

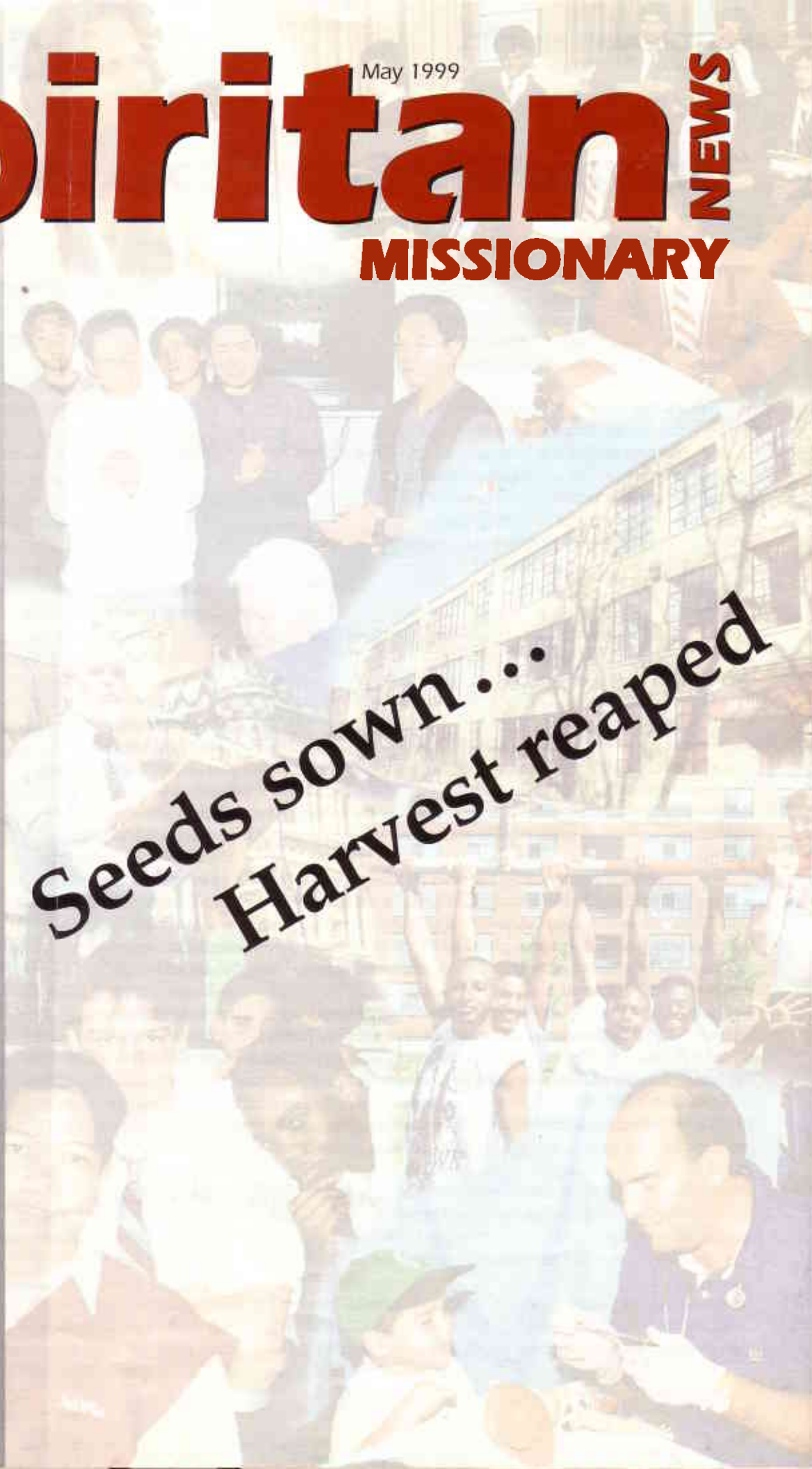
Spiritana NEWS

May 1999

MISSIONARY



Neil McNeil



Seeds sown...
Harvest reaped

"Onward We Go"

This issue of *Spiritan Missionary News* marks the 40th anniversary of Neil McNeil High School, Toronto. Founded by the Spiritans (at that time called the Holy Ghost Fathers) in September 1958, the school has always been central to the service of the Congregation in Ontario. Its 35 graduation classes have contained over 7000 students whose ages at the present time range from 19 to 55 years of age.

To mark this anniversary it was decided to let a small cross-section of this large group speak about their lives, their careers, their philosophies or their memories of Neil. The past students whose articles appear in this issue, were selected by a group of teachers at the school who between them spanned the entire 40 year period. An effort was made to cover a variety of careers, especially ones which were centred in the areas of culture and service.

The group tried to select graduates from each of the four decades on our list, although the earlier graduates predominate as they have had more time to acquire excellence and prominence in their careers. It tried to get the widest variety of stories and made no effort to pick only those past students who are most prominent and recognized in society. To select 25 from 7000 is a risky exercise. "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen" and many of the graduates of Neil are quietly living lives of great value without any public recognition.

It was my happy task to contact the selected group and ask them to contribute to this issue of *Spiritan Missionary News*. In most cases my phone call or letter opened a torrent of fond memories and enquiries about retired teachers and former students. Only one alumnus declined to contribute as he felt that his contribution to the quality of life of his community was too humble and prosaic to be of interest to our readers. Little does he realize the contribution he makes. It is of the highest quality and of great significance to the young people of the town in which he lives.

I got great enjoyment putting together this issue and was filled with pride at the accomplishments of Neil McNeil graduates. So many quoted the school motto "*Fidelitas in Arduis*" and its admonition to persevere in difficult times. Most felt that this was one of the crucial philosophies they learned at Neil and that it was valuable in their journey through life. One even sang the stirring "Onward we go" verse of the school's anthem over the phone.

The motto and the spirit of Neil McNeil High School are still alive today in its 34 teachers and 582 students. Although the number of Spiritans on the staff is reduced to three, Frs. McCarthy and Kelly along with Lay Spiritan Frank O'Neill, the traditions and philosophy have remained intact down through the years.

To the school of 1999, the former teachers and pupils extend the wish "Onward to the 50th". And *Spiritan Missionary News* adds its "amen" to that.

Gerald FitzGerald CSSy

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Spiritan Missionary News is published four times a year by the Spiritans, The Congregation of the Holy Ghost, 121 Victoria Park Ave. Toronto, ON M4E 3S2. Tel. (416) 698-2003. Fax 698-1884. E-mail spilav@netcom.ca. All correspondence and changes of address should be sent to this address. Canadian Publications Mail Registration No. 7978. Postage paid at Toronto, ON. Printed by Johnstone/Adams Graphics Ltd., Markham, Ontario. One year subscription: \$10.00.

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A Culture of Peace

Joy Warner, Lay Spiritan

"Where there is no vision the people perish" (Prov.19:18)

The coming Millennium has given rise to an unprecedented soul-searching and self-questioning. In my diocese of Hamilton, Bishop Tonnos has named the Jubilee preparation theme for 1999 **Called to Conversion**. In the Christian community the biblical tradition of jubilee offers a vision of God at work in history, challenging us to restore a new era of justice and well being for all in harmony with the earth. However, the Holy Spirit does not confine itself to the church. It blows where it will to breathe new life and vision into our tired institutions and worn out ideologies. There seems to be a growing convergence between both secular and religious world views that fundamental change is needed in our relationship to each other as a global family and in our relationship to our home, Planet Earth.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has proclaimed the year 2000 as the **International Year for the Culture of Peace**. In response to an appeal signed by the Nobel Peace Laureates, it has named the first decade of the next millennium — the years 2001-2010 — as the **International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World**. In the final document of the Synod of Bishops for America Pope John Paul II decries the culture of death, "a model of society in which the powerful predominate, setting aside and even eliminating the powerless". He draws attention to the stockpiling of weapons as a threat to peace and calls on the church "by every means possible, including mediation and arbitration to act in favour of peace and fraternity between peoples".

I believe the Spirit is calling all of us to the vision of A Culture of Peace. What might this culture of peace look like? In their **Manifesto 2000** the Nobel Laureates ask us to:

1. Respect the life and dignity of every person.
2. Practise active non-violence.
3. Share our time and material resources in a spirit of generosity.
4. Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity.
5. Promote responsible consumer behaviour.
6. Contribute to the building of community.

Two things strike me about this vision of A Culture of Peace. Firstly the fact that this is the reformulation of the vision offered to us by Jesus, who challenged us to love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us, who said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the chil-



Illustration by David Wysotski (Neil McNeil 1981-1986)

dren of God" (Matt.5:9) and who rebuked his follower for using a sword during His arrest, "Put your sword back into its place: for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." It is the same vision as that of the early church Fathers: "We are a race given over to peace ... We make use of only one instrument: the peaceful word with which we do honour to God." (Clement of Alexandria). "God wished iron to be used for the cultivation of the earth and therefore it should not be used to take human life." (Cyprian of Carthage) The second striking fact is that we can all be promoters of the Culture of Peace right where we are, in our ordinary, everyday lives. In our families and churches and communities we can all commit ourselves to the work of peace-building. After all this is one and the same as working for the biblical vision of Shalom and for the coming of the kingdom which we pray for during every Mass in the Lord's Prayer. In fact it is no more and no less than our mission and vocation as followers of Christ.

For more information on the Culture of Peace you can send for a \$10 kit to Voice of Women for Peace, 761 Queen Street West, #203, Toronto ON M6G 1J1, or see web site www.unesco.org/manifesto2000. ♦

Tall Oaks from Little Acorns Grow

by John D. Geary, C.S.Sp.

There's an old adage that we learned in Philosophy class years ago: whatever is perceived is perceived in accordance with the kind of person perceiving it. In other words, we all view reality through our personal lens, wearing the spectacles of remembrance when we view the past. Be warned therefore, that what I have to say in the next few pages is highly personal and drawn up from the depths of memory over 38 years. Others will have seen it differently, would have emphasised aspects that I have ignored and ignored what I may highlight.

When I arrived at Neil McNeil in September 1961 the school was already three years old. It had opened in 1958 with just Grades 9 and 10, the two grades which in those days received public money as elementary grades in the Catholic or Separate

For the last 40 years Neil McNeil has encouraged excellence ... participation ... community ...

School system. This policy of according grudging support to grades 9 and 10 only at the elementary level and nothing at all beyond that was Ontario's way of fulfilling an exceedingly narrow view of the deal that brought Upper Canada, more specifically Ontario, into Confederation in 1867. This distinction, not to say discrimination, regarding Catholic Secondary education was continued until 1984.

Father Michael Troy had opened the doors on that first September morning in 1958 and received about 200 boys in their maroon blazers and grey slacks, carefully co-ordinated with a white shirt and grey and maroon striped tie. But let's back up a little and ask some questions that lie at the genesis of this school. Why Neil McNeil, why on the Toronto-Scarborough border, why all-boys, why in 1958?

The school was the result of a policy initiated by the Toronto Archdiocese under the leadership of Cardinal McGuigan to expand the number of Catholic secondary schools, particularly in Toronto, which was in the throes of a huge movement of immigrants, many of them Catholics, whose children needed to be educated. A programme of school building was part of the Archdiocese's response to this influx and locating the school in the east end reflected the fact that there was no Catholic secondary school for boys east of Yonge St. up to that time. The school was named after Cardinal McGuigan's predecessor as Archbishop of Toronto, Archbishop Neil McNeil. And why all boys? The prevailing wisdom in Catholic education of the time was that single-sex schools provided a better learning environment. Many would still hold to that belief.

Resources – no; esprit – yes

When you remember that the school was built with scarce archdiocesan funds it is not surprising that it was, to put it mildly, an austere building and contained none of the educational bells and whistles we now take for granted in secondary schools. Within a few years of its opening it was overcrowded and the dreaded portables had made their appearance; they became, in one form or another, a constant presence on the site until well into 1999. The gym was adequate but not well-equipped, the stage and theatre facilities small and bereft of lighting, there was no language lab, there was a shortage of science rooms and indeed, very little in the academic department other than basic classrooms and desks. It is a measure of the faith parents and students put in our teaching staff and the

