

Island church in Howe Sound

By JOHN McCARTHY

It was 2:50 p.m., October 6th, 1970, at the corner of Melmore and Hood Roads, Bowen Island, B.C. "The meeting place was the church lot. We discussed the location of our

planned church". A relatively short meeting of 11 people who, at 3:30 p.m. were enjoying tea and cakes at Evergreen Hall. So say the minutes of the meeting.

This was the beginning of the end of years of effort to

establish a church on Bowen Island for the Catholic Community there. In 1948 mass was celebrated in the old school which burned the following year. The "old dance hall" was pressed into Sunday service.

The dates of memory are rather vague but it seems the dance hall gave way to Evergreen Hall in 1958.

In 1968 a delegation of three was selected to put plans into motion for the acquisition of a church. The delegation was to approach the Union Steamship Company's real estate arm, Bowen Estates Ltd., for a piece of their property. Fred Brown of Union Steamships convinced his company the offer was a good deal. A site on "Miller's Landing Road" was settled on and one dollar changed hands. The three, Alex Rankin, John Mayberry and Sam Dumaresq, were joined by Harry Wright, all under the guidance of Father G. Beauregard. It is not known how the funds to purchase that lot were raised.

Funds for the structure itself took a little longer to come by. Eventually various organizations and individuals contributed by way of fiscal donations or personal involvement in fund raising activities. Church Extension Society, the United Church and Canadian Legion of Bowen were among the contributors.

The archdiocese threw in its weight, The Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception at St. Vincent's Hospital threw in an organ (for a price—Dumaresq's old fishnet for decorating Maycroft.) With Father Beauregard leading, the project took off.

At that October meeting in 1970 were Father Campbell, Father Beauregard, Mrs. E. Dorman, Mrs. A. Paterson, Sam Dumaresq, Harry Wright, Jack and Loretta Dolhanty, John and Mary Dolhanty and Sister (probably) Gallant. These names reappear continuously in the story of "Word of God Mission".

Our 11 friends were somewhat naive or at least optimistic. The meeting noted there were 400 people on Bowen but summer masses attracted up to 136. The price for the church construction was expected to be 10 to \$13,000 dollars. "We should be able to borrow this additional \$3,000 with no trouble. Ask the archdiocese for the slack!"

However, Father Campbell: "I believe the bishop's opinion is..." "Therefore we go the one more step before starting on the church". They adjourned that meeting at 4:45 p.m. "so the 5:00 p.m. ferry could be met".

From 1948 until Father Beauregard took over about 1960 the island masses were celebrated by Fathers Paris, J.E. Brown, Peter Mallon, and F. Foran. For 18 years Father Beauregard crossed Howe Sound regularly to say mass in various accommodations. It was he who "headmanned" the effort to build a church and who brought the "Word of

God" to the island—notwithstanding the final choice of "St. Gerard's" as the name of the mission.

Easter Sunday, April 11th, 1971, saw Beaver Lumber Company pre-fab plans discussed and preparations made for clearing the lot. Father Beauregard became a logger of sorts and felled timber with the best of them. Evidently he did some high-rigging by the look of a photo of him some 30 feet up a tree!

Construction started in July 1971 but Jacob Michael, son of Diane and Michael Meal, was baptized on April 25th and Rebecca Miriam, daughter of Loretta and Jack Dolhanty, entered Christendom on July 18th, 1971. With these scriptural names St. Gerard's was bound to succeed and succeed it did.

Reid Poole, a non-Catholic, was chosen as contractor and more than filled his obligations—refunding an under budget surplus.

The first mass in new St. Gerard's Mission was celebrated September 5th, 1971 in surroundings both ecumenical, for half the congregation was other than Catholic, and unique by reason of the furnishings. Nineteen solid oak pews had been obtained from the dismantled military chapel at Sardis for \$900 (Sam Dumaresq told them it was all he had so that was the price), the crucifix was made by Harry Wright out of white cedar driftwood, Mrs. Roberts painted the Stations of the Cross, Ernie Peerless' decorating, Mrs. Wilson's carpeting, Mrs. Dorman's plaque over the entrance, etc., etc.,

Since Father Beauregard "retired" in 1978 the mission has been served mainly by Father James McLeod and Father Richard Mugford.

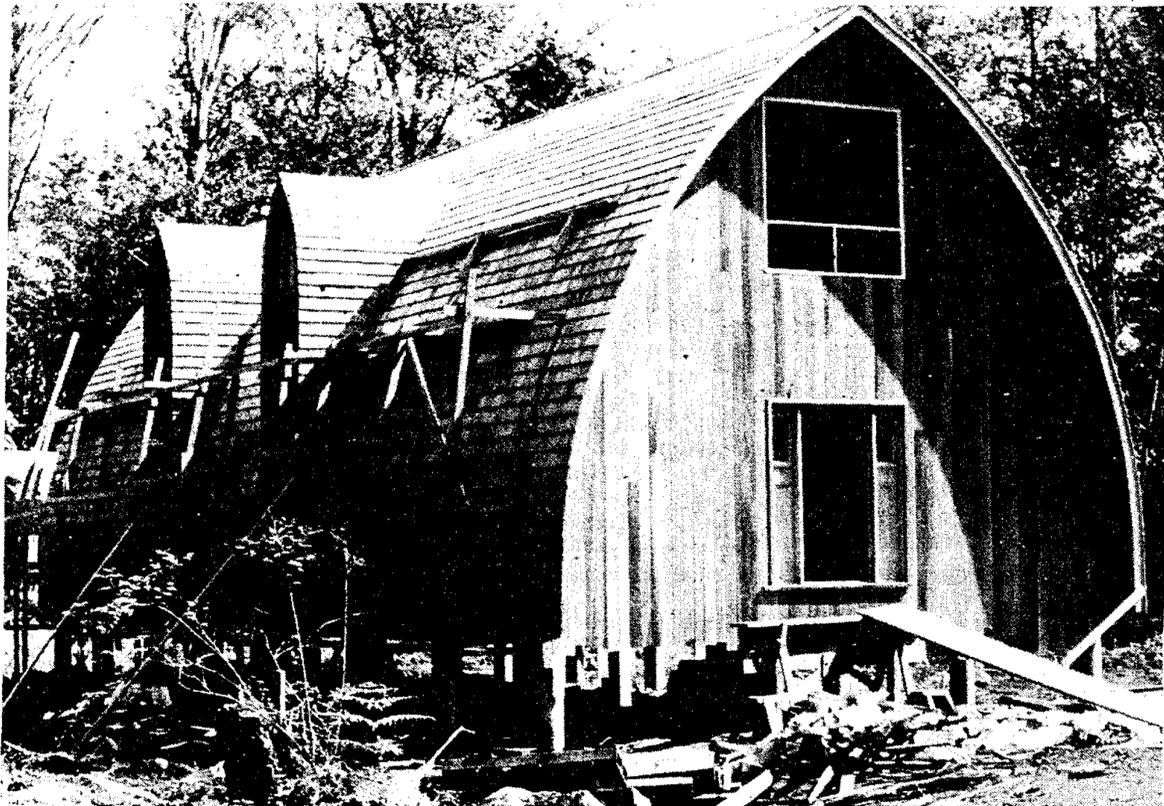
St. Gerard's is not just a summer chapel. In 1974 Christmas mass was celebrated and a few weeks later on January 5th a Requiem for Mrs. Dorothy Proudlock. Bazaars are still part of the parish activities and Edith Forrest is still making quilts as she has done from the start.

In 1979 the old organ began to wheeze and the Bowen Island United Church came to the rescue by donating a "practically new organ".

Father Beauregard is no stranger to remote areas. The Saskatchewan born priest has seen South America and for some time served the remote missions of Vancouver Island. He is reputed to speak at least 14 languages including his latest acquisition, Japanese.



GROUP OF "ORIGINALS" in front of the new St. Gerard's Mission, Bowen Island. (l. to r. front row) Father Beauregard, Sister Philomena Gallant, Mooney boy, Mrs. Paterson, Sister Loretta McDonald, Sister Jean Mulvaney, Mooney girl and another Mooney boy. (l. to r. back row) Mr. Mooney, Harry Wright, Mrs. Dorman, Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Dorman's sister and Sam Dumaresq. (Photo: Courtesy of J. Intihar)



ST. GERARD'S all but finished. (Photo: Courtesy of J. Intihar)



ARCHBISHOP James F. Carney blesses the new church on Bowen Island, assisted by Father B.A. Rossi. (Photo: Courtesy of J. Intihar)

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