



Celebrating 150 Years
THE DIOCESE OF HAMILTON



A Short History of the
Roman Catholic Diocese
of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada



The Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

150 Anniversary Prayer

We rejoice, O God,
 that you have called us to be your Church
 in the Diocese of Hamilton.
 We thank you for the abundant blessings
 you have bestowed upon us
 during the past one hundred and fifty years.
 Confirm us in the faith
 of those who have gone before us.
 Empower us by your Spirit
 to meet the challenges of our day.
 Continue to sustain us on our journey,
 with the Body and Blood of your Son,
 until we come at last to our eternal home
 in the company of Mary, Mother of the Living.
 We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen.



FOREWORD

God blessed the world when the Word was born as Son of God, Jesus Christ. The saving grace of Christ continues to be given to us even to this day, and our Lord invites us to use this grace for our own salvation and the betterment of the world in which we live.

For one hundred and fifty years Catholics living in the Diocese of Hamilton have responded to this invitation of the Lord. I am grateful to Father Edward J.R. Jackman o.p. who has prepared this short history of our diocese. It presents a summary of how we have responded to the Lord's invitation. May it help us to be thankful for what has been accomplished and motivate us to an ever more faithful life in Christ as we celebrate this wonderful anniversary.

May God bless Hamilton Diocese for centuries to come.

+A.F. Tonnos
Bishop of Hamilton

A Short History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

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2006

PREFACE

I would like to thank Bishop Anthony Tonnos for his invitation to help in writing this short history of the Diocese of Hamilton. I have often had the pleasure of visiting the diocese and now I can do so in earnest. I would also like to thank Mr. John O'Brien and his staff for their ample help in bringing this booklet to completion. My gratitude also to my friend and colleague Mr. Michael Power, a Catholic historian, for his many suggestions and contributions. More generally, my thanks to the many clergy, religious and laity who are helping us to celebrate this historic anniversary.

INTRODUCTION

This short history has been written for the people of the Diocese of Hamilton so that parishioners can appreciate and celebrate the history of this great diocese on the occasion of its sesquicentennial celebrations during 2005 and 2006, marking its 150th anniversary. It will highlight the important events and developments in a diocese that has played a leading role in the history of the Canadian Catholic Church.

Not everyone is interested in all the details of history, whether religious or secular, but just about everyone can and should appreciate the general historical outline of the institutions in which they live, work and worship; thus this short and convenient booklet. May it be appreciated for what it is hoped to be: an introduction to an even greater story of the Holy Spirit's working amongst a particular people of God.

Our Church was founded by Jesus Christ some two thousand years ago in what is often called “The Holy Land”, the area that surrounds the City of Jerusalem. Always missionary in outlook, the Church spread throughout the Roman Empire of old and established its headquarters in its capital, the City of Rome, in what is now known as Vatican City.

Over the centuries, the Roman Catholic Church spread its influence first to Europe and then to the other continents of the world especially after about the year 1500. From 1600 onwards, missionaries from France began to visit what is now Ontario, and eventually our own territory, the Diocese of Hamilton. The missionaries, usually Franciscans or Jesuits, said Mass and began to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the native peoples.

In the first half of the 17th century our diocesan area was inhabited by two groups of native peoples: the Petuns to the north, whose history is closely intertwined with that of the persecuted Huron Indians to the east; and the Neutral Indians in the south, who at first had a more peaceful history. The first French missionary to visit the Neutrals was the Recollet Franciscan, Father Joseph de La Roche Daillon in 1626.

Later, two French Jesuits missionaries, Fathers Jean de Brébeuf and Pierre-Joseph-Marie Chaumonot, visited the country of the Neutrals during 1640 and 1641. No convert from these many visits is recorded but much territory was covered from Brantford to Hamilton to Oakville and to Milton.

Following the massacres and martyrdoms in Huronia in 1649, all missionary activity in the diocese ceased for the next 150 years. There was no one to evangelize. The Iroquois had dispersed the Hurons and Petuns and had completely destroyed the Neutrals. Natives would not reappear in the diocese in any significant number until 1784,

when Joseph Brant led Mohawk Loyalists and other native groups to a large tract of land along the Grand River. Also, there was little permanent European settlement in our diocesan area during this period from 1650 to 1780.

By the late 1700s, however, settlement of Southern Ontario began in earnest under the British colonial regime. In what was to become the area of the Diocese of Hamilton today, small settlements began along the major lakes and rivers over a swath of land in mid-western Ontario stretching from Lakes Erie and Ontario in the south to Lake Huron and Georgian Bay in the north. To meet the spiritual needs of these newly arrived settlers, traveling missionary priests visited the people occasionally to say Mass and administer the Sacraments in both public buildings and private homes. These priests were assigned first to the Dioceses of Québec, then Kingston, and finally Toronto, all of which at one time or another encompassed the present-day Hamilton Diocese. At first the priests were French, later Scottish and Irish, as Upper Canada (Ontario) developed its identity separate from that of Lower Canada (Québec).

Most prominent among these early clergy was the Scotsman, Bishop Alexander Macdonell from Glengarry and Kingston. As the first bishop in Ontario from 1816 to 1840, he worked with the colonial authorities to establish parishes and churches in this province of pioneers. Thus, some of the first Catholic churches were established in places such as Oakville, Dundas, Brantford and Guelph.

Priests were expected to reside at these locations, build a church and visit the people usually on horseback in the surrounding territory, often the size of a present-day county such as Wentworth or Wellington. Mass was said as regularly as possible in a few major locations but the Sacraments of Baptism, Marriage and Confession often had to be delayed until the priest was next able to visit the more distant smaller communities.

Meanwhile, immigrants continued to pour into the new province from the 1820s to the 1840s. They often came on planned immigration schemes, and though life in the new world was difficult, the spiritual needs of the people were never neglected. Bishops and priests saw to it that the ever-expanding number of new settlements received pastoral care, no matter how remote the settlement might be, or how difficult it was to reach.

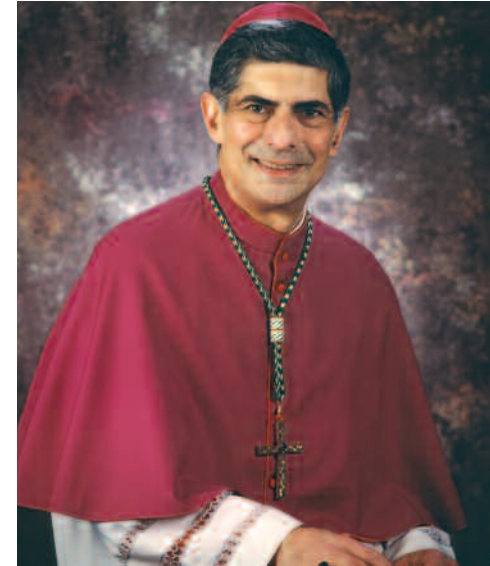
In the late 1840s the Catholic population of Ontario, and particularly our area, greatly increased. Two major events were the cause of this. Firstly, in Ireland there was the great potato famine from 1845 to 1849, which drove millions out of their native land. In desperation the Irish fled and sought relief anywhere in the world where they could find enough food to eat for their survival. Ontario received large numbers of Irish and soon the Catholic population had doubled.

Secondly, in 1848, political troubles in Europe forced large numbers of German-speaking peoples to seek freedom in the new world. They would make their first home in Waterloo County and later spread to the north-west into Bruce County. They were served by the Fathers of the Resurrection who came from the United States. Of particular significance was their founding of St. Jerome's College in Waterloo County. In 1852, the Jesuit fathers arrived in the Guelph area, and ministered to families in the surrounding region, a presence that continues to this day.

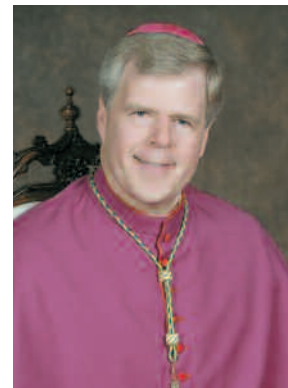
To meet the pastoral needs of our ever-growing Catholic community, the Vatican decided to create new dioceses in Ontario so that there could be better ecclesiastical supervision of the many new parishes and their peoples.

Thus, on February 29, 1856 the Dioceses of Hamilton and London were formed from portions of the Diocese of Toronto. Soon afterwards the Diocese of Ottawa was cut off from that of Kingston, leaving Ontario with five dioceses,

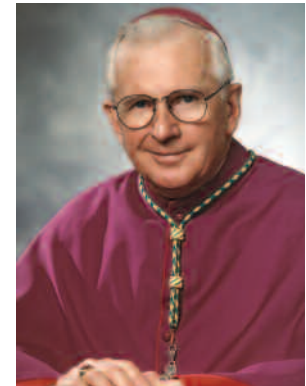
OUR CURRENT BISHOPS



Most Reverend Anthony F. Tonnos, D.D.
8th Bishop of Hamilton
1984 –



Most Reverend Gerard P. Bergie, D.D.
Auxiliary Bishop of Hamilton
2005 –



Most Reverend Matthew Francis Ustrzycki, D.D.
Auxiliary Bishop of Hamilton
1985 –

OUR FORMER BISHOPS



Bishop John Farrell, D.D.
1st Bishop of Hamilton
1856–1873



Bishop Peter F. Crinnon, D.D.
2nd Bishop of Hamilton
1874–1882



Bishop John F. McNally, D.D.
5th Bishop of Hamilton
1924–1937



Bishop Joseph F. Ryan, D.D.
6th Bishop of Hamilton
1937–1973



Bishop James J. Carbery, D.D.
3rd Bishop of Hamilton
1884–1887



Bishop Thomas J. Dowling, D.D.
4th Bishop of Hamilton
1889–1924



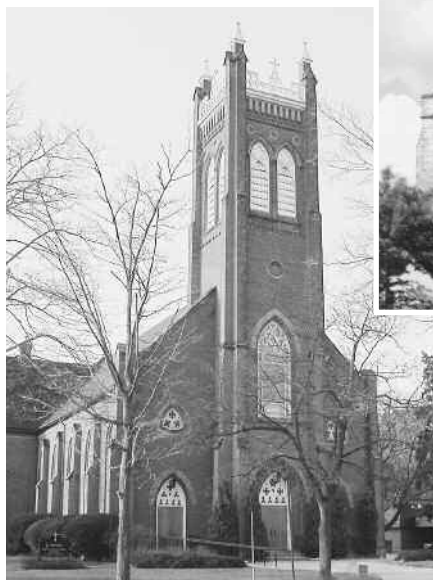
Bishop Paul F. Reding, D.D.
7th Bishop of Hamilton
1973–1983



Bishop James H. MacDonald, CSC, D.D.
Auxiliary Bishop of Hamilton
1978–1982



Cathedral of Christ the King –
established 1933, Hamilton



St. Augustine Church –
established 1826, Dundas,
our oldest church



Mary Mother of God Church – established 1996,
Oakville, our newest church

a basic structure which still corresponds with today's large centres of population.

The first Bishop of the diocese, Most Reverend John Farrell, like his next three successors, was of Irish birth. After his ordination in 1845, he served in various parishes in Ontario and taught at Regiopolis College in Kingston. He was consecrated a bishop in Kingston on May 11, 1856, and shortly afterwards was installed as the Bishop of Hamilton at the city's only Catholic Church, St. Mary's. In his first pastoral letter issued that same month, he named as the patron of the Diocese the "...Ever Glorious and Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Annunciation". . After a fire destroyed the wooden church, Bishop Farrell built the present St. Mary's in 1859 and 1860 as his new cathedral, in whose vault he and two of his successor bishops are buried. St. Mary's, today, strikingly and proudly remains our first cathedral and our "pro-cathedral" as it sometimes substitutes for our Christ the King Cathedral. St. Patrick's Church, built in Hamilton in the 1870s, has also occasionally served as a pro-cathedral.

There was a great deal of reorganization, consolidation and expansion during the 1850s and 1860s in order to implement the new diocesan structures. Of greatest importance was the need to obtain more priests to serve in the growing network of parishes. There was also a need for religious sisters to help found schools, hospitals and other charitable institutions that were so desperately needed by the struggling immigrant communities.

By the 1870s and 1880s the diocese had expanded to its northern limit, Tobermory. Parishes would spawn mission churches, which in turn became new parishes themselves with a resident priest. This process repeated itself many times. Greatly helping in this expansion was the building of the railways throughout the diocese, which now comprised the eight counties of Haldimand, Brant, Wentworth and Halton in the south, Waterloo and Wellington in the middle, and

Bruce and Grey in the north. Priests and people could now travel with ease throughout the diocese and the conveniences of modern living could be brought great distances. Thus, some very fine churches were built even in the most remote areas of the diocese.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the diocese became self-sufficient in vocations to the diocesan priesthood to meet its own pastoral needs. The rural areas were particularly prolific in producing priestly and religious vocations. Like so many other dioceses, one area in particular consistently produced more vocations than any other, and for Hamilton that was in north Wellington County around Arthur and Kenilworth parishes, and in southern Bruce County.

At first, candidates for the diocesan priesthood would study at one of the Papal Universities in Rome or in one of the seminaries in the Province of Québec, especially Le Grand Séminaire de Montréal. After the First World War, priestly formation usually took place in one of two seminaries in Ontario, St. Augustine's in Toronto or St. Peter's in London. Two male religious orders established houses of formation for priests and brothers in the diocese. The Jesuits had a novitiate in Guelph, and the Resurrectionists had a scholasticate in Waterloo.

Numerous vocations flowed into the sisterhoods also with headquarters both within and outside of the diocese. Of particular note, by their size, were the Sisters of St. Joseph in Hamilton and the School Sisters of Notre Dame with their motherhouse in Waterdown. The Sisters of St. Joseph taught in separate schools and were hospital administrators and nurses. The School Sisters of Notre Dame also taught at all three levels of education and established Notre Dame College Residence at what was later to become part of St. Jerome's University. To the present day, a large number of religious communities continue to establish new houses in the diocese.

By the final decades of the 19th century and into the 20th century, the nature of the diocese had begun to change. Industrialization had taken place, led by the City of Hamilton itself which became the leader of steel production in Canada. The cities in the southern and central parts of the diocese began to expand rapidly. Huge numbers of new workers arrived with their families and their needs had to be taken care of. New churches, schools and a host of charitable institutions were needed.

Many of the new immigrants were of a different ethnic background from the original Irish and German peoples, who were the most numerous in the diocese during so much of the 19th century. Other Catholic peoples began to arrive from Europe in large numbers. The first to arrive were the Italians, the Polish and the Ukrainian peoples. They often built their own churches, served by their own clergy.

This was also a time of increasing specialization in the work of the Church. Religious orders came to do specific tasks. Examples are the Jesuits and Resurrectionists, who worked in education and parishes, and the Basilians, who served many missions in the northern part of the diocese from their parish church in Owen Sound. Above all, the period before the First World War was a time of consolidation, stabilization and proud triumphalism as exemplified by the church worldwide at that time. Many of the oldest churches and institutions, which we see today, date from this period and are still standing strong.

During the First World War (1914 to 1918) and the Second World War (1939 to 1945) our people volunteered in large numbers for the military and our priests served as chaplains. After both wars there was extensive suburban expansion around the big cities. Many new churches were built. Their architectural style differed substantially from that of the traditional 19th century Gothic structures. Of particular note was the new Christ the King Cathedral, built in the 1930s in the neo-gothic style by Bishop Thomas McNally.

Of particular importance to the diocese, during the post-Second-World War era was the episcopacy of Bishop Joseph Francis Ryan. A true native son, he was the bishop of Hamilton from 1937 to 1973. During the 1950s and 1960s there was a major influx of immigrants from war-devastated Europe and a very high birth rate from Canada. Bishop Ryan opened more than 50 new parishes, thus doubling their existing number.

Bishop Ryan was also very influential in the expansion of the new school systems both on the practical front of assisting in the building of many new schools and also on the political front, in obtaining more rights and funding for Catholic education, at all levels, from the Ontario government.

Many new religious orders also entered the diocese during this same period, a time of exceptionally numerous vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Devoted to the contemplative life were the Precious Blood Sisters who established a presence in Hamilton in 1946, followed by the Carmelite Sisters in Kitchener in 1952. Many religious communities came to work specifically with the poor and downtrodden such as the Sisters of Social Service and the Brothers of the Good Shepherd.

From 1962 to 1965 the Second Vatican Council took place in Rome. Since then, the church throughout the entire world has had a decidedly different look about it. Not only did church architecture change but the way in which the Church carried out its mission changed. The laity began to play a much larger role in church life; the Mass was now said in the local languages rather than in Latin, and in general the church became more pastoral in its approach to the people.

True to the spirit of the Council and to the church's inspiration by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Diocese of Hamilton went from being a receiving diocese to being one

that sent forth its own missionaries. Thus, from 1962 to 1981, priests and sisters were sent out from the diocese to serve in the Guatemalan Diocese of Zacapa, where the needs were and still are much greater than anything we have experienced here at home.

By the late 1960s Canada had embraced a policy of bilingualism and multi-culturalism. People from all continents of the world began to flow into Canada during the tenures of Bishop Ryan and Bishop Paul Francis Reding. This would result in English-language parishes with peoples from some fifty or more different linguistic and ethnic groups. Many "national" parishes, from French to Korean, were now established or had been established long since. Diversity was already a strong tradition in the diocese.

As the church progressed to become more culturally diverse, there always remained a deep bond of unity as seen in our common loyalty to the teachings of the Church and our love of Christ in the Eucharist.

Today, the Diocese of Hamilton embraces seven counties (Haldimand having gone to the new Diocese of St. Catharines in 1958) which altogether have a population well over half a million Catholics in over 120 parishes and missions. It is one of English Canada's largest dioceses and is well organized. There are Catholic school boards for each of the counties and numerous schools to cater to the educational needs of all students up to the end of high school. St. Jerome's, now a University, is a national leader in the field of Catholic higher education.

Entering the 21st century, the diocese continues to grow. Under the leadership of Most Rev. Anthony Frederick Tonno, the present Bishop of Hamilton, there has been a resurgence of church building since 2002. Bishop Tonno has also dedicated his energies to the fields of education and health-care ensuring that they remain truly Catholic in spite of and perhaps because of government support. The

increasing size of the diocese has necessitated the appointment of auxiliary bishops to help carry the burdens of office.

During the sesquicentennial anniversary year, 2005–2006, which Bishop Tonnos, in his pastoral letter, has dedicated to “Our Lord in the Eucharist”, pride can be taken in the many accomplishments of this diocese. It has certainly been built upon a solid foundation so that future generations of Catholics can extend its outreach with confidence. The diocese has taken particular care to ensure that the spiritual and social needs of all its people are met. Through an unbroken succession of able leaders at all levels the Diocese of Hamilton remains an exemplar of what a diocese in the Roman Catholic Church should be. In the years to come may we build with conviction and hope so that the journey begun here upon Earth will truly lead us into God’s kingdom in heaven.