00 loan at six per cent interest per annum. This temporary solution allowed the Parish to continue its mission through the difficult times of the Great Depression.

It was in Fr. Buhrer's administration that the seed was planted for the creation of the new parish of St. Joseph in Sinclair. Ever since 1936, Sinclair had been part of St. Agathe. Fr. Buhrer had built a summer cottage in Sinclair which was to become the rectory. Simultaneously, Guerrette was to be detached from Daigle to become a separate parish. However, Fr. Buhrer was transferred to St. Louis in Auburn, on February 2, 1936, replacing Fr. Chatagnon who had died the previous December, before the official organization of St. Joseph and Guerrette.

It was, and still is, for some parishioners, difficult to visualize the parish priest as a human being with faults and failings equal to any. Despite the consecration of their life to God, priests make, like all people, errors of judgement. Parishioners may admire or may not admire certain particular characteristics of a pastor. It is natural and expected that some personalities are more magnetic than others. However, Christians have been taught to forgive by the greatest Teacher who ever walked the earth. It is in this forgiveness that unity is found. The strongest among humans is the one who forgives.

Fr. Alvery had many objections to the way certain aspects of parish life were carried out. These traditions had developed over time and were accepted by most parishioners. For example, he objected to the traditional benediction given at the Convent every Wednesday during Lent. He preferred that the Sisters come to the parish church. He claimed that the Convent should not be a parish of its own. "How much nicer it would be for the parish to see the Sisters and their boarders in the Church. A good example indeed." (Alvery, 1937). This conflict, plus others that erupted during the years Fr. Alvery was in St. Agathe did not graciously resolve themselves.

Fr. Alvery also had to contend with the depression years. St. Agathe had a $12,000.00 debt in 1938. The economic conditions of the Parish and town were deplorable. Of the 420 families in St. Agathe, many had no employment. Federal programs were helping, however, not everyone was apparently profiting. Out of the 150 WPA employees working on the Sinclair to Guerrette road, only five were people from the Parish. In 1937, hail and violent storms destroyed much of the crop. Farmers were losing their farms. All but three farms had heavy mortgages. The town was no better off. There was even discussion of transferring its administration over to the State. (It did go bankrupt in 1939). It could not be relied on to render much aid to the citizens. The Church debt could hardly be paid
under these economic conditions. Nevertheless, if one looks at the total revenue of the Parish from 1928 to 1938 one finds total receipts of $73,299.19. This averages to 7,329.91 dollars per year. A good sum if one considers the depression.

In April, 1938, Fr. Alvery was replaced by a former assistant pastor, under Fr. Buhrer, Fr. Emile Robitaille. Fr. Robitaille found the Church building in dreadful need of repair. "The population considers it a disgrace and is ashamed of its church, which they call the "barn of the Lord." (Robitaille, 1938). He undertook the task of renovations with great courage and zeal. The Parish held a bazaar in August of that year which netted $2,000.00. The People of Ste. Agathe displayed their generosity once again.

The renovation project lasted the entire summer and fall. Fr. Robitaille was confident the project would be completed for four thousand dollars. The diocese lent Ste. Agathe that sum. Fr. Robitaille was a practical man. He leveled with the Bishop in reference to the probable difficulty in repaying the debt in the customary quarterly fashion. Many men worked in the woods during the winter and the great Northern Maine storms frequently prevented them from being regularly at home on weekends. This diminished the weekly Church collection. In any case, the $4,000.00 original loan proved insufficient for completing the renovation. Fr. Robitaille frequently used his own monies to meet debt obligations. Near the final phase of the project Fr. Robitaille asked the Bishop for another loan of $1,000.00 which made the entire project worth $5,000.00. "Will you please,

Excellency come once more to my assistance and lend to the parish that $1,000.00, at the same interests as the first $4,000.00?" (Robitaille, 1938). The end product was most impressive. The sanctuary was enlarged and raised, the altar now had a baldacchino (canopy) of gold cloth with silver relief, and a gold and red velvet backdrop. A splendid crucifix, a gift from a parishioner, suspended before the red backdrop. The pews were renovated with new veneer covering. Polished hardwood floors replaced the rough boards of the original church. The walls were painted a soft ivory with silver trim along the arches. The entire project was completed without the help of an architect. The House of God was now said to be worthy of its name.

That July, the parish celebrated the golden jubilee of its foundation. The parish was well decorated for the event. A large arch had been erected to vault route 161 at the approach to the church. A row of blue and white pillars decked with flags formed an impressive approach to the church and convent. The list of invited guests for the anniversary included the Most Reverend Joseph McCarthy, Fr. Buhrer, celebrant of the High Mass, Rev. Wilfred Ouellette, deacon, and Rev. Urban Corriveau, sub-deacon. The Homily was given by Rev. Gerard Dugal, a son of Ste. Agathe parish. After Mass, many of the congregation retired to the convent auditorium decked out as a banquet hall for the occasion. Miss Priscille Bouchard read an address to His excellency and Ms. Modeste Marin presented him with a bouquet of yellow roses in the name of the parish. At three o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday July 16, 217 children were confirmed by the Bishop. That same day, the Bishop blessed the ground of what was to become the new convent for Les Filles de la Sagesse. ( A thunderstorm made it
impossible for the congregation to file in procession to the actual site). The celebration ended with a meal for the Bishop and thirteen invited guests at the convent. This was followed by a three act play performed by high school students entitled, "Ste. Agathe". The day of joyous celebration and thanksgiving was complete. The people of the parish were proud to have had this opportunity to "show off" the accomplishment of fifty years of their dedication to the work of God.

Most anyone can recall a significant personal event which, when viewed after the fact, contains irony. For example, in a community such as Ste. Agathe, founded by Franco-Americans, one can observe instances in its history when the use of French was totally discouraged in schools. Likewise, one can find irony in probably the most terrible setback of the parish. In February of 1940, the twenty year old furnace of the rectory exploded. This alarmed Fr. Robitaille in such a way that he sought a method to improve fire protection for the rectory. "I have bought 300 feet of hose to permit us to take the water from the great reservoir of the convent and thus protect our church and rectory. There is absolutely nothing to protect us against fire, except that reservoir."

At 6 PM on the evening of August 13, 1940, a gasoline stove exploded in the house of the sexton situated next door to the church. The blustery day, coupled with the dry conditions made the church building easy prey to the raging inferno. "Firemen drove from the neighboring towns; but alas! there was already no hope of saving the sacred building. Men and boys did all they could to carry our statues, linen, vestments, etc., but the intense heat and the blinding smoke forced them to abandon many precious things. Father Robitaille brought the sacred vessels to the Convent confident that Our Lady of Wisdom would keep them from further danger." (Church World, August, 1941). Firemen from as far as Presque Isle battled the blaze. Sparks from the church ignited a woodshed near the site of the future Queen of Peace Hall (Red Convent) and destroyed some of the building material waiting assembly. Fear that the Convent would also burn ensued. However, the wind suddenly shifted and the Convent was spared. The wind caused the steeple to collapse; falling across the road with a terrific crash missing a fire engine belonging to Van Buren by inches. The firemen could now more easily control the blaze. The fire, however, had by then inflicted damage on the rectory and some homes across the street. Nevertheless, the beautiful, recently renovated church, the pride of the faithful, was a complete loss. The convent chapel and the parish hall served as temporary church building.

Five days after the disaster, Bishop McCarthy was once more in the parish. This time the occasion was not one of joy, as a month earlier, but one of condolence for the great loss. No church bells pealed his arrival; no merry decorations marked his approach. The mood was somber as he met with Fr. Robitaille and parish leaders at the convent to plan for the

Construction of Present Church

Construction of Present Church, December 1940
reconstruction of the House of God. The money was lacking, except for the 21,000 dollars of insurance to be received. But then people were eager to erect a new church. The Bishop advised the people gathered to employ Mr. Edward T. P. Graham of Boston as the architect for the construction project. He also urged the parish to hire Mr. P. F. Beresford of Medford Massachusetts as construction contractor. When advise was heeded and on September 9, 1940, a contract was signed by Fr. Robitaille and Mr. Beresford in the amount of $52,512.00. The contract stipulated that the building would be “substantially” completed by June 15, 1941.

Construction commenced immediately after the signing of the contract. In September, the following material and services were rendered to the site: 3,000 bags of cement @ .70 per bag, 1,000 cubic yards of gravel valued at $750.00, 9,000 cinder units @ .35 per block, 29,000 face bricks @ .40 each, $2,025.00 worth of reinforcing steel, lumber and nails valued at $900.00, and services of a steam shovel costing $700.00, and labor of $1,800.00 for a grand total of $13,085.00.

Various businesses from throughout Maine and Massachusetts contributed materials and talent to the construction effort. Beautiful stained glass windows were made by Mr. Wilbur Hebert Burnham at a total cost of $2,574.00. The specifications included fourteen aisle, one front, one sanctuary rose, and two transept windows to be fabricated of antique and rolled glass or an equivalent. They were to be soldered on both sides and glued together with waterproof cement. J.L. Sasseville and Sons of Lewiston provided the church's heating system. The T.F. McGann and Sons Company, Boston, specializing in Bronze and Brass sculptural work, hand made the two Tabernacles. There were made of steel, cedared lined with gold plated ornaments. The Hutton Marble Company of Cambridge, Massachusetts furnished the marble work and masonry for the main altar and two side alters.

Ste. Agathe was the scene of exceptional activity during the second weekend in August, 1941. Two important structures were ready for dedication. The church was and awaited the blessing from the Bishop of Portland. The other structure was the new “red convent” which had been built during the same 11 month period. The new convent, the Queen of Peace Hall, consisted mainly of dormitories and a gymnasium-auditorium with a seating capacity of 800. A beautiful Daprato masterpiece was placed in a niche in the exterior wall, domination the facade.

This statue of the Queen of Peace was offered as a souvenir to all the worker who had toiled in the actual construction. The plans for the building were drawn by a former student of the Daughters of Wisdom in Montfort Quebec. Mr. A. Gravel, Mr. J. DeLile of Van Buren was the on-site contractor. The construction progressed rather slowly because of the War. It was difficult to acquire metal framing, plumbing and heating supplies because the mobilization for World War II was underway.

The dedication ceremonies of the new convent addition took place on Saturday, August 9, at 3pm. Crowds came to welcome Bishop McCarthy. The Bishop proceeded to every corner of the building bestowing his benediction. Numerous members of the clergy were present. They included Fathers Houlihan, Menard, Giguer, Conway, Gelines, L. Duellelette, Hamel, Soucy, Dupal, Cyr, Burke, Ricard, R., and Fr. Patenaude, Theriault, and Fr. Robitaille. The celebration continued all afternoon and early evening. It concluded with a banquet given by the Sisters.

The following day, the new church was dedicated. At 3pm, the Knights of Columbus Honor Guard escorted the Bishop and over thirty priests to the entrance of the church. There Mr. Beresford, chief contractor, sealed and placed the cornerstone of the church. The procession streamed around the exterior and interior of the church; Bishop McCarthy blessing its four corners. Everyone then proceed inside the building for several dedication sermons. Fr. Robitaille, proud host, spoke first. "Just a year ago, we mounted Calvart when our beautiful church was destroyed. Indomitable courage and generous sacrifice have made possible the joy of today as we dedicate our new church to Christ, the immortal King of Heaven, to Mary, His divine Mother, and to St. Agatha, our glorious patroness," (Daughters of Wisdom, 1941). The Sermon for the occasion was delivered by Father Giguer of Fort Kent. "You loved the little old Church in which you received so many graces, Today you see it reborn more beautiful, more attractive than before. This new church is the expression of your personal charity and will stand for your children as a lasting memorial of your generosity." (Daughters of Wisdom, 1941). Ste. Agathe, rent with tragedy one year earlier, patiently enduring, did not capitulate to the adversity, but stood and launched a new beginning. The day of festivity ended with a public organ and choir concert.

The gaiety of August 1941 did not reflect the economic and political hardships of some of the parishioners. Of the 300 farmers in the parish in 1915, only 125 were in business in 1941. The depression had taken a heavy toll. Following the "Day that will live in infamy", the Pearl Harbor invasion of December 7, 1941, the industrial plants of Connecticut and other states appealed to many of our young men and women. In 1942 alone, one hundred families, from Ste. Agathe, made their exodus to the cities. The military draft also extracted youth from the parish.
to serve their country in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The entire parish monitored the development of this most cruel war. Many of the alumni of Ste. Agathe High School were now serving in the armed forces. On the tenth anniversary of the founding of the "Chevalier de la Vierge", for example, many of its past members, now serving in the military, were remembered, "...la Sainte Vierge les protège dans les champs d'entraînement et au front. Un des ex-généraux, Leo Raymond, (de Frenchville), vient de s'échapper en Tunisie". (Daughters of Wisdom, 1943). In fact, Mr. Raymond had escaped capture by the German army in Tunisia after a 100 mile ordeal on foot. Fr. Robitaille remained greatly alarmed at the loss of people, especially the youth, from the parish. As a consequence of the War, he also foresaw the possible downfall of farming in the valley. "You can't keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris" goes Dos Pasos' novel. This World War I fear was of equal consternation in the 1940's. Fr. Robitaille believed in the values of the family farm. He saw the cities as a threat to the Franco-American values handed to his flock by their ancestors. This explains Fr. Robitaille's support of a plan to establish an agricultural college in the parish. "It is very urgent that we establish an agricultural college, where the young men can conserve the love of the soil and settle down with their Catholic families." (Robitaille, 1944). The Bishop, recognizing Fr. Robitaille's illness, was sensitive to his request. They worked as a team for the benefit of all. In many instances Fr. Patenaude administered the religious affairs of the parish by himself. In December of 1950 Fr. Robitaille suffered a stroke during a religious service. His doctors ordered complete rest until he regained his strength.

One of Fr. Robitaille's greatest achievement during his service in Ste. Agathe was in the area of education. One room school houses still existed in St. Agathe during the 1940's. After the War, the classrooms in town became rather overcrowded forcing the town to house "the Beginners" and part of the first grade in a room in the convent. The Sisters did not charge rent for this service recognizing that the town was not financially able to pay. The town was certainly not economically able to built a new school. Controversy concerning the teaching of religion in public schools erupted in 1948. Before that time, religion was part of the curriculum, not only at the convent school but, in all one room schools in town as well. Following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, McCollum vs. Board of Education of School District No.71 of Champaign Illinois, Religion could no longer be taught in public schools. This ruling struck, not only at the very heart of the written and unwritten curricula of the schools, but was also perceived to threaten the traditional values preciously guarded by the Catholic Franco-American community.
To say that the teaching of religion was abandoned in public school is incorrect. Religious instruction continued to be offered, not as part of the actual curriculum, but taught before the official start of the school day. However, Fr. Robitaille feared that in some schools, especially in the more rural of the rural schools, teachers might object to this practice, and because of the lack of teachers in those areas, the teacher's request might have to be respected. He, therefore, contrived a plan that would help the town’s chronic teacher shortage and simultaneously help to insure the continued practice of religious instruction in public schools. Fr. Robitaille requested a meeting with the Board of Selectmen to explain his plan.

A lot of land existed opposite the church and adjacent to the convent. Fr. Robitaille envisaged a school on that lot, not constructed from ground up, but assembled from consolidating existing small school from around town. The town purchased the land in question for one dollar. Fr. Robitaille was willing to lend the town $30,000.00 of parish funds towards the realization of the project. "It was understood in the bargain that the Daughters of Wisdom of St. Agatha would teach in the new consolidated school, and that religious instruction would be provided for." (Brassard, 1967). The plan was adopted and put into motion as a joint project between the parish and the town.

Seven rural schools needed to be transported to the site. Six schools in town had been constructed in 1927 using an identical architectural plan. This made the task of connecting the schools, once on site, much easier. One of the seven, the Blaine school, located next to where Mr. Reno Pelletier and his family live today, was a two room structure which would serve as the facade to the new consolidated school. The construction and excavating company Hornbrook, of Madawaska, undertook the challenge of transporting the buildings to the site on flat-bed trucks. The new school, Montfort School, opened its doors to the children in the Fall of 1948 with a staff of five sister and a few lay teachers.

For many years, the people of Cleveland, (Petite Montagne, La Cote et Le Lac Long), were interested in acquiring permission from the Bishop to establish a separate parish. As early as 1920, under the pastoral guidance of Fr. Chatagnon, the good people of Birch Point of the district MUSHROOMED. These summer residents, plus the year-round population, comprised a considerable number of people. In 1950, Mr. Levite Rossignol purchased an old building, a former dance hall, and, with the help of many people, converted it into a summer chapel. This makeshift chapel of St. Michael's, (named after Mr. Rossignol's deceased sister who had taken the name Sr. Michael upon her entry into the convent), served some seventy-five to eighty families. The population continued to grow as the number of Lake shore lot sales developed. The building was then donated to the diocese. In 1951, the directors of St. Michael's were disappointed to hear that Fr. Robitaille would no longer say Mass at the Chapel. He preferred selling the hall up for sale.

His health, a continuing problem, plus the potential loss of his parish revenue, expedited his decision. The Board of Directors of St. Michael, led by Mr. Levite Rossignol, proceeded to solicit the Bishop's permission to seek another priest for the summer months. Fr. D. Wilfred Soucy of Sinclair indicated that he would be available if the Bishop deemed it appropriate.

During the 1940's the summer population of the Cleveland district mushroomed. These summer residents, plus the year-round population, comprised a considerable number of people. In 1950, Mr. Levite Rossignol purchased an old building, a former dance hall, and, with the help of many people, converted it into a summer chapel. This makeshift chapel of St. Michael's, (named after Mr. Rossignol's deceased sister who had taken the name Sr. Michael upon her entry into the convent), served some seventy-five to eighty families. The population continued to grow as the number of Lake shore lot sales developed. The building was then donated to the diocese. In 1951, the directors of St. Michael's were disappointed to hear that Fr. Robitaille would no longer say Mass at the Chapel. He preferred selling the hall up for sale.

His health, a continuing problem, plus the potential loss of his parish revenue, expedited his decision. The Board of Directors of St. Michael, led by Mr. Levite Rossignol, proceeded to solicit the Bishop's permission to seek another priest for the summer months. Fr. D. Wilfred Soucy of Sinclair indicated that he would be available if the Bishop deemed it appropriate.

St. Michael’s was geographically situated in an interesting location. It was across the Lake from Sinclair, which Fr. Soucy could easily make by boat, the land belonged to the town of Madawaska, the hall lay in the parish jurisdiction of Grand Isle, and the Chapel was annexed to the parish of Ste. Agathe! Fr. 38
Soucy was caught in a bind. In a letter to the Bishop asking guidance, he stresses that he wants to avoid ill feelings between himself and Fr. Robitaille over the issue. The Bishop directed Fr. Soucy to say Mass at the Chapel. "Transportation is easy enough. Five minutes with the car, then a parishioner awaits me with boat, it takes five minutes more, and after the services, someone from the mission is always glad to take me back across the lake. If the lake is very rough, it is 18 miles with the car, but I did not have to do it that way once." (Soucy, 1951).

Under the leadership of Father Zenon Charette in Sinclair, St. Michael's Chapel continued to serve the people of the Birch Point with Sunday Masses. Fr. Charette employed the services of the Eudist Fathers of St. Louis. The Chapel, in 1953, would serve some 250 people every Sunday.

In the Spring of 1952, Fr. Robitaille, nearly incapacitated, asked the Bishop to accept his resignation as Pastor of Ste. Agathe. "I am ailing and confined to my room almost all the time for the past 5 weeks. The doctors order me a rest of one year; but I think that with the easy ministry of a small parish, I will be able to manage." (Robitaille, 1952). Fr. Robitaille left Ste. Agathe for the smaller parish of Lille, Maine September 3, 1952. The parish, thankful to have had such leadership during difficult years, lamented his leaving. The Bishop appointed Fr. Romeo Doiron, former pastor of Lille, Maine September 3, 1952. Fr. Doiron found the parish with a debt of $56,000.00. He dedicated some of his many efforts at paying back the creditors. The debt had declined to $40,000.00 by 1955. Before his transfer the parish debt was almost completely paid off.

The question of St. Michael's Chapel again became an issue in 1957. Fr. Doiron reduced the number of Masses, which since 1951 had been two on Sundays and some on weekdays, to one. People of the Birch point area again appealed to the Bishop for help. This time they requested a resident Summer pastor for the increasing number of summer inhabitants in that area. From July 1, 1957, to July 1, 1958, twenty-two new families had taken Summer residency in the Birch Point vicinity. The total number of people served by the Chapel on an average Sunday in July was about three hundred. The Bishop sided with Fr. Doiron on the issue. The issue was temporarily settled.

Parish life was very active under the pastoral leadership of Fr. Doiron. His deep love and understanding of people made him many lasting friendships in the parish. He was a man of great forgiveness, incapable of keeping a grudge. He was visible to his flock which the people greatly appreciated. During his administration several events of importance deepened the sense of community in the parish. On November 3, 1957, the St. John Valley Vocation Association held its inaugural meeting at the Notre Dame de la Sagesse Convent. Seventy sisters from across the Valley attended. Fr. Doiron welcomed the guests. He reminded all present that the seed-bed of faith is the parish. "No vocations to religious life can germinate without faith, and this very gift of faith comes to members of the Church through the parish." (Doiron, 1957). The On October 25, 1959, the sisters celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Notre Dame de la Sagesse Alumni Association. The date also marked the golden jubilee of the class of 1910; first class to graduate from their high school. Fr. Gerard Dugal celebrated a solemn High Mass at 4pm that afternoon with Fr. Doiron and Fr. Valmont Gilbert, Vicaire, served a deacon and sub-deacon. Other priests present for the occasion were Fr. Maurice Plourde and Fr. Robitaille.

Fr. Doiron, devoted pastor, was replaced by the Bishop on November 4, 1961 to take on new responsibilities at St. Mary's in Presque Isle. Fr. Albert Long was appointed his replacement.
Fr. Long interested himself to the education of the youth. It was common to see him inside the convent school. He took a genuine interest in what the students learned.

The church building needed repairs. The ceiling in church was lined with cellotex with no insulation and air space between it and the roof. The roof itself had been constructed with "green" wood resulting in spaces between the planks when the wood finally dried. "...I noticed yesterday in church, a draft strong enough to activate decorations around the Xmas crib." (Long, 1962). So much heat was lost during a typical winter that the snow on the roof melted causing ice to form on the eaves breaking the slate tiles.

The work began during the last week of January. For six weeks Masses were celebrated downstairs in the parish hall. Staging was set up throughout the interior of the church. The contractor found cracks in the cinder blocks of the walls that required some unexpected immediate attention. The entire walls of the church were, in the end, covered and refinished. The ceiling was properly insulated. The cost of the entire project totaled $23,173.49. The job was completed in less than two months. Within four months the debt was paid in full.

Another housekeeping expense incurred was the general maintenance of the exterior of the church. The church masonry needed immediate attention. Fr. Long was hesitant. The parish had just borrowed for the renovation of the interior. Also, from January 1 to May 22, 1963, six families had moved out of the parish for economic reasons. Eleven farmers were forced to abandon farming that spring for the same reasons. Fr. Long wrote to Bishop Daniel Feeney and received encouraging word. The Bishop assured Fr. Long that he would render economic help if needed. Fr. Long proceeded to hire the St. Hilaire Masonry Company of Auburn to do the repairs. The exterior of the church was thus waterproofed at a cost of $4,000.00.

The issue of the summer chapel at Birch Point resurfaced again in 1963. This time a parishioner offered land to the parish for the possible construction of a new St. Michael's. The offer was debated with the prospective donor, Mr. Joe M. Pelletier, the pastor, and the Bishop, for two years. The land in question covered a tract measuring in the vicinity of 1000 X 1800 feet, including the Birch Point Beach itself. "Most of the summer residents are in favor of that great offer of Mr. Pelletier. This piece of land, besides offering a new location for the Chapel, could be used eventually for a youth summer recreation program and other affiliated uses." (Long, 1964). This affirmed Mr. Pelletier's insistence that the land be used for religious reason and for summer youth programs exclusively. Fr. Long proceeded to ask two contractors to give an estimate on the cost of renovating the present Chapel. Both contractors reported that the Chapel, a former dance hall, was enlarged in three phase which resulted in the present uneven floor. The shell of the building was weak and in both contractors' opinions was not worth the cost of repair.

In July, 1965, a meeting of summer residents was held at the Chapel to discuss the matter. The result of the meeting was favorable toward accepting Mr. Pelletier's generous offer. In August, a mail-in survey of 118 camp owners was conducted asking their input about the situation. After two weeks the results were tabulated; sixty-two in favor of the purchase and sixteen
opposed. A contract was drawn by Mr. Joel Leblanc of Madawaska with the following stipulation:

"The above described land is to be used under the jurisdiction of the parish at its discretion, nevertheless, that no part of said premises shall be used for commercial purposes, sold or rented to a private individual, corporation or partnership for commercial purposes; provided, nevertheless, that if profits are made by the parish on said premises and used for parish purposes, this will not be considered as being used for commercial purposes, and this conveyance is made upon the express condition that in case the above-described land shall even cease to be used as set forth in this paragraph, then and in that case the above-described land shall revert back to the party of the first party as if this conveyance had not been made." (Leblanc, 1965). It was another two years before the A-frame structure, now standing, measuring seventy feet in length, forty-five feet wide and thirty-one feet high became reality.

Rec r eat i on at the Convent, 1950's

The 1960's was a period of great transformation in the parish as well as in our society as a whole. Vatican II mandated numerous change that precipitated in abandoning many traditional practices. The Civil Rights movement in the U.S. raised our level of awareness for justice. The movement was hailed by some and detested by those who could not let go of the past. The process of change was very evident and for some very painful. St. Agatha experienced immense changes in those years. Not that these changes would not have occurred through the natural passage of time, but the rapid rate of the changes in the '60's made adjustment for some rather difficult. Besides the revolutionary transformation in Church doctrine, change in Ste. Agathe unfolded in a similar dramatic fashion. An superb example of this is found in the area of education.

**SAD 33 INSTALLS DIRECTORS**

Shown here are the School Administrative District 33 directors who received their certificates for term of office at St. Agatha. SAD 33 is the new district formed by Frenchville and St. Agatha.

From left are Arthur Fongemie of Frenchville, two years; Bertrand Dumais of Frenchville, three years; Vernon Jonston of Madawaska, a representative of the State Board of Education who gave out the certificates; Heracles Levigne of Frenchville, the chairman, one year; Emile Chasse of St. Agatha, vice chairman, two years; Bertrand Collins of St. Agatha, three years; and Romeo Chasse of St. Agatha, one year.

The men were sworn in by Sylvio Michaud, notary public of St. Agatha.

The grey convent, constructed in 1905, was showing signs of maturity in the early 1960's. Partly because of its physical condition and partly because of the changing times, less and less boarders were applying to attend the convent school. In 1958, the sisters discontinued their elementary program. All Ste. Agathe students attended either Montfort or the newly constructed Memorial school. At the opening of the 1959-1960 school year, the Daughters of Wisdom no longer took in male boarders. An unprecedented example of change occurred in 1964 with the decision to hire the first male instructors at the convent school. Mr. Gregory Ouellette and Mr. Rosaire Paradis, recent college graduates, both from Frenchville, took their new positions that fall. Reality decreed major restructuring. The delivery of educational services to the parish children was undergoing an metamorphosis parallel to the other realms of society of the era.

In June, 1964, the towns of St. Agatha and Frenchville voted to consolidate their schools into a School Administrative District, MSAD #33. A new high school, actually an addition to Memorial School located directly behind Montfort was built. Mr. J. Raymond Brennan, Superintendent of the newly formed district, announced at a reception given to honor the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the convent schools on May 2, 1965, that the new school would be named Wisdom High School. To honor and gratitude to the Daughters of Wisdom who since 1905 continued to make tremendous contributions to education in the region, the new high school housed 400 students. The building opened its doors on August 26, 1965, although not yet totally completed, still lacking Home Economics, Science labs, an Industrial Arts area, gymnasium, and library equipment. The faculty consisted of one lay-women, Miss Simone Soucy, and twelve Sisters. Sister Catherine Nadeau, an industrious and capable leader, was appointed the first principal. No longer was the grey convent to
The early 1970’s witnessed another change in the physical appearance of the parish. Fr. Marcel Chouinard, the new pastor, initiated the plans to construct a new modern rectory. The cost of maintaining the old rectory, built by Father Chatagnon, was prohibitive. The heating cost alone totaled over one thousand in 1972. The Parish Council, representing the 256 families of the parish, voted to support the plan. Mr. Gerard Chamberland was given the job of chief contractor. Parish savings, a building fund campaign, and a loan from the Diocese paid for the construction. Fr. Chouinard moved into his new home in the fall of 1973. The cost of the project was $42,938.00.

A parish needs to face adversity with a bold sense of challenge. When a challenge or confrontation is between two humans or groups of humans the result is often a compromise which brings about change. People who cannot let go of tradition remain stagnate in a changing world. However, people cannot compromise on fundamental issues of values and faith.

During the 1970’s such a challenge was thrust upon the parish of Ste. Agathe. It involved everyone, touched the very essence of tradition and initiated, in most parishioners, an initial response of, "how dare they!!". The issue concerned the traditional practice of using the public schools for religious instructional purposes.

This practice had been rather institutionalized as part of
the regular school day. As previously stated, children were instructed in Catholic teachings before the start of the regular elementary school day at the elementary and in the evening at the high school. A Jehovah's Witness family in Ste. Agatha, threatened to file suit if the practice was not ended. The family had recently moved to the valley, naive of the traditions guarded by the people. It was true that the practice had been condemned by the Federal and State courts. It is also fact that this nation was established on the principle of separation of church and state. However, practices that are based on fundamental traditional beliefs, rooted in peoples' history and values, and coerced in changing, does create for uncertainty and rejection of the change agent in this case the new citizen. People who are unfamiliar with the beliefs and history of their newly adopted home may put themselves in situations that may lead to their own rejection by the very people they desire to befriend.

In February 1976, the complaint was lodged to the U.S. Attorney in Portland, Mr. Peter Mills. The assistant commissioner of education Mr. Asa Gordon, promptly notified Mr. Garfield King, then Superintendent of MSAD #33 the complaint had been made and ordered the use of the school buildings for religious instruction stopped. He made it clear that the State does allow for an hour of religious instruction during the day, if the school permits, but that such instruction cannot take place on school property. The loss of State subsidy would result. However, he did contend, "The general attitude is that we don't interfere with local custom until a complaint is made". (Bangor Daily News, 1976). The story made national news. In the Friday, January 14th issue of the New York Times, an article begins like a Dickens novel, "The dominant building in each of the little towns along the upper St. John's River Valley in this remote, farthest northern corner of Maine is a Roman Catholic church". (The New York Times, 1977). (Throughout its wonderful history, Ste. Agathe, the entire Valley for that matter, has frequently been portrayed as this remote endroit, as exotic as "Shangri-La").

The following Sunday from the pulpit, Fr. Roger Chabot, who had replaced Fr. Chouinard on September 19, 1975, summarized the past week's disturbing happening. He urged the parishioners to begin planning for the reorganization of the present method of providing religious instruction in the parish. It was time, he said, for parents to "buck up" on their own faith so that they could play a more active part in their children's religious education. He urged his flock to avoid judging anyone, to trust the elected representatives and obey the law, and to begin working together for a solution to the predicament. Religious instruction did continue in the form of release time for school one hour per week. Children crossed the street to the rectory hall for instruction by the priest, sisters, or lay teachers.

The teaching of Catholic doctrine on school property was not to return in Ste. Agathe. Fr. Chabot, nevertheless, was determined to maximize all opportunities and talents, at his disposal to assure that the harm done would be minimal. In fact, religious instruction took on a more personal form in the initiation of Family Learning Teams in the parish to augment release time. The parish was thus divided into seven neighborhood clusters in which children from grades one through eight, in groups of six, were instructed by volunteer parents in their homes. Each neighborhood was responsible to teach their own children. As many as forty adults took part in the program at its height. Parents received training at the Christ the Light Center in Ste. Luce. The F.L.T program was discontinued in the mid-80's. Release time continues for grades 1-6 at Dr. Levesque School in Upper Frenchville. (St. Agatha elementary children attend that school since the demolition of Montfort School in 1979). Grade 7-8 students are instructed in the evening by one Daughter of Wisdom and several lay volunteer parents. Fr. Chabot served the parish in times of great change,
His constant willingness to pick up the piece and mold them into something better, something new and challenging, is his legacy.

In the 1970's, Ste. Agathe was a vibrant parish. The solidarity resulting from the struggles encountered during the era, coupled with young dedicated priests, cemented the parish. The parishioners came to genuinely celebrate Mass as community. Mass was not viewed simply as an obligation, but as a weekly reaffirmation of peoples' unity in the Body of Christ. A priest who helped to foster this oneness was Fr. John Audibert, a child of the Valley. Was is simply his charismatic personality which attracted people to him, or was it the fact that he was, "un petit gant d'offert Kent", understood by his people and he understanding them. Furthermore, he was not a new comer to the parish. As deacon, Fr. Audibert had served in Ste. Agathe. From 1966 to 1967, he led various youth groups. The C.Y.O. flourished during those years.

Fr. Audibert was called Fr. John by nearly everyone. He ministered to the people of Ste. Agathe from June 10, 1978 to June 30, 1985. He contained the good work of his predecessor Fr. Chabot, in the field of religious education. He had a talent for involving people, many people, in lay ministry. He sincerely believed that all parishioners had a talent to share and offer to the Church, i.e. to God. He possessed excellent human relation skills. He could convince even the most reluctant to get involve. "C'etait un bon salesman". He was also a sensitive individual caring for the spiritual and physical comfort of other before self.

Ste. Agathe had various reasons to boast. Its twenty member choir was the envy of the Valley and beyond. In fact, for many years, there were two separate choirs in the parish; the La Sagesse Choir, directed in French by Mrs. Theresa Ringuette, and in English by Ms. Nicole Behr, (a beautiful bilingual affair), and a youth choir, directed by Lester and Martha Michaud. The active parish displayed the traits of a family. The Ladies of Ste. Anne introduced the practice of providing luncheons, after a funeral, to families in mourning. An evangelization program entitled, We Care, We Share, introduced to the parish during this time, was aimed at reaching out to fallen, and/or, inactive Catholics. The concept of family also manifested itself in the composition of the rectory family. Wayne and Lee Barclay, lay ministers, lived in the rectory with Fr. John during his first years at Ste. Agathe, managing many administrative functions as well as aiding Father support numerous pastoral responsibilities.

Fr. John also remodeled the church structure. Very little renovations had been undertaken since the days of Fr. Long. Like any structure, a church building needs yearly maintenance. In the Spring of 1983, Fr. John began a general rejuvenation of the church building. The project would also improve the quality of insulation in the church. There was still much heat loss during the winter months.

The parish was very fortunate in having an able and talented man as sexton, "bedo", at the time. Mr. Maurice Fongemie, a carpenter, cabinet maker, and all around handy-man, served as "part-time" sexton. He and Fr. John undertook the task of planning and executing the entire project. The team functioned as architect and engineer. The venture was a new experience for both men. Everything from the steeple to the stained glass was inspected, and if needed, refurbished. A new altar and sanctuary furniture was constructed of oak by Mr. Fongemie as well as a new bapitismal font. Pews were removed to allow for a lobby in the rear of the church. (This was not popular with some parishioners. Some said the removal of the pews made the church too small for the needs of the parish). Electric fans were installed from the ceiling aiding in air circulation. The entire project, completed in one year, cost with interest, some $42,000.00 dollars during the first year of fund raising alone.

On October 21, 1984, at 4pm, Bishop Edward C. O'Leary, Bishop of Portland, dedicated the new church. The offertry gifts were presented by workers who had given of themselves during the renovation effort. As a symbol of the care and creativity which went into the project, one of the gifts, presented by Mr. Fongemie, was a sculptured coat of arms for the Bishop. The Eucharistic celebration was followed by an elaborate banquet at the Wisdom High School Gymnasium. Marcel Chartier, Parish Council President, hosted the affair. Over 400 people attended.
On June 30, 1985, Fr. John Audibert was transferred to Holy Cross of Lewiston. Fr. Donald Daigle replaced him. Fr. Daigle was quiet and personal. His intentions were to continue the good works that Fr. John had initiated. However, God was not to grant him a long stay in the parish. Fr. Daigle had difficulties adjusting to his new home. He decided to leave Ste. Agathe after having served three months as pastor.

Fr. Thomas Murphy, director of the Christian Life Center in Upper Frenchville, was appointed administrator until a successor to Fr. Daigle could be found. It was not until June of the following year that Bishop O'Leary appointed Fr. Michael Plourde as permanent pastor.

Fr. Mike is the current pastor of Ste. Agathe. He is a child of the Valley, raised in the parish of St. David. Upon graduating from Madawaska High School, he earned an A.A. from St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, Connecticut. He then completed a B.S. degree from Our Lady of Angels in Albany, New York. Four years of Theology at St. John's Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts, concluded his formal post secondary education. He was ordained in his home parish of St. David by Bishop Amedee Proulx on June 26, 1976. Fr. Mike served as Associate in Biddeford and Westbrook before receiving his appointment to Ste. Agathe in June 1986.

Fr. Mike is a quiet and private individual. His leadership styles reflects the trend initiated by Vatican I. He delegates authority to lay individuals in the parish, allowing them to take ownership in the task at hand. The parish now consists of some 400 families, each with individual needs. He attempts to meet those diverse needs using the human resources available to him within his parish. It is a difficult undertaking. The parish of Sinclair and Guerrette currently are without a resident pastor. Fr. Mike had been appointed administrator in these parishes while continuing to serve the people of Ste. Agathe. His jurisdiction has grown to a point where it is difficult to offer the same type of individual attention to parishioners as pastors did in previous decades. The Chapel at Birch Point will soon be administered by Fr. Jim Plourde of Grand Isle. (The diocese of Portland recently approved the annexation of all but some five acres of that parcel of land to the town of Madawaska to be used for recreational purposes. The Chapel sits on the five acres retained by the diocese).

The parish of Ste. Agathe is one hundred years old this year. The parishioners celebrate, not just the rich tradition of the past, but the anticipation of an equally rich future. Despite the inevitable changes that have occurred in the past century, faith in the resurrection of Christ is the constant truth which guides us into the future.
1984 CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS MASS — Joseph, Jason McGlaughlin; Angels, Lucas Jalbert and Eric Michaud; Innkeeper, Bruce Bouchard; Mary, Kim Paradis; Shepherds, Jamous Lizotte and Douglas Lerman.

Present Church and Rectory

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I take full responsibility for any errors on inclusion or omission in this work. I further take responsibility for errors of grammar other than those found in direct quotes.

Some information was not available to me at the time of publication. A deadline had to be met, and therefore, it was rather impossible for me to elaborate on certain topics. The lack of information on other topics further prevented the elaboration. I challenge any reader to continue my efforts. I trust that I have given a balanced overview of our history. I ask the readers to preserve our oral and written history so future generations have an accurate picture of where they came from.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Augustine Alvery, Rev., Correspondence With Bishop of Portland," 1936-1937.


Joel Leblanc, "Correspondence With Bishop of Portland," 2 Sept. 1965.


Paul Buhrer, Rev., Correspondence With Bishop of Portland," 1923-1925.


