

# The Clarion



*Newsletter of the Brothers of Christian Instruction*

## After 111 years, Farewell, Plattsburgh



Pictured: Brothers gathered on May 24, 2014 for the Plattsburgh tribute: Guy Roddy, Andre Millette, Jerome Lessard, Walter Zwierchowski, Charles Thomas, Daniel Caron, Mark Couture and Raymond Fortin

The presence of the Brothers of Christian Instruction in Plattsburgh, NY is coming to an end this summer with the closing of the residence on 93 Court St. The present community of three will be relocated to Notre Dame Institute, the Brothers' retirement facility in Alfred, Maine.

In announcing this decision to regroup Brothers Ray Fortin, Charles Thomas and Mark Couture, Br. Jerome Lessard, Provincial, stated that it was with "very heavy hearts that we face the inevitable, due mainly to decreasing membership and the diminishment in health of our present members - a phenomenon experienced by most religious communities in North America."

One hundred and eleven years ago, a small contingent of French-speaking Brothers settled in the Vilas mansion on North Catherine St. close to the State Normal School where they would attend classes. Immediately they got involved in Catholic education in the parish schools of St. Peter's. Mount Assumption Institute would soon be established. The creation of Seton Catholic Central in 1989 marked a significant change. Even when Br. Fortin's retirement from that

institution in 2010, the Brothers remained active as volunteers in the city.

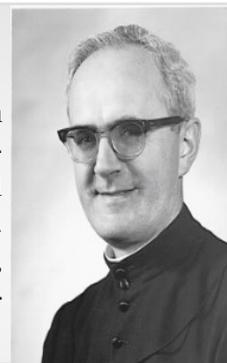
Since the announcement of the pull-out many communications have testified to "the wonderful blessing" the Brothers have been in the Ogdensburg Diocese in New York's North Country. On being notified of the decision Bishop Terry La Valley stated in his letter to the provincial "The Brothers have had a tremendous positive impact on the lives of so many in the Plattsburgh area, not only in the field of education but through their work in social service and social justice. I am extremely grateful for the love of God and the sharing of our faith that has taken place through the presence of your Brothers."

In a press release in *The North Country Catholic*, Bishop La Valley stated that the Brothers truly incarnated the words of their Mission Statement, serving in the spirit of their cofounders: As participants in the life of God who is love, we challenge ourselves to become an evangelical community by willingly sharing who we are, what we are, what we have and by carefully discerning that our lives and our ministry bespeak justice.

"May God bless all the Brothers of Christian Instruction as they continue to share their consecrated lives with God's people. Their presence will be greatly missed."

### May He Rest in Peace

Br. Henri Bernier, age 98, died on April 3 in Biddeford from the results of a fall. To accommodate family members, his funeral took place in Alfred on April 24. As superior in Plattsburgh in 1964, he was the proud construction supervisor of "his" gym.



## A Bitter-sweet Celebration

Br. Francis Blouin

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014, in response to the Brothers' decision to leave the Plattsburgh area, several hundred of their friends gather in the former MAI gym to celebrate the 111 years of dedicated service by the Brothers of Christian Instruction in the Plattsburgh area. Diocesan and educational leaders, parish officials and community friends, alumni and alumnae express their deep appreciation to the Brothers for their educational leadership in the North Country during all that period. The Brothers are comforted by the realization that though their absence will be felt, their influence remains through the thousands of graduates they nurtured during these years.

### Highlights of 111 Years of Service in the North Country

**1903 - On Aug. 15** Br. Ulysses Baron purchases the Vilas property for \$14,000 as a residence for the Brothers attending the Plattsburgh Normal School. Brothers began teaching in St. Peter's elementary school located above the church sacristy. Two adjacent properties were also bought for \$4000.



**1904** - The Brothers were officially incorporated under the title of the Society of Christian Instruction by the New York State Legislature.

**1906** - St. Peter's Academy is formally organized as the parish's elementary school and serves to this day.

**1911** - The American Juniorate is opened at Mount Assumption with Br. Denis Antoine as its Director. Lawrence Higgins, Michael Boulerice, Gabriel Cote, Bernard Guindon and Boniface Crepeau are among its first candidates.

**1916** - Two stories are added to the Vilas Mansion to serve as dormitories and an infirmary.

**1920** - The Juniorate in Plattsburgh is formally closed. Mount Assumption High School is installed in the vacated facilities with Br. Oscar Legault as principal

recruiting 70 students that first year.

**1924** - The impressive four-story expansion to the MAI building on North Catherine St is dedicated allowing for a rapid increase in the school's enrollment.

**1925** - Johnson House at 89 Court St. is purchased

**1926** - Mount Assumption is formally accredited by the NY State Board of Regents.

**1926** - Br. Ephrem Morin, appointed principal of MAI, soon launches a very successful sports program including hockey. He served 40 years in Plattsburgh, 2 terms as principal.

**1928** - The Tierney House on 80 Brinkerhoff Street is purchased and becomes the convent of the Daughters of Charity of the Sacred Heart who arrived in 1933 to assure domestic services at MAI and later as faculty members until 1990.

**1931** - Br. Alix Fresnel is appointed principal serving two separate terms. It is during his administration that Br. David Touchette and Mr. Peter Blessant organized what became known as the most respected high school band in the North Country, receiving top honors during more than twenty years.

**1934** - The "Eucharistic Crusade" is launched to develop a greater devotion to the Blessed Sacrament among students.

**1944** - The Brennan House at the corner of N. Catherine and Court Streets is purchased to serve as the residence for the Brothers assigned to St. Peter's Parish School.

**1959** - The “Dacien wing” housing chapel, study halls and recreation areas is opened in an attempt to improve the academic environment at the school.

**1963** - Alix Hall is purchased to serve as additional accommodations for boarders.

**1964** - The Br. Lawrence Higgins Memorial Gym and Dining Facilities are built under the direction of Br. Henri Bernier.

**1965** - Weekly Bingos are organized in the new gymnasium, soon subsidizing MAI by \$50,000 yearly during a period of 49 years. Many weekly volunteers assist the Brothers in this operation.

**1976** - MAI becomes coeducational and reaches its highest enrollment with 500 students.

**1981** - Bernard Hall is destroyed by fire and replaced by the Bragg House.

**1988** - The death on Oct. 11th of Br. Bernard Guindon (Brother Sir) ends the longest term of any Brother at MAI, 56 years of dedication and loyalty to one institution.

**1989** - On July 1<sup>st</sup>, Mount Assumption Institute and St. John High School are merged to form Seton Catholic Central, a process initiated more than 10 years prior. Br. Daniel Caron is appointed principal, Br. Roland Gaudette, Campus Minister, Br. Guy Roddy, Treasurer, Rene Demers, Alumni Director, a position he held until his death 22 years later at 80 on 9-1-2011. Seton Catholic Central opens with 376 students.

**2002** - Seton Catholic Central is relocated to the former airbase. Br. Raymond is hired as Building and Grounds Supervisor. Br. Rene Demers remained Alumni Director.

**2010** - Br. Raymond Fortin, the last Brother at Seton, retires, ending 107 years of active presence by the Brothers in education in Plattsburgh.

***“Brothers have always been about education, not buildings.”***

-Br. Ray Fortin

**2010, Dec. 10** - Opening of \$8 million Catherine Gardens, a series of affordable apartments in the former MAI complex and grounds.

**May 25, 2014** - Several hundred people representatives of the Catholic diocese and school system, alumni and local parishes gather in the Senior Citizens Center (the former MAI gym) to celebrate the contributions of the Brothers of Christian Instruction who ministered for 111 years in the North Country.



*As teachers they have taught us to know the time to listen, the time to laugh, the time to encourage, the time to show affection, and above all, that the time to love is always. They have encouraged us to defy the impossible, to never be satisfied with mediocrity.* –Msgr. Lawrence Deno

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### **THE CLARION**

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## Walsh's 2014 Alfred Maine Service Experience



This group photo of the 20 Walsh University volunteers with the Brothers of NDI was taken in Notre Dame Chapel during their May 7-14 visit to Maine.

Walsh's AMSE was developed in 2012 by Walsh student Derek Anders '13 (pictured in the back row to the right of Br. Walter) as a way to connect current Walsh students with the history and legacy of the Brothers of Christian Instruction. In visiting Alfred, they learn about La Mennais College and the origins of WU.

Intentional time for prayers, meals, socials was scheduled for shared stories and experiences. Sessions on the history of Notre Dame, the Shakers, vocations and the religious life

provided a better understanding and appreciation of the Brothers' charism and contribution to Walsh.

Work sessions included among many projects painting in Br. Ted's Spiritual Center and spring cleaning of the lake front, Br. Jerry's Cemetery Lane, and the campus Founder's monument. Outings afforded a tour of Maine's southern rocky coast with emphasis of area lighthouses, capped off with a lobster dinner. New this year was participation in York County Shelter's 5K Run/Walk fund raiser held along Kennebunk Beach. The evening walk along the Marginal Way in Ogunquit and a closing ice-cream social added some memorable fun times. Senior and incoming student body president Andrew Chwalik '15 summarized the group's reaction: What a happy experience! The time spent with the Brothers deepens my pride for Walsh, my home!

### Thank you, Clarion Supporters (as of July 1)

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Our sincerest thanks to our friends, who, on the occasion of the passing of Br. Henri Bernier in April, contributed to the Brothers' Retirement Fund.

**Congratulations** to Br. Francis Blouin on the publication of **WE REMEMBER II**, a collection of biographies of Brothers who died since 1988, a sequel to Br. Patrick Menard's Vol. I

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