



The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



The Oratory—Rebuilding and Construction (1997-2004)

WHEN ASKED ABOUT our particular clerical dress, Toronto Oratorians will often quip that our official habits are black, but with a scattering of plaster dust! Construction seems to be a regular part of

our lives. Whether in Montreal or after moving to Toronto, whether connecting up the houses in 1982 or expanding so as to accommodate a growing number of seminarians, we seem always to have

some construction project on the go. As our work develops, so does the need for appropriate spaces in which to undertake it. And since Oratorians do not transfer from one community to another, we view our property in a far more personal way than those who may be stationed in a given place only temporarily. Our space is more than a place for us to work or carry out an apostolate—it is our home: so of course we treat it differently.

But the period from 1997-2004 was uniquely transformative of our material habitat, even by our standards. And the catalyst for this outburst of activity was the fire that destroyed the old Holy Family Church.

Domus Mea—the Rebuilding of Holy Family Church

Watching the flames engulf Holy Family Church was an overwhelming experience. The church had served the parish for more than ninety years; it was filled with memories and steeped in generations of prayers. Thanks be to God, no one was injured in the fire. As people often say: material things can be replaced, but

people cannot. But still, after material destruction, we are left with the enormous task of replacing what has been lost: what do we do now, where do we hold Masses, where do we start?

None of us faced these questions more directly than the two priests who had served as pastors of Holy Family just before and after the fire—Fr Daniel Utrecht and Fr David Roche. Father Daniel reflects on the campaign to rebuild the Church.



☞ THE FIRE THAT DESTROYED the old Holy Family Church on June 13, 1997 was a shock, but it also provided an opportunity: to build a new, larger, more beautiful church for the glory of God. Within less than a year, preliminary drawings for a new church appeared in the parish bulletin, and we had collected some \$400,000 in donations. In the meantime we had received a ‘cold call’ from Paul J. Mack, the head of a fundraising company in Burlington, telling us that he could help us raise the necessary funds for our project. We honestly thought that we didn't need his professional help, but agreed to meet with him anyway. By the time he completed his presentation, our minds were changed.

His company did a feasibility study which revealed what we already knew: there was great enthusiasm for the building of a new church, but the Parkdale neighbourhood was not exactly filled with millionaires who could make the large donations that would jump-start a large capital campaign. Several six-figure donations are usually thought to be essential if one wishes to raise a million dollars, and we knew no one we could ask for such a donation. We needed to raise more than a million

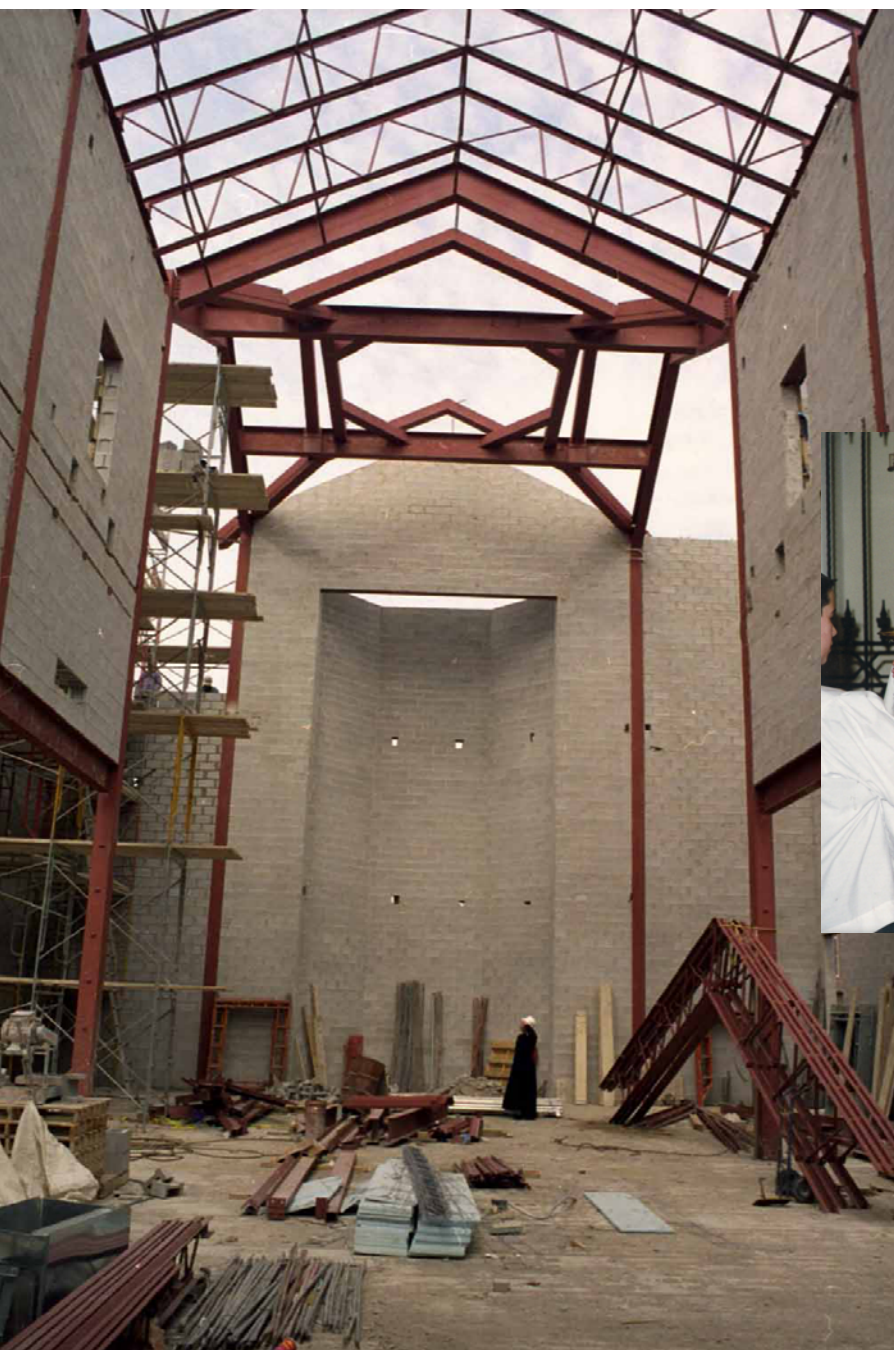


dollars in pledges if the Archdiocese were to agree to lend us the money to complete the project, and it didn't seem possible. Paul persuaded us to set a lower goal: a ten-week campaign with a goal of \$400,000 in donations and pledges. A large team of volunteers came together, with Fr Roche as the overall Chairman.

We announced the start of the Campaign in early February 1999. At the first progress report, at the end of the third week, the \$400,000 goal had already been surpassed! We were breaking all the rules. We did not have any six-figure donations, but an astonishing number of people said yes when asked to pledge \$25,000 or \$20,000 or \$10,000 or \$5,000 over a five-year period. In the fourth week our total had reached \$665,000, and we raised our goal to \$1,000,000. I remember being approached by parishioners who had not yet been canvassed, eager to make their pledges.

By the end of the 10-week campaign we had received pledges amounting to more than \$1.7 million: over four times the original campaign goal. The success of our campaign persuaded the Archdiocese to approve the construction and a loan. There were many more hurdles to overcome, but by the Feast of our Lady of the Rosary, October 7, 1999, demolition of the remains of the old church had begun. By this time the pledge total was \$1,931,684 from 674 donors. ☞

Father David Roche, as Father Daniel mentioned, was put in charge of the fund-raising. As a former pastor of the parish, his knowledge of the parishioners and connection with them made him an obvious choice for the position.



estimated cost was about five million dollars, six times the insurance payment. It didn't seem achievable, but thanks to God and a host of dedicated volunteers, we received over two million dollars in pledges. Like the Lord's disciples, volunteers went out two by two and achieved wonders. One parishioner marvelled, "I have raised more money for the Church in nine weeks than in a lifetime of bake sales."

The campaign was entitled *Domus Mea*, from our Lord's quotation of Psalm 56, "*Domus mea domus orationis vocabitur*—My house shall be called a house of prayer." That Latin verse is inscribed over the wrought iron screen in front of the tabernacle, which we were able to place on the central axis of the Church, thanks to the late Cardinal Ambrozic.

We like to think of the central tabernacle as the fulfillment of the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem.

In the rebuilding process, there were widows who gave their mite, their all, for the glory of God, cheerfully and willingly. God bless these faithful disciples. We remember them daily in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

The new Holy Family Church was dedicated on 25 February 2001 by Aloysius Cardinal Ambrozic, with a specially-commissioned setting of the Mass by Canadian composer and friend Peter-Anthony Togni. A YouTube video of excerpts from the ceremony is still available. It was a day of great rejoicing and the culmination of years of effort and prayer. 🌿

🌿 ON FRIDAY, JUNE 13, 1997, Holy Family Church was destroyed by fire. From the calendar date, one might assume diabolical influences, but since June 13 is the feast day of Saint Anthony of Padua, we prefer to give him the credit! With a growing congregation, we were in need of a larger church – but when would we have done anything about it, without the encouragement of the fire? Our founder Father Jonathan Robinson had discovered that city building rules allowed us to reach all the way to the property line, and so we began planning a new, larger church. The



The Oratory Library

Just three years after the completion of the new Holy Family, our library needed a new and larger home. Because of the growth of Saint Philip's Seminary and the expansion of our collection, not to mention the growth in our work of spiritual direction that required more parlour space, we saw a pressing need for a purpose-built library. Designed by architect

Brian Atkins, the Oratory Library was completed in 2004. It was added to the building housing the refectory and common room, incorporating both a ground floor and a basement, and is now home to a collection of around 14,000 volumes. It is a serene and quiet place to read and to work, a refuge in a noisy world.

(+) Brian Atkins

Brian Atkins was the architect whose plans we chose for the rebuilding of Holy Family Church. Through working closely within him on this project we came to trust his skill, his architectural sense, his appreciation of our desires, and finally his friendship. When the time came to build our library, he was the one to whom we turned. Years later, at the very end of his career, he also designed our new seminary building, dedicated in October 2022 by the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic. After a long and distinguished career, Brian died on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 2025. His son wrote after Brian's death: "Regardless of the project, Brian always brought his passion for his craft, though it can be seen best in the churches he designed. He was the architect for many churches in Toronto throughout his career, but the work he loved the most was for the Holy Family Church and Oratory in Toronto. One of his wishes after he passed was for his funeral to be held at his favourite church." We were honoured to have his funeral in the church that he designed. We are grateful for his work and for his friendship. May he rest in peace.



A Double Ordination

This fall we are doubly blessed to have two members of the Toronto Oratory be ordained—Brother Bruno (Daniel) Hegedüs as a priest, and Brother Jeffrey Sullivan as a deacon.

Brother Bruno was born in Hungary but was educated all around the world—in Wales, the United States, and Japan! Beginning in 2015 he was an analyst in a fund management company in Tokyo, but in 2019, having become an associate, he left fund management and Japan behind and entered the Toronto Oratory. Since completing his theological studies in May 2025, Bruno has been teaching in the philosophy division of Saint Philip's Seminary. He was ordained a deacon by Thomas Cardinal Collins on 6 September 2025, the anniversary of the first Mass we

said at Holy Family when we arrived in 1979.

Brother Jeffrey was graduated from the University of Waterloo in 2015 and was hired full-time by Google at their Waterloo office. As a Senior Software Developer he was responsible for making the Gmail website faster for over a billion users. Now his skills are focused in a very different direction: he has been assisting with our RCIA program and is completing his theological studies (the final part of his intellectual preparation for ordination) in May.

As a date and details of the celebration become known, we will let you know! In the meantime, remember to pray for Brs Bruno and Jeffrey, and for future vocations.

Summer School—the Jubilee for Saint Francis of Assisi

In this year's summer school the second week will be dedicated to St Francis of Assisi, inspired by the Church's proclamation of 2026 as a Jubilee Year in honour of the 800th anniversary of his death; few saints have had the breadth of his appeal. The first week of the Summer School, as always, is a survey of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This survey is a great introduction for home-schooling parents, catechists, teachers, or those just wanting a solid intellectual appreciation of their faith. Spaces are now available for both first and second weeks. For those from out of town, accommodation is available in the Seminary Residence. You can consult the Oratory Website for details and register through EventBrite. It is always a fruitful and joyful time. Come join us. 🌿



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