

“DO YOU KNOW WHAT A MISSION IS?”



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“Do you know what a mission is?” Father Philip Kennedy, president of Catholic Missions In Canada (CMIC), asks a group of Grade 5 students. Several eager hands shoot up.

“It’s a quest,” answers one student.

“A goal,” shouts another.

“Something you work for,” answers yet another.

Sitting at the back of the group is a little girl anxiously waving her arm in the air. “And what about you? What do you think a mission is?” Fr. Kennedy asks.

“A mission is a journey you go on to spread the word of God!” she answers.

Fr. Kennedy smiles, “Exactly! And where do you think the missions are?” Again, eager hands start waving.

“In Africa,” answers one.

“In Afghanistan,” answers another.

Fr. Kennedy pulls out a large map of Canada. Red dots cover the map. “Can you guess how many dots are on the map?” asks Fr. Kennedy.

Around 600 to 700 dots cover the map. Fr. Kennedy tells the children that each dot represents a mission community in Canada supported by CMIC. The students freeze. You could even see a couple whose jaws dropped!

These students, like many throughout Canada, do not know that Canada is still a mission country. They think that having a Catholic church within driving distance is the norm or that everyone who goes to a Catholic school will receive religious education.

The community of St. Alban’s in Newfoundland and Labrador is home to Holy Cross School and is asking for help from CMIC. The community, which is mostly Catholic with a number of people of Mic Mac ancestry, had the Catholic education system removed by legislative decree. The loss of the school was a tremendous disappointment but the community was determined to find an alternative option. In September 2003, it formed an independent school system and opened Holy Cross School shortly after.

At this school, the goal is to continue to provide children with an education system that will cater to their academic and spiritual needs as they try to be an example of community spirit and educational excellence to all.

Like many mission communities, Holy Cross School needs

funding to keep the school running. The community of St. Alban’s helps any way it can. Bishop Martin W. Currie (Grand Falls) says, “The people of the community clean the building free of cost and the town of St. Alban’s provides free snow removal. Also, former parishioners who live in other parts of the country send money home to help the school.”

Even with all this help from the community, it is not enough to guarantee that the school will have the funds to keep providing quality Catholic education. Because of this, the community of St. Alban’s is asking CMIC for financial assistance, so that it can continue to improve its curriculum for Junior Kindergarten to Grade 9, especially in the areas of religious education and formation.

Mission communities like St. Alban’s and the children of Holy Cross School are what Fr. Kennedy tries to get the children he visits to understand.

Fr. Kennedy’s school visits are part of the School Awareness Program to inform youth that Canada is still a mission country. This program not only helps them better understand the makeup of the Catholic church in Canada, but it gives them a richer understanding of Canada’s history, geography and people.

Many throughout Canada do not know that Canada is still a mission country

Teachers who choose to participate have access to lesson plans, daily prayers and reflections that are specifically created to reflect the culture of the missions.

Many schools have also participated by fundraising with their students. What better way to spread the word about the missions and to introduce children to charitable works than by asking them to bring in as little as a “Loonie for the Missions”?

CMIC believes that if today’s youth can be taught about the needs of the missions, one day they will become life long supporters of mission communities like St. Alban’s.

“Father?” asks a young boy at the back of the class, “How do you become a missionary?”

Today’s young Catholics will become the leaders of the church of tomorrow. And maybe, through Fr. Kennedy’s one simple visit, Canada has gained another missionary. ✚