

***Rev. Joseph Boyle:
Shepherding in the
Outmissions of
Western Canada***

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When the Toronto Province was created in 1918, the training of English-Canadians to serve in clergy-starved Western Canada was one of the top priorities. Father Joseph Boyle fulfilled the hope and dream of the early leadership. As one of the first Western Canadian students to study in the new province's preparatory college, novitiate and seminary, Fr. Boyle returned to the West for all of his six decades of appointments.

Tall and lanky, he became a recognizable and beloved figure among the small communities nestled in the Kootenay Mountains and Cariboo of British Columbia for most of his priestly life. To the daily struggles of the settlers, he brought understanding perhaps from his family's experience of moving to Western Canada at the turn of the 20th century.

The oldest child of four children, Joe was born on May 3, 1909 in Waterdown, New York, where his parents had married a year earlier. Both hailed from across Lake Ontario in Canada. Two years previously, his father William Boyle had travelled to Western Canada as a laborer to bring in the Alberta grain harvest. Upon returning east through Saskatchewan, William stopped in Regina to help in delivering the crop to the grain elevator at Govan, 100 miles north of Regina.

A few years after Joe was born, the Canadian prairies lured William to settle his family in Regina near Holy Rosary Cathedral, where the Redemptorists had assumed pastoral responsibility in 1915. When Fr. George Daly, the Redemptorist pastor (1916-1918), knocked on the Boyles' door, asking if there were any Catholics, Helen Boyle replied, "Dear, we are all Catholics."

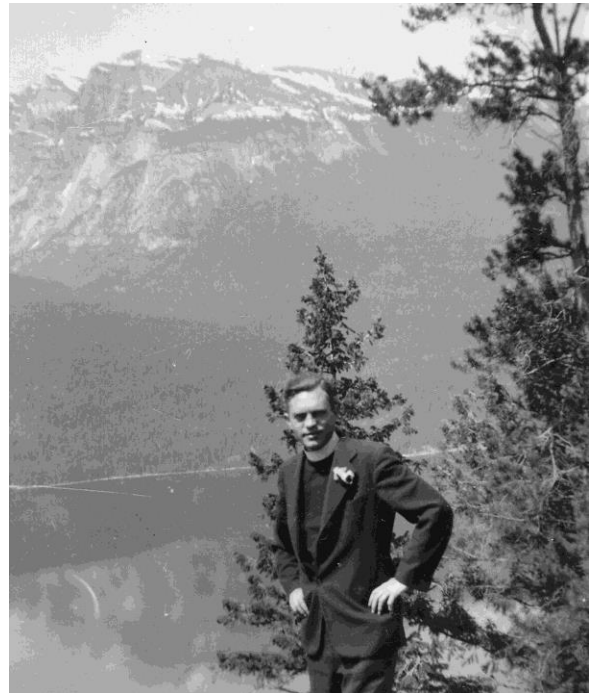
Fr. Daly spotted a vocation in Joe, one of the altar servers at the cathedral. Joe later credited his mother, who "had us children pray every night that we might know our right vocation. Dad and the Redemptorist Fathers kept urging the advantages of the priesthood. The Sister at school would say a word of encouragement now and then. Some inspired person, I know not whom, filled me with the conviction that there were many souls who would go to hell if I did not become a priest. This convinced me of my duty."

Joe attended the Jesuit Campion College in Regina for a year and confided

that he was timid about pursuing a priestly vocation despite the encouragement to do so. However during the summer of 1924, he learned that his best friend would be attending St. Mary's College, the eight-year-old preparatory college of the Toronto Province, just outside of Brockville, Ontario.

"This was providential," Joe recalled. The pair travelled by train half the distance of Canada to St. Mary's, which was located in the Eastern Ontario area where his parents were born. Staffed by the newly-ordained English Canadian Redemptorists, who entered novitiate at Ilchester and studied at Mount St. Alphonsus, Esopus, NY, St. Mary's reflected the youth, spirit and zeal of the new Province.

After overcoming initial homesickness, Joe participated in the college's extracurricular activities and sports. During the five years, his oratorical ability developed. In a college contest, his speech was described as "rich in illustrations and vibrant with patriotic sentiment." For the



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last two years before graduation in 1929, he was joined by a younger brother Edward.

Following graduation, Joe entered Novitiate under Fr. Peter Costello, who eight years earlier had set up the novitiate in the monastery of St. Peter's parish in Saint John, New Brunswick. After professing first vows on August 2, 1930 at Saint John, seminary studies followed at the temporary site in the monastery of St. Ann's church, Montreal (1930-1931) and at St. Alphonsus seminary, the permanent site which opened in 1931 in the southern Ontario town of Woodstock. Ordained on June 23, 1935 by Bishop John Thomas Kidd of the Diocese of London, Ontario, Fr. Boyle celebrated his first Solemn High Mass a week later in his home parish of Holy Rosary Cathedral, Regina.

FIRST OUTMISSION APPOINTMENT IN 1936

After completing seminary studies, he returned to Saskatchewan for his first appointment at St. Gerard's parish, Yorkton (1936-1940) and its outmissions in small farming communities. His independent thinking and ecumenism was seen as the house annalist as he added commentary to the factual account. In a May 1937 entry, he wrote about attending a banquet for cub scouts and their parents in the basement of St. Andrew's United Church. "It's a proselytizing movement; does undoubted good. We could use the set-up at the church." A year later after missing the daily train from Wroxton after Sunday Mass, his 10-hour feat of walking 34 miles to Yorkton became community lore.

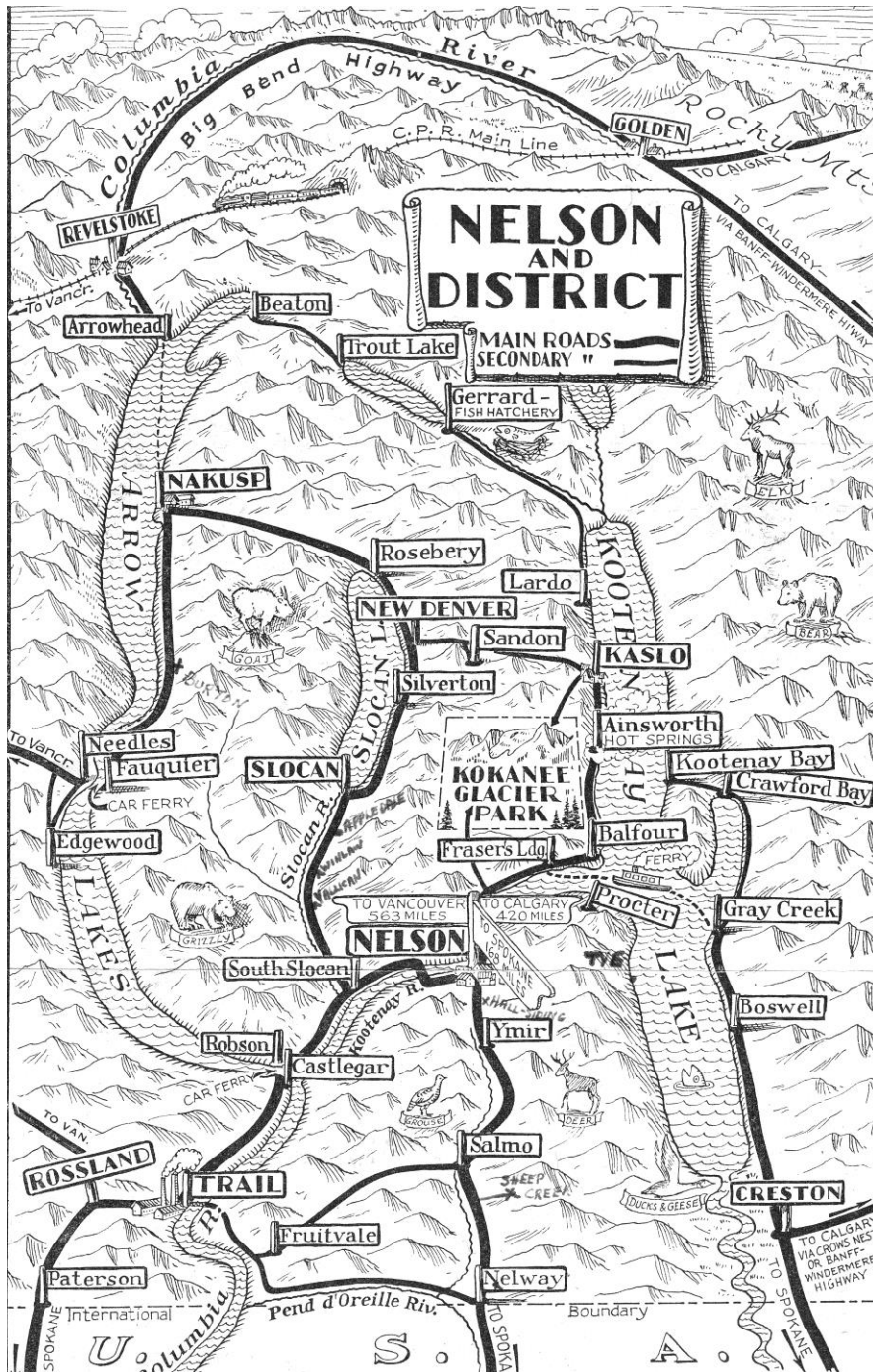
The Yorkton outmissions served as an apprenticeship for the a quarter century of outmission assignments in the British Columbia Diocese of Nelson. Created in 1936, the diocese covered 47,982 square miles (124,272 square km.) of the Okanagan and Kootenay regions of southeastern BC. At a request of pioneer Nelson Bishop

Martin Johnson, uncle of three Redemptorists, the Toronto Province assumed the pastoral care of Blessed Sacrament parish in the town of Nelson and its outmissions. Straddling the northern borders of the states of Washington and Idaho, the Redemptorist mission territory in the Selkirk Mountains had grown to 21 outmissions by 1947.

His series of appointments to the outmissions of Blessed Sacrament parish (1940-1945, 1946-1953, 1959-1973), were interrupted for the six months training at Second Novitiate (January 1945-June 1945) at the Woodstock seminary and a return to Yorkton (1945-1946). During the early appointments, he travelled by bus and often spent a week at a time in an outmission. In November 1940, he wrote admiringly of the congregation in Kaslo. "Amid snow, ice, out of the dusk and in the pouring rain, the faithful of our small parish wended their way to our chapel. ... Eighteen people were present, which is considered a splendid showing."

In another annals entry in 1940, it stated that Fr. Boyle and two confreres "motored to South Slocan to spend the day erecting a woodshed behind the church." Other entries noted his Instruction of children from four outmissions during the summers and the treacherous driving on the mountain roads. For 10 years until 1953, his observations and tales laced with a dry wit were captured in a column, entitled "Along Mission Trails - Kootenay Kopy," which he wrote for *The Prospector*, a local paper. Confrere Fr. Joseph Owens thought well of it, writing a congratulatory note: "Keep it up, it's good stuff."

Moving westward to the neighboring diocese of Kamloops, Fr. Boyle served as superior at Sacred Heart parish, Williams Lake (1953-1959), where he earned the distinction of "well-beloved" by the house annalist.



OUTMISSIONS SUITED HIS WANDERLUST

With its lack of urban parish regime, the outmissions suited Fr. Boyle's independent nomadic personality. Fr. Dominic Langi, pastor at Nelson, described the Boyle

ministry in this way: "Father Boyle shepherding his scattered flock in the mission fields." In 1960, the Nelson outmissions under Fr. Boyle's care stretched from South Slocan (24 families) in the south and Kaslo (30 families), which included Ainsworth (8 families) and Lardo (5 families), Procter (21 families) and Riondel (80 families) in the north.

The later Nelson years were well-remembered as his Volkswagen Beetle travelled the rocky roads.

As a pioneer in ecumenism, he had a wide circle of friends of every Christian denomination. Naomi Miller of Wasa, BC remembered Father Boyle on his knees playing marbles with children or acting as umpire in baseball games. "If we ever went to the Kaslo Hospital, one could tell if Fr. Boyle had visited. Everyone was smiling. Father B told jokes and talked to all ... no denominational difference."

Fr. Raymond Corriveau noted, "Fr. Joe loved people. People loved him. He was gifted (many of us would say afflicted) with wanderlust and God seemed to be able to use this in the itinerant missionary. His favourite mode of travel even into old age was hitchhiking."

Fr. William Bernard recalled Edmonton Provincial Superior Grattan Feehan on visitation to Nelson conducted a search for the illusive Fr. Boyle. “He finally found him in a confessional in Kaslo.”

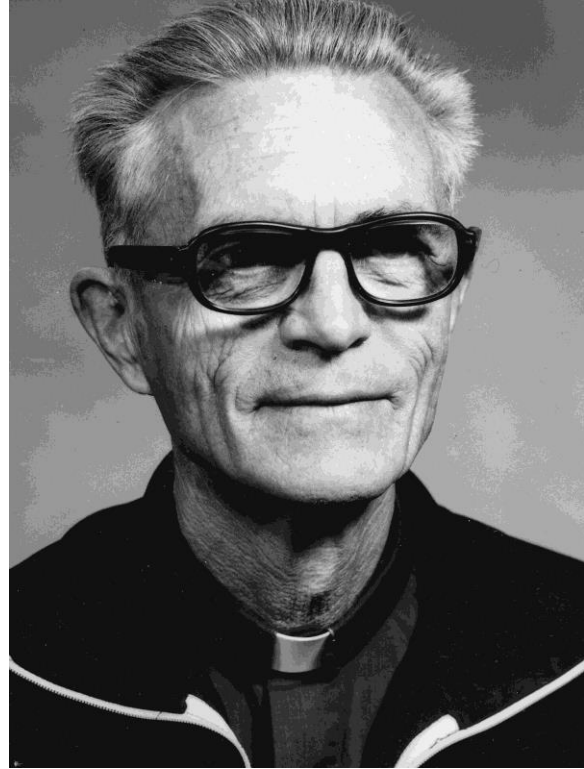
Later in a letter, Fr. Feehan expressed “gratitude to you Joe for all that you have done in the Nelson area. No one could have been more involved with all the people, or more dedicated to their service for so many years.”

Sr. Lita Camozzi of the Sisters of Service, knew Fr. Boyle from her childhood and recalled a parishioner’s anecdote of Fr. Boyle coming into her kitchen, lifting the lids off the pots on the stove, saying, “Smells good, I’ll stay.”

After the end of an assignment (1973-1975) as chaplain of Mount St. Francis, an extended care hospital in Nelson, he requested and received a year’s sick leave. For 30 years, Fr. Boyle had coped with a bleeding ulcer for which he daily drank quarts of milk. He recuperated (1976-1977) in Vancouver and travelled in the western U.S.

In better health, he received short-term parish re-appointments at Blessed Sacrament, Nelson (1977-1979) and St. Gerard’s, Yorkton, (1979). Using the Nelson rectory as a base, Fr. Boyle accepted assignments, replacing priests who were on leaves from their parishes. During this period, he served at St. Catherine’s parish, Petersburg, Alaska (1980); various parishes in the Nelson diocese (1981, 1982, 1986, 1987); Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Vancouver (1981); Our Lady of Foothills, Hinton, Alberta (1982-1983); and St. Jude’s parish, 100 Mile House, BC (1986). He also returned to Williams Lake (1986, 1987, 1988-1995), where he retired.

Throughout his life, Fr. Boyle observed a special



devotion to the Blessed Sacrament as well as the silence of the hills and mountains. For those walks in 1983 at the age of 70, the parishioners of Hinton commissioned a wooden 6-foot hiking pole carved by a local artist.

In June 1995, a joint celebration was held for the 60th anniversary of his ordination and the Redemptorist farewell from Sacred Heart parish, Williams Lake. Afterwards, he moved to an apartment in Kelowna, B.C. and later to a city nursing home in August 1996. Fr. Boyle lived his last days in Trinity Centre nursing home in Penticton, B.C. where he died of pneumonia at the age of 87.

The funeral Mass was held at Holy Spirit church in Kelowna and was attended by confreres and friends from Williams Lake. Edmonton-Toronto Provincial Superior Corriveau, the principal celebrant, was assisted by former Edmonton Provincial Superiors Grattan Feehan and Edward Kennedy. His body was buried in



the Redemptorist plot in Holy Cross Cemetery in Edmonton.

Sr. Camozzi heard from one of the many Williams Lake friends who had

travelled to his funeral and discovered that the reception afterwards was solely for the clergy. That former parishioner wrote, “I can just hear Father Boyle say, ‘the tightwads.’”