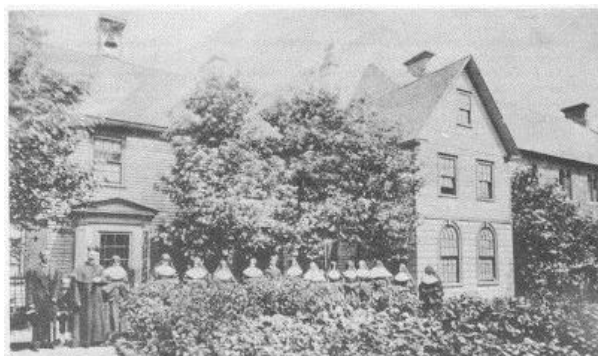


**Eucharistic Liturgy of Thanksgiving
Closing of St. Patrick's Convent
St. John's, NL Canada
September 11, 2016**

Address by Sister Betty Rae Lee, NL Provincial Leader



St. Patrick's Convent/School 1856



St. Patrick's Convent 2016

We gather here today to celebrate the story of the relationship between the people of St. Patrick's Parish and the Presentation Sisters for the past one hundred and sixty years. We honor the weaving of our lives together as a small, but also significant part of God's unfolding dream and we express our deep gratitude to God and to each other for the blessings we have known throughout the years.

The Presentation Story, through which we are connected, began in the mind of God through the dream of a compassionate and visionary woman, Nano Nagle, our Foundress. Known as the "Lady of the Lantern" in Cork, she did all she could to alleviate the sufferings of Ireland's poor in the 18th century.

Our Presentation Newfoundland and Labrador story began in 1833 when four brave women from Galway, Ireland, Mary Bernard Kirwin, Xavier Mallowney, Magdalen O'Shaughnessy, and Xaverius Lynch arrived in St. John's on September 21st of that year after a 25 day journey across the rough Atlantic seas.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our faith-filled ancestors and St. Patrick's Parish plays an important part in our Irish/Newfoundland story. Can you imagine that this treasured booklet is 160 years old? It records our Presentation beginnings here at St. Patrick's and I read, *"On the 10th of January 1856 Sister Mary Clare Waldren, Sister Mary Ignatius Quinlan, Sister Mary Rose Mullally and Sister Mary Regis Halpin, Novice, came from the Motherhouse to establish a house of their Order at*

Riverhead, in this town, under the authority of the Right Reverend Dr. Mullock, Bishop of St. John's." God bless our noble pioneers.

The Annals further reveal the hardships under which the Sisters lived and, no doubt, the people of Riverhead were suffering much at that time also. So many young Sisters died because of the "*provisional dwelling*" in which they lived which was described as "*miserable, cold, damp and uncomfortable*". There are many touching narratives of the faith and acceptance of these brave women. Of one such Sister, Sister M. Agnes Kitchen who died at 36, it was written, "*Her resignation to the Divine Will was admirable and her heroic patience edified all. She offered her life as a sacrifice to her Heavenly Spouse and calmly breathed her last sigh. Her life was holy. Her death tranquil.*"

Since these beginnings in 1856, 205 Sisters served at St. Patrick's and over the years they shared their gifts and leadership as they ministered among you in the school and parish. Since most of our time here was connected with the young through the teaching ministry, these memories are most treasured. It is interesting to note that we have a list in our Archives naming every teacher who taught at St. Patrick's from 1921-1999.

So many of these Sisters who taught at St. Patrick's have since returned home to God but their memory remains in this place as does the energy of many of your relatives who were so good to them. Some women who lived and ministered among you have left our community to continue to live their Christian call in a different manner. Many others now live in other parts of our province and beyond and they carry with them the memories of their time among you. We cannot forget to acknowledge the women from this parish who, because of the faith, inspiration and encouragement of home and church community became members of our congregation. We acknowledged our beginning with four Sisters. Now we recognize the last community to reside at St. Patrick's: Sisters Dorothy Baird, Dorothy Corrigan, Marie Furey, Mary Molloy, Frances Pennell and Patricia Whittle. Sisters Marie and Patricia will remain until the building is closed at the end of October this year. Some of you may not know the Sisters who are present in our Church today here today, who served in this parish so I would ask them to stand now. Hopefully some of you can get re-acquainted during the reception afterwards.

As we hold tenderly the lives of these 205 women in a treasured narrative, our hearts are grateful indeed.

In reflecting on the meaning of our common story within home, school and parish over these 160 years, we acknowledge the moments of joy in wonderful connections

and the moments of sadness because of misunderstandings and hurts. And that is really the whole of life, the shadow and the sun, the darkness and the light of our lives, both calling out for reconciliation and celebration.

In God's universal dream for all creation we were drawn together for a time. There is indeed pain for all of us in seeing the Convent close, yet we trust that the God who has led us to this point will continue to be faithful to creating and nurturing life through the next use of this building.

We cannot announce today how the Convent will be used because an agreement for the use of the building, while in process, has not yet been finalized. Hopefully, by the end of October we will be in a position to make an announcement relative to the future of this wonderful and historic building. A new story is waiting to be told in this place.

Before concluding, I would like to say a special thank you to Archbishop Currie, Father Dohey, and to all of you who prepared for and participated in this beautiful Liturgy today and to all of you who have come to share this moment with us. This is a memory we will treasure. In our name I express deep appreciation to you, Mary Skinner, for your kind words of gratitude and we, in turn, extend a heartfelt thank you to the parishioners for your kindness, generosity and support over the years. You have allowed us to share in your lives and you have helped shape our congregational story.

*So now the time has come for us to leave this sacred place
Strong in this holy company of living faith.
May you know that absence is full of tender presence
and that nothing is ever lost or forgotten.*

I invite the Sisters to stand and raise their hands over you as I pray a blessing from all our Presentation Sisters:

*We pray a blessing on you as you journey onward from this moment.
As you meet the poor, the sad, the stranger, may you see the face of Christ.
May you remember that our love and appreciation for you are etched on our hearts
in a bond that unites us forever.
And may the power of God's presence bless us all at this moment of leave taking.*

Amen.