

Reflections

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150th Anniversary Celebrated This Year

The founding of the Diocese of Hamilton 150 years ago brought together far-flung communities from Hamilton to Tobermory, uniting Catholic families who had often struggled in isolation to maintain their practice of the faith.

Communities within what became the Diocese of Hamilton had few roads connecting them, and only a handful of priests to attend to some 28,000 Catholics in nine parishes. Being a hardy traveller was part of the job description for priests of that time, with one stalwart missionary, Father John Wiriath, single-handedly providing religious guidance to Catholics in 26 townships around Waterloo County in the 1830s.

The Diocese of Hamilton was created in February 1856 (followed by the creation of the Diocese of London a week later) after a decision that the existing Diocese of Toronto was becoming too large and unwieldy. The first bishop was the Right Reverend John Farrell, whose reported youthful vigour (he was only in his mid-thirties when appointed Bishop of Hamilton) led to the rapid establishment of new schools, churches and religious communities.

The oldest parish in the Diocese is St. Augustine in Dundas (see story on page 3), which began in 1827. The Diocese's first cathedral was Hamilton's St. Mary Parish, the first church built in Hamilton. It remained the cathedral until 1927 when that designation was turned over to the larger St. Patrick

Parish. In December 1933, the Cathedral of Christ the King was dedicated by Bishop John McNally and remains to this day the location of the administrative offices of the Diocese, and the parish where priestly ordinations usually take place.

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PHOTO:
Cathedral of Christ the King (right)

Special Anniversary Edition



Celebrating 150 Years
THE DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

MESSAGE

From the Vocation Director

Special Anniversary Edition of Reflections

In 1856, the new Diocese of Hamilton was formed with eight priests, three Sisters of St. Joseph and some 28,000 Catholics. We celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Diocese this year with 560,000 Catholics, more than 20 male and female religious communities, approximately 100 Diocesan priests and 21 seminarians preparing for the priesthood. We have a lot to celebrate!

Our anniversary theme is the Eucharist, as the source and summit of Christian life. The heart of our Church life has always been Catholics gathered together in their local parishes for the Sunday liturgy. This issue of *Reflections* shares the thoughts of some Diocesan members about the meaning of the Eucharist in their lives. We also cover some milestones in Diocesan history, profile the newest parish, and review the history of Catholic education.

An anniversary is a time to give thanks to God and remember those who have gone before us. But it's also a time to look ahead. What is God asking of us? In what ways is the risen Lord Jesus at work among us? How can each of us share in, and become instruments of God as the living Body of Christ? Let's use the 150th anniversary as a time to reflect on our own personal vocations.

Fr. Mark Gatto

*Our
Newest
Parish*



Catholic Education Over 150 Years

There were already six Catholic schools flourishing by 1856 when the Diocese of Hamilton was created, thanks to the leadership of religious communities such as the Jesuits, Sisters of St. Joseph and the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Even the small community of St. Agatha had a fine stone school-house and would soon host the fledgling St. Jerome's College.

Catholic schools were managed by individual school boards – usually led by the parish priest and some lay people – up until the 1960s when school boards responsible for entire districts were formed. Another striking change began that decade with the gradual disappearance of priests, religious sisters and brothers from the classroom and from school administration.

"When I became a priest it was expected that you would do a stint teaching," Monsignor Harvey Roach, 77, recalls. "At that time the Catholic system wasn't completely funded by the province and the Catholic boards couldn't offer lay teachers a competitive salary."

He's convinced that the diminished presence of priests and religious in schools became a factor in the declining number of religious vocations. "When you had a predominant number of priests and religious in schools, children had the opportunity to get to know them and their vocation, and to discern whether they themselves were so called."

– continued on page 4

DIOCESE'S NEWEST PARISH PLANS YEAR OF FESTIVITIES

Mary Mother of God Parish in Oakville has much to celebrate in 2006. Not only will it participate in celebrations for the Diocese's 150th anniversary, but this year also marks the parish's 10th anniversary, and its pastor Fr. Charlie Jordan's 25th anniversary as an ordained priest.

The parish, established in August 1996, is the newest in the Diocese. But the church itself opened just two years ago, in January 2004. Until then, Masses were held in the gym of the adjacent St. Marguerite d'Youville School and the offices were located in the rectory.

"It really feels like we're making history in this special year," says Fr. Charlie. "Our parish is a young, growing community, and in a sense it represents the Diocese itself. Perhaps it's more appropriate to say that the Diocese is 150 years young rather than old."

Each Deanery, or region of parishes, will hold a celebration for the Diocesan anniversary. Mary Mother of God Parish will host the celebration for the Halton Deanery, with a Mass and reception on March 24. All are welcome to attend. For more information, please call the parish at 905-337-2184.



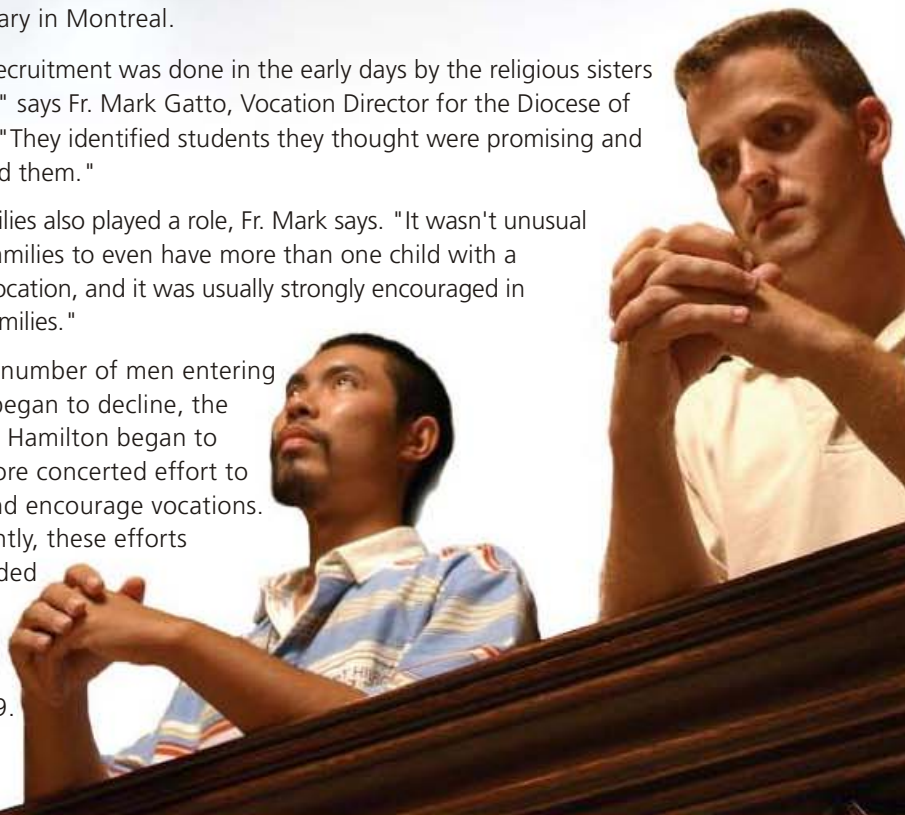
Seminary Life in Diocesan History

St. Peter's Seminary in London opened in 1912, with St. Augustine's in Scarborough opening the following year. These are still the main seminaries at which men from the Diocese of Hamilton go through their formation and discernment. Prior to these seminaries being established, priests of the Diocese were either foreign-trained or studied at a seminary in Montreal.

"A lot of recruitment was done in the early days by the religious sisters in schools," says Fr. Mark Gatto, Vocation Director for the Diocese of Hamilton. "They identified students they thought were promising and encouraged them."

Larger families also played a role, Fr. Mark says. "It wasn't unusual for large families to even have more than one child with a religious vocation, and it was usually strongly encouraged in Catholic families."

When the number of men entering seminary began to decline, the Diocese of Hamilton began to make a more concerted effort to support and encourage vocations. Most recently, these efforts have included a full-time vocation director since 1999.



ST. AUGUSTINE ENJOYS STATUS AS OLDEST PARISH

Father Jim Curtin was never a history buff until he came to St. Augustine Church in Dundas, but the parish's well-preserved history, dating back to 1827, has become a fascinating backdrop to his work as pastor.

"We're a historic parish within a historic community, attracting people who like the character of our old church," he explains. "I got drawn into it when I came here 13 years ago. To see all the old church books and the handwritten records of the priests going out on horseback to do baptisms...there was so much hardship that families endured in the old days. The death records show how many babies and children died in those days."

One of St. Augustine's most famous parishioners was Lady Mary MacNab, wife of Sir Allan MacNab. Hamilton's own Bishop Joseph Ryan was also baptized at St. Augustine. People often contact St. Augustine for help with genealogy searches, leading the parish to undertake a two-year project to put church records on a database.



Our Oldest Parish

THE DIOCESE THEN AND NOW

	1856	1956	2006
Catholics	28,000	112,000	560,000
Priests	8	125	134
Parishes	9	86	122
Religious congregations (men)	2	9	17
Religious congregations (women)	1	10	13
Schools	6	101	352

First Religious Communities in the Diocese

Jesuits	1847
Sisters of St. Joseph	1852
Loretto Sisters	1856
Resurrectionists	1857
Basilians	1863
School Sisters of Notre Dame	1871

Bishops of the Diocese of Hamilton

1. John Farrell	1856 - 1873
2. Peter Crinnon	1874 - 1882
3. James Carberry	1883 - 1887
4. Thomas Dowling	1889 - 1924
5. John McNally	1924 - 1937
6. Joseph Ryan	1937 - 1973
7. Paul Francis Reding	1973 - 1983
8. Anthony Tonnos	1984 -

Reflections on the Eucharist

The Eucharist is the theme of the Diocese's 150th anniversary. *Reflections* hears from five members of the Catholic community about what the Eucharist means to them. Michael Anderson, seminarian at St. Peter's Seminary in London; Sister Theresia Elder, Order of the Precious Blood; Dennis Ryan, parishioner at Sacred Heart Church in Hamilton; John Shea, parishioner at St. Joseph Church in Hamilton; and Elaine Zettel, student at McMaster University, share their thoughts.

● Receiving Your First Communion

Michael: I received my First Communion when I converted to Catholicism as an adult in 1999. I came into the Church specifically to receive Holy Communion. There is a calling in the Eucharist to be with the Lord.

Sister Theresia: That's one of my most precious memories. That's our first awareness of really getting in touch with Jesus.

Dennis: As a former Presbyterian who converted to Catholicism, I was looking for the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. I always had the understanding from the beginning, but it strengthened with time.

John: I'm 90, so it's a pretty distant memory, but I have a nice picture at home of me wearing a blue suit. They tried to get across to us what the Eucharist really was, and every time I go to Mass I still remind myself. Christ said, "This is my body, this is my blood." He was very clear about that.

Elaine: I remember the excitement of the big day – all the preparations, and learning about it in school. From that time, I knew it was something special, worthy of respect. The Sacrament of the Mass is what nourishes us. It's one of our greatest gifts from God.

Photos below - left to right: Michael Anderson, Sister Theresia Elder, Dennis Ryan, John Shea and Elaine Zettel.



● The Meaning of the Eucharist

Michael: We have to come to Christ with eyes of faith and see past how our senses would deceive us. When we say "Amen" at Communion, we are saying that we believe in His presence.

Sister Theresia: As Sisters of the Precious Blood, our devotion to the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross is the basis of our life. The Mass is Christ's redemption – we are fed by His body and blood.

Dennis: Every time I receive the Eucharist, Christ's presence gives me a feeling of inner peace.

John: It's a mystery, and it's one we have to accept. St. Augustine said, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."

Elaine: It's often hard to see God's presence in our lives. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is a tremendous gift of Christ. It's what helps us to keep going.

● A Year to Celebrate the Eucharist

Michael: There's no better way to celebrate the anniversary than with a celebration of the Eucharist.

John: The meaning of the Eucharist won't change as long as we keep talking about what it is.

Elaine: This is a time of renewal for our Church. Looking ahead, I see a bright future for the Diocese of Hamilton, as we keep the love of the Eucharist alive.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OVER 150 YEARS – continued from page 2

Pat Daly, longstanding chair of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board, says another major change came in the 1980s when the Catholic system finally received full funding from the province. He says other changes in society at large have affected Catholic schools. "We're in a more secular society, with a growing influence of the media and of pop culture. I would say that some influences from society are clearly counter to what we're attempting to achieve in our Catholic schools, and I argue that makes it increasingly challenging for those of us involved in Catholic education."

What remains constant, say both men, is the importance of the partnership between schools, parishes and families. "The heart of Catholic education is to form a Christ-like community which lives out the mandate of charity and justice," Msgr. Roach says.

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