

Father O'Shea's Diocesan Reflections (part 1)

Having concluded the extravagant 150th recall of the 1864 Charlottetown Conference, we might look quietly now at the state of our diocese in that golden year.

In 1864 the Diocese of Charlottetown was 35 years old with our third bishop, Peter MacIntyre, in the chair. The Catholic population of PEI that year stood at 36,000. In addition, the Magdalen Islands at that time were part of our diocese and the Catholic population over there was 2,800. (In 1946 these Magdalen Islands people became members of the Diocese of Gaspé.)

In 1864 our diocese had twenty priests, eighteen serving on PEI and two in the Magdalen Islands. Those stationed on PEI resided in the following centres: Tignish, Cascumpec, Miscouche, Indian River, Kinkora, Rustico, Kelly's Cross, Charlottetown, Tracadie, Vernon River (2), East Point, Souris, St. George's and St. Andrew's. In addition, two priests were on the staff of St. Dunstan's College (opened in 1855) and one was on sick leave.

Like today, most of the pastors of 1864 had more than one congregation to serve, at least occasionally, wherever other smaller churches existed in their mission area. In Tignish, Rustico and Charlottetown, however, each pastor had only one church for all liturgical services.

Apart from these three, the communities served by the pastors of 1864 were clustered like this:

Cascumpec, Burton and Brae
Miscouche, Egmont Bay and Mont Carmel
Indian River, Grand River and Summerside
Kinkora, Seven Mile Bay and Hope River

Kelly's Cross and Emyvale
Vernon River, Iona and St. Teresa's
Tracadie, Covehead and Fort Augustus
St. Andrew's and St. Peter's

East Point and St. Margaret's
Souris, Rollo Bay and Little Pond
St. George's, Cardigan, Georgetown and Sturgeon

In 1864 our twenty priests were from the following areas: eleven came from within our diocese, five were from Quebec and four were natives of Ireland.

There were two ordinations to the priesthood in 1864, both included in the twenty above, and two seminarians, one studying in Montreal and the other in Evreux, France.

A happy event toward the close of 1864 was the installation of a new pipe organ for St. Dunstan's Cathedral. Shipped in from England, this instrument was acclaimed by the musical elite to be the best yet heard on PEI. Early in December that year in a packed cathedral, this mighty organ was the centre piece for a sacred concert of picked voices, performed under the direction of Father Trudelle, one of the Quebec priests here at the time. (This was in our second cathedral, a very nice structure in wood on the same site as today's, having its front doors facing the waterfront.)

(Part 2 to follow)