

CELEBRATION OF 100 YEARS

PRESENCE OF SISTERS OF MERCY ON BELL ISLAND

On Monday evening we attended a most impressive celebration on Bell Island at the invitation of St. Michael's Parish. Exactly one hundred years ago, on 19 September 1917, four sisters (Sisters Mary Consilio, Mary Cecily O'Reilly, Alphonsus McNamara and Mary Aloysius Rawlins) crossed the Tickle and founded our community at the Front. The people of St. Michael's Parish invited any Sisters who could attend to join them for Mass, dinner and music. Twenty-one of us joined them for the special evening.

The crossing on the new ferry, the Legionnaire, was beautiful – calm and sunny. The Archbishop and eight priests joined us for the trip. We were met at the ferry by several Knights of Columbus who



offered us drives if needed. We went directly to Church and joined the parishioners and many others who had come back home for the occasion. The bell, used at the original St. Michael's Church and preserved by St. Michael's High School, was relocated to the grounds of the modern St. Michael's Parish Church (built on the site of the Immaculate Conception Church after it had burned to the ground). Archbishop Currie blessed the bell, rang it and then invited a small choir from St. Michael's School to lead us in *O Canada* and the *Ode to Newfoundland*. The bell has so much significance in joyfully linking our built heritage with the geography of this Island.

We then went into the Church for Mass at which the Archbishop presided. The sanctuary was lovely, adorned by a single vase of red roses and new white altar cloths with gold embroidery. The School choir joined the adult choir to lead us in song. Members of the parish led the Liturgy of the Word. The Archbishop, in his homily, recalled some of our history on Bell Island right up to the present day with a special mention of Sister Phyllis' pastoral presence. He reminded us that the *Ode to Newfoundland* was sung for the very first time at the opening of the first Catholic school on the Island in 1901!



At the conclusion of Mass, Father Ray Earle (the current parish priest) added his words of thanks and presented us with a lovely plaque with our Mercy Cross and with words of commendation. Having presented the plaque, he then asked if they could have it back to place it in a prominent place in the Church as a constant reminder of our presence in community and in ministry for so many years!



From the Church we went to the parish hall where we were served an absolutely lovely chicken dinner with wine, dessert and a beautifully decorated cake with our Mercy Cross embedded in it (the cake was cut by Sister Sheila Grant “from Bell Island”!). Father Earle warmly welcomed the parishioners and the visitors. Archbishop Currie led the Grace. The hall was beautifully decorated with Mercy crosses and teapots with steaming cups of tea! The meal was prepared by a group of parishioners and served most graciously and quickly by students from St. Michael’s High School. Three musicians entertained us throughout the evening.

At the end of the meal, Pat Craig was master of ceremonies. He first invited greetings from David Brazil (Member of the House of Assembly for Conception Bay East and Bell Island). David spoke warmly about the Sisters of Mercy who taught him, giving special gratitude to Rosaline and Alicia for challenging him and giving him the confidence to be the leader he is today. He then gave Elizabeth a medal forged from a piece of metal from retired ferry as well as a plaque from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador thanking us for our service over the one hundred years. Francis Fitzgerald spoke next again commending the Sisters who had served the people of the Island – the teachers and administrators at the schools and the presence in the parish and at Dr. Walter Memorial Health Centre. Sally (Hickey) Kelly then added her appreciation for the gift of the Sisters’ teaching, remembering especially the influence of Sister Mary Adrienne in her life.



Gifts were then given the Congregation: a donation of five hundred dollars from St. Michael’s Parish to be used for a charity of our choice, a donation of five hundred dollars from the Bell Island Business Community to be used for a charity of our choice, a Richard Steele painting of Our Lady of Mercy School, and individual roses for each one of us attending. An arrangement of soft ferns had been delivered to Phyllis at McAuley Convent during the day.



Elizabeth spoke gratitude on behalf of the Congregation. She brought special greetings from Sister Phyllis whose spirit was very present this evening even though she could not come in person. Elizabeth reminded everyone that, for a brief period of time in the 1960’s, the Sisters taught at Sacred Heart School in Lance Cove. She also noted that one Sister is buried in the cemetery on Bell Island. That sister, one of the members of the first community at the Mines, was Sister Mary Gabrielle Carter who became quite ill as a young Sister. When it was clear

that she was dying, she asked to be buried on Bell Island because she did not want to leave the children and the Sisters there.

She then thanked the people not only for supporting and affirming the many Sisters of Mercy who have lived and ministered here, but noted that Bell Island was the birthplace of many young women who



were finally professed in our Congregation. Fifteen of these women remained Sisters; five left the Congregation carrying the charism of Mercy with them in their new homes and places of ministry. The eighteen finally professed Sisters were Mary Baptist McDermott, Mary Perpetua Bown, Mary Paschal Dwyer, Mary Calasanctius Power, Mary Rosalita Power, Mary Regina Carbage, Anita Petrie, Mary Teresita Dobbin, Elsie Lahey, Bernetta Walsh, Maureen O'Keefe, Sheila Pumphrey, Helen Cole, Rita Fitzgerald, Regina Cahill, Ann Normore, Loretta Walsh and Sheila Grant. She also recognized *Kitty's Partners Overseas*, the wonderful group of women in an Associate Relationship with us.

Elizabeth then invited the Sisters present to stand and, with her, bless the people present and all those, living or deceased, who have shared our Mercy journey in these past one hundred years. She read the following adapted from the Litany of Mercy with the awareness that we brought our charism of Mercy to Bell Island but the people and the place of Bell Island showed us far more mercy in return:

Creator God – Maker and Source of Mercy – embrace these women and men in your Mercy.

Jesus – exemplar and champion of Mercy – embrace these women and men in your Mercy.

*Spirit – artist and animator of Mercy – embrace these women and men
and this holy place that is Bell Island in your Mercy.*

Mercy calls us. Mercy guides us. Mercy sustains us,

*In your name, with your help, by your hand, in the large days and ordinary ways,
Alone and together, we are people for mercy.*

The Sisters then blessed the people with the blessing from John O'Donohue:

*On the day when the weight deadens on your shoulders and you stumble,
may the clay dance to balance you.*

*And when your eyes freeze behind the grey window and the ghost of loss gets in to you,
may a flock of colours, indigo, red, green, and azure blue come to awaken in you a meadow of delight.*

*When the canvas frays in the currach of thought and a stain of ocean blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters a path of yellow moonlight to bring you safely home.*

*May the nourishment of the earth be yours, may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours, may the protection of the ancestors be yours.*

And so may a slow wind work these words of love around you, an invisible cloak to mind your life.

What a special moment this has been for our Congregation! How blessed we were and are to share our journey in Mercy among such fine people in such a special place!