

By Pat Haggerty

We often hear the term “life-long learners.” That is especially true in the education field. Many schools and districts have something pertaining to life-long learning in their mission statements. It is definitely something of value to aspire to.

We can be life-long learners of texts and materials, but we can also be learners of the world around us. That is just as important. To learn from the world and those around us is a gift to be treasured. New doors can be opened for us and self-discovery can be the bonus.

I recently took a trip to Quebec City for a convergence of Lay Assumptionists from three areas. We met at Montmartre, the Assumptionist facility in Québec, and we were hosted by Alliance members from that region. What a wonderful and meaningful gathering! I have been reflecting on the experience ever since.

I took away many things from the trip, but I would like to share three key remembrances with you. They have to do with hospitality, energy and consecrated religious. Those sound like such random topics, but they all have something to do with what I experienced.

First of all, let me say that hospitality is definitely a trademark of the Québecois. Their warmth, generosity and graciousness are unparalleled! Our groups from Sturbridge and Brighton were

able to experience that first-hand. The members of the Montmartre Alliance hosted us in their homes and opened their doors to us. They put us at ease and made their homes our homes for the duration of our stay.

As I reflect on this quality of hospitality, it makes me think of the many instances in the gospels where Jesus is invited into homes and when He shares a meal with others---whether it be the hospitality of Martha and Mary, the feeding of the loaves and fishes to the multitude or the disciples sharing bread with the Lord on the way to Emmaus. Peter tells us: "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint." (1 Peter 4:8-9)

My second reflection has to do with one of the sights in the area. We had the opportunity to visit the Parc de la Chute Montmorency (the Falls of Montmorency). These are a trio of spectacular falls that even exceed the height of Niagara Falls. A companion and I were able to get fairly close to one of the singular falls. The energy and turbulence that emanated from the top of the falls was breath-taking. We stood near the base and a surge of wonder overtook me. I could see the contrast of the upper turbulence juxtaposed with the calmness of the waters below. It reminded of the turbulence we sometimes feel in our own lives. There is lots of energy and activity that eventually results in a feeling of resolution and calm. That sense of calmness and well-being is a true gift from God, a grace of the purest sense. This is what we are all striving for.

Thirdly, I reflected on the tremendous contribution made by religious orders of sisters who had given of their time and talents over the centuries. These women made a significant impact on life in Quebec and the development of children at that time as well. Gone are the magnificent motherhouses---most of them have been turned into condominiums or now house huge companies. Yet, the contribution of the Sisters lives on. There is a beautiful sculpture in front of the Ursuline Sisters Church and Museum. It is of a hand holding a feather. At the base of the sculpture reads: (and I am paraphrasing from the French) "Dedicated to the devoted women who consecrated their lives since 1639 for the instruction and education of the youth of Québec." In this year of consecrated religious, this is certainly something to celebrate! Merçi, mes bonnes soeurs!

I am grateful for the time I spent in Québec City and for the many wonderful people I met. This trip has taught me to always reflect on lessons learned.