

Celebrations at St. Lawrence to mark 138 years of the presence of the Sisters of Mercy in the area from 1871 - 2009



The Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy had received word from Mary (Tarrant) Hodge early in August that the people of St. Lawrence, little St. Lawrence, Lawn and surrounding areas wanted to have a celebration to recognize the ministry of the Sisters of Mercy in those areas and to officially thank them. Three Sisters, Sister M. Rose Murphy, M. Xavier Tarahan, and M. Stanislaus Taylor, had arrived in St. Lawrence in 1871 and the last Sister to minister there was Sr. Lucia Walsh who left in 2009. Would the Sisters who had ministered, or who had come from there be able to attend the festivities planned on the weekend of October 20th and 21st, 2012, asked Mary? She insisted that the Congregational Leader HAD to be there! The Planning Committee would not entertain her absence but were willing to change the date of the event to suit her agenda. Elizabeth Davis was free to go on the 20th and 21st.

We heard little tidbits of information in the ensuing weeks: Father Cecil Critch would be doing ALL the cooking, there would be entertainment, and there would be surprises worth waiting for. The official invitation arrived and we began looking forward with great anticipation to this fabulous weekend. We hoped the weather would cooperate for the drive to the Burin peninsula.

Saturday, October 20th was the most beautiful day, weather-wise, that we had had all year! Sisters from St. John's left very early in the morning had not yet ventured out from their mightiest, the sky was cloudless, the and when we drove off the Trans-Peninsula highway the splendor of the reds of the autumn leaves was with digital cameras were kept busy This was particularly difficult especially if our driver had no intention of letting us out of the car to shoot the scenery!



when traffic was light and the moose night's haunts. The sun shone its environment was ecologically correct Canada and travelled down the gold, yellows, browns and sometimes absolutely breathtaking. Those of us trying to capture the beauty before us.

We had been told to proceed to the Golden Age Club upon our arrival: the majority of us fitted into the category of Golden Age so it was most appropriate that this be our first rendezvous. The rails on either side of the ramp going into the building were festooned with blue and gold balloons and a large Welcome poster was above the entrance. A white-apronned lady was at the door ringing an old school bell to welcome us in! The greetings began inside in profusion as many of the ladies there had been our students.

There was a hearty lunch awaiting us ; pea soup, turkey soup, fish chowder (Fr. Critch's own concoction), all kinds of sandwiches, cookies and sweets, and real hot tea and coffee, very welcome for us who had just made the 4-4 ½ hour drive from St. John's. There were 20 Sisters of Mercy, and later an ex-Sister, Brenda Molloy-Mooney joined us. Of course Mary Tarrant Hodge was our own Sister Mary Jean.



After lunch we were free to visit the Miner's Museum, the famous sculpture on the town hall grounds, join in rooting for the St. Lawrence soccer team – the game was being played just a few hundred yards from the Golden Age Club - or we might want to visit the school, the church, the walking trails that were familiar to us when we lived here. Or we could even go to the hotel to unpack and have a snooze.

The next formal event was a Memorial Service in the Sisters' Cemetery not far from the church. There are six Sisters buried there: Sisters M. Tarahan, Burfitt, Jordan, Turpin, Laughlin and Kelly. Three priests are also buried in that site: Fathers Walsh, Thorne and Whalen.



After the brief but very moving service we proceeded to the Parish Hall for the evening meal and entertainment. In the lobby we noted that we were assigned specific tables of eight, at least one or two Sisters at each table, with parishioners from the areas joining us. There was a large photographic display on one wall of

the dining area, very tastefully done featuring photos of Sisters of Mercy past and recent past as well as various aspects of the life of the parishioners and residents of the area. At the tables the place mats were original drawings by the elementary school children, each one brightly coloured depicting some environmental theme and "Thank You" were linen serviettes at each place, a well as a seedling of a balsam fir, (or was been obtained from the Forestry division seedling was a card with the reflection of asking us to reflect that "we plant seeds We water seeds already planted, future promise....We are prophets of a was appropriate in view of the fact that



for God's creation. There beautiful yellow rose, as it blue spruce?) which had in Grand Falls. With the Archbishop Oscar Romero that one day will grow. knowing that they hold future not our own." This Kateri Tekakwitha is being

canonized in Rome this weekend and she is the patron saint of the environment.

We each had a bookmark with Catherine's picture and the Suscipe on one side, and photos of the old convent and church on the other. These photos were also on the front of the 4-page booklet which listed the menu, the persons bringing greetings, a photo of Sisters in the old habit (we did not recognize any of them) and several with the modified habit and the modern dress. We recognized all of them!

Leo Etchegary, on behalf of the Parish Council welcomed us all and asked Father Critch to say the Grace before the meal. Heather Clarke, accompanied by Fr. Critch on the guitar, sang beautifully "I am the Vine". Each table in turn was called to pick up the buffet dinner which consisted of garden salad, baked salmon, harvest pork tenderloin, Moroccan chicken, seafood pasta, baby potatoes, buttered carrots, and a multitude of desserts, tea and coffee. We could not want for more!



Following the meal the Sisters were officially welcomed, first by Thelma Roul, of the St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Council, Mayor Wade Rowse of St. Lawrence, and Mayor William Lockyer of Lawn. Father Critch introduced Sr. Elizabeth Davis, Congregational Leader, who then gave a beautiful address. Mary Tarrant-Hodge, co-chair of the organizing Committee gave an expression of thanks to all the Sisters of Mercy who had ministered here and who had been such an influence in her own life.

We were entertained heartily and musically by choirs from St. Lawrence and Lawn. One group of guitar players from Lawn expressed their gratitude to Sr. Rosemary Ryan who had taught them to play the guitar in Grade Six. Not only did they continue after she had left Lawn but they also taught others to play so that the legacy lives on. We heard lovely renditions of Music and Friends, Down on the Mira, Go Lassie, go, Salt Water Joys, and many more sung with so much enthusiasm and passion. The evening ended with more mingling, chatting, getting-reacquainted, and conversations often beginning with, "Do you remember.....?"

Sunday morning at the Oceanview Hotel we were treated to a complimentary pick-up breakfast with all types of breads, jams, bagels, muffins, hot and cold cereals....far exceeding the usual continental breakfasts one gets in hotels. Then we proceeded to St. Thomas Aquinas Church for the Liturgy. Srs Marcella, Gladys, and Brenda Mooney had attended the first Midnight Mass at that church in 1966 or 1967. We are not too sure of the exact date but we did remember how cold it was because the heating system had not been installed yet. Today the Church presents a panorama of famous paintings on the



back wall where there had once been stained glass windows but which had been broken in recent years. The paintings represent different aspects of the life of Jesus beginning with the Annunciation and ending with the Ascension. It is a spectacular sight. Below is a large painting of Christ reaching out his hand to pull Peter out of the water. It is dedicated to the people who lost their lives at sea particularly those on the American ships, SS Truxton and Pollux, wrecked near St. Lawrence in 1942. There was another painting parallel to this one, but it was covered and it was only later that we found out what it was about.

The combined choirs of St. Lawrence and Lawn who had entertained us last night provided the beautiful music. As well, the children's choir of St. Lawrence sang at the Offertory and the one of Lawn sang "The Prayer of St. Francis" at the Communion. At the Offertory little children brought up two vases of red roses to the altar, and some more seedlings for planting.

The homily was given by Sr. Elizabeth. Noting the famous paintings at the back of the church, she spoke of the artist Seiger Koder whose paintings are also about Scripture events but do not directly show Jesus, or God intervening. Instead in Koder's paintings we catch glimpses of the Divine maybe in a bowl of water, or in a well. Koder uses these, Elizabeth said, to show that we ourselves are to image Christ in our lives. This imaging of Christ was quite evident in the support and love that the people of St. Lawrence have given to the Sisters over the years and are continuing today.

At the end of the Mass a big red rose from the vases at the altar was given to each of the Sisters. Then Sr. Lucia, Charlotte, and Elizabeth accompanied by the other Sisters were asked to go to the back of the church. Here the covered painting was unveiled! It shows Christ, surrounded by the poor and lame and disadvantaged and it was dedicated to the Sisters of Mercy! A small picture of Catherine is below the inscription along with the Suscipe! It was a wonderful tribute to our 138 years of Mercy in St. Lawrence and area. As a response all the Sisters present sang the Suscipe of Catherine McAuley.

We mingled with the people at the end of the Liturgy, had more photos taken, then we were ushered back to the Parish Hall for a lunch before we left for our various destinations. We departed with joyful hearts, deep and sincere gratitude, and knowledge that the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy on that part of the Burin Peninsula is very much alive.









Standing: Sheila Grant, Marcella Grant, Nellie Pomroy, Theresa March, Dolorosa Brennan, Alicia Linehan, Elizabeth Davis, Barbara Kenney, Alverna Harnett, Rosemary Ryan, Maura Mason, Brenda Molloy Mooney, Charlotte Fitzpatrick , Mary Tarrant Hodge

Seated: Gladys Bozec, M. Lucia, Rosaline Hynes, Margie Taylor, Lydia Kelley , Ellen Sullivan, Bridget Patterson, Maureen Lawlor.