

The following are some memories of the first Incumbent of the Parish of St. Michael and All Angels, Canon Rev. Jenö Kohner which he wrote in January of 1999:

#### “Reminiscences of St. Michael and All Angels”

In May 1963 Joan and I with our two children, Helen and Steven, moved to 15649 du Bosquet, Pierrefonds, where a house had been rented for us by the Diocese. I had been appointed as Bishop’s missionary at Thorndale Anglican Mission. The Anglican work had been begun by Fr. Paul Busing, Diocesan Missioner. The idea was to send a priest into this new area and see what would happen. The parish had no buildings, Sunday worship took place in Thorndale Elementary School. It meant a team of men setting up chairs and a folding altar.

The parish had a very active council headed by Bill Combe. He was, in fact, doing the work of a lay pastoral assistant. Barbara Sherstone and her husband Cliff were involved, as were Ernie and Irene Martinson, Mr. and Mrs. Martin, Mr. and Mrs. Wright, Mr. and Mrs. Za from the so-called “Shell Development” and Mr. and Mrs. Howard. Mrs. Howard would head up the W. A., while Mrs. Heath, whose husband was in the US customs service and had seven children would be the Sunday School person. Ken and Esme Nicholson and Winnie Wakefield were among early members. Greendale was then made up of three model houses but expanded fast. Mr. and Mrs. Hetherington were among the first inhabitants. He became one of the first, if not the first “Anglo” employee of Bombardier. Pierrefonds West would develop later. St. John’s Boulevard was a one lane each way road with farmhouses and fields bordering it. Saint Charles also was a country road, Lacey Green Village was one of the few developments. We did our shopping and banking in the Beaconsfield shopping center. The new housing developments were almost 100% Anglo. St. Genevieve village was almost wholly French.

The make-up of the Parish was young families.

Lots of little ones. For baptisms (No public baptisms in those days) we “borrowed” St. Mary’s Church, then on St. Charles (rector was David Conliffe) or St. Barnabas, Roxboro (in it’s old building) who’s priest was Fr. Bill McCarthy, to be succeeded by the Rev. Reginald Hollis. There were some who lived in the area, but attended St. Mary’s or St. Barnabas, some did not like the idea of worshiping in a secular building. In the late 1960s, perhaps 1969, when the church had been built, 50 babies were baptized. That same year St. Barnabas had 100 baptisms. There was only one couple, Mr. and Mrs. Ritchie who were grandparents. His gardening advice was appreciated by all who knew him.

Most families fitted the categories below:

- 1] Employees of TransCanada Airlines transferred from Winnipeg, which occurred around 1960. A new maintenance base had been set up in Dorval.
- 2] Young executives from all parts of Canada sent by their firms to Montréal to get head office experience. Montréal then had most of the Canadian head offices.
- 3] Immigrants coming out on their own (mainly the British Isles) having either been hired to work in the area or came out and found work.

There were relatively few native Montrealers - the Don McKnights came from Verdun as did a few families. By and large all were strangers to Quebec at the time.

Irene Martinson was one of the first organists we had. We had asked Mr. William Bulford to come from Lachine to teach us the Merbecke setting to the Eucharist. He came weekly for a long time. He was the organist at St. John the Evangelist, and was accompanied by his daughter Monica. As people came from all over Canada, agreeing on a tune for a hymn was no easy matter! Eventually the choir made themselves red gowns with white collars. Later, once the church was built, the latest settings of the Eucharist, the Jazz Masses, were sung. There was Fr. Beaumont’s Mass, whose Gloria was set to the RAF march, and a number of others. The “red hymn book”

eventually appeared with its music and we enjoyed Sidney Carter's compositions. Liturgically at times we used the Eucharist from the New Zealand Prayer Book. Although the 1959 Prayer Book was still new, a ferment had begun in the church for a more contemporary approach, both in words and music. A young congregation with many children was an ideal testing ground. The idea that an old testament reading and a Psalm be included in the Eucharist also surfaced. Fr. Busing and others encouraged us - so the Eucharist would begin with part of Morning Prayer to get both first reading and song in. Some experiments were a success, others less so. Joan Smith, one of our successor organists to Irene, was an enthusiastic teacher. Ed Smith is remembered as an enthusiastic member of the choir. He will be remembered in singing the "Amen" from the movie, "The Lilies of the Field" (with Sydney Poitier). Don McKnight was an able choir director.

Land had already been purchased for a future church building. I believe it cost \$10,000. The problem was that it was in the middle of one community (Thorndale) with no direct connecting roads from "Shell" or Greendale. To give directions to someone coming from areas off St. John's or St. Charles was no easy task! In that sense, the United Church did better by acquiring property on St. John's. However, as Mrs. Hethrington pointed out to the Rev. Mr. Batstone, the minister, on seeing the plans for the future St. Genevieve United Church, "it looks like a shopping center". So some Church Symbol, like a tower, would be needed. St. Mary's was on St. Charles Road. One evening, a cub leaving church from a cub meeting was killed by a car. So those who liked the idea of a church on the main road were sobered. John Cooke was engaged as an architect - but the first task was to build a rectory. The rectory at 15560 Cabot was built by Gazaille. The Parish Council was engaged in the design-the diocese insisted on: four bedrooms, study with separate entrance and the flooring of sufficient thickness to be sanded several times without replacing the floor. Some members of the Parish could not understand the need for

so many bookshelves! After all, most suburban homes did not contain many books! So bookshelves were placed in study and living room, but there was no money left for a fireplace which would have added around \$800 to the price. As it was, the rectory came in at around \$18,000 and built in 1965. So-called Dutch bricks were used, a rougher type of brick, leading one neighbor to say "the Church is so poor that it uses old bricks from abandoned buildings!" That of course was not the case. The rectory also had a basement room reserved for parish activities, youth group meetings, Parish Council, and had an altar in it, so midweek Lenten services could be held. There was a 7am Wednesday Lenten Eucharist, with breakfast, so people could leave for work at 7:45 am after a cup of coffee and toast. The room, it was thought, would also serve as an extra Sunday school room when the church was built. Those were the days when Sunday school had 100 or so members.

As to the church: there were debates whether a church should be built. Bill Howard was against the project on the grounds that stewardship exercise responsibility did not call for a church. A school hall was adequate. Ken Nicholson (the treasurer at the time) took the opposite view: the church was needed as the community was growing, but above all he wanted his daughters to be married in their own church building. Eventually, Bill Howard resigned as the council wanted to build the church. To get some of the monies, bricks were sold and certificates given to members. Bazaars were held.

John Cooke was first asked to submit plans for a round church. Somehow the circle spoke to us (we had a parish retreat/conference at Epiphany House) of inclusivity, of the idea of "God in the midst of us". However, we soon realized that a round church would be far more expensive than a rectangular or square one, and that a circle had limitations; it could not be enlarged. We thought of a name for the church, "Church of the Holy Paraclete" or Church of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit as the energizer of

Christian community was beginning to be written about and there was no other church in the diocese with such a dedication.

In the end, a more conventional model was adopted but with angled pews focusing on the altar. The design also included a gallery and sliding doors between the sanctuary and the hall so overflow crowds could be accommodated.

The first stone was laid by Bishop Ken Maguire on September 29, 1966 and he then announced the church would be called St. Michael and All Angels, a favorite Irish title for a church. A photo of the time shows the bishop surrounded by children.

The dedication of the church took place in 1967, before Expo 67 was open. Fr. Paul Busing was the preacher. John Muldrew and Mike Alexander were Wardens. Brian Sherstone carried the cross and the sanctuary and gallery were filled with a few people sitting in the hall. Edie Stewart was head of the Altar Guild who, with her helpers, placed the tapestry frontal (Laudean) on the altar together with the candlesticks and candles.

The Altar came from the former St. Mary's Church, cut down in size, as did the font. The pulpit was a memorial to the parents of Mr. Kyle and on it a brass plaque "Sir, we would see Jesus" - a reminder to preacher.

Most striking in the church is the reredos. Originally, it had no cross in front of it obscuring it. The Chi-Rho symbol was supposed to take the place of the cross. The reredos, made of polyfilla, is the largest such work in Canada. It is technically called "plaster bas-relief". It shows the Archangels Michael, as captain of the armies of God, Raphael, the angel of healing with the chalice and Gabriel, the angel of the annunciation with a trumpet. An additional angel has hands in the "Orans" position (prayer), representing the holy Guardian Angels. Two angels, one in position of praise, another with a scroll reminding us of the angelic inspiration of the

Scriptures. (A description by the artist Sidney Goldsmith is attached, as is one by author, both pieces written in 1967). This was a gift of Father Kohner's sister and brother-in-law Mr. and Mrs. John Hurst. The processional cross was a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ken Nicholson, the candlesticks by the Rev. and Mrs. Jenö Kohner in memory of their parents, the furnishings are identified with plaques.

Before the church was built, a building committee went out many times on Saturday morning to look at churches. There was one Roman Catholic Church in Montréal's east end with a "wailing room", a gallery with glass between young children and parents. Sounds went in the "wailing" and was contained. With our many babies, we were looking for answers. We went to the South Shore, looking at Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. The one we disliked the most was St. George's in Chateauguay with its cheap looks, and pipes running through the hall. This was the church to which I was appointed in 1970. We determined to bury pipes at St. Michael's. Alas, this did not work and after 1970 they had to be dug up due to leaking, earth movement, etc.

What did not work at St. Michael's, for reasons unknown, was the oil furnace system which would occasionally "explode", sending black oily soot all over the walls of the furnace room. The cause was never discovered by Pierrefonds Heating, the contractors. Cleaning of the furnace room was a dirty, smelly and sickening task.

The congregation had some identical twins - the Bohl girls and the Perrault girls. Often, on Saturday mornings we would show Disney films in a crowded hall. The cinema at Fairview center objected and we had to cease. Mary Poppins had to have been shown three times!

The youth group was headed by Danny Martinson. Gerald Kyle was also a faithful member. Scouts were headed by Larry Smith. One year, seven boys including Gerald Kyle became Queen scouts. Bob Belding had the

Cubs troop. Scouting was very much alive, and we enjoyed Baden Powell Sundays, with the scouts leading the intercessions.

I noticed during the winter months, that many women were in depression. They had few friends, being new comers, the winter made them stay-at-home. I asked Reg Hollis at St. Barnabas about this and he confirmed he was as worried about the same phenomenon. So we did two things. We organized an observation nursery, with leadership provided by the diocese's family life unit, headed by the irrepressible Kay Child's, with Erika Busing and others, and they ran this workshop twice.

The other thing we did was to begin an art class during the day. Many took up art, drawing, and painting. Winnie Wakefield and Esme Nicholson were part of that gang. We invited all and many women who had felt alone in the Canadian winter to come and find friends.

Pierrefonds Manor was built in the late 1960s, and we began monthly services there. The Manor was not a success at first - charging \$1000 a month, a great sum in those days. It did not get filled. So patients were on the second floor and the first was rented to Bell Telephone, who ran courses for executives.

The Parish experienced its share of sadness's. One father with five children (Shaw) lost his job due to a degenerative illness. Wives would be abandoned. Fathers leaving them penniless. There were some alcoholic types around who would phone the parish priest at three in the morning on Sundays. There was the family quarrel to which I was called, when I arrived the husband pulled his revolver on me and pointed it now to me, now to his wife. Hearing the crash of a DC7 near St. Therese upset many and some families lost relatives. Household finance was the "big nasty". While people could borrow from them, the interest rate was 25% and they had brutal ways of getting their money back.

But the memories are positive, and many more good things happened than bad. Mr. and Mrs. Greer, who ran the "North Shore News" weekly, always reported on our doings. We were active and involved-in partnership in the Gospel, in receiving people in the mission field and supporting them. In the work of the newly established PWRDF, this was then a relief fund. The Vietnam War, with the news of napalm used on civilians upset us all, but we responded with a refusal to use products of DOW Chemicals. Above all, the Fellowship of the Parish, its energy was a delight.

I am glad I had served two curacies before coming to St. Michael's. The six years helped me in leading the Parish during seven years. For some things, I was not prepared (who is?). I had been at the church of St. John the Evangelist for three years when I came. That church had a daily Eucharist, a firm liturgical tradition. I missed that when we had no church. However, once a week I celebrated at St. Margaret's Home on Sherbrooke Street. One Sunday, I invited the Sisters of St. John the Divine to visit. One went into the Sunday school. The next thing I heard was "Sisters have taken over the Sunday school". So, we had many laughs through the years. The number of adult confirmation candidates was a delight.

Leaving St. Michaels was hard for us all. Daughter Helen was at Thorndale School, Nicholas was born there and the community was our family. I really grieved when leaving. Somehow, one's first Parish is always special-one puts more work into it, agonizes more over people. St. Michael's will always remain a very special place, though many of the co-workers have died or moved away, and few are left of the pioneers in 1999.

*Jenö G. Köhner*

1st Incumbent  
January 30, 1999