

The Spiritans

Acorns and Mustard Seeds

The arrival of the Spiritans in English-speaking Canada coincided roughly with the rapid expansion of the Catholic High School system in Toronto. We were invited by Archdiocesan authorities to open a school in the east end of the city and did so in September 1958. Organizing such a project while depending on transatlantic sources – our founding Province in Ireland and our world headquarters at that time in Paris, France – was a cumbersome and often frustrating process; constant appeals for support both in personnel and finances, negotiating with an educational establishment different from the Irish model, challenges from looming deadlines – this was a high-risk, nerve-wracking project for a group of Spiritans who needed all their energy, their sense of dedication, to keep things moving on.

In the early years some of the priests used spare classrooms as their living quarters. One slept in a janitor's storeroom, under the stairs. Hockey was largely a mystery to our men, raised on Rugby; but fierce enthusiasm and determination carried the day, helped by willing fathers and others who coached.

Other schools founded by Spiritans followed: Francis Libermann, Regina Pacis, Marian Academy. When we celebrated the half-century of McNeil's existence in 2008 we could look back on the pioneering work of giants such as Fr. Michael Troy and Fr. Garry McCarthy with a sense of achievement. We are proud to hand on this thriving, noble work to the next generation of Catholic educators.