



The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



The Oratory—Years of Growth (1985-1997)

2025 marks the 50th anniversary of the Foundation of our house. We'll be taking the opportunity in the next couple of newsletters to recall the history of the community through the reflections of the Fathers and Brothers and through our photo archives. We

hope that these remembrances will pay tribute to the inspirations and sacrifices that made this half century possible, remind or inform us of the formative stages of the Toronto Oratory, and give glory to God for the many graces He has bestowed.

Sacramental Service through
the Oratorian Parishes

A large part of the reason for the Oratory’s move to Toronto in 1979 was the possibility of having a parish in which to function. That opportunity was something the circumstances in Montreal at the time would not allow. Although taking over the pastoral care of Holy Family Parish in particular was not the original plan, it turned out to be a providential step. There was space for the community (and ultimately the seminary, as well) to expand and a great quantity and variety of work to be done. Saint Philip, in founding the Oratory, was intending to reinvigorate the priesthood after the reformation. He wanted to set a pattern for priests living a common life centred upon prayer, frequent and beautiful celebration of the Eucharist, regular preaching of the Word of God, and, of course, a dedication to providing easy access to the sacrament of confession.

Almost immediately, a special music program, under the direction of Peter Bishop (who just retired

after 46 years of dedicated service) began. The first Mass offered by the Fathers of the Oratory was on 6 September 1979, and just a month later, on 7 October 1979, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, the first sung Novus Ordo Latin Mass was celebrated in the parish. But whether the Masses were in Latin or English, sung or spoken, the faithful soon came to trust that whichever Mass they attended would be offered with a fitting reverence. Confessions being made available before every Mass, every day, was also something that was almost unheard of at that time. With regular Holy Hours and sung Sunday Vespers, Holy Family Church soon became known beyond its parish boundaries and became a spiritual home for many people. Our work in the parish was greatly assisted by the arrival of the Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa’s sisters) in 1984. They have become a distinct and valuable part of what makes the parish unique.

Sixteen years after our arrival in Toronto, in 1995, Cardinal Ambrozic asked that we also undertake the spiritual care of Saint Vincent de Paul Parish. Our



The Annual Marian procession



The Oratorians hold a barbecue
for the parish volunteers



The interior of
Holy Family Parish
before the fire

growth in vocations allowed us to accept that invitation—since 1985, Fathers Thomas Trottier, Paul Pearson, and Martin Hilbert had been ordained for the Oratorian community. We would serve the parish while living in community at the Oratory residence at Holy Family Church.

One of the great blessings of Oratorian life in a parish is the stability our life brings to the pastoral care of the faithful. We have been 46 years in Holy Family Church and 30 years in Saint Vincent de Paul Church. We have baptized the children of people we baptized. We bury people we have known for decades. In a world in which everything seems to change at an alarming speed, Oratorian parishes are a quiet and stable refuge.



The Development of Saint Philip's Seminary

Saint Philip's Seminary was founded forty years ago in 1984 for the training of young Oratorians for the priesthood. But what began for the needs of the Toronto Oratory soon developed into an important work for the wider Church. Two years later, in 1986, at the request of Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter, we expanded the work of the Seminary to include the philosophical training of the men in residence at Serra House, the vocations house for the Archdiocese of Toronto. At the suggestion of Aloysius Cardinal Ambrozic, we opened the Seminary in 1988 to students outside of the Archdiocese. Since that time, the Seminary has grown to include men from dioceses and religious communities from around the world, with over 250 of our seminarians now ordained as priests.

That expansion made it clear that we needed the ability to grant our seminarians degrees to recognize their academic work. We began by working out an affiliation with the Pontifical University of the Lateran in Rome, an affiliation that lasted until 2013, when new European Union laws made affiliation illegal for North American seminaries. Because of the laws concerning degree-granting in Ontario, we were not allowed to grant Lateran degrees here in Toronto, even though the Lateran had approved our qualification to do so. And so we began the process

Seminarians have lunch during an excursion



(almost unknown in Ontario at that time) of acquiring our own independent degree-granting status. After much legal work and the fall of two provincial governments, Providence prevailed. By an Act of the Parliament of the Province of Ontario in 1990, in consultation with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities of the Province of Ontario, Saint Philip's Seminary was established as a degree-granting institution in its own right. This act granted to the Seminary the right to confer degrees both for those studying philosophy and for those studying theology.

Saint Philip's Seminary, brought into being by so many different people and motives, has become much more than a solid and dependable way of forming our Oratorian priests. So much of our identity as a

community (and a foundation of our cohesiveness) is our common work in the seminary—as teachers, spiritual directors, and priests involved with the day-to-day running of the seminary. This means that, unlike most Oratories (especially those of a significant size), we don't have to struggle to find work and incomes for our priests. Clearly the parishes cannot support so many priests—most of us work, in fact, as volunteers in the parishes. But rather than be

scattered around in various occupations that would pull us away from the community life of the Oratory, we are able to be here and to work together. That has transformed our life, giving us a focus and stability to our house. When we do work outside the house, it is by choice—because we are convinced of the importance of the work and its appropriateness for our vocation. We doubt we would be where we are as a community without the existence of the Seminary.



Saint Philip and Care for the Sick

Saint Philip had a special concern for the sick. They were often left to suffer alone—without medicines or food, deprived of normal human interaction and the support of the sacraments. He would go into the hospitals and send his followers there. His pastoral care for the sick served as the inspiration for the founding of an order by one of his early disciples, Saint Camillus of Lellis. Although medical care has improved dramatically in so many ways, the special

spiritual needs of the sick because of their suffering and isolation still continue. With the secularization of much hospital pastoral care, we have chosen to focus on more specifically sacramental care in our local hospitals, long-term care facilities and nursing homes. Fathers Thomas Trottier and Martin Hilbert have spent much of their priesthood involved with the care for the sick. Father Thomas has been faithfully ministering to the Bickle Centre, a part of the Toronto Rehabilitation Centre.



☞ **THE BICKLE CENTRE FOR** Complex and Continuing Care is one of several health care institutions located within the boundaries of Holy Family Parish. I began to visit there when I became a brother in the Oratory in 1982, and I continued to minister there (visiting patients, bringing Holy Communion, saying Mass) when I was ordained a priest in 1987. The Bickle is a remarkable place in many ways. One witnesses practical charity and devotion as family members—husbands, wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters—visit relatives, often daily, sometimes for years on end. There are patients and families here that I have known since the 1980s. The families themselves get to know one another, and beautiful networks of care and friendship develop. During the Covid pandemic, access to the Bickle was severely limited. When I returned, I was struck by how many of the staff welcomed me back in a truly heartfelt way. I realized from this that the presence of a Catholic priest, faithful in a quiet way to his priestly duties, served to give a spiritual dimension to this place of care and suffering and to all who work here. This was something I hadn't realized and they hadn't realized but which Covid brought to the fore. I have been intensely aware of this since. ☞



Father Martin worked in hospital chaplaincy right after his ordination.

☞ **“MAY THE LORD IN** his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit...” So begins the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. Two days after ordination, I began working as the Catholic chaplain at the Western and the Hospital for Sick Children. Helping Catholics to face serious illness and death

and dealing with their families and friends became a daily reality. One never knows quite what to say at a human level to a person who is often a complete stranger, so it is a blessing and a privilege to be able to offer God's grace through the Sacraments, which speak for themselves. I became conscious of St Philip's love for the sick and thankful for the opportunity to give them a reason to hope in God's love for them through the grace that I received in ordination. ☞

New Novices

The first week of September this year was filled with blessings. On the 1st, we clothed two new novices: Father Eric Mason and Brother Augustine (Para) Babuهران.

Father Eric was born in Peterborough in 1987 and is the eldest of six siblings. After obtaining a BA at Trent University, he was accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese of Peterborough and came to study at St Philip's Seminary. He then attended St Augustine's Seminary and was ordained a priest in 2015. We are all delighted to have him return to the Toronto Oratory, this time as a novice.

Br Augustine was born in 2001 and raised in Whitby, Ontario. On April 16, 2022, he was baptized and confirmed at St Michael's Cathedral, where he later worked as a sacristan. He obtained a BA in medieval studies, philosophy, and political science from St Michael's College and is completing an MA at the Centre for Medieval Studies, both at the University of Toronto. He has served at the altar and sung in the Schola Cantorum at Holy Family Church.



Brother Bruno (Daniel) Hegedüs Ordained a Deacon

On Saturday, 6 September, at Holy Family Church, our Brother Bruno was ordained by Thomas Cardinal Collins as a deacon, the last stage before the priesthood. He completed his studies for the priesthood in May. Please keep Brother Bruno in your prayers as he begins serving as a deacon—assisting at the altar, preaching, baptizing, and teaching in the seminary. It was a delight to have Cardinal Collins with us again. He has been performing our ordinations since 2009.

The Annual 40 Hours Devotion

Saint Philip was credited with popularizing the 40 Hours Devotion in Rome in the 1500's. We have tried to maintain this tradition by our annual celebration; this year it will happen 15-17 October. The 40 Hours begins with a sung Mass on a Wednesday, with the Blessed Sacrament enthroned on the altar at the end of the Mass. Aside from the times of regularly scheduled Masses, Eucharistic exposition continues until the closing holy hour on Friday evening. We have developed the custom of a Rosary Holy Hour, combining prayers, reflections, and beautiful music. It is a truly splendid event.

The 40 Hours was instituted as a powerful prayer, often offered for a particularly pressing need. This year, we offer it in thanksgiving for the many blessings of the past 50 years as an Oratorian community. Come and join us. 🍷



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