



# The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



THERE ARE STAGES in our lives that seem to be almost exclusively focused on the future—we are preparing, laying the groundwork, making sacrifices, restructuring our lives for something good that seems impossibly remote. But with determination and trust, we try to persevere, moving ever so slowly (and even imperceptibly) towards our goal. But even great distances can be covered, one step at a time. It seems the past few years have been all about preparing and waiting. But on many fronts, the time has finally come—to see the fruits of all of this labour and your generosity.

## Times of Celebration for the Oratory

### *The Holy Year for the Five Saints*

Saint Philip Neri was canonized in 1622 in an historic celebration. Canonizations were traditionally

performed for individual saints. But, in response to the turmoil in the world brought on by the Reformation and the Thirty Years War, the Church saw fit to raise to the altar **five** new saints. The ceremony for the Spaniard St Isidore the Farmer had already been planned, but his intended celebration was expanded to include Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, and of course Philip Neri. The day had been transformed from the recognition of a holy 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Century farmer known for his generosity to the poor into a morale-boosting celebration of the great saints of the counter-reformation. In commemoration of this great day in the Church, from March 2022 until just a few days ago, the Church has proclaimed a Holy Year for the Oratory.

After starting the year with a mass of thanksgiving celebrated on our altar that contains relics of both Saint Philip and Saint Ignatius, at which the Jesuit father John O'Brien preached, we have been having special events like our Evening of the Arts and

have had the relic of St Philip in the Church for public veneration. We recently concluded the year with a novena to St Philip and a pilgrimage to Martyrs' Shrine.

*2025—450 years of the Oratory and our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

We have begun our preparations for 2025, when we will mark the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the official establishment of the Oratory in 1575 and our own official beginning in 1975. Saint Philip's original community was a response to the needs of the Church at the height of the Reformation. He saw that laypeople needed spiritual support, especially through regular preaching and teaching and the sacrament of confession. He also realized that this was never going to happen unless those called to the priesthood were properly formed, spiritually supported, and personally challenged to grow in the ways of holiness. The Oratory was the answer to both of these issues. And we firmly believe, almost 450 years later, that it still is.

Father Jonathan Robinson certainly thought so in the 1970's. He had gathered together a community of young men in Montreal (including Fr David Roche, the last founding member), with the idea of founding an Oratory here in Canada, having seen flourishing houses in London and Birmingham, England. After proving that they could live together in the way necessary for an Oratory, the Church officially established them by a papal decree on 6 October 1975. The decree was communicated to us on 1 November, the date we have subsequently celebrated as our foundation day.

In 1979, at the invitation of Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter, the community moved to Toronto and was entrusted with the spiritual care of Holy Family Church and then the neighbouring church, St Vincent de Paul, in 1995. In the more than four decades in Toronto, the community has served faithfully, grown dramatically, and taken on new works for the good of the Church. We now have twelve priests in the community, one lay brother, and three brothers in priestly formation.

*A New Generation of Members*

Just before our last newsletter, we were delighted to clothe Brother Bernard (Logan) Weir in the habit of Saint Philip. This was followed by another joyful event, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, the feast day of St Bruno, and the anniversary of the day our papal decree was signed—the



MPP (Masters in Public Policy). Br Bruno began working as an analyst at a fund management company in Tokyo in 2015 and left in 2019 to join us, after having become an associate in the firm. He completed his philosophical studies here at Saint Philip's Seminary in May and is currently studying theology with us. Please keep him in your prayers.

*The Oratory Theology Summer School*

aggregation of Brother Bruno (Daniel) Hegedüs. The Oratory does not have vows (as religious orders do), but the aggregation ceremony marks the end of our three-year novitiate and the joining of the new member to the "flock" of the community. It signifies someone's intention to live in the community for life, dedicating one's time, energy, and work to the good of the Congregation, and also the community's recognition that the brother is a suitable member of the community, someone we can imagine living with for the rest of our lives!

Br Bruno was born in Budapest, Hungary. He attended Hungarian schools until transferring to Atlantic College in Wales, where he obtained an International Baccalaureate Diploma. He then entered Dartmouth College NH, obtaining a BA in Government, and afterwards, at the Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Tokyo, he received an

In honour of the precious legacy Pope Benedict XVI has left the Church, this year's second session of the Oratory Theology Summer School will be dedicated to him—his life, his times, his writings, and his surprisingly broad interests. As always, the first week will continue to be dedicated to a study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The first week will be July 3-7, and week two July 10-14. The classes run from 8:30 a.m. until 2:45 and include lunch and daily mass. The courses are designed to be in person, but they will continue to be available online as well.

*Saint Philip's Seminary Marks its Anniversary, too*

The wonderful blessing of the new Seminary building in October, the fruit of the *Renovatio* project to which so many of you have contributed so generously, came just in time for the Seminary to celebrate



the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its inception. Back in 1984, the Toronto Oratory recognized that its members needed a specialized training in preparation for ordination. In part because of the challenges facing Catholic theological education at the time, and in part because of the importance of remaining here with the community, we decided to launch a program of theological studies right here at the Oratory. Originally, the program was just for Oratorians, but God obviously had something else in mind.

In 1986, at the request of Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter, the Philosophy Division of Saint Philip's Seminary was designed to provide a place for the philosophical preparation of seminarians for the Archdiocese of Toronto, especially those in residence at Serra House, the archdiocesan house of discernment. Soon after, in the fall of 1988, a residential program was made available to seminarians from other Dioceses and Religious Communities, providing not only intellectual training, but also spiritual and personal formation. In 2008, again at the request of the Archdiocese of Toronto and Saint Augustine's

Seminary, we expanded our philosophical program to include a three-year course of studies with an expanded set of degrees.

Construction of the new seminary building began in 2020 and was blessed in October 2022. The Seminary is now operating at capacity—the new space was obviously needed! The new facilities, with their beautiful spaces and new technologies, are a great blessing. We currently have 41 seminarians studying with us, with 28 in residence (including our own three). This year we expect about ten ordinations of our alumni around the world. Please keep them in your prayers.

We will send out announcements about celebrations in honour of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary later in the summer. We hope you will be able to join us in thanking God and all our supporters for making these many years (and young priests they have helped to train) possible. This is the future of the Church, a solid and dependable future, and we are honoured to be part of it and honoured to have your support and assistance. ☺

