

# BORN OUT OF TRAGEDY

*The Springhill mining disaster  
and the beginnings of The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund*

In the town of Springhill  
They don't sleep easy  
Often the earth will tremble  
and roll  
When the earth is restless  
Miners die

— *Springhill Mining Disaster song,  
written by Ewan McColl and Peggy  
Seeger.*

Springhill, Nova Scotia is located on high ground between the Minas Basin and Northumberland Strait, in the Cobequid Mountains in Cumberland County. In early records, the town is called "Springhill Mines", appropriate because coal mining was the town's bread and butter right into the 1960s due to the coal deposits underlying the town.

Fifty years ago, on October 23, 1958, Canadians were jolted by shocking news: a sharp underground bump at the Springhill Coal Field had trapped over a hundred men far underground. It was heard and felt several miles away. A "bump" is a sudden seismic jolt, often causing the collapse of supporting walls. Springhill, Nova Scotia had heard and felt many bumps over the years, a common feature of mines like theirs.

For months, the mine had been experiencing rumbling and minor collapses. One cool fall evening in 1958, after a first small bump and then a massive one shortly afterwards, 174 men were trapped at depths of nearly 4,000 feet. Rescuers worked feverishly to save them. Ultimately, more men would be saved than the 75 men who died as a result of the "bump" in number 4 colliery. Nothing could be more terrifying than being trapped far underground in a collapsed mine



TED DINSMORE

*Nova Scotia's famed mine rescue workers such as those above faced lethal gas and massive piles of rock in their efforts to get men out. They worked in shifts and kept digging constantly.*

and this terror touched the hearts of Canadians through CBC television's live coverage.

The disaster shook people, and like other groups, Anglicans were stirred into action. Led by church officials, Anglican parishes across the country raised over \$100,000 in aid for the miners' families and the Springhill community. In those days, a nice house cost \$1,000, and the sum raised would be equivalent to \$750,000 today.

Sometimes however, out of disaster comes noble beginnings and something good. The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund of the Anglican Church of Canada exists today thanks to the heartfelt response to a Canadian tragedy. Another positive note is that the mine is now a prototype geothermal energy project.

In the 21st century, we are acquainted with tragedy on a far



TORONTO STAR ARCHIVES

*The Springhill Mine as seen from the air in 1958. The mine was massive and deep, virtually underlying the entire town and going down to almost 15,000 feet. Today it helps to generate geothermal energy.*

too regular basis — as the people of Springhill did in their day — Canadians and people around the world wake up to new shocks almost every morning: oil shock; climate shock; pandemic shock; culture shock; war shock — the list grows longer and the effect is as numbing as mine "bumps".

More than ever, the world needs what PWRDF has to offer: focused, effective partnership as an expression of our baptismal covenant to strive for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being.

PWRDF is addressing the issues Canadians care about: basic health, HIV and AIDS, humanitarian relief, capacity building, food security, human rights, peace building, sustainable agriculture, and language and cultural recovery. Since 1958 Anglicans in Canada have raised more than \$88 million to support the work of PWRDF. We believe that we can all share in the creation of a more just and peaceful world.