

Fr. Jan, Pastor, Mayor Gosine, Mary Jewer, Chair of the Parish Council, members of the Parish Council and of the parish of St. Michael's:

Thank you, as Shakespeare would write, thank you for lending me your ears!

A number of Sisters of Mercy have come here today to visit you, St. Michael's Parish and people of Bell Island – three born on Bell Island! We have come to say "good-bye" and "thank you". I speak on behalf of the sisters and Sister Elizabeth Davis, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Mercy. Elizabeth could not be present today but joins us in spirit.

The Sisters of Mercy first came to Newfoundland from Ireland, at the request of Bishop Fleming in 1842, to teach girls. From the very beginning the sisters visited and cared for the sick and those in need, in addition to teaching school – that was the mission of the Sisters of Mercy. While our mission has not changed there certainly have been variations in our ministries and in the places in this province and beyond where the Sisters of Mercy have been missioned and continue to be.

In 1917 four Sisters of Mercy came to this island. When the sisters first came, and in the subsequent years, the sisters set up and took responsibility for education in the primary, elementary and higher-level schools at the Front and a few years later, at the Mines. There were two convents where the sisters lived, St. Edward's and Immaculate Conception. All aspects of education were facilitated with a special emphasis on music and song. In her book, *Weavers of the Tapestry*, Sr. Katherine Bellamy wrote that the Bell Island children took to music like ducks to water!

Besides teaching in the schools on Bell Island the sisters visited those who were sick and responded to various needs as made known to them. They engaged in various activities of the church and community as their rule permitted, much more open and diverse in recent years! In these latter years the number of sisters on Bell Island dwindled to two or three and then, most recently, to one sister. These sisters had retired from teaching and lived on Bell Island with pastoral ministry in the parish and community. Also, in more recent years the sisters who resided on Bell Island lived in a much smaller house on Dosco Hill. (A note: It is sad that the landmark and historic building that was St. Edward's Convent at the

Front burned to the ground in this same year that the Sisters of Mercy are saying good-bye.)

So now, the Sisters of Mercy have come to another transition moment in our lives, as we take our final steps in ministry on Bell Island. We are officially closing the house on Dosco and returning the building to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing (NLHC). With deep sadness we have come to the time when we must say 'Good-bye'. Our circumstances in numbers of members and ages of the sisters have called us to make many changes in our ministries.

We are sorry to have to end our formal presence in ministry on Bell Island. While today may mark an ending, the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy remains in the person and spirit of the Bell Island people, at home and abroad, who have been educated and influenced by the sisters. We have a group of Associates on the island, *Kitty's Partners Overseas*, who continue to be connected with us, and to study and live the spirit of our foundress, Catherine McAuley. We have the life and legacy of eighteen Bell Island women who were professed as Sisters of Mercy, nine of whom are alive and well connected to Bell Island! We have one Sister of Mercy, Sr. M. Gabrielle Carter, buried on this island, thus ensuring an enduring link with our Congregation.

As we say 'Good-bye', we say 'Thank You'. We express deep gratitude to the people of Bell Island, to your ancestors who welcomed the Sisters and helped them settle in - into your life, your families, your church and your community. We express gratitude to your children who were the shining stars in the schools, in the parishes, and in the communities, learning and growing into beautiful men and women who brought culture, social responsibility, political astuteness, business success and faith to your island home and beyond, wherever they went. We especially thank you, your parish and faith community, the pastors, school board and community leaders, teachers, parents, parish groups and individuals who collaborated with the sisters over the years and nurtured and supported them in our common mission - the mission of Jesus and of all God's people.

I have to say one big **thank you** to Roseanne Grant who has been our Mercy Consul on Bell Island! We did not set up a fancy consulate house for her but she has diligently served in that role for a number of years! She is sister to one of our sisters, so you see how we have hooked in family and friends as collaborators!

We also express gratitude for the women from Bell Island who have become Sisters of Mercy, living and ministering in so many rich and diverse ways around Newfoundland and Labrador. And we say thanks to the land which holds our Sister Mary Gabrielle, the land that stands solid and proud, a symbol of the spirit of Bell Island which has helped shape our Congregation and our way of being mercy in the world.

As a token of our love for you, the parish and people of Bell Island, and in appreciation of your commitment to the social, cultural and spiritual life of the people of Bell Island the Sisters of Mercy will make a financial commitment to St. Michael's Parish for the next three years, given in the month of March each year.

This is our blessing for you, a blessing shared with you on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary celebrated with us in September 2017:

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 in your mercy these women and  
men

and this holy place that is Bell Island.

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.

We thank our God that we not only had the privilege of sharing our charism of Mercy with the people of this holy place, that we not only had the gift of so many of the Bell Islanders entering our community, but we also had the wonder of the mercy shown us by the people for over a century. How blessed we were and are to share our journey in Mercy among such wonderful people in such a special place!

We ask God's blessing for the parish and for all of you! Thank you! And again, thank you.