

Gratitude blesses bishop's journey



Bishop Douglas Crosby

Bishop Douglas Crosby only recalls one time that he gave a second thought about what he had given up to be a priest.

“When my brother had his first child, that’s when I experienced just a little bit of envy,” he said in an interview from his office in the Corner Brook and Labrador Diocese. “Just briefly. It really struck me the commitment I had made.”

“I didn’t dwell on it; it didn’t send me into a depression,” he said.

Crosby, who will be installed as bishop of Hamilton, Ont., on Nov. 8, will be the next featured speaker in the Edmonton Archdiocese’s Nothing More Beautiful series. On Dec. 9, he will speak on The Church We Believe in is Holy at 7 p.m. at St. Joseph’s Basilica, along with Agnes Bedard, a former national CWL president.

Crosby seems overwhelmed with thanksgiving for the life he has led since he entered the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1968.

“I’ve met such wonderful people,” he said. “I’m involved in people’s lives at critical moments and it’s such a great thing. They welcome you into their lives, you get to know them and experience them. It’s such a mutual sharing and it’s so good.”

Born in Marathon, Ont., in 1949, Crosby was the eldest of seven children – he had two brothers and four sisters.

His father, a hard-working and soft-spoken man, worked as a maintenance supervisor in a pulp and paper mill. His mother was a convert to Catholicism from the Presbyterian faith and from the beginning was very committed to her faith.

“Faith was always important to our family,” he said.

Crosby first thought he'd study law at Western University in London, Ont. "But I wasn't settled on that. I thought long and hard about it and finally decided to give the priesthood a try."

He thought he would enter the Oblate novitiate for a year. "I'll be a year behind my peers in school, but at least I would have given it a try. When I did the novitiate I enjoyed it very much."

NORTHERN OBLATE

When studying Canadian Church history, he recalls being moved by the story of Bishop Lionel Scheffer, vicar apostolic of the vicariate of Labrador. Scheffer had been an Oblate priest in the Ottawa-Hull area but was sent north.

"I was impressed by that, that he left the city to go north," he said. "That's at a time when there was very, very little in the North. I never expected to be his successor," said Crosby. "But I was always grateful for that grace."

After ordination in 1975, his first assignment was Labrador City, where he served as an assistant parish priest for five years. "I learned as much in those five years as in all my years in theology and philosophy. Labrador City is a mining town, a town where people work hard to eke out a living," he said.

"It's interesting now to be going to Hamilton where they smelt the iron ore that comes from Labrador City."

Crosby's next assignment was Ottawa where he served as a parish priest before his election as provincial superior of the Oblates. He served two terms and also served as president of the Oblate Conference of Canada. As president, he initiated the Oblate apology for Indian residential schools in 1991. "That was a tough thing because everybody wasn't on board at that point.

The Oblate apology was the first made by any Catholic entity involved in running the schools.

PRESSURE COOKER

His next assignments brought him to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCC) secretariat in Ottawa where he served briefly as director of missions then was appointed CCCC general secretary for the English side.

"It was a bit of a pressure cooker, but the staff worked well together and that makes it all good."

But Crosby did not get to complete his three-year term. In 1997, he was appointed bishop of Labrador City-Schefferville. In 2003, Crosby was named bishop of St. George's, while maintaining responsibility for Labrador.

"We had to respond to lawsuits about sexual abuse," he said. "We worked with very competent people and worked out a settlement agreement with the claimants

and restructured the diocese in order to accomplish that.”

Crosby is thankful to the Oblates for giving him a “wonderful education and formation” and many “great challenges.” He is thankful for the priesthood for the way it nurtured his faith in God and his love for the Church. And he has loved being a bishop.

“I believe there are tough things about life that everybody experiences,” he said. “But it’s a great blessing.”