

# The Old Monsignor



Number 22 • Spring-Summer 2011

François de Laval Animation Centre Newsletter

EDITORIAL



## From the Old to the New

by Marie-France Cossette

The Old Monsignor: That was the affectionate nickname the parishioners used for their priest, François de Laval, after his death in 1708. From now on, this heart-warming name will be the title of our newsletter.

Like an artist who withdraws for a while to renew his creativity in order to produce a new work of art, so has the François-de Laval Animation Centre newsletter team been in a period of renewal and reflection for the last three years. This is the reason for our long silence: after fifteen years of existence, we needed to reflect on how to update our mandate to present our Blessed François to the world. How can we best present this pioneer of our history so that he will stir up admiration and inspire daring and courage in our contemporaries, and especially in young people who may be short on religious culture and who live in a world of instant gratification and virtual reality?

So we developed a three-year plan that would help us determine the best avenues for reaching the greatest number of people. A website was created in French, English and Spanish and is updated weekly. A new, more modern brochure and a canonization prayer image have been printed in all three languages for free distribution. A bench, candles and prayers have been placed at the tomb of our Blessed Monsignor, to make the area more inviting. A special activity called "François de Laval: a Man, a Dream" has been developed in our parishes for the youth who are embarking on Christian initiation or preparing for the sacraments. Every year, we choose two of the many parishes founded by François de Laval to receive a gratitude and recognition visit, during which we offer the community an icon and a relic of the founder. More recently, retirement homes have been asking us take part in their activities. Bonds have been established and maintained with the faithful in the new French parish of



Bienheureux-François-de Laval en Thymerais, which encompasses François' hometown.

During the summer tourist season, the short trilingual TV program on the life of François de Laval continues to provide an interesting and informative rest for passing pilgrims. An icon and a relic of the first Bishop of Quebec are also on exhibit for the public, along with giant puppets of our three Blessed Founders, which fascinate our visitors, young and old alike. Even the Centre's floor is put to use, to project images. These are just some of the accomplishments that have been added to the Centre's annual and daily activities over the last three years.

Our newsletter, with its new look and more in-depth content, will now be published twice a year and will call on a wide variety of contributors. In the pages of this edition, for example, you will be pleasantly surprised to discover the extent of François de Laval's influence in an article written by Luc Bengono. You will read about the echoes of the pilgrimage made by our three Blessed Founders, which is of particular interest this year. An article presenting the French parish established under the name Bienheureux-François-de Laval, en Thymerais, will take you back to the native land of our Blessed François. A variety of information gleaned from different sources rounds out the newsletter, which will provide a useful communications tool to help the world get to know and appreciate the great visionary that was our founder.

Happy summer reading!

# Contents

Editorial From the Old to the New .....	1
Who was Monsignor de Laval? .....	3
History Page.....	4
A Festive Pilgrimage.....	5
Well-deserved Recognition from France .....	6
Gratitude and Recognition Tour to the Parishes of Île d'Orléans .....	7
Iconography .....	8

The Old Monsignor  
Number 22  
Spring-Summer 2011



#### Contact us

Centre d'animation François-de Laval  
20, rue De Buade  
Québec (Québec) G1R 4A1

Phone: 418 692-0228  
Email: [centre@francoisdelaval.com](mailto:centre@francoisdelaval.com)  
Visit our website: [www.francoisdelaval.com](http://www.francoisdelaval.com)

This newsletter is published twice a year and sent for free by mail. It can also be found in PDF format on our website.

Contributor: Luc Bengono  
Copyeditor: Martina de Vries  
Graphic design: [Lecourscommunication.com](http://Lecourscommunication.com)  
Print run: 1,000 copies

Legal deposit:  
Library and Archives Canada ISSN 1920-1117

## PRESS RELEASE

I would like to take this opportunity to report that I will be stepping down as the director of the Centre. For health reasons, I am passing the torch to the man who has been my enthusiastic colleague for the past few years, Jean Duval. I will nevertheless stay on with the Centre as a guide and facilitator. My sincere thanks to everyone who has supported me in this challenging task and helped me discover unsuspected strengths within myself.

Marie-France Cossette

## Your prayer intentions...

All received prayer intentions are given to the Brotherhood of the Holy Family, which meets once each month. At a mass, the prayer intentions are entrusted to the intercession of the Blessed François de Laval.

Your prayer intention will be grouped with all those written by the dozens of pilgrims and visitors who come every day to the tomb of our Blessed François de Laval. You can send us your prayer intention by mail or email, through our website or directly in the funeral chapel at the Notre-Dame de Québec Basilica-Cathedral.

We promise that your requests will remain confidential.

Please report all favours granted:  
Séminaire de Québec  
Cause du bienheureux François de Laval  
1, rue des Remparts  
C.P. 460 H.V.  
Québec (Québec)  
G1R 4R7

## Learn more about our Blessed François de Laval

Visit our website  
[www.francoisdelaval.com](http://www.francoisdelaval.com)

*Come and  
visit our  
exhibition centre!*

We offer special activities for:

- Schools: social science program
- Parishes: for retreats, in conjunction with Christian initiation or as part of the sacramental process
- Religious communities, movements, groups, etc.



# Who was *Monsignor de Laval*?

by Luc Bengono

*Luc Bengono, a French instructor at Regina's French-language school Monseigneur de Laval, in Saskatchewan, has embarked on a quest for historical truth. His motivation arose out of a friendly discussion with a young Quebecer who could only see the negative side of the history of the Catholic Church in Québec. His first subject of research was François de Laval, whose identity appears to be something of a mystery to his work colleagues and to many Francophones in Saskatchewan. To remedy this situation, Bengono wrote an article in L'Eau vive, the only French-language newspaper in Saskatchewan, published once a week and widely read across the entire province. He had two objectives for his initiative: "First, to reveal the highly positive contribution of the Catholic Church and the people of faith in Québec and Canada. And second, to introduce the community to the face and life of the person who gave his name the only French-language school in the city of Regina." In recognition for the efforts of this French immigrant of Cameroonian heritage, we are reprinting his article here, with a few modifications.*

Who was the man whose name is written in large letters on the front of the French school in Regina? Whenever this question comes up, it tends to elicit some fairly evasive answers. And yet it continues to intrigue many people who come here from abroad and sometimes even the people from the land of the Maple Leaf. So who was Monsignor de Laval? "He was the friend of all and of sundry, Indians and Frenchmen, governors of Quebec and founders of Montreal and Trois-Rivières" reveals Lucie Bélingé, in the June 1997 issue of Notre-Dame du Cap. But that doesn't tell us much, either.

In fact, he was a man who came from afar. François de Laval was born on April 30, 1623, in Montigny-sur-Avre, a little town about 130 km west of Paris and nearly 9,000 km away from Regina. He had seven brother and sisters, and his parents were members of the French nobility. Hugues de Laval, his father, was a descendent of the Baron de Montmorency, a blue-blood from the highest ranks of the nobles.

From the time of his childhood, this young aristocrat, whose future as a French noble was all but written in stone, surprised his family with his attraction to the priesthood. At the age of 8, his parents sent him to the famous College La Flèche, now a military academy but at that time directed by the Jesuits. The director noted "hidden depths" in the boy, whom he described as upright, firm and well brought up.

## He renounced his wealth

Later, François was trained in theology at the prestigious Clermont College in Paris, and on May 1, 1647, he was ordained to the priesthood. He was 24 years old and he had

a dream: to be a missionary. An eminent ecclesiastic, Father Rhodes, suggested to Rome that François be appointed as the apostolic curate in Tonkin. Had he left for Vietnam, the history of Canada would certainly have been altered! But destiny held another future in store for him. The Jesuits of Québec clamoured for him, putting pressure on the highest authority of the State. In January 1657, Louis XIV, King of France, wrote to the Pope. On December 8, 1658, François was consecrated bishop and named apostolic curate of New France. He was granted the title Monsignor de Laval.



The future bishop, who had lost his own father in 1638, renounced all his titles of nobility, bequeathing them to his younger brother, Jean-Louis. On April 19, 1659, at the port of La Rochelle in France, François embarked for the New World. His mother died that same year. When he arrived in Québec City on June 16, 1659, he was 36 years old. "The entire colony was on the quay, along with many Amerindians; the town rang with cries of welcome, the sound of church bells and the noise of the fort's cannons. On that very day, Msgr. de Laval baptized a young Huron and went to the cabin of a dying man to administer the last rites." It was the beginning of a great life work that would change the face of New France and Canada.

At the time, Quebec City had about 2,000 inhabitants, including twenty-some priests and monks. Poverty was widespread, exacerbated by the war against the British colonies. François set to work, demonstrating piety, charity, humility, courage and abnegation. For example, "in fall 1659, there was an epidemic in Quebec City, and Msgr. de Laval spent his days at the hospital, despite efforts to dissuade him." Likewise, "it was very cold in Quebec City in the winter. Big stoves were set up in the centre of the churches, many of which caught fire!" The Seminary burned down twice, but the courageous bishop rebuilt it both times.

In 1663, he established a school to train new priests - the Grand Seminary of Quebec - as well as the very first parish in New France. Within 17 years, there were 30 parishes across the territory, and a church was built for each of them. In 1668, he founded the Small Seminary of Quebec, to educate boys. "François' seminary was the first to educate the writers, thinkers, political leaders and religious leaders who fought for the rights of French Canadians after the British conquest," wrote Lucie Bélingé. Msgr. de Laval also ordered the construction of the Saint-Joachim Farm, to

(Continued in page 4)



(Continued from page 3)

feed the students at the seminary, along with buildings where the students could learn skills such as carpentry and masonry.

**Up every day at 4 AM**

Msgr. de Laval also led a determined battle against brandy, which was imported from France and traded for furs. The impact of this alcoholic drink on the indigenous population was catastrophic: fights, murder, separation of families, etc. François' efforts attracted the ire of the shopkeepers, merchants and even a few governors. "He was deeply chagrined about this problem, and we saw his concern eating away at him," reported one witness. The battle continued for 20 years. In 1679, the prelate finally convinced King Louis XIV to outlaw the sale of alcohol to the Indians.

In 1674, Québec was raised to the rank of diocese, with a territory that extended from Acadia to the borders of Louisiana, and Msgr. de Laval became the very first Bishop of New France. After pursuing his vocation wholeheartedly for many years, he died, exhausted, on May 6, 1708, from complications related to chilblains (an inflammation caused by cold). This former aristocrat and descendant of one of France's most prestigious barons often made "long pilgrimages on foot, with no money, begging for his bread and hiding his identity."

"Winter and summer alike, this man of the cloth endlessly roamed his immense curacy. On the Saint Lawrence River, in a fragile canoe that he paddled himself, or, in winter, with

his 'chapel' on his back, he set out on snowshoes to go all the way to Montréal, often buffeted by winds and snow." Msgr. de Laval went to the cathedral every morning alone at 4 AM to celebrate mass. In his room in the Seminary, he slept on boards, leaving under the bed the straw mattress given to him by one of his peers.

So now we know who he was. But how did his name come to grace the elementary school building of Regina's French school? Have patience...that will be the topic of another article. Patience was a virtue advocated by Msgr. de Laval. "Too often a sharp word, impatience and a sullen face can destroy in a moment what we have taken so long to achieve [...]. Our faces should be joyful and modest. We should avoid mockery and raucous laughter and generally anything that is counter to holy and joyful modesty. Let your modesty be known among all men."

Monseigneur de Laval School opened in 1980, with two separate buildings for the elementary and high schools. It is the only French-language school in the city of Regina. Monseigneur de Laval School belongs to the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises (CÉF) which manages 15 schools across Saskatchewan. The elementary building has 290 students from pre-kindergarten to Grade 7, and the high school building has 100 students from Grade 8 to Grade 12. <http://ecoles.cefsk.ca>



*Letter of Recommendation from Louis XIV to Pope Alexander VII*

Written in Paris, this 26th day of January 1657

*Holy Father,*

*Those who, under the protection of this crown, have spread the faith in the northern countries of America have succeeded in their enterprise through the mercy of the Divine Goodness that blesses their task, but to complete their endeavours, they feel the need to ask that a bishop and an Episcopal see be established in these countries, so that the converted souls can receive the sacraments that can only be conferred by those authorized to do so. They have come to us to solicit Your Holiness for this establishment which they deem absolutely necessary and, having explained to us the benefits that will come of this for our holy religion, we could not refuse them our intercession to you to exhort you to provide this final completion to our growing Church.*

*Since the leadership must clearly be given to a person of piety, knowledge and particular zeal for the Church of God, we thought it fitting to beseech Your Holiness to engage Father François de Laval de Montigny, whose virtues have made him so commendable that he has been entreated by many places to go work in the Lord's vineyard; he has always appeared to be disposed to do this, although if God had not reserved him for*

*New France, he would have left for Tonkin, sought out by the fathers who preach the Gospel there to help them. And as his background was approved by Sieur Bagny, at that time Your Holiness's nuncio to us, and then sent to the Court of Rome to be presented to you, he was prevented through no part of his own, after having asked that prayers be said so that it would please His Divine Majesty to reveal His will, that he was ready to embrace and follow, not failing to say that in his heart of hearts he felt more inclined to go to a savage country than to a civilized one abounding in all of the necessities of life, which can only be found with great difficulty in New France. Your Holiness has no doubt been informed of all the good qualities of this kind priest and that they must be used well for these institutions, because he has no less zeal for the Glory of God than have always had his*



Louis XIV by Robert Nanteuil (1623-1678), appointed Royal Engraver in 1657

(Continued in page 5)



(Continued from page 4)

*predecessors, whose care and work have called entire nations to the knowledge of God and encouraged them to gratefully take up the yoke of the Gospel.*

*We would propose to Your Holiness other persons who could advance this good work if we did not deem that the said Laval must be preferred over them because of testimonies that we have heard about his remarkable piety by very enlightened persons, such that our knowledge being strengthened by theirs, we can say that it would be difficult to commit the care of such a vast country to someone who could do a better job than he. And since this country is subject to the French monarchy, whose Kings have done so much to help spread the Christian religion there, as their predecessors have done in many parts of the world, we*

*are called to imitate them and to found a Church there, as several churches were founded in Germany under the auspices of Charles the Great; and just as so many souls owe their salvation to your predecessors, those in the New World will owe theirs to Your Holiness and in return will obtain not only the infinite mercy of God for the length of your days for the glory of the Church but also after you have administered it for a long time, the just reward of your works, being admitted to the kingdom of He through Whom you have worked. Holy Father, we add our prayers to theirs in the hopes they will be granted and that the whole of Christendom will rejoice.*

*Your devoted son, King of France and Navarre,  
Louis*

EVENT



## A Festive Pilgrimage

by Marie-France Cossette

On May 1, 2011, the Catholic Church was celebrating. Its much-loved leader John Paul II, who passed away in 2005, had been recognized as one of the Blessed by his successor Pope Benedict XVI. A million pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square to take part in this extraordinary event. In dioceses around the world, celebrations and activities were held to mark the beatification of the man who developed a special relationship with the youth by creating World Youth Days.

Our three Blessed Founders of the Canadian Church, Marie de l'Incarnation, François de Laval and Catherine de Saint-Augustin, were all beatified under the pontificate of John Paul II, and that is why our traditional Pilgrimage of the Blessed was especially festive this year. It all began with a Solemn Mass in honour of Marie de l'Incarnation at the Ursuline Chapel, on April 30, at 7:30 PM. Then the pilgrims processed to the Augustinian Chapel, reciting the rosary. They arrived at François de Laval's tomb in the Cathedral carrying torches, and youth from various

religious organizations in the diocese paid a vibrant homage to John Paul II through song and testimony. In the evening, worshippers from chapels of worship all over the diocese gathered together in the St. Louis Chapel. At four o'clock in the morning, some forty people met in the François-de Laval Animation Centre to view John Paul II's beatification ceremony live from Rome. These night owls ended the long evening with a hearty breakfast before heading off for a well-deserved rest.

It was so touching to see people of all ages entering the Cathedral together, raising their voices together in the Easter Alleluia, their hearts filled with fervid piety! Accompanied by the three giant puppets of our founders, made for the 2008 International Eucharistic Congress, the pilgrims entrusted their many prayer intentions to the Lord, through the intercessions of the Blessed François de Laval: prayers of intercession for the sick, for the youth, for people in war-stricken countries, and prayers of action for the gift of grace, for the gift of our new archbishop and for the future of the Church supported by the faith and courage of the next generations.

Our annual pilgrimage, enhanced this year by the celebration of the beatification of John Paul II, left the participants with a cherished remembrance of a rich and meaningful Church event. We will never be able to adequately express our thanks to our three Blessed Founders for their bravery and determination, and we will forever be inspired by their unshakeable faith in Providence. A very special thanksgiving for our newly Blessed John Paul II, the very man who proclaimed with such conviction on his nomination as pope "Be not afraid!" Echoing François de Laval, who dared rise to the challenge of being an evangelizing missionary in a distant land and put his full trust in the Holy Spirit, let us also respond to John Paul II's exhortation by proclaiming, with the first bishop of Quebec, "Jesus, I have confidence in you!"





## Well-deserved Recognition from France

by Marie-France Cossette

As the first Bishop of New France for fifty years, François de Laval is a central figure in Canadian social and religious history. Originally from Normandy, he arrived in Quebec at the age of 36, armed with all the fieriness of youth.

To prepare for his task as a missionary, François studied and trained rigorously with the Jesuits in La Flèche College and Paris. He deepened his spirituality for several years in a hermitage in Caen.

But since he spent the better part of his life in Canada and, in fact, left home to study at the tender age of 8, the people of his native region barely knew him.



As explained by Father Didier Henry, the priest of Montigny-sur-Avre, François' hometown, "The three hundredth anniversary of his illustrious mission to New France has awakened in the people of Old France a desire to get to know François de Laval better." Father Henry went on to say that the participation of Msgr. Blais, auxiliary bishop of Québec, in the tri-centennial celebrations in Montigny in 2008 and the visit by the delegation from the Chartres diocese to the Eucharistic Congress in Québec in June of the same year "helped us appreciate the great gift that God gave us in the person of François de Laval, who became Monsignor de Laval, our native son who travelled across the ocean to spread the Good Word."

These two great Church moments related to François de Laval definitely brought the faithful from the two dioceses closer together. Better yet, when the Bishop of Chartres, Msgr. Michel Pansard, decided to merge three parishes in his diocese, he thought it appropriate to name the new parish after the Blessed Missionary François de Laval.

The solemn benediction of the new parish Bienheureux-François-de Laval en Thymerais took place on the Day of Prayer for Missions, Sunday, October 24, 2010, in the little church of Dampierre-sur-Blévy. The many people in attendance underscored the importance of the ceremony presided over by the General Curate of the diocese, Laurent Percerou. A letter of friendship and benediction sent for the occasion by Cardinal Marc Ouellet was especially moving for the faithful gathered there in celebration. A golden book signed by the diocesans of Quebec was also given to our French cousins in faith.

This mark of recognition from our brothers and sisters for this son of their country is very touching for us. With the power of our shared prayers we can now ask the Lord for the miracle needed for the canonization of the man that Marie de l'Incarnation already called a "saint."



### The French parish of Bienheureux-François-de Laval en Thymerais

- Located in the Diocese of Chartres
- Department of Eure and Loir
- Includes 30 steeples (villages)
- For 12,500 inhabitants

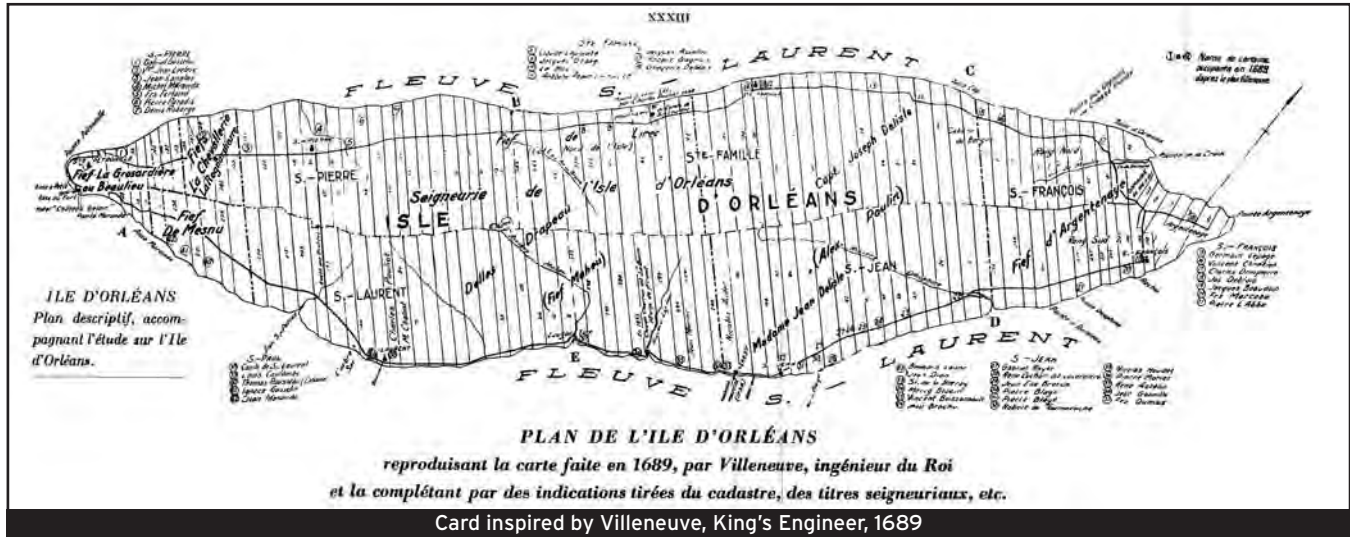




# Gratitude and Recognition tour to the Parishes of Île d'Orléans

by Marie-France Cossette

As part of our gratitude and recognition tour to the parishes founded by François de Laval, June 2011 was dedicated to the parishes of the Île d'Orléans, and especially to the parish of the Sainte-Famille (Holy Family), the first parochial community that the first Bishop of Québec established on the island. It was Monsignor de Laval's deep devotion for the Holy Family of Nazareth that motivated his choice for the name of the parish. Besides dedicating the Québec Seminary to the Holy Family, Msgr. de Laval also encouraged the establishment of the society known as the Ladies of the Holy Family.



From 1661 to 1679, Sainte-Famille was the only parish on the island, and it was canonically established in 1684. The Île d'Orléans was the birthplace of a great many people who went on to become teachers at that time. The Sainte-Famille Parish faced troubled times in 1759, when British soldiers entered the church and took the bell so that the parishioners could not sound the alarm. Once peace was re-established, the bell was immediately returned to use.

On Sunday, June 12, 2011, at the 9 o'clock mass, the parishioners of Sainte-Famille took a trip back in time to the origin of their community, to partake of their founder's unshakable faith in Providence. They were introduced to a tireless priest, who travelled by canoe in summer and snowshoe in winter to bless and support his flock. Some parishioners may have been surprised to learn that the seigniorship of the Île d'Orléans once belonged to François de Laval but that he traded it for the Île Jésus near Montreal in 1675.

The Île d'Orléans parishes of Saint-François, Saint-Pierre, Saint-Jean and Saint-Laurent were also founded by the Msgr. de Laval; only the parish of Sainte-Pétronille was created after his death, a century and a half later in 1870. This gratitude and recognition tour of the island's parishes was an act of thanksgiving for the gift of this brave and zealous priest who believed that life in New France was possible.

## Prayer for the canonization of blessed François de Laval

Lord Jesus, it is with great confidence that we pray to blessed François de Laval, whom you chose to send to our country to announce the good News of salvation.

Through his intercession, please grant us the favours we now implore. Give us the grace to imitate his audacity, his perseverance, and his complete surrender to Providence, and, if it be Your Will, may he soon be counted among the saints. We ask this in Your name, You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen

Picture: Stained glass window depicting Bishop de Laval at a sick person's bedside

« Bishop de Laval was continually there helping the sick and making their beds (...) No eloquence would turn him from acts of humility. »

Marie de l'Incarnation

If you have obtained a favour, please contact

The Cause of blessed François de Laval  
Séminaire de Québec  
1, rue des Remparts, C.P. 460 H.V.  
Québec (Québec) G1R 4R7



NIHIL OBSTAT  
Rev. Msgr Jean Pelletier, P.H., Chancellor, Québec, April 13, 2010

IMPRIMATUR  
Rev. Msgr Jacques Vézina, P.H., Vicar General, Québec, April 13, 2010



# François evêque de Québec



ICONOGRAPHY



**Blessed François de Laval**  
first bishop of Québec  
1623-1708

## ▲ At the National Assembly Buildings of Québec

The Legislative Council Chamber is now a multipurpose room that is used to hold parliamentary commissions and various swearing-in and awards ceremonies.

Commonly called the Salon rouge, it houses an enormous painting titled The Sovereign Council of the Royal Government of New France in 1663, painted by Charles-Édouard-Masson Huot between 1929 and 1930. Msgr. de Laval appears in it next to the governor.

*In the words of  
Monsignor de Laval*

“Too often a sharp word, impatience and a sullen face can destroy in a moment what we have taken so long to achieve.”

Advice to the missionaries in 1668.



Next issue:  
December 2011