

**Tshitshitua Shushep (St. Joseph's) Parish,
Sheshatshiu, Labrador**

The Innu people have a long history of strong faith with the Catholic Church, since they were evangelized in 1615 in the Saguenay River by the Recollect Priests from France. The love and fidelity to their Catholic Faith was so strong that even when they did not have priests living with them, or even visiting them for long period of time, they still kept up their faith in Jesus and tradition of their belief that they received from their elders and the previous generations. They instructed other native peoples in what they themselves had received and taught them their prayers. In many ways, the Innu themselves acted as missionaries.

The people lived in their tents, in previous days, and mostly depended on their hunting, fishing and fur trade for their living. In spite of their limited material possessions, essentials and irregular visits by the priests from Quebec, they kept up their strong faith and passed it on to their younger generations. In 1877, a mission chapel was established in the area by Fr. Charles Arnaud, Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, when the Innu would come and trade at the Hudson's Bay Store.

In 2017 the ministry among the Innu people in Sheshatshiu was entrusted to my care. With the grace of God, and help from the Elders and our Parish Council, I slowly came to know the people and their spiritual needs. Although our people are religious by nature, the fast growth in modern technology, the effect of materialism in the lives of the people and the social challenges that are present in the community have a lasting effect on the stability of the community. The more these things infiltrate the lives of the people, the more the relationship between God and people gets widened day by day. All these things also create a tension between the traditional way of life, on the land, and the modern way of living.

In September 29, 2019 our community marked a proud and happy achievement. A large new church was blessed by Archbishop Peter Hundt. This was built by the Band Council to replace the older and smaller church, Our Lady of Snows, at the request of the Elders. This church was a labour of love over many years. This was a wonderful event that brought together our community in Faith.

This fall, we met as a Parish Council along with our Band Chief of our community and Grand Chief of the Innu Nation with our new bishop, Bishop Bart van Roijen. What came out of that consultation was the overwhelming need of forming the faith in the hearts and minds of the younger generation in the community, bringing hope to our young people. The Elders of Sheshatshiu are the pillars of the Church and they have a strong desire to build up the younger generation in Faith. The first step to achieve this goal is the establishment of two separate youth group programs for the children and teenagers of the parish. With financial support of the Sisters of Mercy and through dedicated volunteers, we have begun sessions for our young people. The response from our young people have been enthusiastic and encouraging. We do not have a meeting room or parish hall as part of our new church, so we use the church itself for all our parish activities. We are hoping, with God's grace, to be able to fundraise to have a meeting room for catechesis, faith formation, and meetings.

I look forward to many more happy memories of Sheshatshiu with the Innu of Labrador. Even though I find the winter to be long and cold, and very different from my home in India, and my previous mission parish in Tanzania, the people are warm and friendly. I feel at home among the Innu People and am content to live with them and serve them.

Fr. Joe (Pichai) C.M

Tshitshitua Shushep Church,

Our Lady of Snows Parish

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The Innu Elders leading the singing on the day of our new Church opening.



Our beautiful new Church, Tshitshuia S



Baptism of many babies on the previous Christmas.



Celebrating Mass "On the Land."



Procession for the Feast of beloved St. Anne.



Enjoying a cup of tea and an Innu “doughnut” in the tent of Elizabeth Penashue.