

**MAPPING A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN RURAL PRINCE EDWARD
ISLAND DURING PARISH RESTRUCTURING**

**THE LIVING CHURCH:
MAPPING A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN RURAL PRINCE EDWARD
ISLAND DURING PARISH RESTRUCTURING**

By

LAURA M. WADDELL, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Laura M. Waddell, B.A. (University of Prince Edward Island)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the importance of local community to Prince Edward Island Catholics during the process of church restructuring. Faced with the possibility of having to close their church buildings due to economic, demographic and pastoral pressures, parishioners have expressed strong attachments to their church buildings and are fighting to keep their churches open. Relying on ethnographic data collected in the summer of 2008 in three church communities on Prince Edward Island, I present the possibility of loss that parishioners face on various levels: of their buildings, their church communities and even their religion. The importance of the cemeteries attached to the church as well as concerns around changing family size show the strong connections that generations of Island families have to their communities. Conflicts over collection funds in the case of church amalgamations are an example of what is at stake in these small communities, where money for the church is circulated mainly among its parishioners. As parishioners seek options to keep their churches open, they become involved in debates about church policy. With these ideas in mind I argue that along with a belief in the doctrines of the larger Roman Catholic Church, local memories and church buildings are an important part of religious life for these parishioners.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Mapping a Community of Faith

The motivation for this project began with a map. In November 2007, the Diocese of Charlottetown, the governing body of all Catholic Church activities on Prince Edward Island, released a map showing the restructuring of the churches in the province. The response from Island Catholics came quickly: they did not want to lose their local churches. Faced with an aging population of parishioners and priests, increased secularization and decreases in revenue, the Diocese of Charlottetown released this plan to cut its current number of churches in half; reducing the number of buildings from 59 to 31 and forming 17 parishes. While the Diocese considers this restructuring a way to support the changes in Catholicism on PEI and a way to “keep the church alive” it is a painful time for parishioners who feel they are losing their local churches and faith communities. Not only will many parishes now share a priest, but almost half of the churches on the Island will not hold regular weekend masses and some may be closed permanently. The Diocese has repeated again and again that “the church is not a building, the people are the church” and has asked parishioners to consider the larger Roman Catholic community in these decisions. However, even as parishioners acknowledge this aspect of their religion, many are reluctant to give up their local churches.

Knowing the history of the Catholic Church on Prince Edward Island, where some parishes are almost 200 years old, and witnessing the anger and

resistance some parishioners are expressing in response to church closures or restructuring, I am interested in the role that community plays in the religious lives of Catholics on Prince Edward Island. Based on ethnographic research conducted in three communities in the summer of 2008, this thesis is an exploration of the importance of locality to the religious identity of members of a rural community. In some ways this is an ethnography about loss and transition as I consider the role of these church buildings in keeping shrinking rural villages on the provincial map. The importance placed on cemeteries and concerns around the changing size of the rural family are indicators of the ties that parishioners have to their communities. As parishioners find new ways to keep their church buildings open, they experience the conflict that often occurs between local religious practices and formal church doctrine and policies. In this thesis I argue that local community is a central component of the experience of religion among these Catholic parishioners.

Theoretical Orientation

Anthropologists have begun to re-evaluate the discipline's idea of "community" as they, along with other social scientists, become aware of the assumptions that are implicit in this group label (Amit 2002, Appadurai 1996, Brydon and Coleman 2008). As globalization becomes an increasingly relevant force in lives around the world, and anthropological subjects become increasingly cosmopolitan agents through migration and movement, researchers have to rethink community. Community can now be experienced through social relations

that may or may not rely on face-to-face meetings and ties to a particular location (Amit 2002). While much of the discussion around changing notions of community comes as anthropologists consider workers crossing international borders and migrants with de-territorialized identities, we must be careful not to privilege movement over the choice to stay in one place. Brydon and Coleman (2008), in their “renegotiation” of the term community focus on place, borrowing Arturo Escobar’s definition of place as “the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (however unstable), sense of boundaries (however permeable), and connection to everyday life” (Brydon and Coleman 2008:10). This rethinking of community as permeable and place as unstable can be applied to the situation on Prince Edward Island. These church communities are grounded by their church buildings, while community members themselves can move in and out of the grouping, attending other churches on occasion, visiting as a tourist or summer resident, or joining or leaving the Roman Catholic religion. Religion is not necessarily concerned with drawing exclusive boundaries around the community as non-Catholics can be welcomed into the church. Classmates and neighbours from another denomination, and husbands and wives from mixed marriages are examples in this study. Movement and instability are themes that recur throughout this community case.

In his exploration of multi-sited fieldwork, Ghassan Hage (2005) uses the term “mobility” to refer to the geographical distance traveled by a person, as well as the concomitant ways in which an individual travels in lifestyle and attitudes.

Mobility in lifestyle can also happen without physical movement, as shown by the experience of parishioners in rural Prince Edward Island. As schools close, families sell their farms or their fishing boats and young people move to western or central Canada for work, Islanders have already begun to experience movement in their rural way of life. Ironically, the majority of parishioners in my study had migrated west at least once in their lives to work in, depending on the generation, Hamilton and other areas of Ontario in the 1950s and 1960s and Edmonton and Calgary in the 1970s and 1980s. Most returned to the Island permanently, and a few visit as summer residents, coming back to the areas where they grew up. They chose to return to the location where they find their community. In this thesis, I use the term “community” to mean a place where people who know each other gather – be it on adjacent pieces of land, in a school or at a church.

In December 2007 the Diocesan Pastoral Initiatives Council (DPIC), the group of priests and laity organized to oversee the parish restructuring in Prince Edward Island, proposed new boundaries for parish communities by re-drawing the map of the Charlottetown Diocese.¹ By suggesting the creation of new parish communities, DPIC challenged the communities that already exist and the committee is encountering resistance in response. At one of the parish restructuring meetings, a representative from DPIC asked Catholics on PEI to “re-evaluate their idea of Christian community more broadly” (Moore 2008). Instead,

¹ The Diocesan Pastoral Initiatives Council is composed of at least seven and no more than ten members of the Diocese who serve a three-year (renewable) term. These members include the Bishop, and priests and lay people from churches across PEI (Diocese of Charlottetown 2009).

in many cases, parishioners are holding onto their church buildings as the “heart” and “centre” of their community. These claims of membership in each parish are an example of “re-imagining community” when the established connections between people and place have been challenged (Nadel-Klein 2003).

The work of anthropologist Anthony Cohen has explored the concept of “belonging” in rural communities in Britain and also shows the importance of geographic location to identity. In the small towns and villages he studied, “people’s knowledge of each other is very much more complete than in the heterogeneous urban environment” (Cohen 1982: 10). The close, supportive relationships shared within a community are perceived to be at risk when the community is told to expand and include Others (Nadel-Klein 2003). For those who grew up, attended school and now work in the same locations, the relationships they have with others in these locations are examples of “multiplex relationships” (Gluckman 1973[1967]). These overlapping, face-to-face relationships provide reinforcement for the church, as the church also reinforces relationships outside of the religious domain.

Given the directive to change locations and expand parish communities, parishioners are responding with varied ideas about where their community is located, and presenting reasons for staying in their familiar localities. How are they defining their communities? Appadurai suggests re-reading ethnographic work on neighbourhoods to understand the production of locality “as a property of social life” (1996:182). In his work, locality is the feeling gained from ritual

activity that is performed to produce a sense of identity. For Durkheim, religion is a representation of society itself and acts of worship tie the individual to his or her community (2001[1912]). Religious beliefs in a village community are often found more in collective celebrations than individual sacraments (Freeman 1968:44). Loyalty to the collectivity versus the importance of sacraments is often at the root of the struggle between popular or local faith and more formal policies or teachings of the official Catholic Church (Badone 1990b). As Island parishioners struggle for ownership of their churches and consider alternative ways to have mass in their own church, they are often in conflict with official church and DPIC ideas.

The closure of churches is not a topic unique to Prince Edward Island. Parishioners told me about relatives undergoing similar processes across Canada, and both Canadian and American newspapers have recently reported on the changes to Roman Catholic dioceses across North America (Mayne 2008; Valpy 2008; Vitello and Haughney 2009). This process is representative of larger societal secularization, a topic of much interest to social scientists studying religion. The “secularization thesis”, as it has been termed, heralds the end of religion. Researchers point to a decline in everything related to religion: from support for the church and a decrease in ritual practices including prayer and church attendance to loss of the belief in God, as signs that religion is disappearing from public life (Brandes 1976; Wilson 1982). While some researchers have argued that secularization is inevitable as it is driven by

modernity, rationalization and progress, others have challenged this model, claiming that both religion and modernity are connected to particular historical processes (Casanova 2006; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008; Stark 1999). These historically specific and not universal forces account for the rise in ongoing religious debates around the world. “Religion,” write Jakobsen and Pellegrini, “has not faded away, nor has it remained contained in the private sphere” (2008:18).² As religions cannot be discussed outside of cultural and historical contexts, neither should “secularisms,” as Jakobsen and Pellegrini (2008) suggest, extending the term to encompass plural accounts of changes to religions. This perspective also recognizes the various debates around the meaning of secularization, which tend to emphasize either changes in ritual practice, or personal beliefs and spirituality. Clearly, religious change is a complex process that is not necessarily unidirectional. For the purposes of the present study, I focus on the public, demographic aspects of religious change on Prince Edward Island. The question of whether religious experience is increasingly located outside the domain of the institutional churches – in individual spirituality or community activities such as sports – is one that requires further research. Regardless of the answer to that question, however, it is clear that secularization is taking place in contemporary Prince Edward Island, if by secularization we understand decreasing participation in formal religious institutions and declining

² Anthropologists have provided much recent research on state secularization and the increasing tensions surrounding religion in the public sphere. See, for example, John Bowen’s (2007) study of *laïcité* in France and Esra Özyürek’s (2006) investigations of private secularism in Turkey.

financial support for those institutions.³ It is these demographic and economic factors that have provided the impetus for the controversial restructuring process.

Given the pressures influencing the potential closure of churches, my ethnography posed the following questions: what aspects of the local faith community are important to parishioners? What do they believe will be lost or gained by joining another faith community? And does the closure of a church building change the meaning of faith for church members?

Locations

Prince Edward Island is Canada's smallest province and is located on the country's east coast, between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (See Figure 1.1). The 2006 Census lists the total provincial population at 135,851 (Statistics Canada 2006). In the 2001 Census almost half of the population, 63,240 people, identified themselves as Catholic (Statistics Canada 2001). Another third of the Island population identified with a Christian denomination such as the United, Baptist or Anglican Church. This religious patterning reflects the settlement history of Scottish, French and Irish populations on Prince Edward Island. With this largely Christian heritage, the image of the steeple and white clapboard church set among red potato fields or beside a small graveyard was a familiar one to Islanders and tourists alike (CBC News 2007). Historically, almost every small

³ This is not only true of the Roman Catholic church on Prince Edward Island, but for the United and Baptist churches in the province, and across North America. See Bibby (1987) for a sociological discussion on the changes to both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in Canada.

village founded a church so that religious services were accessible to those traveling by horse and buggy or boat.

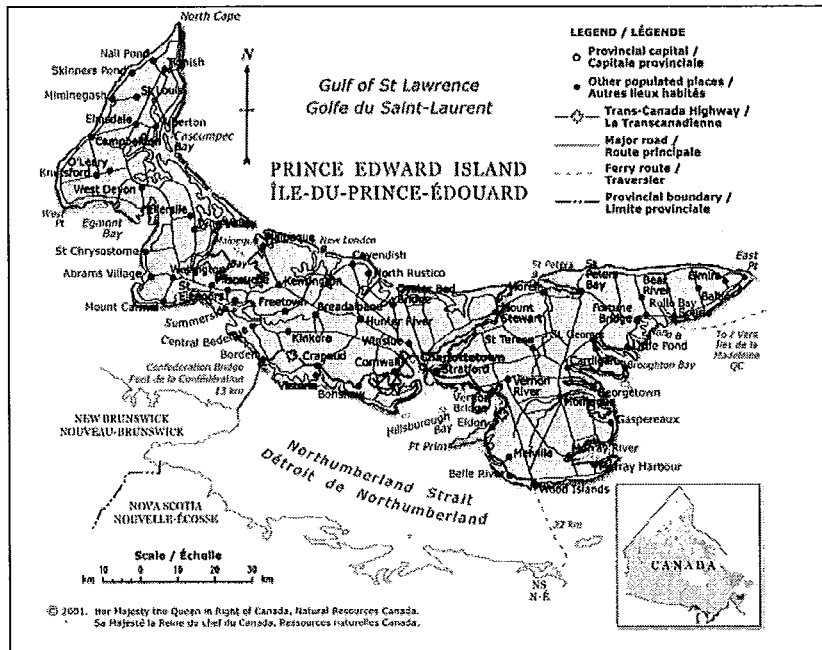


Figure 1.1 Map of Prince Edward Island
(Adapted from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2006, Figure 1).

Currently, however, with a decline in vocations to the priesthood, parishioners choosing to travel by car, and only a third of the 60,000 Catholics attending mass on a weekly basis in the province, the Diocese of Charlottetown is “building poor”: there are too many churches and not enough people and priests to support them (Anne 07/26/08). As a measure to address this problem, DPIC introduced the idea of clusters, or units, of churches, which would share one priest. My research focused on three churches in eastern Prince Edward Island. Two of these churches had been placed by DPIC in separate units, the St. Benedict’s Unit and the St. Luke’s Unit (See Figure 1.2). The third church had

been assigned to one of these clusters but parishioners hoped to be able to join the other. These churches are introduced in Chapter Two.

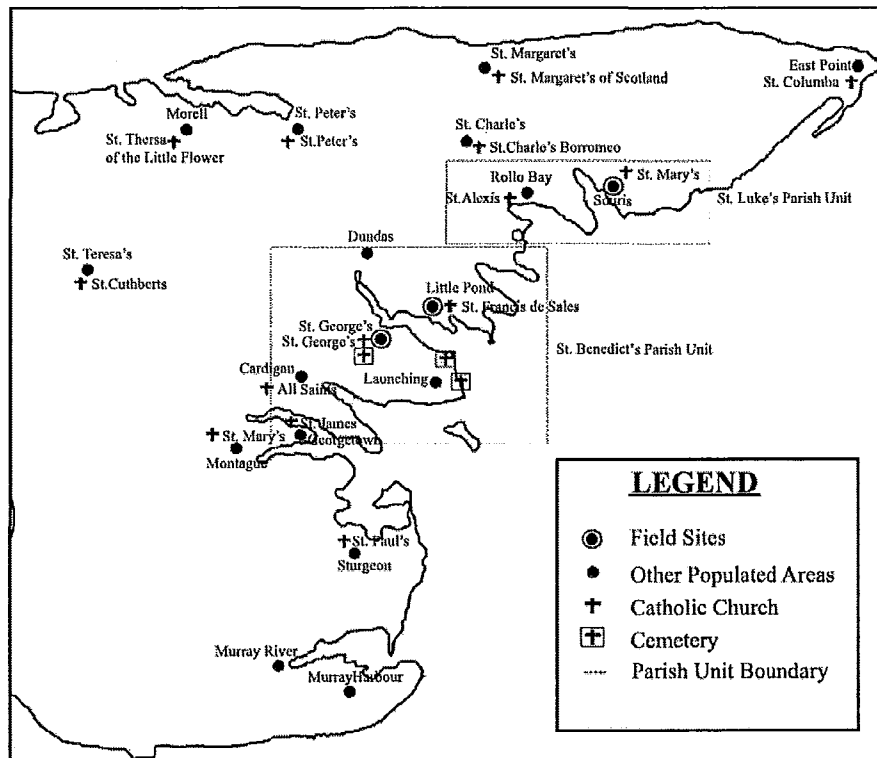


Figure 1.2 Map of Eastern Prince Edward Island Communities with Catholic churches are marked, along with the cemeteries from St. George's (Image Credit: Niedzwiecki 2009).

Fieldwork

I have lived on Prince Edward Island since September 1996 and still consider it home, even while attending school in Ontario.⁴ Both of my parents were raised on Prince Edward Island and their families have a long history in the province. With these connections, the communities that I chose to study were familiar, although this project occasioned the first visit I made to any of the

⁴ I will explore my history and connections to Prince Edward Island more fully in Chapter Two.

churches. I was able to conduct some initial fieldwork in February 2008, when I attended two DPIC meetings, one in the western end of PEI and the other for the St. Benedict's Unit on February 18th, 2008. I moved back to PEI for fieldwork on May 19th, 2008, and started visiting each of the communities during that month, moving to the village of Cardigan on May 31st and living there until August 15th. For eleven weeks I visited people I knew in each of the three communities, setting up interviews by phone in most cases. I attended Sunday mass in at least one of the churches each week and attended any special masses and weekday masses that were held. Much of my participant observation was structured within mass times or gatherings after special services. I also attended two funeral services and one burial, and was able to help out at a funeral tea and volunteer at a Vacation Bible School. In participating in the church community in these structured ways, I followed a pattern typical of many of my interview respondents. Like them, I also made more informal visits to some of the community members I was closest with, popping down to tea after mass or dropping by unannounced if I was driving through the neighbourhood. In these visits I would hear information shared about the churches along with comments on the weather, news about people visiting from away, illnesses in the community, and, in some cases, information on a death and funeral arrangements. My participation changed week to week, depending on how many interviews I was able to organize, or what events were taking place in the community.

The important masses I attended included the outdoor celebrations in the St. Benedict's Unit that were held once a month in the summer, rotating between the churches. St. George's held their outdoor mass on June 22nd, which was also the culmination of their local celebrations of the Eucharistic Conference that was taking place in Québec City, Québec at the same time. According to one parishioner, their unit was the only one on PEI and perhaps the only one in the Maritimes to celebrate the conference. St. Francis de Sales in Little Pond held their unit celebration on Sunday, July 27th, with a lunch provided in the Community Centre afterwards. One of the final services I attended was presided over by a female pastoral associate in a church near my research area. In contrast to the typical mass with a male priest at the altar, this service represented a shift in current Catholic ideas about worship and ritual, which I will discuss further in Chapter Six.

Discussion of Chapters

Chapter Two begins with an introduction to the restructuring process and a summary of themes in comments from parishioners across the Island that support my thesis. I also provide a history of the Diocese of Charlottetown, as recounted by historian Reverend John C. MacMillan (1913) and the various parishioners whose churches I visited during the summer of 2008. It is the memories of these parishioners that provide the introduction to the churches in my study. I also rely on those no longer alive to give a history of sorts, as this chapter focuses on the community that remains even after living members have gone – in the cemeteries.

My methodology for this project would not have been possible without my knowledge of and family connections to Prince Edward Island. For this reason, I have combined my third chapter, on my research methods, with a reflection on my fieldwork. In this chapter, I explore my choice of this project and what it meant personally for me to return to PEI to undertake the ethnographic research for my Master's thesis. I rely on Ruth Behar's (1996) reflections on the death of her grandfather to consider my own response to my grandfather's death in November 2008. When I returned to Prince Edward Island for his funeral I was overwhelmed with the support that came from members of the surrounding community, many of whom I had met through my research.

In Chapter Four I explore what being "rooted" means to parishioners and how the church building helps tie them to a particular place and its heritage. The church building is the last public institution in many of these villages. The churches are landmarks, gathering places and markers of historic and religious identity. Moreover, since the parishioners fund the maintenance of their churches, the idea of having to move and share a history with another group is one many resist. While the Diocese of Charlottetown has implored parishioners to remember that "the church is not a building, the people are the church" many parishioners suggested building one new large church for each unit as a solution to problems of distinct church community identity. In this way, the physical place of worship would remain an important part of religious and community practices.

Chapter Five takes up the theme of community by describing some of the relationships outside of the church. St. Francis de Sales, the church in Little Pond, is part of a mixed religious community. This area has a history of ecumenical practices that arose from the existence of both a United and Catholic church in the same neighbourhood. In this chapter I also report on parishioners' thoughts on such religiously controversial topics including birth control and abortion and how their opinions on these subjects provide some insight into their ideas about continuity and community.

In Chapter Six I explore divisions in the larger Catholic community caused by the tensions between popular religious belief and formal church policy. Local pressures, including the ones that guide the restructuring process, have forced parishes to consider alternatives to the celibate male priest and the practice of confession. Parishioners' support of such alternatives would allow them to keep their churches open, contradicting the Diocesan plan to amalgamate resources for more outreach.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, the Conclusion, I use the example of my final day in the field to reflect on many of the themes that come out of this ethnographic research.

Chapter Two

History and Memory

Introduction

This chapter presents a history of the restructuring process as well as the Diocese of Charlottetown and the churches in my project. As DPIC has relied on responses from parishioners to frame its plans, so too do I use their voices in the stories of the churches. Much of the history of my research locations is reconstructed from memories recounted by parishioners. Their deep connection to their local histories is also expressed in their concern for the cemeteries, attached to the local churches, as these burial places contain generations of parishioners' families, the people who first told the stories that were transmitted to me.

Background

The current plans for parish restructuring have been ongoing since 1994, and are organized by the Diocesan Parish Initiatives Council, or DPIC, the group of priests and laity organized to oversee the restructuring process. In the last 14 years, DPIC has responded to changes in local demographics and church attendance by closing three churches⁵, shifting from a “one priest-one parish” model to “one priest-multiple parishes” and, most controversially, by presenting the Island-wide plan for church restructuring (See Figure 2.1).

⁵ One of these churches, St. Mary's of the People Church in Hunter River, closed during my fieldwork. While I did not attend the closure I spoke to Anne, a member of DPIC who told me about the decommissioning process and the plans for the building. Her comments are included in Chapter Three.

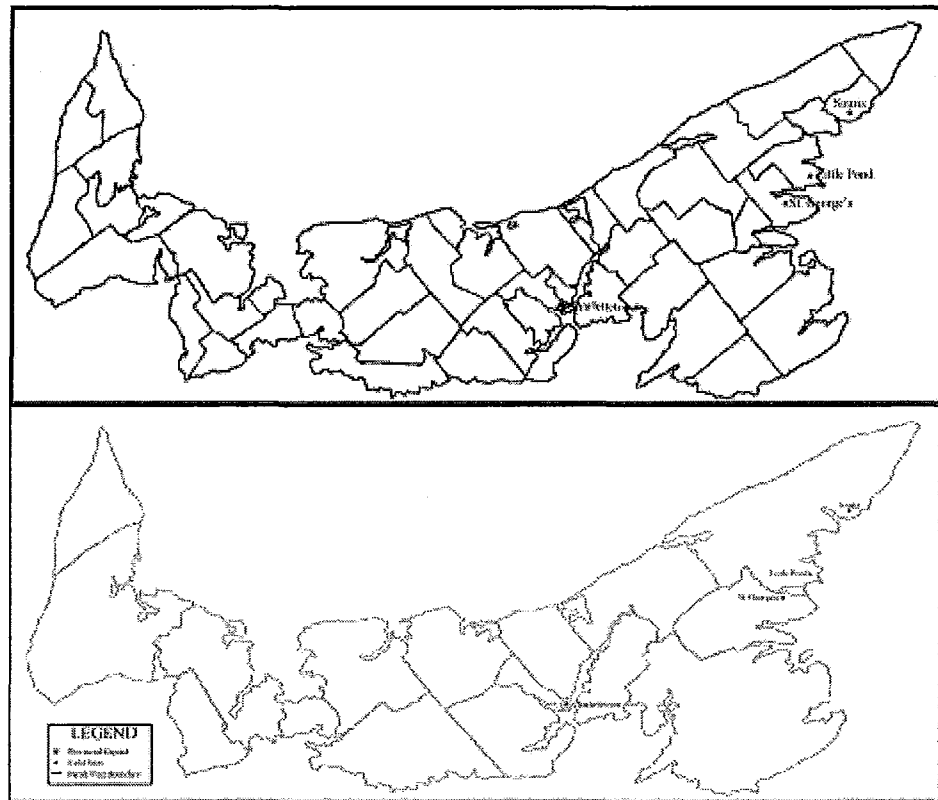


Figure 2.1 Two Maps of Parish Units in the Diocese of Charlottetown
Top image depicts the parish units before November 2007; many of the parish boundaries included only one church. Bottom image shows the map released in November 2007 which introduced the proposed parish units (Images adapted from Diocese of Charlottetown 2007c).

Many Island Catholics believe that the DPIC plan will involve the closure of almost half of the current church buildings. However, the list of churches to be closed has never been released, nor does the Council want church closures to be the main focus of the restructuring, as I will explain shortly. When DPIC released the map in November 2007, the Committee also asked each church to answer a series of questions. The results of this questionnaire were presented at further parish meetings in early 2008. At these parish meetings, held during January and February 2008, parishioners responded to the proposed changes by discussing

their church priorities and advancing reasons why their buildings should be kept open.

It was at these meetings that DPIC stressed that its mandate was not to close any churches, but that a plan was needed in case churches might have to be shut down in response to demographic, economic and pastoral pressures. Various churches in eastern PEI have chosen to close for a few months in recent winters in order to save money on heating and decrease the need for visiting priests to drive in stormy weather. With these temporary closures in mind, the head of the Diocese of Charlottetown, Bishop Vernon Fougère stated it will be parishioners who will close their own churches, as these economic and demographic changes will eventually force members of the smaller churches to leave their buildings indefinitely and join another church. The choice to close has been left with local church communities, but through the restructuring process, parishioners are much more aware that they have to make a responsible decision. Unit clusters, not closures, are the current focus of restructuring.

Speaking to DPIC members over the course of the summer, I frequently heard of the need to have a plan, particularly in case priests were lost. The Diocese of Charlottetown reported that in 2007 there were 32 active clergy in the diocese and of those, 6 were above the age of 65 and another 9 were between the ages of 60 and 65 (Diocese of Charlottetown 2007a). That number was reduced to 29 active priests during my summer of fieldwork in 2008 as one priest retired, another left the priesthood entirely and one was on sick leave. The rhetoric of the

diocesan leaders has shifted from “leaving the responsibility with the people” into what Anne⁶, a DPIC member has called “crisis management.” As she put it, “We’re one heart attack away from a problem” (07/26/08). The DPIC plan is now in place in case churches have to close for a lack of priests.

After the Island-wide meetings in January and February 2008, DPIC released a summary report in April 2008. This report was soon followed by the announcement of annual priestly appointments which introduced the new parish clusters, a slightly scaled-back version of the originally proposed parish re-mapping which came out of the winter meetings and April summary. This is the environment I entered in June 2008 when I arrived in eastern PEI to begin my fieldwork.

Terms

I have separated the terms “church” and “parish” in this project, although at times I became confused about this separation myself. My initial distinction between these categories, to facilitate analysis and to refer to the groupings “before” and “after” the DPIC plan, could not be easily maintained. I have tried consistently to use the term “church” to refer to the physical building where masses are held, as in “St. Mary’s Church.” The term “parish” refers to the people who make up the group that uses and worships in the building. “St Mary’s parish” refers to the community located at that church. “Parish Unit” is DPIC’s preferred

⁶ In order to protect the identities of the participants in my research, all names have been changed. Exceptions to this include the various priests and nuns associated with the churches in my study.

term for the cluster⁷ of parishes that come together, eventually to form a “multi-point parish”, or one community group using various locations for worship. The formation of these clusters in the diocese is the current goal of DPIC.

The example in my research is St. Benedict’s Parish Unit, the title of a group of four churches that share a priest. None of the churches carry the name “St. Benedict’s”, but this title has been given to the organization of activities, schedules, and governing bodies shared among these four churches. This unit includes St. Francis de Sales Church in Little Pond, St. George’s Church in St. George’s, All Saints Church in Cardigan and St. James’ Church in Georgetown. The first two churches became part of my study and the third was my home church while I lived in Cardigan for the summer. Since All Saints was the church attended by my mother in her youth, and my grandparents continue to attend church there, I felt it might be a conflict of interest to interview those parish members, although I did participate in community events in the area. As it was one of the churches in the St. Benedict’s cluster or parish unit, All Saints become another place in which to encounter members of the other churches in the unit, including those from St. George’s and St Francis de Sales churches. These particular churches will be discussed later in this chapter.

History

While I was in the process of preparing to write my thesis, my grandmother asked me if I would include a chapter on the history of the churches

⁷ Cluster is a term used previously by DPIC.

on Prince Edward Island. “Not to push you,” she said, “but I think it would be a good idea to talk about the hard work that went into building these churches in the first place.” Reading Rev. John C. MacMillan’s (1913) history of the Catholic Church in Prince Edward Island, I could sense the pride with which he recorded the building of each new church. For example, concerning the construction of St. Augustine’s Church in North Rustico in 1838, MacMillan writes: “the occasion called forth unbounded enthusiasm in every quarter of the parish” as “the good Acadians of Rustico were proud of their church, for it was the largest in the Diocese” (MacMillan 1913:25).

The first Catholics to settle on Prince Edward Island arrived from France in 1720 and were served by two Sulpician priests who accompanied them (O’Shea 2003:9). They were followed ten years later by French-speaking colonists, who became known as the Acadians, from Nova Scotia. The first Scottish immigrants landed on the Island in 1772 and in the following years, more arrivals took up residence in the area of King’s County, one of the three counties currently making up Prince Edward Island. Since King’s County is in the eastern end of the province, the descendents of these Scottish immigrants probably helped build the churches in my study. The first priests serving these communities came from Scotland as immigrants themselves. In 1822 the first Island-born priest, Father Bernard MacDonald, was ordained, while the area was still part of the Diocese of Québec. Prince Edward Island did not become the separate Diocese of Charlottetown until 1829 (O’Shea 2003:11). About this time, many Irish Catholic

immigrants were arriving and continued to come in large numbers until the 1850s, settling the western parts of the Island, including Kelly's Cross and Kinkora (O'Shea 2003:12). Lebanese (Syrian) immigrants, most of them Catholic, began arriving in 1888, some settling in Tracadie, while the majority took up residence in Charlottetown (O'Shea 2003:13). With a large population of Catholics in the newly formed province, serving them become as pressing a concern as building places for them to worship.

Before 1840, a few young men from the Island had been sent on scholarships to study for the priesthood in Rome but many became ill before they had finished their studies. One newly ordained priest, Father Eugene MacEachern, died on board the ship taking him back across the Atlantic to Prince Edward Island (MacMillan 1913:27-8). In 1831 St. Andrew's College, a Catholic university, was created in the house of Bishop Angus MacEachern (O'Shea 2003:15). One of the first priests to attend St. Andrew's College was Reverend Francis John MacDonald. After studying at the Grand Seminary in Québec, he was ordained June 28th, 1840 (MacMillan 1913:34). Upon ordination, Father Francis was appointed to the southern half of King's County. He chose to base his residency in Launching, the first location of St. George's Church and the place where I encountered people in 2008 who remembered stories about his miracles.

When Father Francis was a priest, he served the area from Rollo Bay to Murray Harbour, or the whole eastern end of Prince Edward Island (Refer to Figure 1.2). In 2008 that same geographic area, almost 170 years later, included

14 churches. At the time when Father Francis became a priest, the population of Catholics was 20,429, not quite half of the 47,034 people on the island (MacMillan 1913:35). The 1841 Census lists the Catholic population of King's County, most of Father Francis' area, as 6,652 people (Statistics Canada 1841). In the late 19th century the strain of a lack of priests was evident, although MacMillan states that the role of St. Andrew's College was to help prepare more priests, "and soon the supply will so come up to the demand, that at least the more populous centres may rejoice in the presence of a resident priest" (1913:35). One of the earliest populous centres to have a church and priest was what has become St. George's parish.

St. George's Church

The parish that currently uses St. George's Church has existed in at least four different buildings and three different locations. Originally constructed as a log building for Scottish immigrants in 1802 at Launching, this chapel was located along the Cardigan River so that it would be accessible by boat for those living along the river or across it on Boughton Island (Refer to Figure 1.2). One history of the area states that the founding families gathered in the log building on Sundays and holy days, although Father MacEachern, one of two priests on the Island at the time, could only come and administer the sacraments every three or four months (Christian 1997:7). In the early days of the Roman Catholic Church on Prince Edward Island, the "one priest – one parish" model was unknown.

Within 20 years the church moved a mile inland, leaving behind the first of three church cemeteries. The second building, which one parishioner described “as about the size of a small bungalow” was dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel and it was in use for almost 40 years before the church moved again (O’Shea 2003: 81). In response to demographic changes and the movement of families inland, a new church was built in the community of St. George’s in 1860. This move caused some problems at the time, which are still recalled by current parishioners, including Stephen, a lifetime member of church, who told me,

I can remember as a kid hearing stories when I went to my grandparent’s in Launching, you know, about the movement of the church. Back in those days people had their own pews. They literally built and took their own seats to the church. So what they did was they went to the church in Launching and they took their pews out of the church because they weren’t going to St. Georges. (06/08/08).

There is a history lesson in these stories about former St. Michael’s parishioners long dead, who, current St. George’s parishioners told me, eventually rejoined the new church. Over time, they accepted the changes. “And we will too,” one semi-retired couple, Stephen and Christina, told me, “But”, Stephen said, “it’s not something that comes easy, closing your church, or if that has to happen. It’s a very hard thing” (06/08/08).

Another hardship endured by the St. George’s parishioners occurred in 1943 on Easter Sunday, perhaps the most holy day in the Catholic calendar. On this Sunday, the old wooden church burned to the ground. The church was not rebuilt until 1952 when the community was able to raise enough funds (O’Shea

2003:81). Many parishioners from St. George's commented on this event, even if they could not remember the exact year that it had occurred. Some people told me about their memories of hearing the news of the fire and having to attend mass in the hall until the new church was built. Christina's grandfather worked on the construction of the building. Margaret, now a former member of St. George's who currently lives in Little Pond, told me the story of the new suit and matching hat that she received for the opening of the church. These memories provide many parishioners with a connection to the church and in some cases, generate a sense of failure that this building, rebuilt during their lifetime, may not remain open.



Figure 2.2 St. George's Church The current building and location of St. George's church (Image Credit: Waddell, June 10, 2008).

Jane, who, with her husband, bought the family farm from her parents and lives just below their original farmhouse, expressed regret that St. George's may have to close, since her parents and grandparents had worked so hard to maintain a church in that location. As she says,

If they owed any bills anywhere else, the church collection came first. They did not spend any money on themselves, they did not owe people and they supported their church. It wasn't easy being farmers, I didn't realize until after I was well grown up how tight it was (07/22/08).

Jane's words illustrate the importance of the place the church occupied in the lives of previous generations.

The current church in St. George's, which serves 110 families in a farming and predominantly Catholic community north of Cardigan, is the only community building and it is used for funerals and teas, wedding showers, fundraising suppers, Catholic Women's League (CWL) meetings, and card games. Some parishioners may be at the church five to ten times a month, outside of attending weekly mass. For those living in the area and attending St. George's, it is hard to face the possibility that the church may close. As Christina said in her interview, "I can't conceive of going down that road and coming over the hill there and not seeing that church. It's just there."

St. Francis de Sales

St. Francis de Sales Church was built in 1863 to serve a small number of Acadian and Scottish families in the village of Little Pond (Refer to Figure 1.2). Father Dugald MacDonald took over the northern part of King's County, the areas of East Point, St. Margaret's, Souris and Rollo Bay earlier that year



Figure 2.3 St. Francis de Sales Church. This is one of the oldest wooden churches on PEI (Image Credit: Waddell, June 9, 2008).

and learned that the people of Little Pond had plans to build a church on Lot 65, an area of Little Pond (MacMillan 1913: 252). Bishop MacIntyre, "who was an

enthusiast in church building” supported the project, as parishioners were willing to build their own church.⁸ However, before the church was built, Father Francis MacDonald, from Launching, expressed some concern regarding the building plans, as it was from his missions that this new church would be created (252). Father Francis’ objections foreshadow the discussion among the present-day Diocesan leadership as he,

[D]id not approve of multiplying churches in localities where there was no prospect of any notable increase of population, because he believed that missions thus formed would never be self-sustaining, and would consequently be a hindrance to effective parochial work, by withdrawing the pastor from the main part of his people for the sake of attending to a few (MacMillan 1913: 252).

Comments of this type can be found in the DPIC documents and were expressed at meetings. In 2008 the issue became one of making a decision for the larger community as DPIC asked smaller parishes to think about how far their resources could be stretched for the greater good of the Catholic Church on Prince Edward Island. Those with whom I spoke on DPIC seem to be promoting a “big picture” view of Catholicism, thinking of the organization of the provincial church and its role in community outreach as opposed to localized communities and practices.

Little Pond is a mixed religious community, and this point was made over and over by parishioners to suggest that their community identity does not depend

⁸ This sense of responsibility, independence and hard work continues in the area today. Parishioners told me that any time they needed something done on the small church, they always managed to raise the money for it.

only on the church, as it might in a predominantly Catholic community such as St. George's. Overlapping identities came into play in one interview, as Jevan, a farmer and father spoke of the "extended communities" to which he belonged through school, his wife's family and his children's hockey team. Suppers, anniversaries, even funeral teas for both United Church members and Catholics are held in the community centre, the former two-room schoolhouse across the road from the church. St. Francis de Sales church, perhaps because it was very small to begin with, has never had a resident priest, and this fact may result in both its strength and weakness. The parishioners themselves are the ones who must fight for the church, and when a priest refuses to drive out to them in the winter, mass cannot be held. The church continues to exist as a parish, even without the guidance of a priest. Initiatives over the summer of 2008 involved hiring retired priests to say mass, at the price of \$100 a Sunday. The money was obtained from the weekly collection, which increases during the summer tourist season since visitors to the parish attend mass and contribute to the collection.

The church currently serves 40 families, or 125 parishioners, and has, over the years, shared pastoral leadership with churches in the nearby communities of Souris, Rollo Bay, St. Charles and St. George's (Diocese of Charlottetown 2008, O'Shea 2003). It became clear to me when I began interviews with the parishioners that there is a certain amount of uncertainty about where the church in Little Pond belongs.

The physical building of St. Francis de Sales church has a very different history from St. George's. The current building is the same one that was built and then opened and dedicated to St. Francis de Sales in November 1863 (MacMillan 1913: 253; See Figure 2.3). A wooden church 150 years old is a rare thing on Prince Edward Island as many of the original churches from that era have been lost to fires (O'Shea 2003). Parishioners told me about the various literal connections they have with the church as they continue to live in the community, what Taylor (1995:27) calls a "physical 'archive'", where the building and its location are actual pieces of the community history. Margaret lives on the land that housed the cottage of Paul Lawless, the Irish-born blacksmith who smelted the handles and hinges still on the door of the church (06/16/08). Others remember the parish house, never lived in by a resident priest, but used by those visiting for weekend masses or as accommodation for members of religious orders who came to present missions to the community. In the past, Redemptorist priests, like those in Taylor's (1995) study of Irish Catholics, gave missions at St. Francis de Sales. More recently it has been priests or nuns from visiting provinces who have held weekend missions, a shift similar to the move away from the 'classic' style of mission that Badone (1989) notes in Brittany after the 1950s. These missions on PEI, often meant to reinforce formal practices in the church or promote a revival of faith, are also remembered for the entertainment that they brought to the community, as in Catholic Europe (Badone 1989; Taylor 1995).

People in Little Pond also tell stories from childhood memories about what went on in the church at lunchtime during Lent⁹ almost 50 years ago. For about 20 minutes during the break for lunch, the Catholic children from the mixed school would cross the road from the two-room schoolhouse and go into the church to pray the Stations of the Cross. “And sometimes”, tells Caroline, a retired parishioner, “it was a bit irreverent” (06/09/08). One of the pictures displayed inside the church depicts a bearded St Francis de Sales. As Caroline says, “I remember one day another student announcing that he was going to bring a razor the next day for St. Francis to shave. I reminded him of that one day a couple of years ago. Of course he didn’t remember it.” Another woman from Little Pond, Shelley, who told me about these prayers, was also a student at the school, but not a Catholic:

We were the only Protestant family that used to go across to the church with our friends for the visits, when they were saying their prayers during lunchtime. We used to have to go in through the vestry and put the vestry cloth on our head and we’d go out and sit into the seat and our friends would go and do the Stations of the Cross and I always thought, “Our church is so plain – a Protestant church is so plain, there’s nothing to it – I always thought that church in Little Pond was the most beautiful church there was. It really had a nice altar. I always thought, it was so beautiful compared to Annandale [United] church (06/16/08).

⁹ Lent is comprised of the 40 days leading up to Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday, a day of fasting. In recognition of the sacrifices that Christ made during his 40 days alone in the desert, many Catholics use this time to pay particular attention to the Stations of the Cross, or the Passion of the Christ, the 14 steps that tell the story of his crucifixion. In honour of Christ’s Passion, many Catholics use this as a time for their own sacrifices, including abstaining from certain foods or making extra time to pray during the day.

In Little Pond it is clearly not only the Catholics who have memories of the church building and an interest in it, but also people of other religious backgrounds living in the community.¹⁰ Those non-Catholics may have attended St. Francis de Sales for weddings or funerals of friends, sat through prayers there as children or just admired the church. In this community, the building has both sacred and secular meanings.

St. George's and St. Francis de Sales are part of the larger St. Benedict's Parish unit, a grouping of four churches under one group of pastoral care. Studying these churches together shows me people who are already in the process of joining church communities. Members of both of these churches believe they could be closed sooner than others in the unit so participants have had time to consider their concerns and wishes for the future.

St. Mary's

My third church was St Mary's, located in the town of Souris¹¹ which was half an hour's drive from my home for the summer. Souris is one of the larger towns in eastern PEI (Refer to Figure 1.2). As a result, St Mary's is in no danger of closing as it serves almost 500 families. St. Mary's Church held its first mass in 1839 for a small group of English and Acadian parishioners although that first

¹⁰ I did not set out to interview non-Catholics in any of the communities I visited but as Shelley happened to be at Margaret's house during the interview she was more than happy to talk to me about church closures in both the United and Catholic dioceses.

¹¹ Souris, the French term for "mouse", gained its name from the early plagues of mice experienced by the French settlers in the area (O'Shea 2003:86).

building was destroyed by fire just ten years later (O’Shea 2003:86). In 1901 a much larger sandstone church, designed by William Harris¹², was built to accommodate the increasing (and predominantly Catholic) population in Souris. Only the outer shell of the building survived a fire in 1928, but from those ruins, the current church was rebuilt and opened in 1930 (O’Shea 2003:86).



Figure 2.4 St. Mary’s Church
(Image Credit: Waddell, July 28, 2008).

St. Mary’s shares a priest with St. Alexis, a smaller church located just 5 kilometres away in Rollo Bay and together these churches are known as the St. Luke’s Parish Unit. The priest in this parish unit says that he and parish council members are concerned about ensuring that St. Alexis does not feel it has been “taken

over” by St. Mary’s. As many parishioners from St. Francis de Sales would attend St. Mary’s if their own church were to close, I sought to discover what community means to parishioners in this “welcoming church”.

The Church and its Surroundings

One tension that I found in my interviews with parishioners and DPIC members involved differing priorities concerning the upkeep of church buildings

¹² William Critchlow Harris is a well-known architect in the Maritimes, responsible for the design of many gothic churches and buildings in PEI, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in the late 1800s. See Tuck (1978) for more on Harris’ history and works.

as opposed to plans for outreach and the development of the larger Catholic community on Prince Edward Island. One DPIC member suggested that parishioners were clinging to their churches and becoming embittered when favours were granted to other churches because these tangible things are easier to grasp than an understanding of the larger Catholic community. However, as another DPIC member later admitted, and as I was to find in my interviews, cemeteries are one of the most important concerns in the debate around church closures, both for reasons related to the tangible location of the burial ground as well as the historic and spiritual attachments to the people interred at these sites.

Cemeteries

The circle of who is included in the church community unquestionably encompasses those located not far from the building itself: the people buried in the cemetery. The cemeteries and their survival was one of the first and most common concerns expressed after the DPIC plan came out in the fall of 2007. The November document contains information about cemeteries, but unfortunately is rather vague. The burial grounds have always been the responsibility of the churches. The cost of cemetery maintenance has traditionally been covered by the weekly collections at mass. If closures were to take place, would the church community that remained open be responsible for maintaining the cemeteries from the other closed churches as well?

One parishioner from St. George's, Peter, showed me how poorly that responsibility has been carried out in the past. St. George's Church, one of the

oldest churches on Prince Edward Island, has three cemeteries, one at each of the sites where the building has been located over the last 200 years (Refer to the cemetery locations in Figure 1.2). The current cemetery, known as Malcolm's Hill, shares the hill with the church and has been in use for over 150 years. Peter took me to visit the next oldest cemetery in a field just off the main road in Launching where St. Michael's Church was located. This burial ground, dominated by a large white cross, is overgrown with weeds, but if one looks carefully, a few headstones can be found at the crossroads of Primrose Rd. and Bruce Point Rd (See Figure 2.5).



Figure 2.5 St. George's Second Cemetery In use from about 1820 to 1860 this cemetery is now only tended by volunteers from the parish (Image Credit: Waddell July 9, 2008).

As we left this second site, Peter told me that when they were erecting the white cross in this cemetery they disturbed a grave and unearthed some bones. His daughter, an X-ray specialist, was able to identify one as a leg bone, which she though probably belonged to someone about her size. He asked himself, and

repeated to me, “Now what was this person thinking, what was this person’s life like at this time?”

The third and oldest cemetery in St. George’s parish is considered a Pioneer Cemetery on PEI. To get to it, you have to drive down as far as Bruce Point Road will take you and then make the turn onto St. Michael’s Road. The land itself is owned by someone in the United States, but I was told that he is very conscientious about the fact that there are human remains on his property. Visiting the site, one follows along the tractor line of the field closest to the road for about 100 metres to the edge of some wild grasses, a few metres from a grove of trees. The trees mark where you will find the burial ground and from the edge of the field you should be able to make out a dike, which is the only sign of any boundary to the cemetery (See Figure 2.6).¹³ You can follow the grove around until you are looking out over Boughton Bay and you will see where parishioners have erected a headstone commemorating the first church members buried in the cemetery, the original Scottish settlers in the area who used the cemetery from about 1795 to 1820 (Christian 1997).

¹³ The first Bishop to visit Prince Edward Island in 1803 commented in a letter after his visit that cemeteries were permitted wherever there was a chapel, but instructed that they must be blessed and well fenced in (Christian 1997:9). The dike was probably built after that letter.



Figure 2.6 Pioneer Cemetery at Launching The trees that mark the boundaries of St. George's first burial ground, overlooking Boughton Bay (Image Credit: Waddell July 9, 2008).

As we left this final site, Peter told me that his primary concern about the restructuring process is what will happen to these cemeteries; he even asked me what I thought should be done. During our interview, he did not have much to say about rejuvenating the church, preferring to tell me stories about local church history. His connection to the past was clear when he posed the question: “what is the point in closing church buildings when there are cemeteries attached to them that still need to be maintained?” Perhaps because of the cemeteries he has seen abandoned in St. George's parish and the guilt he personally feels about their abandoned state, Peter believes that the church community extends to include the deceased. If the dead are still present in the area, the church building should stay there as well. Peter is not the only parishioner concerned about the cemeteries.

Other members of St. George's Church worry that what has happened to the older cemeteries in their parish is a preview of what will happen to other Catholic cemeteries should the churches close. Jennifer, a parishioner from St. Francis de Sales, told me about the day she got lost driving around St. George's and came across the cemetery in Launching. She was shocked to see the state of it, overgrown with weeds and said, "Even if it is from the 1800s there has to be ancestors now that belong to those people there. I think it's sad to see something like that happen because they were people at one time. Why isn't somebody maintaining that?" (07/28/08). For various reasons, there is not money to maintain these other cemeteries and the care for these older burial grounds has been left to volunteers, like Peter. He fears that if St. George's Church building and others close on Prince Edward Island this history, of cemeteries without any formalized care, will be the future.

Feelings of Family Members

When I asked parishioners about plans for their own funeral and the location they would choose for the related rituals, almost all of them told me they would choose burial over cremation and most said they would choose to be buried in the cemetery of their local church, regardless of whether or not the church itself was still open or being used for services. A familiar explanation from parishioners for their choice was because "all of my family are there, my parents are there, my grandparents are there" (07/22//08). Some people even became very emotional when talking about their parents' graves. Jane, a woman in her

late 50s, teared up as she spoke about the beauty of the cemetery where the birds were always singing whenever she went to visit her mother's grave. Diane, a parishioner in her 40s with two small children, almost cried as she considered what might happen to the cemetery if the church was abandoned. The thought that the church building might fall into ruins on the land where her father was buried was quite distressing for her.

The parishioners who had trouble thinking ahead about their exact burial location were those in mixed marriages, in which each partner belongs to a different religion. Of the five such women I spoke to, all were Catholic and in three of the cases, the only partner practicing her religion. Most of their husbands had been raised Protestant, either United or Presbyterian. For those in mixed marriages, burial is complicated by the fact that each church and separate denomination has its own cemetery. The question arises of where each partner will be buried: with their parents and relatives or with their husband and family who belong to another denomination? These questions of kinship are not uncommon in Catholic burial practices. Ariès (1981:74) states that French rural parishioners in the 18th century were already concerned with keeping families together after death, including the question of whether or not wives would be buried with their husbands. Badone (1989:143) writes that in Brittany the limitations of the caveau, the vault containing between six and twelve spaces for deceased family members, "pose problems concerning the definition of a kin group." In cases of mixed marriages on PEI, it becomes a question of who the

individual belongs to, the family and religion of origin, or the one that they created with a partner and children. As Diane, whose husband is a practicing Presbyterian, said, she would like to be buried in the cemetery of her church, but being only in her early 40s with a young family, she's not sure just what may happen in the coming years. She jokes with her husband, saying, "if I die young, bury me with my own because you'll probably get a new wife. If we're old, I'll go with you, but if I'm young, you'll probably have someone else!" (07/15/08).

Who is Buried There?

There is a sense of entitlement to the cemetery that complicates the issue of who has the right to be buried in a particular location. Longstanding members of the community understand that they will be buried in the local cemetery and know that their weekly donation to the collection at mass helps pay for cemetery maintenance. But some people expressed concern about those who have lived and died "off Island" and return only to be buried. Their contribution to cemetery care is small, perhaps only enough for the plot and a donation for the priest who officiates at the burial service.

The reality, according to Father Molina, the Chancellor of the diocese and a member of DPIC, is that it is only those families who have lost relatives in the last 10 years who are providing funds for the maintenance of the whole cemetery. While in many cases the local parishioners are descendants of those who built the original churches, their actual cemetery visits are limited to their close relatives and their donations last only as long as their adult lives. This timeline explains

how two graveyards from St. George's, both now over 150 years old, have been all but abandoned. Not many people know who is actually buried in the pioneer cemetery at Launching. As both of the above examples show, there is a definite connection between family relationships and locale; and many who are buried in the rural church cemeteries have both of these connections, having lived in the area with their families for most of their lives. I will explore these connections further in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. For many of the parishioners of these churches in eastern PEI, the cemetery is sacred ground. As evidenced by Peter's questions about the owner of the bone, there is an interest in those who were previously members of the community, even if their identity has long been forgotten.

Funeral Teas

The French writer Rabelais said that “[Paris] was a good town to live in, but not to die in,” owing to the large population of beggars and derelicts that lived around the cemetery (Ariès 1981:70). In rural churches on PEI, the opposite comment is heard. One woman said at a unit meeting, “St. George's is a good church to die in” because of the renown of the teas held after funerals and the prayers said at the grave. St. George's was not the only church that could claim such a reputation. Parishioners from Kinkora said the same at their meeting in February 2008 and women from All Saints Church in Cardigan exchanged ideas about how the tea was organized in other churches in order to improve their own practices. Funeral teas are serious events, supported mostly through volunteer

donations of food and time, although that practice has changed in some parishes. A former member from Kinkora mentioned that the church now charged a fee for the tea, not to pay the volunteers, who still donate their time, but as a matter of principle to support the church. This pride of the many who work at the teas, and the creation of a set fee, much like other services that accompany a funeral, show what an institution this is in Catholic funerary practices on Prince Edward Island. However, the practice of charging a set fee also attests to the decline in the church community, because the fee is used to raise funds from those using the church for the funeral who may not be regular church contributors. Parishioners frequently mentioned the tensions surrounding the use of the church and concept of set fees in our conversations, as they struggled with the idea of having their church available for mass for everyone, but also realized the cost of its upkeep with declining attendance.

For these teas to function effectively, most members of the Catholic Women's League (CWL) in a parish provide a plate of sweets or tray of sandwiches and help out in organizing the donations of refreshments, setting up the hall, serving and cleaning up after the funeral tea. In addition to calling other church members for donations, the CWL members also phone the neighbours of the deceased, who may not be Catholic themselves, to ask for food donations, as neighbours tend to give generously. Along with bringing food to the family, often part of a community's response to a death (Ashenburg 2002), on PEI, donations

of food are also collected at the church to feed the crowd after the funeral service and any leftovers are sent home with the family.

Community plays a key role in these memorial gatherings, first in providing refreshment and organizational support for the teas, and in the reunion after the funeral at the tea. In these small communities, the deceased is usually well known to the community and it is easy to find volunteers and donations. In the example of the tea I volunteered for in Cardigan near the end of my fieldwork, however, the deceased had been born in the village but had lived in Charlottetown for the past 20 years. In this case, the CWL had to make some initial calls to older people in the community to find out “who he was” which was really the practice of finding out who his parents had been and if there were any siblings or relatives still in the area. The outsider status of the deceased further complicated the donations for the tea; as he had not been a church member for the last 20 years, younger couples in the parish did not know him and donations were low. Since the deceased had been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), friends from that organization were present at the funeral, celebrating one of his other community identities. Unfortunately, their presence increased the number of mourners at the funeral tea and as a result there was not enough food for all, something that rarely happens. As this example shows, close, face-to-face connections of community are central to the success of the final public gathering for the deceased.

Conclusion

The use of the church building and the importance of community in many aspects of everyday life are explored in the following chapters. I continue to rely on the memories of parishioners to explore the importance of the church in their lives, as well as their thoughts on the topics of community and their Catholic identity. Through my discussions with parishioners I also heard many opinions given on larger issues, including the declining numbers of people going to church, and what it is like to live in a rural community. The potential closing of the churches was compared to the past closure of rural schools and a sense of loss was expressed by many participants with whom I spoke.

The following chapter begins with a reflection on my choice of topic of study and my methods as a sometimes “insider” anthropologist. However, I return to the topic of loss as I consider the support given to my family by the community of Cardigan and St. Benedict’s Parish Unit on the death of my grandfather a few months after I completed my fieldwork. Many of the themes explored in Chapter Two – the pride in local history, the importance of the community gathering – became realities that I experienced when I returned to Prince Edward Island.

Chapter Three

Reflection on Methods and Experience

Introduction

To begin the actual fieldwork for this project in June 2008 I returned to a house that I knew well, a house in a small village in eastern Prince Edward Island. This was a house roughly fifty years old, built by my maternal grandfather, where my mother and her four siblings had been raised and where I had spent many summer visits. My grandparents, still living there in the summer of 2008, were deeply troubled by the changes that were taking place within the Catholic churches in their area, and by the prospect of losing their own church, located just a mile down the road. There were also other areas of concern in their lives. My elderly grandfather, no longer able to do much around the large house, refused to discuss the possibility of closing the home and moving into town for the winter to be closer to some of his children. It took me a while to understand that his reluctance to leave his house – regardless of the fact that he could no longer properly look after a building meant for seven but now only housing two – came from his fear that if he left it once, he might never come back. I finally began to see this home as a metaphor that echoed the feelings of many parishioners about their churches. With buildings requiring more upkeep in communities that were growing older without the renewal of younger generations, parish communities were faced with the possibility of the loss of their own “home” and the threat that they might never return to their own church building. This threat of loss was

something I sensed throughout my time in the field and one that took on even more meaning a few months later.

In this reflexive chapter I consider how my move away from PEI influenced the choice and direction of my topic, which eventually led me back “home” to the field. I include this reflection within a chapter on research methods as my time in the field echoes comments made by anthropologist Vered Amit (2006). She writes, “the construction of the ethnographic field involves efforts to accommodate and interweave sets of relationships and engagements developed in one context with those arising in another” (Amit 2000:6). I would not have met many of the parishioners in eastern PEI without my thesis research, but I would never have met the people I did without the help of my family and religious connections. The circular nature of these relationships plays a strong role in how my research unfolded and is now “incorporated” into my connections with that part of PEI (Amit 2000:9).

The Search for a Topic

My research for this project began, somewhat inadvertently, in the fall of 2007. Having just moved from Prince Edward Island to begin graduate school in Hamilton, Ontario, I spent many mornings on the internet reading *The Guardian*, the provincial PEI paper, to catch up with things “at home”. Here, I first read the news that the Diocese of Charlottetown was holding meetings to discuss the closure of many of the Island’s Catholic churches, and from Ontario, I followed the reports of the initial meetings. At this early point in my graduate degree, I

was still without a thesis topic. I returned to Prince Edward Island for the Christmas holidays. It was not until the first week of January, just before I went back to school in Hamilton, that I sat listening to another prayer for the churches in our Sunday mass and wondered, “Why don’t I study this, the reactions of parishioners to the threat of the closure of Catholic churches on PEI?”

“Anthropology” Ruth Behar writes, “is frequently about displacements” (Behar 1996:43; Berdahl 2000:184). Throughout my summer of fieldwork and even after my return to Hamilton in the fall of 2008, I wondered if some of my attraction to this project grew out of events in my own life: my mixed emotions and reactions toward the Catholic church, my own search for community and a sense of belonging in a new town, and the way that I found that community in regular visits to the church with my extended family in Hamilton. While this project went in more directions than I could have predicted, my first connections to it, as they must be for many anthropologists, were taken from the current context and understanding of my own life.

At the same time, I knew my supervisor had previously done work on rural Catholicism in Europe (Badone 1989, 1990a &b, 2007, 2008) and while I was not a scholar of Christianity, I had insider connections to Roman Catholicism, having been raised in a very strong Catholic tradition. My mother counted among her aunts and uncles two priests and one nun. On my father’s side, there was the story about his maternal grandmother who had almost caused a village riot in the early 1900s when she, a Protestant, converted to Catholicism to marry her Irish-

Catholic fiancé. In my high school years I was (at times) a willing participant in my church, attending weekly mass with my family, and then joining and eventually leading the youth choir at our church. As I grew older and entered university I started to have more questions about religion than faith in it, and, while living in Australia for a semester, I stopped attending church regularly for the first time in my life. Moving out of my parents' house officially when I came to Hamilton in 2007, but very much still missing my family, I chose to attend church with my maternal grandmother's brother who was also living in Hamilton. Attending mass enabled me to be automatically part of a community in my new city and also to experience a weekly family and Prince Edward Island connection.

My thesis project also meant a return to Prince Edward Island, a place I called home, although having lived in Alberta with my parents before returning to PEI at the beginning of junior high school, I was often gently teased by friends for being a "CFA" or "come from away". However, as I was to discover, even if I had not been born or spent my childhood years on PEI, my status as a fifth generation Islander counted for a great deal. These connections and family roots, I later found out, were centrally important in helping me to gain initial contacts in the field and also to understand the importance of community in this rural part of the province. Since I am a practicing Catholic and former Island resident, my research project made me a regional "halfie," an anthropologist with ethnic roots in the community but one who has trained in another (part of the) country or culture (Abu-Lughod 1991).

Writing a book that blurs the definition of ethnography, Marilyn Ivy expresses the desire to give up saying “I” in her publication (1995:27). In my own case, this choice is not possible. I recognize that it is my connections, my heritage and even my knowledge and memories of childhood and church that paved the way for this research. As a result, I am part of something larger than myself and this is reflected in my role as both an insider and outsider in the “field.” With this status in mind, I will not try to limit the “I” in my ethnographic descriptions as much of my analysis is based on conversations in which I was a key participant, along with Catholic parishioners. In doing this, I rely on Tedlock’s dialogical understanding of anthropology, according to which “shared culture emerges from interaction” and “ethnography...is revealed as an emergent cultural (or intercultural) phenomenon produced, reproduced and revised in dialogues between fieldworkers and natives” (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995:2). Not only did I revise my questions over the summer in response to comments made in my first few interviews, but as the summer progressed, so did the lengths of my interviews. Through these conversations, initially about church and community, but which grew to include topics such as home renovations, alternative health care and youth hockey, I came to get a sense of many concerns shared among parishioners and community members in Prince Edward Island.

Into the Field

In February 2008 I spent a week on Prince Edward Island where I began preliminary research by reading about the history of many Island churches and by

attending public meetings where changes in the organization of the diocese were discussed. As stormy weather had cancelled some meetings scheduled for January, I was able to attend a meeting in western PEI and a rescheduled meeting in Cardigan, my mother's hometown, in the eastern end of the province. This meeting was for the group of churches known as "St. Benedict's Pastoral Unit" which would come to include two of the churches in my study. The presentations and the comments from these meetings provided me with a general idea of what I could study in any parish and they also gave me a sense of what kind of questions I would be able to ask in semi-structured interviews with parishioners.

I returned to Prince Edward Island at the end of May 2008 to begin my three months of fieldwork and to choose my locations. Originally I had planned to work with three churches in eastern PEI that were to become part of a larger parish unit of seven. This unit had received a large amount of media attention which focused on the protests and outright anger some parishioners expressed at the prospect of being forced to join such a large parish unit (Roach 2008; Willis 2008). By the time I arrived on PEI in the spring of 2008, DPIC had changed the configuration of this unit, dividing the seven churches among four other units and placing the three churches I had originally planned to work with in three separate units. This "movement" of churches suggests something about the challenges that DPIC is making to certain ideas about the boundaries of communities. It is often this movement, of their church and of themselves that parishioners are resisting in order to keep their church in their community.

One of these churches, St. Francis de Sales in Little Pond, was still undergoing such movement. Having been “moved” to the St. Benedict’s Unit in the spring of 2008, parishioners from this church spent the summer discussing the possibility of moving north to join St. Luke’s Parish Unit, the Souris unit containing the churches of St. Mary’s and St. Alexis. In one document on the changes to the diocese, the Bishop of the Diocese of Charlottetown, Rev. Vernon Fougère (2007) compared the priests’ weekend mass schedules to baseball players making the rounds of the bases. In my experience it was not only the priests but also the parishioners who moved among churches to suit their schedules or just to make up for a weekend when they might not have a priest at their local church. This movement made my work multi-sited (Marcus 1995) as I chose to work with St. Francis de Sales church and a church from each of the units to which it might eventually belong. My choices were St. George’s Church in St. George’s to the south of Little Pond, and St. Mary’s Church in Souris, to the north. I had never visited either of these churches before beginning my fieldwork but came to know them well over the course of the three months I spent on PEI. With my locations settled in early June, I began to plan my interviews.

Finding Respondents

As a novice ethnographer, I relied on the basic research method of ethnography, participant-observation, for much of my research on community life (Amit 2000; Bernard 1994; Clifford 2005). Along with this approach I also conducted semi-structured interviews with church parishioners to learn more

specific details about their church attendance and religious practice. Participant-observation was not hard to undertake, as my first afternoon “in the field” was spent attending Saturday evening mass at the church in Little Pond. Finding participants for the second part of my study, formal interviews, was initially much harder than participant observation. I had to rely on a typical rural and Prince Edward Island resource – family connections – in order to recruit interview participants.

Doing research at “home,” even with my connections, was not easy at first, a situation not uncommon to many ethnographers, wherever they work (Amit 2000:3; Berdahl 2000:183-4; Zanka 2000:166). My own confidence was tested when my local knowledge failed me at the very beginning. My initial plan was to advertise for participants in each of the parish bulletins. From the beginning, my grandmother expressed doubts that my plan would work as in her experience rural churchgoers were more likely to volunteer when they are directly contacted on a person-to-person basis. However, because I was stubborn and perhaps a bit shy about asking people outright to participate in my study, I continued with my plan to publish an advertisement in the bulletin of each church unit. Of course, my grandmother was right. In fact, I only received one response to the announcement and the brochures I had printed. Significantly, that reply was from a friend of another woman I had already interviewed who had passed along the brochure I had given her in person. A few of the participants mentioned that they had seen the announcement but it was my phone call that motivated

them to participate. In the end, I relied on names given to me by my grandmother, her sister and her sister's daughter to contact participants from the various parishes. This strategy, I become aware, is how things work in small communities. More than once, I discovered that a participant was pleased to find out that we had mutual acquaintances, and, as a result, was more open to talk to me about their church experiences than if I had been a complete stranger. This sense of comfort in knowing the same friends was a theme that recurred frequently in my exploration into the importance of local community.

I also had to find a balance between using my personal connections and having some (albeit small) professional distance in the field (Amit 2000:3). In order to have a place to live and a vehicle to drive to interviews, I lived with my grandparents in the village of Cardigan. While the village has its own church and my grandparents have always been very involved in the community, I decided not to base my study there in order to avoid interviewing them or their close friends and very likely running into ethical issues involving anonymity. At the same time, their church was one of the churches in the larger St. Benedict's Pastoral Unit so living in Cardigan provided me with good connections to two of the three churches in my study. I could go to church with my grandparents and see members from the other churches in my study, and the parishioners from the churches I was interviewing often knew my grandparents. In some cases, parishioners would tell me in interviews about their unwillingness to move to my grandparents' church and then they would make sure I was not going to pass that

information along. However, I never felt that these close relationships created any ethical dilemmas; if anything, these connections made my participants feel more comfortable with me rather than threatened by me. In a small community the known is always much less frightening than the unknown. My location in Cardigan facilitated my multi-sited research.

Research Participants

I was able to conduct 31 formal interviews with 34 people during my time on Prince Edward Island.¹⁴ Six of these interviews were with individuals in formal church roles: priests, a nun, pastoral associates and DPIC members. The other 25 interviews were with parishioners from the three churches. In three cases, my interviews took place with couples, and in one case, I had the added benefit of hearing from both a Catholic parishioner, Margaret, and her Protestant neighbour, Shelley, who was visiting during the interview. When speaking to churchgoers, I heard from 9 men and 20 women, a reflection of the often higher involvement of women than men in the churches on Prince Edward Island, which is also apparent among Catholics in parts of Europe (Dubisch 1990; Badone 1990a: 148). I cannot discount my gender in considering my role as a researcher, nor the gender of those I interviewed. Most of the men I interviewed had occupied leadership roles at one time or another in their church, sitting on a pastoral council or representing the parish at the restructuring meetings. None of

¹⁴ See Appendix A for a list of Interview Questions for People Who Regularly Attend Church. See Appendix B for a list of Interview Questions for Priests and Pastoral Associates.

these men had served at a funeral tea, while many of the women with whom I spoke had experience with this form of volunteering, as well as teaching catechism and organizing other fundraising events. Since the parish councils were on holiday for the summer and various summer socials were just starting to take place, I had more contact with women in the church than with men.

Most of my informants were of European ancestry, the descendents of Scottish and Irish immigrants who came to the area in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Almost all spoke English as their first language, although two of the priests and the one nun I interviewed were from a French-speaking area of the province. Another priest and DPIC member was originally from Columbia, and was fluent in both Spanish and English. However, as he chose to enter the priesthood after immigrating to Prince Edward Island, he considers himself a local priest, an important distinction when one considers the lack of men from the province entering the priesthood and the possibility of recruiting other priests from outside of Canada.

The majority of my interview participants were over the age of 40, and many were retired and in their 60s or 70s. Most were married and had children, some of those children as young as seven years old and others old enough to have children of their own. Although this sample may not be representative of all of the people attending the churches in eastern PEI, it is a reflection of the predominant groups that attend mass: those more elderly as opposed to young families, and more women than men.

I only interviewed three participants who lived “in town,” two in Souris, and one in Montague. All three were retired, with two living in retirement apartments in the main town and the third living in a house bought by her daughter near the main road into Souris. Every other family was a farming family, either in the current generation or the previous one to it, which reflects a rural influence on the lifestyles of many participants. Nowhere is this rural lifestyle seen more than in parishioners’ traveling habits. The communities in which they lived had very few amenities; for a quick trip to get groceries or to visit a drug store, people from Little Pond would drive 25 minutes to Souris while those from St. George’s could drive 10 minutes to the Cardigan Garage for milk, or take another 10 minutes and continue to Montague, the largest town in eastern PEI (Refer to Figure 1.2). Many from St. George’s worked in Montague as well, so there were daily trips made to that town. For the airport, shopping at Sears, attending university, or just going to a movie theatre, people from all three areas would have to drive to Charlottetown, which is between 35 minutes to an hour away from each of the communities. In a summer that saw some of the highest gas prices in Canada in the Maritimes, I was surprised how often people would mention in conversation that they had recently been in Charlottetown for dinner, to shop, go to a show or visit with family. The price of gas did not seem to be a major concern in the day-to-day travels of these Islanders; the opinion seemed to be that amenities were located in Charlottetown, and people had to access them so they would continue to travel for those purposes. At the same time, when the topic

of traveling to church was discussed, the price of gas was often raised as a concern.

I was able to conduct at least 10 interviews with parishioners from each of St. George's and St. Francis de Sales churches. Because it was located further from my summer home than the other two churches in my study, and because of the certainty among parishioners that the church would stay open, I conducted fewer interviews at St. Mary's Church. While the sample from St. Mary's is small, the similarities in responses from parishioners with a range of age, educational and economic backgrounds reassured me that these interviews would be useful for my study.

The people I spoke to represented a broad range of churchgoers: from those who had lived in the area their whole lives to Catholic women in "mixed-marriages" attending a different church from the one in which they had been raised, to summer residents from the eastern United States, to those who had grown up in the community but lived elsewhere during the non-summer months. Their wide range of memories of the church, their differing ideas about community and their attachments to their various church buildings all inform this work. While I cannot draw broad generalizations from their responses to my interview questions, their comments provide a rich idea of who is attending mass in rural communities on Prince Edward Island and their concerns in the face of changes to their church.

Community Ties

Once I had a few contacts, participants themselves would often suggest other names. One participant in Souris, Vicky, was happy to go through the phone book with me to match her suggested names with phone numbers. As a very dedicated member of her church, she simply smiled when I thanked her for the help. When I asked her if these people might not appreciate her volunteering them for my project, Vicky laughed and told me it was her chance to get even for all the times her name had been put forward for committees (07/11/08).

Anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1982) has suggested that people in small villages tend to have more complete knowledge of each other than those in larger centres. In my experience not only do they know each other, but there is also much overlap in community circles as many people share acquaintances. This situation illustrates what Max Gluckman (1973 [1967]) has termed “multiplex ties” or relationships (Kilduff and Tsai 2003). For example, two parishioners of the same church may also work at the same office or have their children playing on the same hockey team. These meetings in multiple locations often work to reinforce the sense of community among such participants, as I will discuss in the following chapters. Many of the participants in my project saw each other regularly, some were relatives and most saw each other at mass or church committee meetings. As a result, they usually knew if I had interviewed someone whose name they had volunteered. Perhaps these overlapping ties did not help promote anonymity in already small and close communities, but as a result of

these connections I felt that there was a more cooperative and accepting sentiment concerning my project. I was not interviewing isolated members in each area, I was instead meeting individuals who were interconnected, which helped me to feel closer to being part of the community.

However, these close community ties were not always supportive. Vicky, happy to pass along the names of other parishioners, noted that “there’s advantages and disadvantages” to the close, face-to-face knowledge that neighbours share about each other. Other parishioners, from St. George’s church, commented on feeling unwelcome when visiting All Saints Church in Cardigan, the closest church in their unit. This sense of being unwelcome may contribute to their reluctance to leave their own church as the alternative is not very appealing. A few parishioners commented on the history of bitterness between some other Catholic church communities on the Island. When people stay in one place for a long time and keep telling stories to reinforce their memories, old hurts and bitterness may last for a lifetime or beyond, making it harder to bring rival communities together.

Feeling Included

Canadian writer and entertainer Stuart McLean visited Prince Edward Island in the summer of 2008 as part of his ‘Vinyl Café’ tour. In his opening monologue, he described Prince Edward Island in this way:

People don’t put on airs here, it’s comfortable. There are only four movie theatres on the Island; this is the kind of place where you have to make your own fun. So the kids play baseball, or fall off the wharf, the teens have beach parties and everybody else goes to

fundraisers. People in PEI gather up in kitchens and community halls at the slightest provocation. Everyone is a neighbour. It doesn't matter whether they live next door and have unexpected medical expenses or are on the other side of the world and have suffered through a tsunami. Last Tuesday night I found myself sitting next to the wood stove in Margie Carmichael's kitchen. Margie is a fourth generation Islander. "I may not be best friends with my neighbour" said Margie, "but we look out for each other. We mind each other's business". (McLean 2008).

My walks by the Cardigan wharf, on my way down to the tourism centre to do some photocopying or faxing, meant that I would run into someone my grandparents, and later I, myself, knew. A trip to the grocery store in Montague, the largest town in the area, usually meant meeting someone familiar: perhaps recognizing a face in the aisles, or maybe the cashier had studied Geography with my grandfather who used to teach at the high school. I was in a part of the country where drivers wave to everyone they pass on the road, as the chances are good that they know the person. As I spent more time in these communities, I began to know many of the people I passed on the road too, slowly, unconsciously, becoming part of the very communities that I was studying.

I left Prince Edward Island and my grandparents' house in mid-August. My final week was spent in a flurry of last-minute interviews, masses and activities that I wanted to complete before I left. It was during these last visits that I realized I had made my own connections as well; I felt sad leaving, especially when people expressed surprise that I was heading back so soon, even as they recommended other people I would probably like to interview.

When I returned to Hamilton and began looking through my notes, I began to realize that my study of the churches and communities that support them on Prince Edward Island is a study of loss and change, of preserving memories, and of searching for hope in the future of these communities. Not only were these parishioners commenting on the loss of their church buildings but also about the potential disappearance of a particular way of life and a way of understanding community in rural Canada.

November 2008

On November 8th, 2008 I returned to Cardigan, Prince Edward Island. I had not expected to return so early and not for this reason. Instead of being welcomed back for Christmas, I arrived a month early to say my last goodbye to my maternal grandfather. He had been in failing health over the summer, which was part of the reason that I had been able to live with my grandparents, to provide help in case my grandmother needed it. However, his death was due to an accident. On the morning of Thursday, November 6th, with plans to attend the funeral of another friend in the community, my grandfather had been outside, watching workmen cut down one of the large trees in his yard. Without warning he was hit by a falling branch. He was initially assessed in the hospital in Montague, where I had once taken him for a regular check-up during the summer. The doctors then sent him into Charlottetown for more tests, where he died later that afternoon of injuries sustained in the accident.

Duty Memory

Ruth Behar (1996:52) writes that modern death is a double defeat, as the bereaved feel both the painful loss of their loved one and a sense of defeat in not having avoided that loss. We all knew that my grandfather was getting old and the summer showed me that things would be changing. However, none of his five children, nor his grandchildren, the youngest ones only just six months and two years old, expected him to leave us so soon. This abrupt and unexpected loss coloured our sadness that weekend.

My own losses included the knowledge that I had spent the summer travelling all over eastern Prince Edward Island with my tape recorder ready for interviews, but I had never thought to turn it on in the evenings when my grandfather, Grampy, told me his memories of St. Dunstan's University and what he had learned there. Behar (1996) describes "duty memory" as one that holds the bearer responsible for the remembrances. While standing in the receiving line at his wake, I was moved the most by one visitor whom I had never even met before. He was a former university classmate of Grampy's, and he told me he had been planning to accompany my grandfather to the 60th anniversary of their graduating class the following spring. Here, I felt the weight of my responsibility, and regretted that I had not archived the memories of his days at university, an institution that had a hand in helping me to return to Prince Edward Island and spend the summer with him.

Celebration

Our duty that November weekend involved celebrating Grampy's life. Behar (1996:48,52) describes the discourse of salvation among parishioners in rural Spain as the understanding that the dead have gone to someplace better. My grandfather's strong faith could be felt throughout the entire weekend. Talk of salvation was present as my aunt prayed to the Holy Spirit, my grandfather's particular focus of the Triumvirate. Salvation was also a theme when the priest visited my grandmother the day after the accident, and I sensed it in all of the funeral plans, including the wake and mass, that were purposefully held in the church. As I struggled with my own emotions during the graveyard service, Sister Joan tried to comfort me by reminding me that my grandfather's soul was in heaven and that he was in a better place. I found that hard to hear at the moment when I was filled with grief, but afterwards, I took comfort in knowing how much he had experienced in his life and how fortunate I was to have spent this last summer with him.

After his funeral and graveside service, I left the funeral tea to go back up to the church sanctuary and pick up the offerings of his wooden toys that we, the grandchildren, had carried up to the altar before communion. Throughout his life, Grampy had enjoyed working with wood and over the years he had created many things, including lovingly carving various toys for his grandchildren. A neighbour from the village was in the sanctuary, cleaning up after mass, and as he commented on these particular carvings he started showing me the pieces that

Grampy had made for the church: the shepherd's crook for the life-size statue of St. Joseph, the wooden board to display the hymnal numbers, the cover for the baptismal font and the wooden candle holders in the chapel. To me, these carvings stood as symbols of the things my grandfather had given to his family and the community: like Grampy, St Joseph was an exemplar of fatherhood; Grampy had kept music alive in the church, singing the *Exultet*¹⁵ various years at the Easter Vigil mass; and the baptismal font conveyed his faith and dedication to the church. I realized that the All Saints church building was, as St. Francis de Sales and St. George's buildings had been it had been for parishioners in my summer interviews, a "physical archive" of my immediate family's history and religious faith.

Community Support

Nadel-Klein (2003), among other anthropologists working in rural, face-to-face communities (Cohen 1982; Gluckman 1973 [1967]; Mewett 1982), has commented on the close, supportive relationships that exist in small villages and we experienced various acts over that funeral weekend which demonstrated such connections. I think of Stuart McLean's (2008) words again, that "everyone is a neighbour" as I recall one of the first stories told after the accident.

¹⁵ The Exultet is the opening proclamation of the Easter Vigil mass, the third service in the Easter Triduum and one of the most important gatherings in the Catholic Church. Sung by candlelight, the Exultet heralds that Christ is the Light as he has fulfilled his promise of resurrection. The Easter Vigil mass is the culmination of the Easter Triduum, the celebration in the church of Christ's last supper, crucifixion and resurrection (Melloh 1995:446-7).

On the evening of Grampy's death, Anna, the neighbour across the road, was in Charlottetown, half an hour's drive away. Someone called her with the news and one of her first reactions was dismay that she was not at home to go across the road and turn the lights on at my grandparents' house. Since news travels quickly in small communities, it was only a few hours after leaving the hospital that my mother received a call from a second neighbour in the village, sending her condolences and asking if she could go over to the house and turn on the lights. This neighbour didn't have a key so my mother explained how to get into the house and where to turn on the lights. I was touched by the thought behind the act. I pictured various neighbours hearing of my grandfather's death and looking instinctively to the house halfway up the hill. The idea of turning on the lights, to make the house a place of memory and one where a vigil would be kept after a death, resonated in my mind with the concerns many parishioners had expressed about living to see their church abandoned, with the lights no longer lit for mass every Sunday morning, nor candles glowing in memory of the deceased members of the community.

Feeding the Soul

Three days after Grampy's death, and the day before the funeral, we held the wake in the basement of All Saints Church, with afternoon visiting hours from 2 – 4 pm and evening hours from 7 – 9 pm. This is a standard PEI tradition among various Christian denominations, to hold a gathering for the family to receive condolences from neighbours and friends. The topic of a wake came up in

more than one interview and it was best described by Jennifer, a parishioner in St. Francis de Sales who had recently lost her father. She said, “to have a wake, and perhaps it’s because I’m from old PEI, but...the next time you see the people or the family it’s not so difficult” (07/28/08). Most people came out for the afternoon visitation, having more time on a Sunday afternoon in late fall than in the evening. Moreover, for those coming from Charlottetown, the afternoon visit was a way to avoid driving in the dark. The funeral director told us we had almost 500 signatures in the guest book when we finished around 5 pm. Some people came in couples, so we may have had as many as 800 – 900 visitors in those first three hours. I had looked up often to see my grandmother in tears as someone gave her their condolences or shared a memory of my grandfather.

Absolutely exhausted from standing for so long and for going through so many emotions, we arrived back at the house to discover not only more food delivered to us – a tradition on the death of a family member on Prince Edward Island – but that clean tableware and rolls had been provided, salads were prepared, and everything was fresh from the oven, just waiting to join the plates on the table. We found a note on the desk in the laundry room that told us to enjoy dinner and not worry about dishes; neighbours would be back to clean up after we had returned to the church for the evening visiting hours. As exhausted as I was, and completely famished as well, I had trouble believing that a few community members would be so generous. Our whole day had been spent at the church, as we were the bereaved family. Now these neighbours, who had made a

casserole in the morning, stood in the wake lineup in the afternoon, set out supper and would clean up afterwards, had committed themselves to the full day as well. They were not only elderly people from the community upholding a tradition of support for grieving family members, although many of them had been present at the wake. The food had been prepared and delivered by men and women the age of my mother and her siblings, people with jobs and children themselves, who had given their time to help out with the food and attend the wake. Here was a tangible and moving example of a tradition of solidarity that existed in this community, shared by multiple generations, where people both celebrated and mourned together.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, this chapter is less an investigation of the role of reflexivity in fieldwork than an exploration of a concrete moment when my work as an anthropologist provided me with connections that comforted me during a time of grief. The “field,” instead of being left behind, had come with me, and was now part of my family story (Amit 2000). Although I did feel increasingly included as a community member during the last few weeks of my fieldwork, I was more completely embraced by the community when I returned to say goodbye to my grandfather. Instead of being simply a granddaughter at my grandfather’s funeral, I was greeted by many community members with whom I had forged relationships during my summer of fieldwork. Had I not developed my own relationships over the summer, I might not have understood how

important these funeral rituals are to the bereaved, nor how much a community comes together to say goodbye to one of its members.

Chapter Four

Space and Place in the Church

Roots

Asking what “rootedness” means and questioning the authenticity of claims to location are important challenges within cultural anthropology as the discipline grapples with the shift from studying small-scale villages to focusing on transnational travelers, multi-cultural urban spaces and people on the move (Amit 2002; Clifford 1997; Malkki 1992). At the same time, in a world of movement and shifting boundaries, there are people who stay in one place for multiple generations and their ties to location and community can also teach us something about the nature of community and change. Following Margaret Rodman, my focus on place in Prince Edward Island is concerned with “how the anthropological study of place relates to the experience of living in places” (Rodman 1992:641). Studying church closures and community on Prince Edward Island presents a picture of what it is to live in a rural area, where most destinations are reached only by car, but where the distance is not taken for granted as the passing fields are important economically and where directions are given using churches as landmarks, as well as signs of history and religious identity. Those struggling with the church say quite clearly that “the church left us,” as if the church has moved away from them. The issues raised in this chapter relate to the importance of location to a church community and the symbolic nature of the church buildings. The Diocese of Charlottetown has repeated the

phrase, “the church is not a building, the people are the church” and yet, topics including finances, the closures of other buildings in the communities and the ever-present worry about cemeteries in rural Prince Edward Island continue to indicate that the church buildings are important in the daily lives of rural Catholics.

James Clifford (1997) argues against claims of rootedness because he finds that arguments about authenticity and claims to land are often problematic. On Prince Edward Island contestation does not centre on land claims; if anything, there is more than enough land.¹⁶ Instead the issues of debate pertain to the preservation of communities on the land because of the longstanding ties of history and memory that people living there have to the area itself.

Terms

Notwithstanding the critiques of the term “roots” (Malkki 1992) I have chosen to use it because of its metaphoric significance and its arboreal connotations. The image of “roots” and being “rooted” makes sense in a farming community where family livelihoods have literally taken root, in a place where family trees go back locally 150 years and where the lines of descent have existed through four or more generations. The heads of those lines are buried in the cemeteries of the rural churches. Driving through St. George’s and up to Little

¹⁶ Owning land has been important in the past. In the late 1700s the province was divided into lots and British owners were chosen by lottery. Many never fulfilled one of the rules of ownership – settlement within 10 years – leaving those on Prince Edward Island to rent and work land that they could not own. This issue was resolved when PEI joined Confederation in 1873 (Canadian Confederation 2005).

Pond, the family names that I read on mailboxes at the side of the road are the same ones recorded on the gravestones in the pioneer cemetery at the former location of St. Michael's Church: MacCormack, Walker, MacDonald, MacLean and MacPherson (Christian 1997). People have strong and historic ties here. Within the lived memory of these people, and in their parents and grandparents' lives, this area, or PEI at least, has been home. As a result, I consider these people rooted, and these roots are expressed in their concerns about closing churches.

The Church as a Building

Each of the churches that I visited held at least one weekend mass and three of the four churches in the St. Benedict's Unit: St. George's, All Saints in Cardigan and St. James, also held a weekly morning mass in the chapel during the week. Father Brendan Gallant, the priest in the unit who was based in Georgetown, presided over these masses, while Sister Joan Marie Chaisson, who had her office in St. George's, provided support through preparation for the masses, by organizing lay ministries, and when she had the chance, led prayer services herself. St. Francis de Sales, in Little Pond, had been closed over the winter months and as a result of the confusion about the unit to which it belonged, this parish did not have a regular weekend mass. The parishioners in that parish used some money from their collection to hire retired or visiting priests in order to have at least a Sunday liturgy, as they rarely had a weekly mass and none took place during the three months I was living on PEI. These constant changes in

schedules and the balancing that went on between the needs of the different churches created tensions between the communities, as well as some distancing between some individuals and the church, as I will discuss in Chapter Six.

In contrast, St. Mary's, in Souris, had a Saturday evening mass and an early Sunday morning mass, while St. Alexis, the other church in this unit, took the later Sunday mass. A daily mass rotated between these two churches during the week and once a month Father Floyd Gallant (who also happened to be Father Brendan's younger brother) celebrated a mass in French, honouring the Acadian roots that still exist in the area.

However, the church is not only concerned with providing a regular mass and weekly sacraments. During the summer, as parishioners were eager to point out to me during our interviews, many other things took place at the churches. On a more sacred level, there were outdoor masses in the St. Benedict's Unit, rotating once a month so that each church would host one during the warm weather. When the outdoor mass was held in St. George's, the hall under the church became the location for the social tea afterwards; when the outdoor mass was in Little Pond, the parishioners crossed the road to the community centre and former one-room schoolhouse for a barbeque and snacks. At these locations I was recognized by people I had interviewed in church, and I also recognized them in the roles that they had described; seeing those who preferred to be in the background quietly providing support, as well as hearing familiar voices provide the introductions and readings during mass.

Along with special masses and teas, the church hall in St. George's is also used for community events, including wedding and baby showers, wedding receptions, bingo nights, card games, church suppers and fundraisers, Catholic Women's League meetings, kindergarten classes, catechism classes and even wakes. In the case of St. George's, if the church were to close, the community centre would be closing as well, physically removing the only public meeting place in the community.

“First the Schools, Now the Churches”

Rural Islanders are familiar with the closing of community buildings, as many village schools, mostly one-room buildings that existed in some cases for 100 years, closed in the mid 1960s and students were taken by buses to larger, consolidated schools in nearby communities. In January 2009 the Eastern School Board announced that a study, conducted the previous summer while I was doing my fieldwork, suggested the closure of 11 of the 34 schools in the district (Wright 2009). Speaking to Ashley, a parishioner from St. George's, in her 40s and a mother of two teenagers, I heard the comparison made between schools and churches. Ashley commented, “We've been to two different meetings about the closures of the small schools and that's one of the first things they say is, ‘You want the rural communities to survive?’ and if you start taking away their schools and their churches, what are they going to have?” (07/22/08).

In the January 2009 report, Dundas Consolidated, the school where St. George's students attend elementary school, was on the list. This closure would

mean another move further from home for students in the area, forty years after the first consolidation. The generation that made the previous move now sees their children attending larger schools and mixing with students from various religions. In contrast, the grandparents of these children, having attended school in a Catholic community, only knew Catholics when they were in elementary school and walked to the one-room schoolhouse in their village.

While families adjusted to the changes that came with school consolidation, the significance of the church has increased as it is now the only public building remaining in the community. As Ashley also noted, “If people are looking to come to the area and there’s no school and no church then they’re going to go elsewhere because that’s a part of any community” (07/22/08). However, community members realize that there are benefits to attending schools that draw from a larger group of students. Trevor, a father from St. George’s, sees it as a benefit that his children are meeting students outside of their own religious background. Moreover, extra programs including art, music and French Immersion are not always offered at the smaller schools, where incoming grade one classes may be as small as two or three children.

Over the long term, a church may be even more important within an individual’s life than a school. Children graduate from one school, perhaps the local elementary school, and move off to high school, then into a job or university. Parishioners grow up attending a specific church and if they choose to stay in the community and remain Catholic, that church will be with them

throughout their lives, becoming often more important in later years as school or work communities disappear. Jane, a retired schoolteacher from St. George's, who spent many years at Dundas Consolidated, says that when she was working and had children at home she felt some guilt about not doing enough at the church, and she promised that when she retired, the church would get more of her time. Attending and being involved in St. George's has become an important part of her community identity, "Especially since I stopped working because I miss my community at school" (07/22/08). The connections that parishioners have to a particular church building continue throughout their lifetime.

Significantly the locations of schools also play a role in shaping preferences of parishioners during the church restructuring process. In the case of St. Francis de Sales, the church community is somewhat divided about which direction they should take if and when their small church closes. With Little Pond split between school zones, some children from the church head north to Souris, and others attend high school in Montague, located south of the area (Refer to Figure 1.2). These school-church ties are important to many parents as school reinforces church in the lives of their children. If there is something going on for the youth at church, they'll hear about it in school, and, most importantly for parents, children are more likely to attend mass if they know they can see their friends before and after the service. As Ashley, the mother of two teenagers said, "But it makes it easier, [since] his friends or his classmates are all there. It's not, 'Well Mom, but so-and-so doesn't have to go, so why do I have to?'" (07/22/08).

The relationships between the school and the church complement each other; some parishioners worry what about will be left of the community when these institutions are both gone.

Travel

To understand the location of churches in most villages in Prince Edward Island, we must look back at the history of the Catholic Church and the Diocese of Charlottetown. In December 1837 Rev. Bernard MacDonald was appointed to the post of Bishop and at this time his diocese was

an area of almost thirty thousand square miles, wherein a population ever-increasing demanded care and attention far greater than could be bestowed by the priests now at his disposal...usually there was easy access by boat to the settlements lying along the coast, but when the people took up land in the interior of the country, it meant many a tiresome journey on foot (MacMillan 1913:21).

Peter, a member of St. George's parish, still has one of the Stations of the Cross that was in the original St. Michael's Church before it was moved by boat to a church on Panmure Island, an area about 35 minutes from St. George's by car. The painting, of the second station where Jesus receives the cross, carries water stains from its various moves by boat over the years. Jane, another parishioner from St. George's, grew up on a farm in the next community and remembers the efforts her parents made to attend mass before they ever owned a car:

And when I think of my parents who had to go by horse and wagon or by boat, or they went on a back of a truck that picked up everybody along the way, they would have spent longer than half

an hour, they would have spent an hour, all told, to go to church. And there was just no question, you didn't stay home because it was raining or because it was cold, you just went. And you trusted God would get you there. And I think sometimes only He got us there because sometimes I don't think we should have been. I remember going across on the river ice and it's all cracking and thinking, oh! And they went and they took us too (07/22/08).

DPIC regularly states that the current parish map dates back to the days of horses and buggies. With access to cars, Islanders no longer have to rely on horse-drawn or water transport and the Diocese of Charlottetown is responding by trying to close churches where they are really no longer required for ease of travel. Various parishioners with whom I spoke expressed an interest in visiting other Catholic churches on a more regular basis. The Catholic Church as a whole has made an effort to be more flexible for parishioners, offering the Sunday liturgy on Saturday evenings, in case members cannot make it to Sunday morning mass because of work; or more and more often because of children's hockey practices and tournaments. In some of the churches in Charlottetown, where congregations are four and five times the size of those in churches in eastern PEI, there may be three or four masses offered, one on Saturday evening, two on Sunday morning and perhaps even one on Sunday evening in the summer. However, even though rural churches in eastern PEI do not hold multiple masses, parishioners are aware of other churches close by and are able to visit them if they need a more convenient time. For the members of St. Francis de Sales, the close-by communities of St Margaret's and St. Charles each have a church where mass can be attended, along with the three others in the St. Benedict's unit. Some

members of the community even travel to Montague, perhaps 35 or 40 minutes away by car to attend church and visit family there.

In Jane's comments there is almost a paradox: she understands the sacrifices her family made to attend church when it was not easily accessible. Now, members in the St. Benedict's Unit can reach a number of churches in half the time her parents traveled for mass. Some of the students in Little Pond attend high school in Montague so traveling south one more day of the week to see classmates at mass is not a problem. For others, who live on the other side of the school zone in the same small community, the trip to Souris for school is longer than it is to attend any of the other churches on the way. So the calls from St. George's residents to invite Cardigan and Georgetown parishioners to travel "off the beaten path" just a few more minutes, in order to keep their church open, connects to the history of travel in the diocese. Now, however, it is an issue of deciding which parish will give up its building and force members to travel elsewhere for church. In some cases, this decision could mean giving up the last public building in the community, a symbol of the identity of the community itself.

The Church as a Sacred Symbol

As a small child I remember my mother telling me that I could recognize a Catholic church by the cross on its steeple. She and my sister still pay attention to the cross on the steeple so they know when to bless themselves or make the sign

of the cross as they drive by a church.¹⁷ Many parishioners told me that they maintained this Catholic practice of blessing themselves when they drove by a church. June, an elderly member of St. Mary's church in Souris, expressed her concern about how the closure of churches all across Prince Edward Island would change the visual landscape; no longer would tourists, traveling to PEI, see the Catholic communities nor would they understand the level of faith that she felt was present on the Island (07/23/08). A similar "visible" example of religion is observed by Jill Dubisch (1990, 1995) in Greece. There, "religiosity is also found in the Greek landscape itself" as churches and memorial shrines are seen on many islands of the country (Dubisch 1990:130). While a Greek Orthodox priest is necessary for any liturgy performed in the church, the responsibility to erect and maintain these shrines and churches is left with lay people (Dubisch 1990:130). On Prince Edward Island, as Catholic churches are part of the Diocese of Charlottetown and thus governed by Canon Law, the permission to both open and close, or decommission, a parish is left to the authority of the diocese (Diocese of Charlottetown 2007b).

When St. Mary's of the People Church in Hunter River was decommissioned in the summer of 2008, Anne, a member of DPIC, told me that many of the religious pieces, including crosses, statues and pictures were taken out of the church as part of the process of closing the parish. However, the

¹⁷ Catholics themselves give various reasons for making the sign of the cross when passing a church: in recognition of the cross displayed outside of the building, in remembrance of the deceased in the cemetery adjacent to the church, or in honour of the Blessed Sacrament inside the building.

stained-glass windows remained with the church and Anne expressed some concern about what would happen to these beautiful pieces that had been donated by parishioners to the building (07/26/08). Likewise, for Diane in St. George's windows were symbolic. She worried about leaving the church building to fall to ruin and she could not get the image of the smashed windows out of her mind, along with the thought of the cross falling down.

Countless parishioners with whom I spoke also mentioned how the church was truly a symbol of the hard work that their ancestors had put into building places where they could practice their religion. Margaret, a long-time member of St. Francis de Sales parish, now in her 60s, found it hard to talk about the symbolism of the church, suggesting that talking about something other than bricks and mortar was too “sentimental and you shouldn't be sentimental in this whole venture. But it does matter, it does matter to people” (06/16/08). As she explained, “And when you walk through the cemetery, the people, you sort of feel like you're letting the ancestors down, like you're letting those people who came before you down by giving up without a fight” (06/16/08). William, a retired parishioner from St. Francis de Sales was the only one to comment on the sacred nature of those bricks and mortar. He believes “it is a real blessing” to have the Tabernacle¹⁸ and its contents in a community and is saddened that Jesus' presence would be removed from an area (07/23/08). For these parishioners, the image of

¹⁸ The Tabernacle is the cupboard, usually found at the front of the church, which stores the Blessed Sacrament once it has been consecrated. For more information on the sacred nature of consecration see Note 28 in Chapter Six.

the church steeple on the landscape represents the history of Catholic belief in their communities; removing it represents an end to that tradition.

Family Memory in the Cemetery

The “roots” that many parishioners feel linking them to their church and community are connected with place of birth and the longevity of families names, as previously mentioned. At the same time, anthropologists are also aware of, to quote Liisa Malkki (1992:38), “the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them,” and what Behar (1996) calls “lived memory.” These attachments are vividly present in the lives of Prince Edward Island Catholics as they imagine the baptisms, first communions and weddings of their children, and hope for their own funerals in their local church. For many families with young children, the concerns about closing St. George’s have to do with lack of continuity in their children’s sacraments; those who have already received their baptism or first communion may not be able to be confirmed in that same parish. During interviews, I wondered out loud if the attachments of my respondents’ youngest children or grandchildren will be different than their own. Those children who will remember their first communion in the amalgamated church could be the ones who begin to bridge the gap with the generations to come.

For families who have lived in the same rural communities for generations, claims of membership in each parish are an example of the process of “re-imagining community” that occurs when the established connections between

people and place have been challenged (Nadel-Klein 2003). In her work on Scottish fisherman, Nadel-Klein (2003) argues that community identity, and its location, is something that rural people can count on as changes to the economy take away their historic work and heritage. I suggest that her insight can be applied to conceptions of identity among Catholics in rural areas of eastern Prince Edward Island. The location of a church in a familiar community may be central to ideas about the persistence of the collectivity under changing social and economic circumstances. As memories are moved to new spaces as schools close, churches amalgamate and Islanders move out of the province, the cemeteries provide a very specific tie to family and land for parishioners.

Negotiating how that space is used within a family is an important indication of identity as well. Sarah, an elderly widow in Souris, is currently dealing with a situation concerning reserved spaces in the cemetery. Her husband died almost 30 years ago while the family lived out of the province. Knowing she would move back to PEI, Sarah brought his body back to Souris to be buried as “there was no way I was going to leave him [there] while I was back here” (07/10/08). However, she now plans to be cremated because, unbeknownst to her, the plot next to her husband, who is buried beside his parents, was taken by his younger sister who also died out of province a few years ago. Sarah was present at her sister-in-law’s funeral, but did not go to the graveyard and only discovered later that the plot she thought was for her had already been used. However, if she is cremated, Sarah can be added to her husband’s plot, to be buried at his head.

To complicate matters further, while she was making this decision, her own three children told her they would like to be buried in Souris, so she also has the option of buying a large plot and being buried with them. Sarah explains that even her two children living in New Brunswick and Ontario want to be buried on PEI. She says, “they all love Souris. There’s got to be something, some connection that’s bringing them all back, and it’s bringing a lot of them back that used to live here years and years ago, they’re coming back to live. As I say, it’s a magnetism of some kind” (07/10/08).

In these considerations about burial, location is a metaphor for the relationships shared with those in a similar space, or who share a similar religion. Even though parishioners claim that it won’t matter where they are buried – what’s important is who they will meet in the afterlife – they nevertheless wish to be placed with kin from their past, and have their headstones in the same place as those with whom they grew up and attended church.

Finances

Sometimes it is an outsider’s observation that best describes a group, as Stuart McLean made clear during his performance at the King’s Playhouse on PEI in June 2008. The loud reply of laughter showed he was correct when he said that on PEI, people have to make their own fun, and they do, they go to fundraisers (McLean 2008). I spent one warm Sunday evening in July in the crowded All Saints Church attending a benefit for former Prince Edward Island premier and Cardigan resident Bennett Campbell. Performing on the stage were members of

St. George's, St. Alexis and St. Mary's parishes, among others, and sitting in the pews were people I had interviewed or would eventually interview. This benefit was a community event organized, performed and supported by many of the same people who keep their churches going with similar donations of time and money.

Listening to stories about some of the fundraisers that take place at St. George's and St. Francis de Sales, or even considering how the food is collected for the funeral teas, I realized that money is, for the most part, circulated within the community itself. If St. George's needs a new coat of exterior paint, Sister Joan calls her sister and the group from Palmer Road and they volunteer their time to put on a dinner theatre (07/15/08). The food comes from the community and is served by many of the women in the parish, tickets are bought by their families and the money is raised from the kitchens, the talents and the pockets of the parishioners themselves.

As a result, it is a source of painful conflict when parishioners are resentful about differences in finances between churches. Each church collects the bulk of its revenue through the weekly collection and regular parishioners are issued church-specific envelopes for the year. If parishioners attend mass at a church other than their own, they are still encouraged to put in their donation envelope marked for their home church, as the diocese has a practice of returning the envelopes to the home parish during the week. When St. Francis de Sales closed during the winter of 2008, parishioners still used their local envelopes when they attended mass elsewhere. This way St. Francis de Sales was not at an

even greater financial disadvantage by missing out on several months' worth of collection monies. The Diocesan practice of returning the envelopes to the local church allows parishioners the chance to continue to fund their local church even if they have to attend mass at another location. However, this practice also promotes a sense of loyalty that threatens to undermine unity if churches do amalgamate. How are people who are accustomed to supporting their home church, no matter where they attend mass, now to transfer their donations to another building? This dilemma was summed up well by Diane, a working farm-wife in her mid-40s and mother of two, who said, "It's hard" because

St. George's has money now, only because we sold some land and sold the parish house and then that's another aspect, if we come into [the unit], what is it, Canon Law, do we have to pass it all over? Which is heartwrenching because you think could we keep going on our own but eventually the end is...I don't know (07/15/07).

Money is one of the central concerns in the restructuring process. Through some clever financing in previous years, St. George's Church sold both the farmland and the parish house attached to the church. Unlike other churches in the diocese struggling to get by, this church has some funds in the bank. As Diane's comments suggest, parishioners are reluctant to see these funds used to subsidize an amalgamated unit of parishes. However, parishioners also acknowledged that it would be a waste of the money to stubbornly stay open as long as possible and then enter into a unit "destitute because you spent all the

money that you had paying for a new roof or a \$25,000 paint job”. In the words of one parishioner, “I don’t want to be the prodigal son!” (Christina 06/08/08).

If the churches do amalgamate, Peter, an elderly farmer from St. George’s, suggested that there will be a shift in the way that finances are used: “While it costs a lot to heat the church,” he said, “but it costs a lot to drive too” (07/09/08). He wondered how much of the economic concerns will be passed back to the people instead of being taken care of by the church. At the same time, he acknowledged that it is the people themselves who are putting the money into the church in the first place. Ashley, another St. George’s parishioner picked up on this thought in her interview saying that cost has to be factored into the decision to keep a church open, “but if it takes 100 or 200 parishioners driving somewhere else and trying to fit in as opposed to a priest driving for another five or ten minutes and keep a church open, I think that’s the viewpoint I’m taking too” (07/22/08). Both parishioners frame the options in terms of financial numbers.

Ashley was also concerned about those who neglect their financial responsibility to the church. While people come out to meetings and complain about the possibility of church closures, she noted that the numbers at mass are still the same and the collection revenues remain about the same. If anything, Ashley said, “the churches should be charging big time for having weddings because they [couples getting married] don’t hesitate to pay it for anything else” (07/22/08). “But no” she commented after, “if the church said, we want this

much, wow, people would be so offended by it.”¹⁹ Here she touches on a financial issue, the reliance that the church places on the charity of its parishioners. At least one church in the Diocese of Charlottetown has set up the option for parishioners to give their collection donation by direct deposit. This allows parishioners another way to support their church while attending mass elsewhere, or perhaps not attending at all. Re-thinking money and how it is used is now a very pertinent topic as churches have to rely on less and less funding in order to continue to stay open.

Reclaiming a Place

Another important concern about the churches surrounds the fate of the empty buildings. The official discourse expressed by DPIC and certain parishioners is that the diocese as a whole needs to move away from this concern with upkeep; suggestions have been made that many parishioners are focusing too much on the church building and keeping it open, to the detriment of their religion. However, the life of a building is a real concern in a rural area where one is certain to see at least one abandoned building or decrepit barn on an hour-long drive through the country. Many parishioners, still involved in the day to day duties of organizing cleaning schedules, finding money for the winter furnace, or deciding if it is worth the cost to re-paint the outside of the church

¹⁹ A similar example of such an offense was observed by Caroline Brettell in her research on Catholics in Portugal (1990). There, a priest tried to charge three times as much for a marriage service. Those opposed believed he had done it to take advantage of the higher incomes in the village (even though the bride’s parents were not very rich). I doubt PEI parishioners would approve of using income differences as a way to determine the cost of a wedding in their church.

building, are very concerned about the future of these prominent physical structures if the church community moves.

What would happen to a church building that is officially closed? Diane, thinking about the possibility of selling her church in St. George's, had trouble picturing it fulfilling another role: "Like, if it was a restaurant, I don't know if I could go to the restaurant" (07/15/08). At the same time, she asked how the use of the former church buildings could be controlled. If there were stipulations on the use of the building after the sale, owing to its character as a religious and sacred edifice, she asked, "who would buy it?"

The idea of finding support to maintain church buildings from the wider community has been mentioned by DPIC. In the draft of the committee report on the consultation process, released in April 2008, the authors acknowledged the historical and cultural importance of the church to the wider secular community. As a result the report recommended: "If the Church building is a giver of identity to the secular and local community because of historical and cultural reasons, the faithful of the parish should look for ways for the same secular community to support the maintenance of the buildings" (Diocese of Charlottetown 2008). An example of this type of support is found at St. Mary's Church in Indian River. The current building, built in 1902, was designed by William Critchlow Harris and is described as an "architectural gem for the whole Island" (O'Shea 2003:66). Not only is it a beautiful church, but its vaulted ceilings provide beautiful acoustics and since 1996 it has been the location of the Indian River Music

Festival, a two-month series of concerts of classical and folk music, appropriate for a church setting (Indian River 2009). These concerts, often heard on CBC, are non-denominational and since they present world-class Canadian singers and musicians including Isabel Bayrakdarian, Measha Brueggemann, Susie LeBlanc, and Peter Tiefenbach, they are advertised in tourist literature, and, from my own experience, often sold out. Some of the proceeds from the summer festival go toward upkeep of the building (Indian River 2009). St. Mary's Church in Indian River, should it ever need to close as a parish, has now established itself as a concert venue and could draw on its secular resources in the community to look after the building and keep it running in the summer.

A more recent example of community support comes from a Protestant denomination on Prince Edward Island. The former United Church in Hunter River was bought by Kris and Melanie Taylor, a couple who had been married and had three of their children baptized in that church building. They spent almost a year renovating the church, beginning with the removal of the windows and the steeple in October 2007 and ending with the opening of a 140-seat theatre and entertainment venue, known as "Harmony House" on July 4th, 2008 (Taylor 2009). Anne, a DPIC member, told me that many of the Protestant congregations on Prince Edward Island were ahead of the Catholic communities (07/26/08). For example, the United Church in Hunter River closed over a year before the Catholic building in the same community, and Catholics in Little Pond were well aware that the United Church in Fortune had been closed, while their church

remains open. The Taylors, in opening Harmony House, have kept their spiritual and historical connections to the church but have also expanded these connections to the wider performance and entertainment community on Prince Edward Island, stimulating rural economic development at the same time.

The closure of churches is a very current topic in North America and national media sources have provided commentary on various closures in Canada and the United States (Valpy 2008; Vitello and Haughney 2009). A recent article in the *Globe and Mail* (Mayne 2008) highlights the success of Harmony House, while reporting on the sale of various Roman Catholic and Anglican buildings in Halifax, the largest and most densely populated city in the Maritimes and the location of three well known universities. The article makes a good argument for city churches, but the comparison with Hunter River ignores the differences between urban and rural development. Hunter River is a small community and, along with Harmony House, is also the location of one of the few Catholic churches that have closed. The Taylors hope that people from Charlottetown or Summerside, the larger towns on PEI, will drive to Hunter River for a concert. However, there is probably only room for one such venue in that area and certainly not enough support for two renovated churches in the same small town itself.

The resale value of a church in a rural community is small. I spoke with Jevan, a farmer in Little Pond, about selling his current house after he has built another. He plans to see if someone in his family wants the house, but if not, he

hopes to sell it but knows that it may be difficult. The urban shift in Canada underlies the phenomenon that Anne, the DPIC member, terms “building poor.” Not only are youth from the rural areas moving out of province to larger cities for school or work, but rural families are much smaller than in the past. I spoke to various women, parents themselves, who grew up in families of four, seven, or even twelve children. The families with young children or teenagers now have two or three children. With fewer children being born and some moving away, the population left in the rural areas has been reduced. The buildings built in previous generations to house a larger population, including schools and churches, are now facing declining numbers of people and rising costs of maintenance.

Starting Over

Realizing that keeping many churches open in the long-term, as the population ages and collections decline, is not feasible, parishioners know that they need to change. “But” one asked, “how the heck do we do it?” Unable to overcome their attachments to location, community and memories, many parishioners supported the suggestion of leaving all of the current churches and building an entirely new one in a central space to accommodate all the former churches. This is what happened 40 years before with the construction of consolidated schools. Many people feel that this strategy would help avoid the bitterness that parishioners sense brewing now, it would be the “best unifier...the thing that will make [the unit] work, because it is a new church...it’s not like ‘I won, like my parish won, you lost’” (Christina 06/08/08).

After a discussion highlighting memories, history and the symbol of the church in the community it might seem somewhat contradictory to discuss the creation of a new church. However, I interpret the idea of a new church for all as the least painful solution to parishioners' fears of closing their church buildings. Instead of moving into another, already established parish and having to break into an already existing community, and being reminded of its ties to the building, a new church would allow for all those involved to create a new community. This sense of fairness, of making sure that no church 'wins' over others is connected to the perception of what will be lost if a church has to close. A new church would be a hybrid form of the contributing churches, and a new symbol for the entire community that would match the amalgamated group. Even though most of the parishioners with whom I spoke said that they would continue attending church regardless of location, by suggesting the construction of a new building as the solution to creating a new community, they highlight the ongoing connection between a religious community and its locale.

While the bitterness and reluctance to attend mass in another location is connected to issues of community ties and belonging, which will be discussed in the next chapter, these feelings also have to do with location and the buildings themselves. Margaret, a long-time member of St. Francis de Sales, now in her 60s, repeated a comment to me that she heard from one of the priests, that "what we need is more fires" (06/16/08). Peggy, a now-retired member of St. George's parish wished for a similar situation to deal with the neglected buildings saying,

“I’m hoping the Lord will take care of that [with] a big lightning strike”
(06/08/08).

A new church would mean a new start for parishioners, a fresh beginning as a group, without the resentments about the DPIC process and favouritism that worry some people now. As Trevor (07/16/08) stated in his interview,

Yes, it’s a time of change and a time of loss, but it’s also a time of great opportunity. How many times in the church’s lifetime do you actually get the opportunity to be directly involved in how the church is going to look in the future? Not often we get to do that. Most people that are here now have that opportunity and responsibility to deal with that issue. It’s daunting, and there will be emotional scars, but it’s a wonderful time to have a re-birth of the church.

Re-birth is a very strong image in the idea of building another church from the collected communities and buildings in the St. Benedict’s Unit. Re-birth itself is a key theme within Catholicism, as the most important mass of the year, Easter Vigil, is a commemoration of Christ’s Resurrection. Moreover, according to Catholic doctrine taking the Eucharist each week during mass is a symbol of that resurrection and a reminder of the re-birth that will follow the death of each Catholic and Christian believer.

During a time when parishioners and members of PEI’s rural communities are faced with the possibility of the loss of their small schools, and churches are on the brink of closing, when family numbers are declining and rising numbers of youth are leaving the area, there is a real sense of hope in Trevor’s comments. This hope should not be surprising, as I interviewed very devout members of struggling church communities. All but one person I spoke to said that they

would continue to attend mass regardless of whether or not their church building closed. As these parishioners struggled with their personal connections to and concerns about a specific church, they were quick to remind both themselves and me that “the church is not a building, the people are the church”. However, it seems that the church building and the religious community cannot be separated as easily as the familiar statement suggests. Those faithful parishioners who support the construction of a new church for the combined parish unit are also caught in this conflict. For them, a building and its location are symbolic of an existing community and they struggle to maintain as many things around them as possible while their rural areas change. It is their faith and its importance to the wider community that maintains these churches that I will discuss in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

Diagnosing Community Relationships

Introduction

The literature on community and belonging often refers to ‘locality’, a term that Cohen defines as “how people experience and express their difference from others, and...how their sense of difference becomes incorporated and informs the nature of their social organization and process” (1982:2). Appadurai (1996) suggests that locality is expressed in the spatial unit of the neighbourhood, which provides a specific grouping within which I consider locality on Prince Edward Island. While people from the three parishes that I studied share a sense of locality, the situation is complicated by their membership in various forms of neighbourhoods or community groupings. At the geographic level parishioners are both members of a certain church, but also part of the larger secular community or involved in “neighbouring” relations (Mewett 1982); at the religious level they are part of distinct church communities but also part of the larger Roman Catholic church; and at the regional level they belong to and practice a certain “rural” lifestyle as opposed to a more urban culture. Some of the relationships at these different levels overlap into what Gluckman (1973 [1967]:19-20) calls “multiplex ties,” which often reinforce these forms of acquaintance. The parishioners of these three churches express their membership in these community levels in various ways and it is this process of balancing different levels of identity that I illustrate in this chapter.

In this chapter, as I consider social relations and the state of community, I also rely on work from medical anthropology on the body to understand these terms. Here, I follow Douglas (1970) and other symbolic anthropologists, for whom the body represents a model of society. This perspective leads me to consider what debates about abortion, birth control and family size symbolize for a community dealing with threats to its religious and social life, as well as the possibility of the loss of both (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). The pro-life sentiment expressed by numerous people I spoke to provides insight into ideas about community identity and continuity among Catholics on Prince Edward Island, as well as a certain set of moral beliefs.

Community Feeling

When asked about the significance of attending church in their own community, many parishioners spoke of a “tight-knit” feeling among those who attended church regularly. Even when church members went to another location for mass, many felt that something was missing since they were not attending their own church. It could be as simple as missing the parish bulletin or the local news, or as intangible as a “feeling” that one achieves when attending the weekly rituals in a familiar place, surrounded by familiar people. For Stephen and Christina in St. George’s, who have seen schools and general stores in the area close, the church is the last institution that identifies St. George’s as a distinct community, separate from the next location. Island historian, Harry Holman, agrees, saying that the churches “are among the last community-defining

buildings” now that many lighthouses, one-room schoolhouses and train stations have been decommissioned and removed from these rural areas (CBC News 2007). Caroline, a retired member of St. Francis de Sales, suggests that the most serious result of the church closing will be the loss of the close feeling among parishioners, and she says that “it’s going to take a generation I think, for any real degree of closeness or...belonging to a new parish” to develop (06/09/08). Katherine, a parishioner from Little Pond, was the first to use the term “tight-knit” to describe her community when speaking with me, and she was also one of the first to extend that community to myself, making sure to greet me before or after mass, or turning around with a big smile and calling me by name during the Sign of Peace.²⁰ Katherine explained that often she felt “left out” when in a strange church so she was especially concerned with extending a welcome to me, a newcomer. Her efforts were also a sign of her desire to show me that community spirit is alive and well in her small church.

Patsy, a member of St. George’s parish, commented on the importance of both her church and others as well. St. George’s she says, “is home.” She told me

It’s the heart of our community and you know, we’re very, what would you say, attached to it. And you’re not supposed to be attached to a building but anyway, it’s our church...the sense of community I think would be lost too. It’s the centre, it’s the heart of our community (06/18/08).

²⁰ In the Catholic mass the Sign of Peace is part of the Communion Rites, when the priest repeats words Christ said to his disciples about the peace and unity in his kingdom in heaven, and then invites the congregation to share that peace by shaking hands with those around them.

Her words are echoed by novelist Mary Gordon, who, in writing about the closure of Catholic churches in the United States, suggests that the loss of churches is “like pulling the heart out of these neighbourhoods” (Vitello and Haughney 2009). On a visit to another church in the unit, St. Francis de Sales in Little Pond, Patsy noted “what a beautiful little church it is.” In saying this, she recognized how hard it might be for those located there to close their church, because of its image, as well as its location, even though its congregation is small. These examples show on the one hand how a church is strengthened by its local community, and on the other hand how a community connects with all forms of togetherness and social interaction in a certain location. This sense of participation in a local community adds to the experience of rural church-going and is an important consideration for those who continue to attend church.

In discussing “community,” both harmony and conflict are useful in describing group dynamics. Within the communities of St. George’s, Little Pond and Souris, both harmony and conflict were apparent. Mewett (1982) lists kinship, neighbouring and church as associational categories for creating types of communities. Larsen uses very similar categories, listing relatives, friends from a church congregation and neighbours as the main bases of association among members of Kilbroney, a small village in Northern Ireland (1982:141). Mewett and Larsen disagree, however, on how these identities overlap. In religiously divided Kilbroney, Larsen sees church divisions as a way of separating enemy

groups to avoid potential violence; people of similar faith backgrounds follow networks to socialize with, attend church with, and be kin with those of the same faith background and to avoid others (1982:145). Mewett, on the other hand, recognizes the way that neighbourhood and church identities often overlap in order to create a sense of “communal harmony” (Mewett 1982:111). Parishioners negotiate multiple identities in their search for church and community harmony.

For the people I spoke with in rural PEI, neighbourhood was often the most influential category. It is on the basis of friendships and social ties that parishioners make their decisions about where to attend church. Mewett states that “if a person has neither a relative nor a co-congregationalist in another part of the community, then interaction with those living there can be limited” (1982:111). This statement was certainly true for parishioners from Little Pond who, caught between going north or south, make their decision based on who they know in the surrounding areas (Refer to Figure 1.2). For Caroline, a retired parishioner from St. Francis de Sales, who was raised in the area, the pull is north to St. Charles or Rollo Bay where she knows more people, as opposed to Cardigan where she knows only a few people and even fewer in St. George’s. Jevan, a parishioner a generation younger than Caroline, finds the pull in the opposite direction. He has more connections to Cardigan and Montague, in the south, as his son attends school with friends from that area. Both past and future community relationships play into the choices and the possible changes that

parishioners are willing to accept as they consider the reconfiguration of their church community.

This sense of knowing fellow parishioners changes in the summer when tourist season is in full swing in Little Pond. One elderly church member who says he knows other church members “pretty well” explains that this sense of familiarity changes in the summer when there are lots of tourists: “I don’t know where they all come from” (06/09/08). But some of the tourists are former residents of Little Pond, or family members with ties to the area. Colin, who has lived in southern Ontario for over 40 years, keeps a summer home in Little Pond and finds it important to attend St. Francis de Sales church. Of his connections to other parishioners he says, “I’m related to most of them...[and] even the ones that live here in the summertime from away, you get to know them. So basically you get to know everyone...and I think that makes a difference [when attending church]” (07/21/08). Colin, and others like him, make a point of spending their summers in their family community, fitting easily back into the neighbourhood as they socialize with family and friends they have known since childhood.

Katherine, from St. Francis de Sales, was the only parishioner to suggest that her participation and attendance at church would stop if her building closed. Many other parishioners spoke of friends who might no longer attend if the church building closed, but in most cases, these friends were already struggling with their faith, and the closure of the church building, unfortunately, might be the time they would find to leave religion behind. I also heard feelings of hurt and

bitterness from a few members of St. George's and St. Francis de Sales, the two churches most likely to be closed in the St. Benedict's Unit. Through this process of restructuring in the diocese, issues of emotion and its connection to faith, community, and church location have also been drawn out. Not only is this discussion about religion and location, but community and emotions have found their way into the debate as well.

Even though church connections are strong for members of a congregation, the secular ties that exist between neighbours of various denominations are also strong and important to these church communities, as shown in the following example from Little Pond, a "mixed" religious community where neighbours of different faiths have lived cooperatively as long as both the United and Catholic Churches have been in the area.

Community at Large

In the mid 1940s and 1950s, the local tradition in Little Pond was to have three Catholic and three Protestant (United or Baptist) pallbearers at all funerals. The larger Catholic Church, as one young man from the community was to discover, however, did not approve of this practice. When Jim, now a retired farmer in Little Pond, went into Charlottetown in 1950 to attend St. Dunstan's College, the priest there asked all of the students to take an oath stating that they would never enter a Protestant church.²¹ Jim says, "I didn't take the oath, I kept

²¹ Caroline, also from Little Pond, thought perhaps the priest asked them to take an oath never to participate in a Protestant service, as she remembers Protestant

my mouth shut...you just couldn't do it [in Little Pond]" (06/09/08). While he doesn't know the reasons for the rotation of pallbearers between families of different denominations, it was not the first inter-faith practice in the community.

St. Francis de Sales Church shared a hearse for almost 50 years with the Baptist and United Churches in Little Pond, a sign of the community's "practiced ecumenism before its time" (O'Shea 2003:71; See Figure 5.1). When I asked Jim about the reason behind this tradition, he supposed it was probably financial; none of the churches could have afforded the carriage by itself so they joined together. In his words it was probably "the first ecumenical thing that happened in this country and nobody knew much about it, nobody talked much about it and that's what it was" (06/09/08). The hearse, with both carriage wheels and sleigh runners to function in all seasons, was built in Fortune, a village halfway between Little Pond and Souris, and stored at St. Francis de Sales Church. It is now on display in the Matthew and McLean Museum in Souris, PEI, with an inscription from the 19th century PEI writer Henry Mellick stating that "the neighbours considered it a duty to attend both the wake and the funeral. Among Protestants the funeral service was generally held at home; among the Catholics it was held in the chapel" (Matthew and McLean Museum 2008). Here, religious distinctions were made in the community, but they did not conflict with the responsibility associated with neighbourhood identity to honour a member of the community;

children entering the church in Little Pond regularly. Regardless of the oath, it would still be in conflict with the role of ecumenical pallbearers.

instead, people of different religious backgrounds facilitated the final rites for villagers.

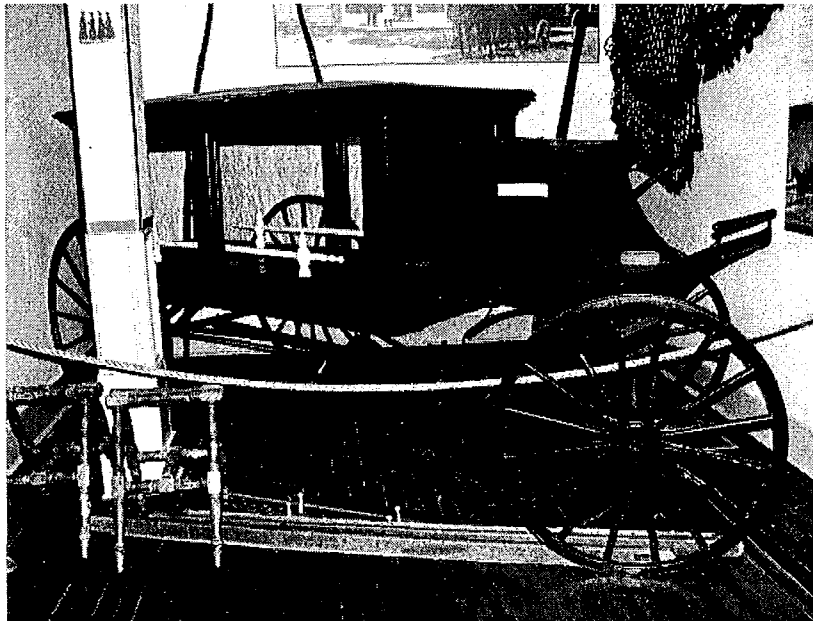


Figure 5.1 Funeral Hearse from Little Pond Now on loan to the Matthew and MacLean Museum in Souris, PEI, the hearse still belongs to St. Francis de Sales Church in Little Pond (Image Credit: Waddell, July 21, 2008).

Ecumenical practices like this continue in Little Pond, but one similar to that which Mellick described could be threatened with the closure of St. Francis de Sales and other rural Catholic churches. Katherine commented that she wanted to have her funeral at the church in Little Pond so that her non-Catholic friends would attend. She is worried that if St. Francis de Sales were to close, her friends and neighbours from Little Pond would feel less comfortable in another Catholic church elsewhere than in the church they know very well in their own community. United Church or non-religious people from Little Pond are familiar with St. Francis de Sales because of its role in the community and neighbourhood. As

these examples suggest, shared membership in a locally based community is as important for identity as formal denominational affiliation. In fact neighbourhood identity complements religious affiliation between members of this community.

When St. Francis de Sales hosted an outdoor mass for the whole of St. Benedict's Unit in August 2008, Fr. Brendon was happy to thank our "United friends", the husband of one parishioner in a mixed marriage and another non-Catholic community member, for their help with logistics. While we had been attending mass, these two men were in the community centre across the road, preparing the barbeque for the luncheon after mass. Without their secular support, someone else might have had to miss mass to get the luncheon prepared before the service was over. A building such as the church in Little Pond shows the connections that people have to the wider local community and to their neighbours and locality, regardless of religion. Memories – of funerals, Lenten prayers, or community gatherings – are linked to a building, even a religious one, that draws many different people from the same neighbourhood together.

Resistance and Community Involvement

When a community is challenged, the reaction is often to cling more tightly to existing social bonds. As members of a particular group, we often only become aware of our own culture when "brought up against its boundaries: that is, when we become aware of *another* culture, of behaviour which deviates from the norms of our own" (Cohen 1982:4). This statement applies to various communities in eastern Prince Edward Island. If St. Francis de Sales church was

not under threat, Caroline admits that she might be more likely to attend mass somewhere else on occasion.²² Now, even if the mass is held at a later and less convenient time, parishioners make an effort to come, especially in “a small congregation...[where] every person makes a difference” (09/06/08). As well, like those mentioned above, Caroline says that she would still prefer to attend her own church because when she goes somewhere else:

I still feel I miss something. Like even when I was working and I would have to go someplace on Saturday evening if I was working days on Sunday and I would have to go to a mass somewhere else, like, I would miss the regular contact with the community and the bulletin and this sort of thing”(09/06/08).

Parishioners at these churches maintain their Catholic faith by ensuring that they attend church every Sunday, in line with Catholic teachings, but they also speak of the ties that extend beyond the liturgy, like the regular contact with familiar people and community news each week. These ties also reflect some of the tensions present in the conflict between popular religion and religious orthodoxy (Badone 1990b), which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Six.

In the wider area of eastern Prince Edward Island, other Catholic churches are also resisting the DPIC plans, showing how connected their communities are to their local church. In 2004 and 2005, when St. Columba at East Point, the

²² Churches in Charlottetown, the capital city of PEI, with larger congregations and more than one priest can provide multiple masses on Saturday evening or Sunday morning for parishioners to attend a service that fits into their schedule. St. Mary’s was the only church in my study that offered two morning masses, both St. George’s and St. Francis de Sales had to rotate times with the other churches in their unit, making it less convenient for parishioners to attend mass in their own community.

easternmost parish on Prince Edward Island, was forced to share a priest with another church, parishioners sent a delegation to the Bishop complaining that not enough masses were being celebrated at their location (Refer to Figure 1.2). Members of this parish were also the most vocal at a DPIC meeting in early 2008, with some parishioners bringing signs and placards to the meeting to protest the possible closure of their church (Willis 2008). St. Alexis, the church in Rollo Bay, which is only five kilometres from St. Mary's in Souris, had been forced to close a few winters previously because of furnace problems. The church required a new furnace but could not afford it at the time and so held winter masses at St. Mary's Church and re-opened in the spring when the weather was warmer. The next winter the parish replaced the furnace but in order to pay some other bills, closed the church doors again to save money on furnace oil. As parishioners from St. Francis de Sales explained to me, these events took place a few years before the DPIC plan came out. However, after the restructuring plan was announced in the fall of 2007, St. Alexis Church was kept open through the winter. Parishioners from St. Francis de Sales guessed that this decision was a response to the threat that St. Alexis might close permanently. St. Francis de Sales parishioners were instead the ones forced to close their church for the winter, both to save funds and to decrease the need for the visiting priest to travel in the stormy winter months.

While some of these forms of resistance come with a political or financial cost, some developments have actually contributed to community social life.

Various parishioners from St. George's commented that the two nuns who have come into their parish as assistants to the priest have been highly effective in recruiting lay volunteers. Sister Joan, the current Pastoral Associate, or PA, sees the situation this way: speaking in the discourse of the restructuring process, she says that parishioners feel that this is their parish and if they want to keep it alive, they have to take responsibility for parish activities. She believes that parishioners are taking on ministries, liturgical preparation and caretaking because they are "willing to keep their parish alive" (06/10/08). These actions are an important sign that parishioners have the will to maintain their communities independently of directives from the larger organizing body of the Catholic Church.

A different response was expressed by some of the women I spoke to in Souris, all of whom are members of St. Mary's Church. In contrast to the very straightforward responses I received from members of St. George's and St. Francis de Sales to questions about how church closure would change their community, or what steps they could take to welcome new members into their church, the women from St. Mary's had less specific answers, or commented that they had not even thought about these issues. As members of the largest church in the area, which has very little chance of closing, they do not face the pressure of losing their church, and they have yet to consider how they might integrate new people into their community. In Cohen's (1982) terms, the women from St. Mary's had not been brought up against the "boundaries" of their church

community. Souris is also a larger community that contains the bank, grocery store and high school that the people from Little Pond use. Here, the community boundaries are upheld by various institutions. Therefore St. Mary's parishioners are less likely than those from more threatened parishes to have concrete ideas about what defines or makes their church community and culture specific.

Aside from St. Mary's Church in Souris, these examples demonstrate how parishioners themselves are finding ways to keep their churches open, often going against Diocesan plans in the process. Parishioners are showing the lengths they are willing to go to keep the church in the community as well as to keep community members together.

The “Welcoming Church”

Peoples' ideas about community building also reveals important points about what they value and do not wish to lose in their current relationships. Many parishioners, from all three parishes, said that they would welcome new parishioners with “open arms,” greeting them at the beginning of mass, including them in the mass, finding out their strengths and using them in the community. Unfortunately, neither St. Francis de Sales nor St. George's churches had an official “welcoming committee,” and when asked, various parishioners noted the absence of one. Granted, there are not many people moving into the area, but the lack of a formalized committee may be a sign that welcoming newcomers is not a priority, with churches focusing more on keeping the current community alive and active. However, the goal of the St. Benedict's Unit, and the larger restructuring

process, involves finding ways to bring this community out of each church and extend it to the level of the unit.

Stephen and Christina, from St. George's, responded to my hypothetical question about how to welcome other groups into their church by suggesting participation. Christina stated that to include newcomers "you would have to try and involve as many people from other churches in your liturgy" (08/06/08). They told me about the plans for the outdoor mass at their church at the end of June, and Stephen suggested that involving members from other parishes in the liturgy should be done more regularly. On a regular Sunday, for example, he could read in St. Francis de Sales or someone from Cardigan could come to St. George's and distribute communion as a Eucharistic minister. For this kind of arrangement to be possible, however, each of the communities would have to agree that they are working together and be willing to give up some of their regular connections to their own church and instead participate in the wider "multi-point parish" of the St. Benedict's Unit. Christina even pointed out that such cooperation would benefit the churches, overcoming much of the duplication that exists between them; she suggested that "we could have one envelope, St. Benedict's Pastoral, and whatever bills came in for St. George's got paid by the central...." But then Stephen wondered what would happen when one church required more funds than another. "I think you would quickly close one or two of them," Christina replied. The reality of closures due to lack of funds is not far from any discussion of church and community.

At the same time as communities are striving to keep their churches open and welcoming, DPIC is asking larger questions, about the extent to which these communities actually are healthy and alive. This process involves thinking ahead to see where communities and the Catholic population on Prince Edward Island will be in the next 10, 20 or 50 years. The general trend is that numbers in the communities are not expected to grow; in fact, the population in King's County will get smaller in the next 8 – 10 years (Diocese of Charlottetown 2007a). Even those who have suggested closing the smaller churches to build a larger, centrally located building realize that in twenty years, even these buildings may be too large for the community. Parishioners understand that their communities are slowly dying out; however, many are not ready to accept this fact.

The Health of the Community

Anthropologists commenting on the interconnection between the individual body and the community suggest that the body can be read as a symbol of the community (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). In rural PEI narratives about the loss of bodies through abortion symbolize a community in transition concerned with both physical and spiritual maintenance. In this section, I focus on the conflict around abortion in the communities where I worked and its connection to family size and concerns about community growth.

When I began my research in the Diocese of Charlottetown, I was required to have my questions approved by a member of DPIC. In our discussion about my interview topics, and some of my more controversial questions on church

policy, Nathan, the DPIC member, initially rejected my question to parishioners about their views on birth control. In his opinion, this issue was no longer an interesting question. After Vatican II, while the church continued to preach against the use of birth control, many priests told parishioners to follow their own conscience on the topic: so many Catholics went ahead and covertly used birth control methods (Greeley 2004:56). Nathan felt the topic had been settled; so instead I turned to questions about married and/or female priests. However, a month after I entered the field, news came that on July 1,st the Prime Minister had invited Dr. Henry Morgentaler to join the Order of Canada (Hébert 2008).²³ As Prince Edward Island is the only province in Canada that does not have a Planned Parenthood Clinic and as I was staying in a household that regularly received regional and national Catholic newspapers, I was well placed to read about the Catholic resistance to this appointment, as led by the church. Since I was also interviewing members of Catholic churches now concerned with this announcement, I included it in my list of interview topics and began to explore the reactions of rural Catholics to the appointment.

All of the ten people I spoke with about Henry Morgentaler's award were opposed to his activism to legalize abortion. Even the most liberal of my participants, the father of one child and a more casual churchgoer who firmly supported the idea of married and female priests, expressed his pro-life feelings

²³ Henry Morgentaler is the medical doctor responsible for opening the first abortion clinic in Canada and, in 1988, winning a court case from the Supreme Court of Canada that decriminalized abortion in Canada (Hébert 2008).

and stated that he would only support abortion in cases of extreme medical emergency. He did not believe it should be legal as a form of birth control. I expected this general pro-life trend among parishioners as the Catholic Church in Canada is a major supporter of anti-abortion movements. This type of reaction is similar to those Ginsburg finds among many members, regardless of religious affiliation, who make up the pro-life movement in the United States. In her words, they see abortion as “symptomatic of other social problems,” in particular, an individualistic attitude, supported by materialism and narcissism that is “displacing nurturant ties of kin and community” (Ginsburg 1989:9).

One of my respondents, June, a very devout church-goer from St. Mary’s Church in Souris had much to say on the topic of abortion and what it was doing to Canadian communities. Personally, she was disgusted that the Canadian government would honour Dr. Morgentaler because,

This Henry Morgentaler and people like him are responsible for what’s happening now in Canada; we don’t have enough people. They’re bringing people in from other countries to work and they’re going to give the Order of Canada to a man who is mainly responsible for the destruction of that generation, probably two generations of children...Canada is no longer made up of Canadians but made up of – the majority of the population in Canada is no longer “Canadian,” it’s people from diverse backgrounds. And I have nothing against that, but we’re losing our Canadian identity, and it’s thanks to Mr. Morgentaler (07/23/08).

While these remarks are clearly anti-immigrant, which raises other issues about community and boundary keeping, they also show how abortion is understood as leading to a loss of community in an area where having many

children and large families have been the norm. As a few parishioners asked, where are the numbers going? Why aren't there large families of boys sending one or even two sons to the priesthood? Where are the larger families filling up the pews? There are many reasons that Catholics oppose abortion, but at a time of community transition, this opposition is connected to the population loss that these communities are facing. Marriage, family and the numbers of children have been changing in these Catholic communities, as the following example shows.

The Use of the Church

The practice of Catholic marriages on Prince Edward Island is for the bride to be married in her home church, regardless of the home parish of the groom. For Jim, an elderly member of St. Francis de Sales who has been attending the church for most of this life, this custom meant being married in St. George's church where his wife grew up. The couple then moved to Little Pond and their children were baptized and confirmed in St. Francis de Sales, the church Jim had attended, and this was also the church where two of his daughters were married, continuing the pattern. This tradition is evident in most of the families I spoke with, and between generations as well. Weddings, the joining of families, are a symbol of growth and promise within these communities and the church has played an important role in these rites of passage.

In Chapter Four I surveyed the multiple functions of the church building that parishioners find important: it is the venue for weddings, for baptisms, funerals, and benefit concerts. The church hall is used as a space for wedding and

baby showers, for funeral teas, charity dinners as well as card games, bingo nights and other concerts. However patterns of church use also tell the story of a shift in population numbers. Father Brendon, the parish priest in St. Benedict's Unit reports that in the past year, St. George's Church has only seen one baptism, eight funerals, and no weddings. In the wider diocese, Father Molina, the Chancellor of the Diocese of Charlottetown, reports that this pattern is common among various churches; weddings and baptisms, the signs of new families, are not as prevalent as they have been in the past, with many churches reporting none in the past year. Similar patterns were noted by Badone (1989:88-9) in rural Brittany almost 20 years earlier, showing that the decrease in church attendance among Catholics is not restricted to Canada.

At St. Francis de Sales, the quintessential rural church in Little Pond, the size of a confirmation²⁴ class almost 20 years ago, which gathered together children between the ages of 12 and 14, was 11. As that group gets smaller and smaller, confirmation is no longer even held at the church in Little Pond; children from grades seven and eight are confirmed with students at the other churches in the unit. More and more the use of the church is changing as, compared to past years, it is needed less and less for the celebrations of marriages, baptisms and

²⁴ Confirmation is typically the third sacrament in a Catholic's life, after baptism and first communion. For those Catholics baptized at birth, confirmation is the time for them to "reaffirm their faith and accept with full consciousness the obligations of baptism" (Bokenkotter 1985:184). On Prince Edward Island, this also marks the end of religious classes as confirmed individuals are now viewed as adults in the church who are able to make their own decisions about their religious practices and attendance.

other sacraments. The declining numbers of these rituals make it harder to keep the churches open, as parishioners know that the groups using the churches will be smaller in the next generation. Once again the question of keeping the church open comes down to numbers, involving both finances and population.

Church Restoration

In her research on the restoration of historic buildings, sociologist Diane Barthel writes that church restoration movements lend credence to the idea that religion is less about serving God than about creating moral communities (Barthel 1996:101). Communities have been an important part of parishioners' attempts to keep their churches open in rural PEI. However, Barthel's perspective is also influenced by a critique of consumerism and a desire to conceptualize religion as a separate domain from entrepreneurial and business practices. She understands religious restoration programs as promoting management styles and the type of work characteristic of the professional class and she sees charging admission to cathedrals as a controversial step toward "embracing money making" (Barthel 1996:104, 111). Unfortunately, money is required for the upkeep of older buildings and, as I mentioned in Chapter Four, when money is circulated mainly among the same people in the community, it is enterprising churches, such as St. Mary's in Indian River with its classical musical festival that reach out to other sources for income and keep their churches going.

At the same time that economics threatens religious buildings, similar pressures are playing out in issues of family size and family planning. Schneider

and Schneider (1995) write about demographic changes in Catholic Sicily in the early twentieth century and their observations are interesting when compared to Prince Edward Island. In the village of Villamaura before 1920, they note that Catholic families had between five and thirteen children, but by the 1930s, family size had shifted to include only two or three children (Schneider and Schneider 1995:184). A similar demographic shift is present on Prince Edward Island, although it occurred later for the families I interviewed. Born into a family of 12 that grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in St. George's, one woman in her 50s now has only two children. Another woman from Souris, in her 40s, was one of seven children in the 1970s and is now the mother of two teenagers.

A generation earlier, parishioners felt the need to defend their choice to have smaller families. Peter, a member of St. George's, is in his 70s and the father of four children. When I asked him about the size of his family he shared with me the sad story that after their last child his wife hemorrhaged severely and the doctor suggested that they have no more children. There was a certain defensiveness in his answer, and I suspect that my question echoed the ideology of having large families that was prevalent at that time. Instead of having more children of their own, Peter and his wife became foster parents, finding other ways to keep a larger family around the farm. Sarah, from Souris, who is also in her 70s, has deep regrets about following her doctor's advice and eventually the priest's teaching on childbirth. After two difficult births, Sarah underwent a hysterectomy, but often felt that her youngest child's many illnesses were a form

of divine punishment for undergoing the surgery that prevented her from having more children (07/10/08).

Religious beliefs, working parents and financial pressures have influenced family size over the past 40 years in these communities. On one visit to Souris I spoke with Vicky, a university-educated mother, who works in the health field, about the expectations of contemporary families. Pregnant with her fourth child, Vicky believes that the contemporary lack of priests and changes in family size are a long-term consequence of ignoring the Catholic doctrine forbidding birth control. Vicky also takes issue with some of the expectations of contemporary families, such as being able to pay for the latest toys or even provide an expensive education for their children. Once again, it is interesting to compare rural PEI with Schneider and Schneider's (1995) study. In Sicily changes in work, the introduction of mass-produced clothing, washing machines and shifts in housing prices put more consumer goods into the hands of the peasant class (1995:187). At the same time as the price of raising children and paying for their clothing and education increased, family size decreased (188). These influences are evident in Vicky's discussion of some of the pressures that have lead to smaller families in rural PEI:

Well, what's to say they all have to go to university? It's what value we're now putting on it. There's more clothes to wash because we buy them more clothes, there's more toys to put away because we have so much more. And they have four different outfits they can put on through the day. You know, there's so many differences. And the homes and our standard of cleanliness so you have the hot shower times six everyday...(07/11/08).

Vicky suggests that consumption patterns and changes in values have influenced family size. Her earlier comments on birth control and its consequences also reveal her religious interpretation of certain decisions and show the shape of her particular moral values. For Vicky, like June in Souris, population is a matter of cause and effect and issues of birth control have repercussions for the Catholic Church. Many reflections from parishioners express a sense of the loss of life, resulting from the pressures that change family size, and the use of birth control. These factors are seen as depleting the generations that will form the community in the future.

The Lost Generation

There is a sense of loss regarding the youth in the Catholic Church on Prince Edward Island. Young people were not well represented among those I saw regularly at mass in the three communities that I visited. Having grown up on Prince Edward Island, I was aware that people of my age share a very real sense of anger and resentment directed toward the church. I am not sure where this anger originates. Clearly however, just as the Second Vatican Council²⁵ reforms of the 1960s mark a generational response to Catholicism, as I found interviewing pre and post-Vatican II Catholics, the following generation, born in the 1970s and 1980s, are another distinct group. In many cases, these young

²⁵ The Second Vatican Council, known less formally as Vatican II, marked major religious reforms in the Roman Catholic Church. Badone (1990b:19) succinctly summarizes these reforms by the Catholic Church as a way to “promote a style of religious expression in which ritual and mystery were deemphasized in favor of an ethically oriented, human-centered and spiritualized faith.” See page 120 for more discussion of the Vatican II reforms.

people have left the church altogether, or only attend for certain special services. While I was not able to interview people in this age group, they were frequently referred to in my interviews, as parishioners wondered how to bring back these youth, and how to be sure that their families and children will be involved in the church. On PEI, at least, Bibby's (1987) characterization of the "the fragmented church" is accurate, as active parishioners admonish members of the younger generations for their absence from church and these younger people are increasingly attending mass only for life cycle rituals such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. Instead of contributing to a parish throughout their lives, as many of the middle aged and elderly parishioners I interviewed are doing, this next generation seems to assume that the church is a permanent fixture of the social landscape, which is not their responsibility to maintain. And many others are choosing not to attend at all and may not care if it disappears entirely. Smaller families result in lower numbers of people attending church, as well as fewer men and women making commitments to the religious life as priests and nuns. This latter issue will be discussed in the next chapter.

The reality is that if the next generation does not attend church, many church buildings and parish communities on PEI will not continue to exist. Similar to Behar's (1996) understanding of memory as a duty, many current Catholics see their religion as a community and neighbourly duty that should be upheld by the next generation through mass attendance, pledges to the priesthood and year-long financial support. If that duty is not fulfilled, the results will be

seen in rural communities on Prince Edward Island in the closing of churches. Church closures, in turn will have an impact on the broader fabric of local communities. In the following chapter I look at the connections that parishioners have to their religion and how local religious identities reflect the official doctrines of the larger Roman Catholic Church.

Chapter Six

Popular Religion on Prince Edward Island

Introduction

Anthropologists have explored the often oppositional dialogue between popular religion, “the informal, unofficial practices, beliefs, and styles of religious expression that lack the formal sanction of established church structures” and the more formal church doctrine presented by priests and other members of the church hierarchy (Badone 1990b: 6). Examples of popular religion or folk religion in other Catholic communities include beliefs in omens and other supernatural occurrences in Brittany (Badone 1989), additional feast days in Spanish villages not currently recognized by the Catholic church (Brandes 1976) and occurrences of spontaneous healing at shrines that are also unacknowledged by the formal church (Badone 2007; Christian 1996). Often these popular traditions come about through a process of syncretism, and more specifically parochialization, whereby orthodox traditions are reshaped at the village level (Brandes 1976; Redfield 1955). While the practices may be forgotten or rethought at the official Church or orthodox level, they are often carried on at the local level (Christian 1987). Tensions arise with the arrival of a more orthodox priest or bishop in an area strongly tied to its specific local interpretation of a ritual or belief.

In rural Prince Edward Island, Redfield’s (1955) Great and Little Traditions are less significant than the split between what Behar (1990) calls the

historical and new church, a division that is marked by the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II, was a series of meetings held by the leaders of the church, the bishops and archbishops, from 1962 to 1965. The result of these meetings was a collection of reforms that were implemented to make the church more relevant in an increasingly modern world. While scholars still debate if these reforms helped or hindered the growth of the Roman Catholic Church, Vatican II was an historic event in the church's current history. In general, the changes instituted by the Council involved a shift from a magical and mystical view of the world, emphasizing rules and ritual, to an understanding of religion more focused on spirituality and social justice, as experienced through liturgy, ecumenism and a focus on the involvement of lay people (Behar 1990, Greeley 2004, Badone 1990b).

Thomas Bokenkotter (1979) outlines five of the changes from the Second Vatican Council that he believes will have a lasting effect on the Church. The first change to the liturgy, is perhaps the most obvious change for ordinary Catholics, as after Vatican II priests celebrated mass in the vernacular instead of in Latin to make it more accessible to the congregation, and faced their parishioners from behind the turned altar (Bokenkotter 1979:421, Behar 1990). Second, Bokenkotter notes a shift in the focus of authority; from an emphasis on the hierarchy of the church, a "fellowship" was instead promoted between the Pope and bishops to allow for a more inclusive decision making process (1979:422). Ecumenism was the third change as Vatican II moved away from

trying to convert Protestants back to the Catholic Church and instead promoted dialogue with other Christians with the goal of uniting around common prayer and work on social problems (423). Fourth, the Church recognized the historical context surrounding its existence, acknowledging the influence of history on Catholic traditions and beliefs (423). Finally, Vatican II promoted “dialogue with the modern secular world” which allowed the Church to accept and embrace various liberal and social movements (424).

Another change resulting from Vatican II was the representation of God as a loving, rather than vengeful, spirit. Bokenkotter (1985:30) writes about this shift in interpreting God as “a person who comes to us in grace and love” and Greeley (2004:50) interprets one of the important outcomes of Vatican II as finding that “the central truth of Christianity was God’s forgiving love...while Catholicism before Vatican II was in fact a...sin – and rule – driven heritage.” Around the world, changes to Catholic practices and attitudes came about through Vatican II, and parishioners on PEI see this as a defining moment in their local church as well.

Catholics on PEI do not want to return to the pre-Vatican II church. In fact, many of Bokenkotter’s (1979) changes have been incorporated into their practices and attitudes. For example, relationships with clergy and church leadership have become more collegial. In addition, a positive attitude toward ecumenism is illustrated through the close relationships of PEI Catholics with friends and family of other faiths and in their own connections to the secular

world. Some parishioners believe the Vatican II reforms have influenced some of the different choices that priests, trained at different points in the church's history, make in using Pastoral Associates²⁶, hearing confessions, and even choosing when to support the Bishop. Decisions on these issues made by priests have also given rise to power struggles, as the diocese, the priests and parishioners struggle over who has "ownership" of the church (Behar 1990). Parishioners believe that some current clergy, 40 years after the Second Vatican Council, question the liberal ethos that emerged from the Council and parishioners react against this "new conservatism" in various ways, including the expression of anticlerical sentiments and even a lack of religion, or secularism (compare Badone 1990b; Brandes 1976). Another tension in religious practice exists in the difference between public ritual and personal faith.²⁷ In general, however, parishioners' experience of Catholicism in eastern Prince Edward Island does not represent a challenge to the orthodox teachings of the Catholic Church. Divisions illustrate differences in interpretation within the bounds of orthodoxy rather than the tensions between orthodoxy and popular religion.

²⁶ Pastoral Associates, or PAs, are nuns or lay men and women trained to support the priest in his parish. Some have permission to lead prayer and liturgy services although their responsibilities vary from church to church on PEI. For a discussion of some of the questions regarding lay led prayer services in Canada, see Henderson (1988).

²⁷ Dubisch (1990:129) notes this type of conflict at a Greek Orthodox pilgrimage site, observing that religious expressions there are more outward than inward.

Pastoral Priorities

The Catholic Church has a long and international history and one of its enduring features has been the ritual of the mass. Beyond any other priority, the Eucharist²⁸, or the consecration and receipt of the Blessed Sacrament, is the main ritual that Prince Edward Island Catholics want from their churches (Diocese of Charlottetown 2008). The belief in transubstantiation through the receipt of communion is the central part of the Catholic mass, and is what separates Catholicism from many other Christian denominations (Bokenkotter 1985). This ritual of the official Church is what ties these Island Catholics together as well as to the wider Catholic community throughout the world. Because of the centrality of the Eucharist in their faith, most parishioners said that they would continue to attend a Catholic church, regardless of where it was located. Most interviewees told me that if their building closed they would find another place to practice their faith since their religion was larger than just one building.

However, this centrality of the Eucharist is not without contestation, as it has been the cause for some tensions as well as some reinterpretations of religion

²⁸ The Eucharist is the centerpiece of the Catholic mass whereby the priest consecrates, or blesses the communion host and wine. Through his blessing it is believed that transubstantiation – “the transition of one thing into another in some aspect of being” – occurs, and the bread and wine take on the presence of Christ as they become his body and blood (Pohle 2009[1909]). After the host has been blessed, parishioners partake in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Here they receive the host and the presence of Christ. The Catholic Church currently expects parishioners to attend church and receive Holy Communion once a week on Sundays, as well as on Holy Days. For these religious reasons, parishioners are concerned with having a priest in their church at least once a week for Sunday mass.

by various parishioners. The most important aspect of the Eucharist in this debate is the act of consecrating the host, or blessing the bread to make it holy, which can only be performed by an ordained priest. When a Pastoral Associate leads a service of Liturgy that includes communion, the Eucharist has to be consecrated in advance. Parishioners are well aware of this distinction between priest and laity and between mass and service. People use this distinction both to argue for a resident priest, and also to argue that churches can exist with only a visiting pastor, if parishioners can take on the other responsibilities associated with weekly religious rituals.

This focus on the weekly mass has generated a critique from priests and DPIC members, who wish that parishioners would move beyond being religious only one hour a week, during mass, and extend their faith to the rest of the week as well. As Father Molina puts it, it is a matter of not being a “Charlie Brown” who is a good man, but doesn’t connect his everyday actions with the Eucharist. Instead, Father Molina would like Catholics to live the Eucharist beyond the weekly hour of church. He says,

The celebration of mass is one hour of the week for many of our faithful. The celebration of the Eucharist is the other 6 days and 23 hours. So when you go for your walk or you go outside, or are working, or cooking, or doing your paperwork, that is celebration of the Eucharist if you make present Jesus Christ in your work (08/11/08).

Parishioners understand this perspective and have provided examples of the ways in which they feel the Eucharist is present in their lives, through both informal

practices and formal ones supported by the church. Over the course of one DPIC meeting in the winter of 2008, unscripted comments revealed that “faith comes alive during the week” through the lived experience of religion as church members serve meals to those unable to cook for themselves, welcome new arrivals to the area, or look after cattle on a farm when a neighbour must be absent.



Figure 6.1 Gifts of the Eucharist Members of the St. Benedict's Unit assembled after the outdoor mass in St. George's. Each member holds a banner showing an example of the way that they live out the Eucharist in their community (Image Credit: Waddell, June 22, 2008).

At a joint mass held in St. Benedict's Unit to celebrate the Eucharistic Congress in Québec City in June 2008, the priest organized a procession of parishioners to show examples of the ways that the Eucharist is lived in their community (See Figure 6.1). Members of the congregation carried banners inscribed with, and

read out, examples such as visiting, leadership, and support along with more religiously associated terms including prayer, catechesis and liturgy.

In her research on Greek Orthodoxy, Jill Dubisch (1990) notes that ritual is often more important than internal belief in the popular faith of her participants. She writes that Greek Orthodoxy is a highly “visible” religion, with votive candles and statues in the church, and the buildings themselves marking the landscape with tiny churches visible on the horizon on many of Greece’s islands (Dubisch 1990:130). In the same way, Catholicism on PEI is highly visible. As discussed in Chapter Four, parishioners in eastern Prince Edward Island express their connections to their churches and the community associated with that particular location. However, in asking parishioners to think about less public, visible, once-weekly rituals, the authorities of the Catholic Church on Prince Edward Island are focusing more on internal beliefs, particularly on the centrality of what the Eucharistic ritual represents. For some parishioners this internalization of religion has allowed for a reinterpretation of how Catholic beliefs fit into their lives.

In particular, two parishioners spoke about their experience of spirituality outside of the church. Both of these women were less concerned with receiving the sacrament than with an individual connection to God. This perspective is not uncommon among those raised in the post-Vatican II era, since Vatican II made a shift from focusing on mass and rituals to keeping a more internal faith (Behar 1990:105). For Katherine, a member of St. Francis de Sales in her 50s, the rituals

of church bring her a sense of peacefulness which makes her feel close to God.

“Mind you”, she says,

I can feel very peaceful down at the water as well, talking to God...it's peacefulness down there. If I'm going to be close to God it's at a private time, not when there's hundreds of people around. And I think that's probably why I like the small church, because it's more quiet, more peaceful and you feel closer to God...but [it's] the closeness of the community that draws me to church as well (06/10/08).

For Ashley, a member of St. George's, going to church is important, but she also understands that much of what she gets out of church depends on the priest and her own frame of mind and participation in the service. She admits that on more than one occasion she has felt that the mass left her cold. Instead, her “quiet peace” can come from attending an evening mass by herself, waiting in the empty church for her children to come from catechism class, or even, she says, “sometimes I get more if I just go for a walk or go somewhere and sit quiet and you get that little time to yourself. It doesn't always have to be sitting in the church” (07/22/08). Ashley's expression of faith comes from taking time out of a busy day. This time for reflection, and an individual sense of connection to her religion, is an experience that she shares with Katherine.

In their interviews these women from two different church communities both said their faith would not change if their particular church building closed, but their participation and commitment to a particular church would be impacted. Neither mentioned the Eucharist in their interviews, instead expressing their faith in terms of morals, community membership and belief in the afterlife. These

aspects of faith were those they wanted their children to share, and what they needed themselves during the loss of family members or when dealing with personal illness.

As noted, Father Molina and other members of DPIC encourage parishioners to move away from a focus on the church building and to expand their sense of religion beyond the weekly hours of the mass. In light of this perspective, parishioners such as Katherine and Ashley provide an interesting re-thinking of internal faith. Their lack of commitment to a new church building could be problematic for future congregations, since their financial commitment may not be there. However, there is something in their reinterpretation of how to live the spirit of the church, if not directly through the Eucharist, then in taking time to meditate on their faith. At both St. George's and St. Francis de Sales churches, Father Brendon used many of his summer sermons to preach about slowing down, avoiding rushing or being impatient. These women embody that sense of finding a place to be peaceful and think about religion outside of a weekly mass setting. Father Brendon reminded me in our discussions, and parishioners in multiple sermons, of the sign hanging over the door of his churches. Hung inside the door, parishioners are meant to see these words as they leave the building. They read, "The mission of the church starts here", and this serves as a reminder for parishioners as they go out into the week.

DPIC has expressed an interest in shifting the church model on PEI from the current one focused on upkeep to one that emphasizes outreach. The leaders

of the Diocese of Charlottetown advocate spending money on social justice projects, and outreach to non-practicing Catholics and the youth of the community (Diocese of Charlottetown 2008). Many parishioners in these rural parishes see the benefit of these projects. For example, Barb, an active member of St. Francis de Sales parish, sees the church as an educator, stating, “It’s a source of where people start to learn their ‘volunteer spirit’, or sense of charity, or reaching out to others. And it’s a place where people know they can go for help” (08/10/08). However, many of the efforts within the churches by these same participants are focused on raising funds in order to maintain their local church building. DPIC would prefer that fundraising activity be used for outreach, while many people in each parish see their role as one of maintaining their own church.

The practice of religion is experienced on PEI as a complex relationship between community and church. None of the people I spoke to would actually leave their religion if their church was no longer there; however, they spoke about “others” they knew, who might leave the church if the restructuring process goes ahead as planned. The comments that people might possibly leave the church are an example of the “upkeep vs. outreach” tension. Keeping up the church could mean missing out on accessing those who have gone away from the faith, while outreach may bring back some but lose others. For the most part, parishioners want to keep things going as they are, for the time being.

Secularization

In many examples of the dialectical relationship between popular faith and the official church, changes in levels of religious practice or an increase in secularization can be at stake (Badone 1990b; Brandes 1976). While the secularization thesis has been called into question in recent decades, it is indisputable that there has been a decline of Roman Catholicism on Prince Edward Island that is partly responsible for the need of the parish restructuring process. I rely on Brandes' (1976:22) definition of secularization as occurring when people "participate in fewer rituals or voluntarily contribute less time and money to the support of religious personnel and institutions."²⁹ This description applies to Prince Edward Island as younger generations attend church much less frequently than previous generations and those who contribute to the church are getting older (Diocese of Charlottetown 2007b). I do not think it is a coincidence that those most involved in their churches and those most concerned with the closure of the buildings are in their late 50s or older. While the Diocese of Charlottetown planned for parish restructuring in response to increasing secularization and decreasing church attendance and revenues, the parish restructuring policy in itself also has the potential to generate secularization, as seen in Brandes' (1976) case in Spain. Here, the priests, and the Vatican II

²⁹ Note that this definition tells us nothing about changes in "religious" or "spiritual" beliefs that may not be in decline but are perhaps increasingly found outside of formal institutions.

reforms they brought with them become unwitting agents of secularization for local parishioners.

One explanation of secularization connects the process to a socioeconomic shift (Brandes 1976). Islanders provide many reasons for the decrease in church attendance and support for Catholicism. Many cite the increased pressures of their lives. For many families, children's participation in hockey is perceived as taking up time that might otherwise be used for church attendance. Another force is social change. Religious denominations are no longer responsible for the control of schools or hospitals on PEI, so the presence of religion in daily life is diminishing. A few parishioners, all of them elderly, blame the decline in attendance at mass on the shift from a "theology of fear" to a "theology of love," similar to that Behar has noted among the younger generation of priests in Spain (1990:104). In both cases, this shift in theology comes after Vatican II and the change in representation from a vengeful God to one of love. Finally, many parishioners commented on the confidence that parishioners now have in questioning many forms of authority, including their priests. These factors, especially the decreased influence of religion in the public sphere, and increased questioning of authority figures, inform how parishioners respond to those committed to the holy orders on Prince Edward Island.

Choosing the Religious Life

The low numbers of young men committing to the priesthood and the reality that current priests are working past the age of retirement in order to

service all of the Catholic churches on Prince Edward Island are pressures influencing the restructuring process. As I reported in Chapter Two, the number of priests is quickly declining as almost half of the active 32 priests are over the age of 60 (Diocese of Charlottetown 2007a). Moreover three of these 32 priests left during my fieldwork: one for retirement, one on sick leave and a third left the priesthood completely. While priests are not necessary in a religious community on a daily basis, they are still essential to the practice of Catholicism for most parishioners. Therefore, these declining numbers are a source of real stress for parishioners and those involved in the restructuring process. However, there are some alternatives that parishioners in the three churches I studied are coming to accept, and even embrace.

It has been over 10 years since the resident priest in St. George's died and the Bishop told parishioners the famous line repeated to me: "I can't reach up on a shelf and pull down a priest for you, but, you can share one" (06/08/08). The Bishop also assigned a Pastoral Associate, or PA, Sister Katherine, or KT, as she is affectionately known, to the community to act as a support for the priest who was in residence in Cardigan, a community about 15 kilometres south. In the following years St. George's and St. Francis de Sales churches have both had experience with Sister KT and her successor, Sister Joan, who was beginning her final year as a PA during the summer of 2008. I only heard good things about these women in their roles as church leaders, including two comments that raised

the idea of expanding the definition of who could become a priest outside of the current category of a celibate male.

Joyce, a longtime church member from St. George's, now in her 50s with two children, said, "To me, Sister Joan would be a beautiful priest. There's nowhere that I knew of back in the Bible that Jesus ever said that a priest had to be a man" (07/18/08). Stephen, another member of St. George's and one of the church's representatives in the restructuring process told me that at the parish meetings,

"I don't know whether it was right or wrong to say it but I said, 'If we could have ordained either Sister K.T. or Sister Joan, we would have done that. And that's no reflection on the priest, you know...They did such great work, especially with the kids, and with the youth in Catechism, moreso than the priests would have done. But I guess [Sister Joan] had more time, she was working only in our parish and she had more time to spend and probably more interest in that thing, [being a former teacher]'"(06/08/08).

Stanley Brandes (1990) writes that in his experience in Spain, parishioners are less critical of nuns than they are of the priests, as they may be viewed as "less threatening than priests, simply because they are women" (1990:192). Perhaps this gender distinction informs some of the sentiments on PEI, but for the most part, parishioners' support of women seems to come from their experiences with these examples of females who have taken a leadership role within the church. Most of the participants in my research know that the Vatican and the current church leader, Pope Benedict XVI, have stated that there will be no discussion of ordaining women, but very few PEI Catholics are willing to agree. The majority of participants, both men and women, go against church teachings to support the

idea of ordaining women. Those who are not in favour of such a change are, for the most part, elderly and more conservative in other views relating to the church.

The majority of Catholics who I interviewed hold at least some beliefs that are in direct opposition to church policy. They rely on their local experiences rather than official church doctrines to inform their ideas about leadership in the church. This attitude makes sense as two of the churches in this study have benefited in the last few years from nuns who work as pastoral associates, in order to support or even fill in for the priest in a parish without a resident pastor. Comments like those quoted above give some insight into the atmosphere of Catholicism on PEI, where the lack of men entering the priesthood and a general increase in secularization among young Island Catholics have opened up the discussion about changing Catholic policy with regards to vocations to the priesthood.

One story that I heard many times during fieldwork concerns a comment made by a recently retired priest on PEI. He said he is in support of allowing priests to marry, “just as long as it’s not mandatory.” Open discussions about the ordination of women and jokes by priests about the possibility of marriage suggest that these topics are part of the popular religious domain on Prince Edward Island. I asked all of the participants in my interviews about their thoughts on whether or not the Catholic Church should allow priests to marry or

ordain women to the priesthood.³⁰ Some parishioners expressed concerns about one or other of these changes, but most supported one if not both options. The majority said they thought both policies needed to be changed. Their reasons included updating the faith to be more equitable to women, and looking to other denominations, particularly the United Church, in which ministers marry, and are often aided by their spouses. On Prince Edward Island as well, there is a long history of men leaving the seminary in order to marry, a trend I discovered increasingly throughout my fieldwork as parishioners revealed to me the names of various male family members who had, at one time, been training to be priests, but were now married and raising children.³¹ Having to make the choice between the priesthood and family life is one barrier men face in deciding about a vocation.³²

³⁰ When I posed the question regarding priests and marriage to parishioners I did not make a distinction between allowing already ordained priests to be married, or allowing married men to become priests. While I realize that these are different points in light of the vows of celibacy that priests take upon their ordination, this did not seem to make a difference for my interviewees. Indeed, many of the comments parishioners made on the topic of having a priest with a spouse could be applied to either case.

³¹ Not only family members but parishioners also mentioned prominent laity in the diocese – including one of the DPIC members in 2008 – who left the seminary to raise families and take on lay leadership roles in their churches.

³² The ordination of the first married priest to the Diocese of Charlottetown on Sunday, August 9th 2009 added more speculation about the possibility of changing the definition of who can be a Catholic priest. A former Anglican priest, Martin Carter, received special permission from the Vatican to be ordained, a practice that has been happening “quietly” in Canada for the past 20 years (Engelhart 2009). As an ordained married priest, Carter is not allowed to be pastor as his own church, and will instead assist at another location (Rochford 2009). Neither Carter nor Bishop Fougère see this as a change to church law, but rather

Significantly, some members of St. Mary's in Souris were the most adamant supporters I encountered of church policy restricting ordination to celibate men. However, they experienced a change in the summer of 2008 during the annual clergy appointments. These regular appointments move priests between churches in the diocese every few years. Some parishioners believe this movement keeps anticlerical sentiments to a minimum because, as Jim from St. Francis de Sales told me, "there's never been a priest anywhere that everyone liked." In the 2008 appointment, Father Paul Batchilder moved from western PEI to take over St. Mary's church in Souris. This incoming priest was a former husband and school teacher who entered the priesthood later in life, after his wife of 25 years died of cancer. The few parishioners I spoke to from his church were more than willing to accept his past as a married man because they felt his experiences would enable him to provide support on topics related to marriage and family relationships. While Father Batchilder's current status as a priest fits into the orthodox pattern as it does not challenge the definition of a priest as a celibate male, his warm welcome into the parish shows that parishioners felt there was something missing from this traditional definition of the celibate male priest.

For the most part, there is much respect shown to priests and nuns on Prince Edward Island. This attitude is similar to the respect Taylor (1990, 1995) found among Catholics in Ireland. The similarities between these two islands, PEI and Ireland, are not surprising, as many of the Catholic communities on PEI

"an exception to the rule," suggesting that married priests is not a topic the Vatican is currently considering (Mcmillan 2009).

were settled by Irish Catholics in the early 1800s (O’Shea 2003). However, criticism of the priests, DPIC members, and the Bishop has arisen as a result of the restructuring process, and these tensions will be explored in the next section.

Anticlericalism

Anticlericalism is often expressed through comments about greedy priests and class conflicts, questions about priestly celibacy and struggles over the ownership of the church (Brandes 1990; Brettell 1990). Many of these topics were raised in comments made by parishioners on Prince Edward Island, although with some differences from sentiments found in Catholic communities in the Mediterranean (Behar 1990; Brettell 1990), or in northwestern France (Badone 1990a). Brettell (1990) writes about the opposition expressed by priests in Portugal toward local church processions, as well as class conflicts between laity and priests. The public conflicts on Prince Edward Island are less concerned with rituals, and stem more from the restructuring process itself. Anticlerical sentiments, directed toward the Bishop, have been heard at parish restructuring meetings as parishioners have asked why “the head of the local church body [is not] out here talking to his people?” (Willis 2008). A few parishioners also expressed frustration with the urban-rural divide between the more vocal decision makers on DPIC, who live in the city of Charlottetown – including the Bishop and those lay leaders working at the Chancery Office – and the majority of Catholics in the province who are based in the rural areas of the province. Some people believe these differences have already caused conflicting decisions.

Parishioners have also expressed support and respect for their priests at parish restructuring meetings, and priests themselves have spoken out loudly in support of the work done by the laity. These observations echo those of Taylor (1990) who found that priests in Ireland “are far more typically praised than damned” (1990:166). Historical class distinctions between priests and laity have been bridged, as priests are no longer the most educated persons in their community and often work within the communities where they were raised. The current trend is to try to work with the priests, to support them as their numbers decline and priests take on the challenge of ministering to multiple churches. Moreover, parishioners realize how lonely priests’ lives can be. More than one parishioner expressed support for the idea of allowing married priests in the church because “the life is not a bed of roses” (Colin 07/21/08) and at the end of a tough day, instead of going home to an empty, quiet house, “wouldn’t he love to go home and sit in his chair and have the wife pass him a cup of coffee and say, ‘How was your day, dear?’” (Rachel 07/11/08). Some priests, along with laypeople on Prince Edward Island, cope with the pressures of their lives through the use and abuse of alcohol. Through informal, day-to-day conversations I became aware of various priests in the diocese who are members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Parishioners, some of them members themselves, understand that priests are capable of having the same vices they do, which allows them to feel both empathy and question the authority of these leaders.

Other aspects of the priestly lifestyle are a topic of serious discussion on Prince Edward Island. In contrast to the stories and jokes told about priests having affairs in Spain (Behar 1990) or Brittany (Badone 1990a), the sexuality of priests was rarely discussed in my interviews with parishioners. The few who did mention priests and sexuality referred to the sex scandals that have plagued the Catholic Church in Canada in the past 10 years.³³ Some of my interviewees suggested that fallout from this type of scandal has tarnished the priesthood in general and may be responsible for the lack of men taking up vocations. With these serious offenses on the minds of parishioners, many may not think joking is appropriate, and perhaps it never was part of local culture. Peter, a dedicated member of St. George's, told me that once cars arrived in the area, around the 1950s, "All of the priests drove with the housekeeper in the back" (09/07/08). His cousin, who was a priest, abided by this rule even with female family members. Ordained in Charlottetown in 1953, he picked up his sister after his ordination and made her sit in the back seat of the car since people in Charlottetown wouldn't know that she was his sister, and they might have made some assumptions upon seeing a priest driving with a woman. Opinions about the sensitive topic of priests' sexuality may also influence the high numbers of parishioners who

³³ These scandals have not left PEI untouched; in fact, one of the retired priests hired by St. Francis de Sales Church in the summer of 2008 was the victim of rumours in early 2000 about abuse of an underage female in his parish. The charges were never followed through and he continues to fill in for other priests in the diocese. See Berry (2000) for an account of the many actual cases of the sexual abuse of children by Roman Catholic priests throughout Canada and the United States.

support the idea of allowing married priests. Many people suggested that wives would provide emotional support for priests, whom parishioners view as living lonely lives.

The initial positive and supportive relationship between parishioners and priests in rural PEI that I observed briefly in the winter of 2008 may have resulted from a united position of defense in response to DPIC and the Diocese of Charlottetown. As the months passed and the plan progressed, I discovered that parishioners expressed their frustrations with their church leaders in small ways; in particular with regards to the topic of confession. The Vatican II reforms allowed priests to do away with the confessional and instead hear face-to-face confessions from parishioners. Peter told me that he had heard that in response to recent sex scandals, mothers in Newfoundland³⁴ were scared to send their children to confession, and priests themselves were hesitant about these encounters because of the accusations of abuse that might come out of such meetings. For both parishioners and priests in the Maritimes, the repercussions of these scandals are large.

One solution to this problem is for priests to provide a public forum for personal reflection and group absolution instead of holding individual confessions. This service, known as General Absolution, was an option for priests on PEI in previous years, in order to provide confession to everyone who

³⁴ Jason Berry (2000) provides a similar quote from a member of the St. John's school board in Newfoundland. He was speaking about the Mount Cashel Orphanage Scandal which involved the physical and sexual abuse of many young boys by the Christian Brothers before it closed in 1989 (Enright 1989).

wished it before important religious seasons, such as Advent or Lent. However, Bishop Vernon Fougère revoked that practice around 2003, citing it as only an emergency option for priests, in case large crowds had gathered for individual confession and it would not be possible to hear all of them on one occasion. The Bishops' second-in-command, Father Molina, told me that when General Absolution is given, "it's always conditional – that if you have sins that you have to confess, then you have to go to [individual] confession [at a later date]. People didn't listen to that part, if you have sins it's better to go to individual confession. But that is one of the rules of the church" (08/11/08). Instead of appreciating a return to orthodox rules, some parishioners see this return to individual confession as one more excuse provoking people to leave the church. Father Molina noted that since General Absolution had been the norm for a few years, "some of the people lost their practice of going to confession." Notes Peter, who is somewhat ambivalent about his choice between General Absolution and the confessional box, "you can't take it away after people got used to it."

If parishioners have misinterpreted the use of General Absolution, they nonetheless have their own ideas about how it should be used and its role in a changing Catholic church. Barb, from St. Francis de Sales, sees the merits of the group service over individual sessions,

Because if you've gone to the hour long service, and listened at all, anything you're going to get out of it, you've gotten out of it... people love the General Absolution. It's seems like they still like, not that they like, but they still have the feeling that they need that forgiveness from the church because if you kept General Absolution, the church would be full. Guaranteed. Big, big

reaction. But, whenever it reverted, and [the Bishop] said 'No more'...then, there was a drop off... confession is probably one of the biggest things, one of the first things, that causes people to fall away, because they don't want to go to it (08/10/08).

Barb notes that the return to individual confession, which often removes anonymity for parishioners, may be one cause of secularization. Asked why people no longer want to go to confession she replied "I think that the priest doesn't have the right to sit there and tell you that you're right and wrong." Many parishioners have expressed support for their priests, but this support has not precluded the questioning of their authority, as has been noted in other parts of the Catholic world including parts of Europe (Badone 1990a, Behar 1990, Brandes 1976, Bretell 1990).

Support for priests has also been generated through the bridges that have been made between priests and laity on Prince Edward Island. The very things that priests and laity both enjoy about the close, supportive relationships within the church do not match the more traditional practice of individual confession. A return to that practice may in fact cause more problems for priests. Not only will they lose parishioners, but with declining numbers of priests, it will become more and more difficult for priests to travel around between churches in order to hear confessions. As pressures increase on priests due to declining numbers, parishioners are willing to help out, so long as priests consider making compromises in certain areas.

Ownership

Behar suggests that tensions between priests and laity are often caused by the struggles for “ownership” of the church (1990:77). On Prince Edward Island and under the guidance of the Diocese of Charlottetown, this question of ownership is one that underlies much of the confusion and frustration about the whole restructuring process. Some parishioners wonder why they cannot continue the way they are, given that their congregation is surviving with help from lay people and only Sunday visits from a priest. According to these parishioners, the ownership of the church belongs with the diocese, the larger governing body. However, official publications from the Bishop and DPIC state that the maintenance of important parish features such as the cemetery is the responsibility of the church community, along with the final decision to close the church. Neither side makes clear who “owns” the church or who may step in to have a final say about plans for its future. In my interviews, I heard parishioners say that they wanted someone in a leadership role who would make the final decisions about the future of the parish.

What parishioners want from their leaders is often conflicted, as is shown in the example of two priests in eastern PEI, each affiliated with a church in my study, and also connected as brothers. Father Brendon Gallant was, and still is, the pastor of St. Benedict’s Unit, which includes St. Francis de Sales and St. George’s churches, two of the churches in my study, along with All Saint’s Church and St. James’ Church further south. Further north, Father Floyd Gallant,

his younger brother, was responsible for the large community of Souris and its two churches, St. Mary's and St. Alexis. A month into my fieldwork, as part of the regular priest reassignment every few years, Father Floyd moved into Charlottetown and was replaced by Father Paul Batchilder. The reactions of parishioners to these various priests says something about the continued confusion around ownership, leadership and what directions parishioners wish for their parishes.

Various parishioners, both from St. Mary's and St. Francis de Sales, who have had contact with Father Floyd expressed some discontent with his style of leadership. He was described as distant, and criticized for not visiting people in the parish. At the same time, parishioners from St George's and St. Francis de Sales regularly stressed that Father Brendon needed to slow down and share some of his responsibility with parishioners; otherwise, he was going to make himself ill from overwork. In spite of complaints against Father Floyd and the concerns about Father Brendon's micromanagement, both priests were seen as having their strengths. Father Floyd's were in his celebration of mass. He performed an incredible funeral mass for a parishioner who had committed suicide and made a point of providing a monthly French mass for Acadians in the area. Father Brendon is respected for all of the extra "details" that he brings to his churches: presenting carnations to the parish women on Mother's Day, providing religious tokens to parishioners in time for Lent, hanging a hockey sweater from the pulpit at the funeral of a man he knew was a hockey fan, and his frequent visits to ill or

grieving parishioners. Each priest has his own strengths, and, as one parishioner said, “If you take Father Brendon and Father Floyd together you’ll have a perfect priest.”

But how important is a resident priest to a thriving church community? Parishioners answered this question in many ways. St. Francis de Sales has always had its priest on loan, and had to hire priests during the summer of 2008. Clearly this community could exist without a priest in residence. Even when parishioners did not know who was going to be leading the service from one week to the next, many agree with Jennifer, a parish member who said, “Oh, I don’t care about that, so long as we have mass” (07/28/08). Even many parishioners from St. George’s felt that they did not need a priest in the community, but they needed a priest to be accessible. The availability of a priest is also necessary to the continuity of a Catholic community. Without a priest, there is no one to consecrate the Eucharist, the priority of most of these parishioners and something they expect on a weekly basis. If the host is consecrated in advance, then perhaps they could survive without seeing a priest every week, but because of the strong support for priests expressed by these parishioners, that option would only be considered in a very serious or emergency case.

One alternative to offset the declining number of priests has been providing sisters to work in parishes as Pastoral Associates. From the example of St. George’s, this option has succeeded. Still, vocations to the womens’ religious orders on PEI are perhaps even lower than they are to the priesthood so these

women are limited in number as well. In recent years, the diocese has also been training lay people to work as PAs. There are currently two women within the St. Benedict's Unit who are undergoing the two-year training program and who will take over in their various parishes when Sister Joan retires in 2009. However, various parishioners expressed some hesitation about these lay PAs, who, perhaps because of their shorter training and their roles as community members, are blurring the lines between laity and church leaders. While parishioners seemed willing to accept married priests or the possibility of women as heads of churches, many still distinguish between those who take religious vows, and those who belong to the general community. And even if nuns or lay PAs can celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, and even bring in blessed hosts to communion, the reality of how these services have been used has not been promising. St. Francis de Sales, a church without a priest that would benefit from a monthly service overseen by a PA, has been under orders from the Bishop to stop such services from becoming a regular practice. One parishioner who was involved in organizing these activities says,

There seems to be a fear on the part of the hierarchy that people are going to use these as a substitute for mass and I guess there's a valid part to that but if it's somebody who is not going to go at all and get something out of this, then spiritually, to go for prayers or readings. And why would people not to have a right to do that?...[I]f a parish wants to remain a parish for part of the year, keep continuity, once a month, how can that not be a good thing? (08/10/08).

Anthropologists writing on anticlericalism often view popular religion as an expression of "resentment" and "resistance" (Badone 1990a; Brettell 1990). The

issue of PAs and their responsibilities is just one example of the differences of opinion concerning the direction of parish restructuring between the leadership of the church, and the many parishioners who support the church through attendance, financial donations and volunteering.

Conclusion

The beliefs and practices that are part of the local Catholic culture on PEI are diverse, ranging from promoting the ordination of women and supporting married priests to rethinking confession. Some people seek communion with the divine through large group events, while others find spirituality on a walk or at the beach. Comments from the Bishop and his supporters about how General Absolution or services lead by PAs should be used suggest that parishioners have misinterpreted these practices. However, as churches become more independent with priests moving between multiple communities, parishioners will have to rely more and more on lay understandings of Catholicism if they want it to continue at all. The larger shift from fear to love that some parishioners have noted has changed the way children react to the church, and may also be responsible for the increasingly egalitarian relationship between priests and parishioners. There is more support for priests, but parishioners do not want the fear that accompanies going to individual confession or to put up with other controlling practices that may have existed in the past. The challenges now lie in how parishioners and priests negotiate the “ownership” of their churches. By closing a few church buildings, will parishioners work to keep the larger Catholic Church alive?

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Leaving the Field

I spent my last day in the field doing a few new things. In the morning, I drove up to Souris to volunteer at the Vacation Bible School for their church unit. The School for the St. Benedict's Unit was scheduled for the week after I left, unfortunately, as I would have enjoyed meeting children and nieces and nephews of the very people I had spent the summer interviewing. Still, this was the first summer of an Island-wide Vacation Bible School, a response I am sure, to much of the discussion at various church meetings about the need to include youth in the church.

My day in Souris was spent corralling a group of five-year-old boys who were happy to learn their Bible verses alongside playing soccer and colouring pictures. As I interacted with this young group, I considered what pressures might cause their attendance at church to decrease as the years progressed. What was their family history? Were any of their churches in danger of closing? Did they play organized hockey, an activity that takes over from church in communities where few religious programs exist for young adults? What kind of influence would be needed to have them think about taking up religious orders? Speaking to one of the organizers at the end of the day, I heard the hope expressed that if these children were having fun in an environment that also included prayer and scripture, then perhaps they would continue to grow up in the church and support it as adults. The Bible School was scheduled to run again in the summer

of 2009 so perhaps some sort of religious community has began its connections among the youth in these areas.

After a day of play, I spent the evening at a Word and Communion Service led by a lay Pastoral Associate. This was the first Catholic service I had ever attended with a female leader. Using female Pastoral Associates to lead services would, in principle, enable churches to stay open, since priests would not be needed for all liturgical celebrations. The scripture reading that evening was from the book of Matthew: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst” (Matthew 18:20). The significance of these words were not lost on me, as this passage had been cited in at least one DPIC document, had been heard at meetings and was repeated to me in interviews. To the parishioners of these churches, at least, the act of gathering together remained the most important part of their religious practice.

Future Research Directions

While the act of gathering, on my last evening on PEI, was significant, the crowd in attendance was small. Perhaps it was a weekday evening during the summer and a nice evening at that, but the small numbers did not speak of a strong future for the church and alternative forms of worship. I felt the event was a reflection of some of the larger questions about Catholicism on Prince Edward Island, as this was a service on the periphery of the weekly schedule, representing the tension between changing the format of worship in ways that would permit churches to stay open, versus the diocesan plan to close churches and combine

congregations. The empty pews and my presence as the only participant under the age of 50 also said something about the changes in church attendance by age. Brandes (1990) calls for researchers to pay attention both to belief and its absence when studying religion. In this research, I have only commented on the absence of attendance at and support for the church. Is there an absence of faith among those not coming to mass on Prince Edward Island? Some current studies on secularization and faith suggest that church attendance is not necessarily correlated with inner faith (Stark 1999, 2004; Wuthnow 1998). Studying personal spirituality and forms of belief outside the church on PEI was too large for the scope of my project and would constitute a fruitful area for further research. Certainly, as the numbers of parishioners decline, and boys and young men are less and less likely to consider entering religious orders, the question of why young people are turning away from the church is an important one.

At the restructuring meetings in the winter of 2008 many parishes listed youth as a high priority; in reality, however, very few parishes put money towards activities for children, teenagers or young adults. Do the younger generations of Catholics on Prince Edward Island feel that the church has “left them,” and are these young people just waiting for outreach in order to come back? Or have they found other communities to support them? The specter of hockey was raised repeatedly during my interviews as parishioners commented on the fact that some former Catholics seem more committed to the local sport played by their children than to their churches. Father Brendan went so far as to ask the rinks in

Montague and Georgetown to limit their playing time on Sunday to after noon, so as not to interfere with Sunday morning mass. Durkheim's (2001 [1912]) definition of religion as a representation of society, where communal rituals recreate that society on a regular basis, could be applied to hockey. For some families, hockey may provide the sense of community that attendance at mass provided in the past: social connections through contact with other families of team members at practice, the collective ritual of regular games, and a focus for monetary contributions. Like churches, hockey rinks are expensive to build and maintain, but they become a gathering place for another kind of community.

Alternatively, perhaps people under the age of 50 in Prince Edward Island feel they do not have time for church, and other things in their lives provide the spiritual sustenance that the church offered to previous generations. This theory was proposed by practicing Catholics on Prince Edward Island. Some researchers on the topic of secularization have posited that the decline of church attendance reflects the decline of belief in God and the supernatural. Others, such as Stark (2004) and Wuthnow (1998) look for types of spirituality that exist outside of formal church gatherings. For example, belief in angels, miracles or random supernatural occurrences fit better into the "routineness of everyday life" as these phenomena do not require reinforcement theory, regular prayer or ritual (Wuthnow 1998:134). For those non-churchgoers living busy daily lives – one of the most commonly cited reasons given by parishioners for the loss of others from their church – dramatic events associated with the supernatural, such as miracles,

provide an alternative locus for their spirituality. A return to nature can also provide people with a connection to the spiritual or sacred, which may be significant for many Islanders who live in a predominantly rural province, marketed to tourists for its unique red soil, lush fields and white, sandy beaches. Non-attendance at church does not necessarily indicate a lack of belief and as the above discussion suggests, there may be many ways that Islanders express their spirituality outside of a church setting.

Younger people may also be alienated from the church by certain official church doctrines and policies, including the very public Catholic protest concerning Dr. Morgentaler's award. Paradoxically, for those who have left the church, their very anger at the church as an institution reveals a belief in a higher being, or at least some form of spirituality, as it is the tension between their strongly held moral positions and opposition to church policies that has forced them to leave the institution and find support elsewhere. As Jakobsen and Pellegrini (2008) point out, secularism is a process that develops in relation to religion. Moreover, secularization is often defined in relation to ideas about how previous generations have (or have not) worshipped. Tracing secularization through church attendance may require a rethinking of what researchers on religion define as "church", "faith" and "religion" from century to century. In the early 1800s, after the arrival of Catholics from Europe, there was little marked public religious ritual on PEI until churches were built. Parishioners at that time would have still considered themselves religious and spiritual although they

would not have attended mass. Even after churches were constructed, parishioners would not have seen a priest for months at a time. Perhaps these early settlers would not recognize the practices of those active Catholics in the local churches now, who are fighting to keep their church buildings open. Perhaps the church is coming full circle back to its origins on Prince Edward Island through local religious practices that are again requiring parishioners and Pastoral Associates to perform the liturgy when priests are not available to the community. These are some of the questions and themes that could guide further ethnographic study on the secularization of Catholics on Prince Edward Island, or indeed in any place where attendance at Catholic churches has declined.

Global Restructuring

The Catholic diocese on Prince Edward Island follows many diocese in Canada and around the world that have struggled with the decline in church attendance and the lack of vocations to the priesthood. While Africa has seen major growth in the number of Catholics on its continent – the population tripled from 55 million in 1978 to 149 million in 2004 – Catholic populations in Asia and parts of the Americas have increased only in relation to demographic increases, and the number of Catholics in Europe has decreased over the same amount of time (Cardinale 2006). While the numbers of Catholics in the global south increases, church support in Europe and North America is on the decline. Understanding the importance that community has to each parish could help guide future restructuring projects in Canada and around the world.

In Canada alone, dioceses across the country have approached the challenges to “keeping the church alive” in various ways. In the Diocese of Halifax, church revitalization has meant amalgamating parishes and closing church buildings (Mayne 2008). The Diocese of Calgary responded to demographic shifts in southern Alberta by closing nearly two dozen churches across the diocese in 2001, prompting very similar emotional responses from parishioners as those observed on PEI (Legge 2001). In contrast, the website for the Archdiocese of Regina lists Lay Ministry under the heading of Vocations, suggesting that this diocese is working to keep churches open through the use of pastoral associates (Archdiocese of Regina 2009). Other parts of western Canada, including the Diocese of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan and the Archdiocese of Keewatin Le-Pas, which covers northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and part of northern Ontario, offer very specific programs in Lay Formation and Adult Education (Diocese of Saskatoon 2009; Archdiocese of Keewatin Le-Pas 2008). With this training, laypeople become more involved in the leadership of the church, working as youth leaders, sacramental teachers, and ministers to keep the churches open and services going during the week. These examples, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, highlight the importance of the local church in the religious lives of people in these dioceses, since an effort is being made to avoid church closures by finding alternative ways to minister in local, rural churches.

Community

The very real possibility that some Catholic churches on Prince Edward Island could close in the next five years has those attending these churches concerned about the viability of both their local religious and geographical communities. As their livelihoods come under threat, and their villages have already seen the removal of significant businesses, the church is the last place where people can gather in these small, local communities. Many people belong to larger groups or communities, working or attending school in a larger centre, but the church building provides a significant and historic example of local community. The building represents much about what it means to live in a rural neighbourhood, as most people have been married or attended weddings in the church, and the parish hall has been a gathering place for fundraisers, card games, summer teas and wakes; all social events that rely on face-to-face relations and work to re-establish the meaning of community for those in attendance.

This community feeling is an important component of religious identity in rural PEI, but many of those in my study claim that the closure of their church building will not change their religious faith. They will continue to attend mass in a new location. However, some parishioners said that their participation in church rituals and the level of their financial contributions might decrease which could lead to further closures and increased forms of secularization in the province.

In January 2009, CBC News reported that the Diocese of Charlottetown was scaling back plans to close churches. No longer is there a target number of

churches to close or a deadline for those closures, and DPIC will rely on a consensus approach, such as the one used at the church in Hunter River, to allow parishioners the choice of whether or not they feel that they can keep their churches open (CBC News 2009). Again, it has been left up to parishioners to decide collectively about the movement of their community to join a new location, or to continue as a parish, relying on funds and participation from parishioners and Pastoral Associates to keep their church building alive, for as long as they can.

In this thesis I have addressed the meaning of location and local practices, and their intersection with religion in order to contribute to discussions of the term “community.” Although studies of globalization, diasporas, and transnationalism have de-emphasized specific locations, consideration of place-based communities remains significant. The fact that such localities continue to defend their identity in the face of changes demonstrates the ongoing importance of face-to-face relations. Appadurai sees locality as an important concept in understanding the connections between the local and the global (1996). Since “Westerners” are often viewed as able to move freely and live cosmopolitan lifestyles, Nadel-Klein sees a paradox in locality in the west, as people are increasingly uprooted from a locale, but still find it hard to claim identity without place (2003:14). Amit suggests that many discussions of de-territorialized relationships use a discourse that continues to rely on ideas of unity and stability (2002:36). While she would like to problematize this underlying theme, stability

might be something that community members seek during a time of transition, as it is often during situations of forced change that articulations of community and identity become clearer. For Catholic parishioners in PEI, facing the changes in their local rural lives, the Catholic church building, and the community that forms within it, represents continuity in their intertwined local, religious and family histories.

Appendix A

Interview Questions: People Who Regularly Attend Church

- 1) Tell me about yourself (age, education, current town).
- 2) What is your religious background?
- 3) How long have you been attending this church?
- 4) Have you ever lived away from this location? Did you attend church there?
- 5) Do you visit other churches?
- 6) What sacraments have you or members of your family received here?
- 7) What sacraments have you received elsewhere? Why did you choose that location?
- 8) Have you thought about your funeral and what locations you would choose for the related rituals?
- 9) How often, on a weekly/monthly basis, do you attend mass?
- 10) How often, on a weekly/monthly basis, are you at the church for other occasions?
- 11) How important is it that you attend this church as opposed to another church?
- 12) What are your reasons for attending church? (Or for volunteering?) What do you feel you get out of your church experience?
- 13) What actions, beliefs or practices do you feel defines your Catholic identity?
- 14) How important is attending (this) church in your community identity? To feeling part of town or being a Catholic?
- 15) Do you know church members outside of church?
- 16) How do you know these members outside of church?
- 17) What do you feel about wider Catholic doctrines on issues like the ordination of women, or allowing priests to marry?

- 18) What was your reaction to Henry Morgentaler's appointment to the Order of Canada? How do you think the Catholic Church should respond to the appointment?
- 19) Please tell me about your responses to the document "Keeping the Church Alive".
- 20) Would you make any changes to the current restructuring map?
- 21) Do you have worries about leaving your current church?
- 22) Do you think anything will be lost with these changes? What may be gained?
- 23) Will this change your own religious faith? Practices? Church attendance and participation?
- 24) What would make this transition easier?
- 25) Do you agree that these changes will keep the church alive?
- 26) How do you think parishioners can help rejuvenate the Catholic Church on PEI?

Appendix B

Interview Questions: Priests and Pastoral Associates

- 1) Tell me about yourself (age, education, current town).
- 2) What is your religious background?
- 3) How long have you been working at this church and other locations?
- 4) What are your weekly responsibilities at these churches?
- 5) Please describe your relationships with other members of the church community.
- 6) How do you know these members outside of church?
- 7) What actions, beliefs or practices do you feel define a Catholic identity?
- 8) How do you suggest parishioners live out the Eucharist during the week?
- 9) Do you see a connection between a church location, shared history and identity?
- 10) How important is a resident priest to a thriving church community?
- 11) Cemeteries have been a concern for parishioners: have you thought about your funeral and what locations you would choose for the related rituals?
- 12) Please tell me about your responses to the document “Keeping the Church Alive.”
- 13) Would you make any changes to the current restructuring map?
- 14) Do you have any worries about leaving your current church?
- 15) Do you think anything will be lost with these changes? What may be gained?
- 16) Will this change your own religious faith?
- 17) What would make this transition easier?
- 18) Do you agree that these changes will keep the church alive?
- 19) How do you think parishioners can help rejuvenate the Catholic Church on PEI?
- 20) Do you feel there are areas of official Church policy and doctrine that are problematic for you?

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