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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Alberton Clergymen Talk With Columnist

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ONE OF the most interesting chats I have had in my travels "Across the Island" was with two young clergymen in Alberton; Rev. David MacDonald, a Presbyterian minister, and Rev. Gerald Steele, a Roman Catholic priest.

These fine young clergymen have been working together in many ways that not so long ago had been virtually unknown among clergymen of their respective denominations.

There has been a great deal of comment in the last year or two about the Ecumenical movement, but for Father Gerald and Rev. David the type of action which the general term implies is a living and very real part of their day-to-day lives as clergymen, and as citizens of the community.

We talked for an hour, or so, as we sat in Mr. MacDonald's office in the Christian Education Centre of the United Church. I am not going to write about everything we discussed, for my questions were often personal – they were also searching – and there are places where I'm not sure just what I should say, and what I should regard as confidential.

But so far as the two young men were concerned, nothing was off the record. Our talk was friendly and informal. They replied frankly, and sometimes in detail, to my most searching queries to their personal reactions to the Ecumenical movement. The idea was originated by Pope John, a man who was selected as a sort of stop-gap, until a better man could be found, and who proved to be one of the best Popes in the long history of the church.

That is my personal appreciation of Pope John's performance. Frankly I got a real kick out of the worthwhile work done, and the progress achieved, by this man of courage and foresight in the few years that were left to him at the time he was elevated to the head of his church.

Many of you know, I believe, something of how Mr. MacDonald and Father Steele co-operate in Alberton. There was the time, for example, when the young priest attended and participated in the service of sacred song one Sunday evening in the United Church.

It was natural, I believe, that when Mr. MacDonald approached his marriage ceremony – it was held in the United Church in O'Leary – that he should desire to have his Roman Catholic clergyman friend participate in the solemn service of worship that is part of our Presbyterian marriage ceremony.

There have been outcries in some Presbyterian homes against this Minister-Priest relationship of close co-operation, but Mr. MacDonald sought and obtained the sanction of the O'Leary church session to have Father Steele participate in the service, which united in marriage the young minister and Miss Sandra Rogers, a lovely young lady from their own congregation.

The two young clergymen have gone beyond an effort to work more closely together in their church work. They have joined in an effort, along with other people in the area, to originate activity that will make the area a more prosperous and a happier place in which to live.

This is from memory, but I recall an effort to encourage co-operative effort among the fishermen, and the rink development that has given the town a fine spot for winter recreation and pleasure. They were deeply interested in the effort to develop new crops which was carried on last year in the West Prince area.

### Listening Valuable

DURING OUR three-way conversation this observation came, and it was voiced by the young priest:

“You know, all too few people realize that listening is a valuable part of dialogue”, and it was backed strongly by the young minister.

And how true that is. Most people who are engaged in a discussion with a person holding opposite views are so busy trying to think up a crushing report to what the other fellow is saying, that they miss completely any bit of knowledge, wisdom or understanding they might otherwise hear.

The two Alberton clergymen have discussed many facets of each other’s religion, and order of service. Both of them told me they have been attracted by some of the things they have observed and studied.

We talked of many things but one of the things that impressed me most deeply, perhaps, was the high personal regard the two young clergymen have for each other.

Mr. MacDonald told me that the first thing that had to be developed was a feeling of confidence in his Roman Catholic friend. And that is not surprising, when we think of the feelings people of those faiths had for each other’s religions in earlier years.

We had completed our discussion and Father Steele was taking me to meet Frank Weeks at the Guardian office in Alberton.

He was just pulling out on to the street when he turned to me and said with obvious feeling:

“You know, Mr. Matheson, I don’t know what I would do if his church should move David away from Alberton.”

As I have said, the high regard these young men have for each other impressed me deeply.

### Thoughts For Future

“Let us open up the windows and let in some fresh air”, was the colorful way that Pope John expressed his desire for developing a spirit of friendly co-operation and study. If I have put that badly, remember that the subject of inter-denominational relations is out of my line.

But I came away from the discussion with a feeling that some windows are being opened. Some fresh air has been let in.

A few years ago I would have said that any thought of co-operation between the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches was an impossible dream.

My talk with my young friends took place almost a year ago though I am only writing it here now. There have been many evidence of co-operation among our clergymen in this province since that time.

Our children, or our children's children may see some developments that would have completely astounded our fathers and their fathers. The future holds many interesting possibilities. Perhaps none is more interesting than what may develop along the lines that the two Alberton clergymen were discussing with me.