

Father Schindler's Story at St. Patrick's Donated to the Archives

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By MC Havey, Archivist (all photos courtesy of the Archives)

An archivist's excursion to collect records is always a pleasurable occasion. In mid-September in the unlikely venue of the Hilton hotel in downtown Toronto, it was extraordinarily so.

An unexpected treasure trove of material of Fr. Karl Schindler's, in which he documented his early years at the German parish of St. Patrick's, Toronto, was donated by Dr. Christian Freitag, a professor from Hohenfels in southern Germany.

Packed into two cigar boxes for the transatlantic flight, the donation of 146 photographs, 40 postcards, 16 letters and a CD of 1968 sermons/talks cover the period from Fr. Schindler's arrival in 1955 until 1981. He died in November 1997.



Fr. Karl Schindler in Prague in 1936



Dr Christian Freitag & MC in the lobby of the Toronto Hilton

Sitting in the hotel's reception area after a holiday in Canada, Dr. Freitag and his wife Margret outlined the decades-old bond between Fr. Schindler and the Freitag family. Fr. Schindler, a chaplain in the same hospital where his father worked during the Second World War in Poland's province of Silesia, had presided at the 1943 wedding of Dr. Freitag's parents. Throughout the years, Fr. Schindler kept in touch with the family, especially after coming to Toronto.

Many of the donated photographs document the German parish's activities at the Richmond Hill country property of swimming, games and sports along with the annual pilgrimage to Martyrs' Shrine and a trip to Niagara Falls. Others show glimpses of daily life, such as the rectory garden (pictured at left)



, Fr. Schindler's bedroom (pictured below)



and his broad smile behind the wheel of a 1955 Chevrolet, the new parish car (pictured below at left).

Fr. Schindler's postcards had a triple purpose. The text described activities in the German parish and the photographic scenes introduced Canada to the family through scenes of Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, the reversing falls in Saint John, beaches of Prince Edward Island and harvesting wheat in Saskatchewan. From the Canadian stamps, young Christian began a stamp collection when the correspondence arrived two or three times a year. He also received Canadian picture books, recalling: "I was so proud to have the picture books written in English. No one had these."





Fr. Karl & Fr. Urben (also from St. Patrick's German Parish) at Niagara Falls

Dr. Freitag's mother clipped and sent newspaper articles to Fr. Schindler about the Catholic Church in Europe, which he used in the Aus aller Welt section (From around the world) of Der Deutsche Katholik in Kanada, his monthly magazine.

From Fr. Schindler's rare visits with the family, Dr. Freitag remembered a warm and interesting priest, who was full of good humour and fun. Of Fr. Schindler's description and photographs of his Canadian apostolate, Dr. Freitag noted: "I'm very glad that these documents are now back in Toronto, where they belong." While in Toronto, the Freitags attended the German Mass at St. Patrick's during the Labour Day weekend. At the coffee gathering, some of the German congregation identified familiar faces in the photos. Afterwards, Maria Luxbacher, the parish staff member for the German community, took the couple to Fr. Schindler's grave at Mount Hope cemetery. Dr. Freitag simply stated: "Her kindness made our visit."



Pie Eating Contest in Richmond Hill in 1955

