

“With the good of the people at heart”



Bishop Blaise Morand was ordained Coadjutor Bishop of Prince Albert by Bishop Laurent Morin of Prince Albert (centre) and co-consecrators Bishop James P. Mahoney of Saskatoon (left), Bishop Eugene-Philippe LaRocque of Alexandria-Cornwall.

This year, Bishop Blaise Morand celebrates his 25th anniversary as Bishop of the Prince Albert diocese. The Diocesan Pulse is pleased to offer a brief retrospective of the Bishop's career. The pictures on these two pages are taken from the diocesan archives and represent only a small fraction of the hundreds of photos taken of Bishop Morand during the last quarter century.

Blaise Morand moved from his home province of Ontario to Saskatoon in 1958. Ordained in London, Ontario, March 22, 1958, Blaise and his brother Leonard joined the Saskatoon diocese with the permission of their bishop. Bishop Morand describes Saskatoon as the city “where I grew up as a priest” and recalls arriving in the rather small city where not all the streets were paved and some of the parishes in the diocese did not yet have running water. “I was from Windsor/Detroit and so that was kind of a big change,” he says understatedly. He served a number of parishes from 1958 to 1981 and taught at St. Paul's high school which, at the time, was near the cathedral in Saskatoon's city centre. He taught from 1958 to 1964. He also served as rector of St. Pius X Seminary from 1967-1971. The last parish he served in Saskatoon was St. Philip Neri, from 1975-1981. Then, plucked out of the diocesan priesthood after twenty-three years in Saskatoon, Blaise Morand was ordained Coadjutor Bishop for the diocese of Prince Albert on June 29, 1981 in a ceremony held in Saskatoon's Centennial Auditorium, a venue chosen because the cathedral was too small to accommodate all the guests.

Asked if he knew what to expect when he became a bishop, Morand says that he had a good idea based on the work he had done under Bishop Mahoney, whom he served as Vicar-General and as Chancellor. Still, he says, there were things peculiar to the Prince Albert diocese he could not have anticipated, like the amount of Native ministry he'd be involved with – there are seventeen First Nations reserves in the Prince Albert diocese – and the decidedly French roots to many of the communities in the diocese, both of which provided new experiences and challenges for the fledgling bishop. The transition to a more rural diocese might have been difficult had Bishop Morand not found people in Prince Albert diocese to be so friendly and open. “One thing that is big for me is nature,” he says, “You're so close to nature here, the forest, the lakes, and that was, in a way, a little bit more like what I had been used to as a kid.”

There have been many challenges and successes in the last 25 years, not to mention too many confirmations to count, but perhaps the most significant challenge Morand has faced is the shortage of priests. There are eight-three parishes in the diocese and only two full-time priests who are actually from the Prince Albert area. All the rest are imports, so to speak, from one place or another. This is the work to which Morand has dedicated a large portion of his considerable energies in the last decade, especially.

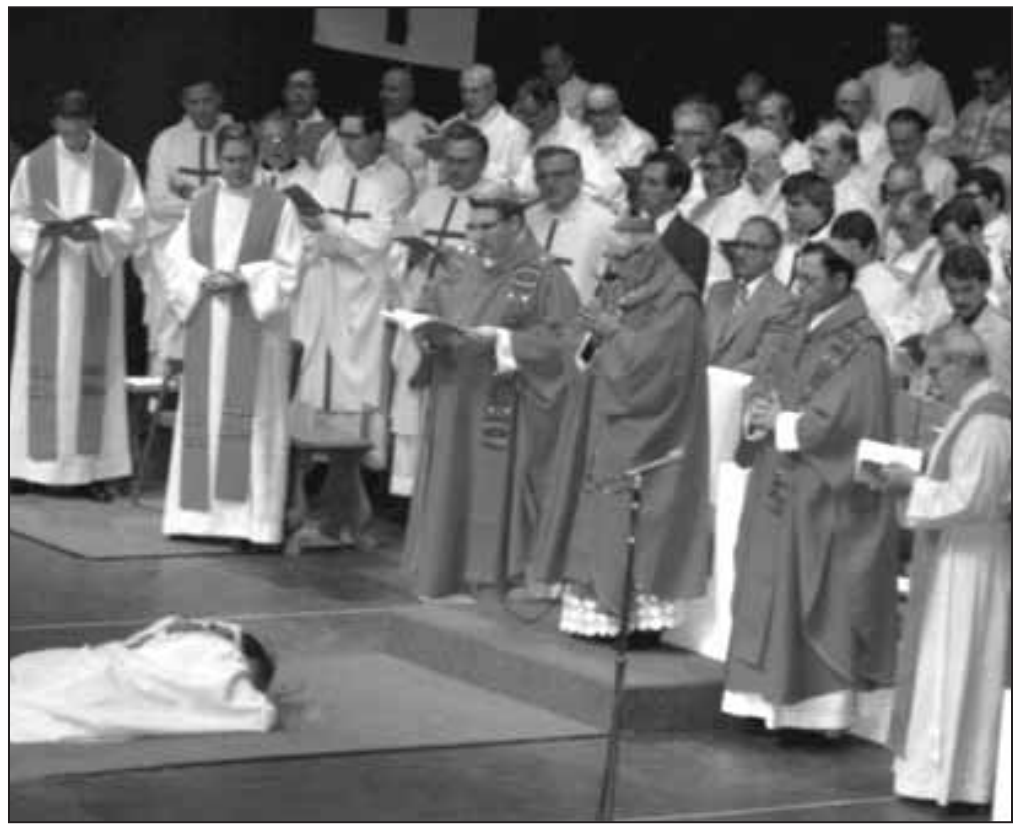
There may be some controversy around his decision to bring in what he calls “off shore” priests, but it is one about which he is unapologetic. To Morand, it's a matter of priorities. “My basic philosophy for doing what I did is that I am very strongly convinced that the heart of our faith is the Eucharist,” he says, explaining his quandry, “If you take out the Eucharist, you've just pulled the heart right out of our faith, and for Eucharist you need priests. If the priests are not there in our diocese, well, what do you do? You have an option of not having priests or going to get them where they are.”

Bishop Morand's decision to bring in young men, mostly from countries experiencing a surge in vocations, has undoubtedly brought some wonderful priests to the diocese. It has also caused a few differences as cultures and expectations occasionally clash, but Morand has always approached this area with sensitivity to the needs of all parties. “I much prefer that they come to us as young seminarians so that they can enculturate and adapt more easily,” he says. “With ordination they will assure us of a continuance of Eucharist.”

In describing his own vision of what makes a good bishop, Morand says a sound spiritual life is a necessity, but first on his list of vital skills is the ability to listen. “You need some very strong spiritual roots,” he says, “because, as a bishop, you're going to have to deal not just with success and beautiful things all the time. Being

a bishop is not about wearing a miter and some lovely vestments. It's in your office interviewing people, one after the other sometimes, and they've all got their concerns and their problems and their dreams and their visions and you try to search through all that, hopefully with the good of the people at heart. That's very important.”

After 25 years of having the good of the people at heart and being shepherd to the Prince Albert diocesan flock, Morand is anticipating retirement. Bishops must submit a letter of resignation to the Pope when they turn 75, which, for Morand, is a short eighteen months away. Still, the Bishop has clearly thought this through and knows some things for certain. “One thing you have to be very careful of, when you retire, is that you *retire*,” he explains, “It's just like I have preached to priests on and on, when I transfer you from a parish, leave the parish, do not go back, don't meddle. Let your successor take



over. It's the same with bishops; get out of the road and let the new man be bishop. If you've got to watch, watch from afar, keep your mouth shut. Let him be himself.” As to whether or not he will stay in Prince Albert after retirement, Morand says that will be up to whoever replaces him. “I would certainly talk to the new bishop,” he says, “and if he wants me to leave, I would go, but if he's fine with my being here, I will stay.”



Bishop Morand, on his first visit to the Vatican after being ordained Bishop, poses with Pope John Paul II and five of his brothers who are also priests. Bishop Morand was on his *ad limina* visit, the obligatory visit each bishop pays the Holy See every five years. Gathering the six brothers together at Rome was the Pope's idea.