

**Today, as I write this article, our country is celebrating Presidents' Day. In our North Country there is an additional reason why February 16<sup>th</sup> is a special day. Pope Pius IX formed the Diocese of Ogdensburg on February 16, 1872. So today is our 137<sup>th</sup> anniversary!**

**Because the day was such a beautiful one, clear, dry and bright I took the opportunity to ride through part of the diocese enjoying this welcome respite from winter. I am always awed by the beautiful landscape and waterscape which is natural to our area. As I drove in the comfort of my car I was reminded of the bishops, priests and people who in ways less comfortable traversed this same land in order to plant the seeds of faith firmly in the minds, hearts and lives of those who call the North Country home.**

**Driving through some of our towns my eyes were drawn to the church steeples which have served over the years as beacons of the church's care not only for the immediate needs of people, but also as symbols of hope pointing the way to heaven and eternal life. I thought of those who have gone before us creating the parishes and institutions, health care and social service agencies, educational opportunities in our Catholic schools, and religious education programs. I was reminded**

**also of the thousands of people, both Catholic and non-Catholic, that have been served through these institutions and agencies.**

**I recalled the pioneering and ecumenical spirit of Bishops Wadhams and Conroy. I remembered those involved in the formation and education of seminarians before they came to Ogdensburg, Bishops Gabriels, Monaghan, and Donnellan. I was reminded of Bishop Bryan J. McEntegart, the builder of our magnificent Cathedral, and his successor, Bishop Walter P. Kellenberg, who upon leaving Ogdensburg became the first Bishop of Rockville Centre. I recalled the three bishops who like me were priests of the Diocese of Buffalo before coming here, Bishops Navagh, Smith, and Brzana. I thought of the difficult decisions necessitated by planning and demographic changes made by Bishops Loverde and Barbarito. Each of these Bishops preached the word of God and contributed to the strength of our diocese. They brought their particular gifts -- all animated by the love of God. All of us are in their debt as we continue the work of the Gospel.**

**The Diocese of Ogdensburg today consists of 39,786 registered families comprised of 111,638 Catholic people. To serve the needs of these people we have 105 parishes, 10 missions, and 23 public oratories. Our 15 Catholic schools educate 2,500 students. Catholic campus**

**Ministry centers are located on 7 college campuses. In our religious education programs we educate 8,700 students. Over 3,200 adults take part in various adult religious education programs including the *Formation for Ministry* and *Why Catholic* programs. St. Joseph's Home in Ogdensburg and St. Joseph's Rehabilitation Center in Saranac Lake provide special services to our people. The Corporal Works of Mercy come alive as we serve inmates in 16 prisons.**

**At the present time the Diocese of Ogdensburg is served by 123 priests (40 of whom are retired), 64 permanent deacons (with 13 more to be ordained in September), 120 sisters, 7 brothers and 713 Commissioned Lay Ministers. Each year in the diocese there are approximately 400 weddings and 1300 infant baptisms. Through the efforts of Catholic Charities nearly 28,000 people are assisted annually and 1,200 high school aged young people are served through Confirmation and youth ministry programs.**

**The church faces many challenges today as the culture in which we live threatens the values that we hold basic. Both our federal and state legislatures periodically introduce legislation which goes against what we believe and cherish as Catholics. This includes such proposed legislation as the Freedom of Choice Act, the Reproductive Health and**

**Privacy Protection Act, attempts at redefining marriage and opening the window on the statute of limitations for long past offenses.**

**All of these issues and more will emerge during the coming year. They will require us to be vigilant in speaking out in defense of what we hold sacred. Some of this legislation, if passed, could seriously hamper the work of the church and the service that the church has given through the decades to the people of our North Country.**

**I hope that you will join me in advocating the Catholic position as we move into the future confident that God will bless our efforts with success and give new courage to those who lack hope.**

**Most Rev. Robert J. Cunningham  
Bishop of Ogdensburg  
February 23, 2009**