



Parish History

Long before the current church of Our Lady of Grace was built on its present location in 1983, there was a strong tradition of Catholic community in Aurora. The earliest members of this community were Irish Catholics who came to settle in the area between 1830 and 1840, after the Irish Potato Famine. These rural settlers celebrated Mass with a visiting Priest in private homes, which were designated as Mass Stations on a weekly basis. This practice continued until the construction of De Lasalle College in 1913 (located on the north-west corner of Yonge and Bloomington Sideroad) provided a small chapel that the Catholic community was given permission to use. After World War Two, the influx of returning soldiers to the Aurora area prompted the Archdiocese of Toronto to begin plans for a Parish structure that could accommodate the projected growth of the Catholic population in town.

While driving through the town in early 1945, Cardinal McGuigan noticed that the large Fleury Estate on Yonge Street North was for sale. Herbert W. Fleury, who would later serve as Aurora's first mayor, built the Fleury Mansion in 1886. After Fleury's death, and for much of the two World Wars, the property was vacant because his principle heir (his daughter Marguerite) was unable to leave Nazi occupied Paris. The property for sale totalled a frontage of 408 feet on Yonge Street, 384 feet on Maple Street, and 173 feet on Catherine Avenue. The Archdiocese purchased the property through a Toronto businessman on October 1, 1945 in order to avoid conflict with the Protestant majority, and by the end of the following year, it had been officially transferred to the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation. The first Mass at the Fleury Mansion was held by a visiting priest on July 14, 1946 in the dining room and parlour area of the house, which had been converted to a chapel using materials acquired from a military camp based in Newmarket.

At some point during the remainder of the summer Cardinal McGuigan asked a young priest named Fr. Richard Lynett to join him on a drive to Aurora. Pointing to the new church property, Cardinal McGuigan turned to Father Lynett and said, "You are now appointed as Pastor, and there is where you will begin your work." Father Lynett began his duties as Pastor on September 1st of that same year. After a parishioner donated a large statue of Our Lady of Grace to the parish, Father Lynett wrote to Cardinal McGuigan seeking approval to give the parish the same name. By October 29, 1946 the Catholic community in Aurora had a proper name, and began to focus on building a proper church. Several years of fundraising took place with events ranging from bridge parties and bazaars to raffles and teas, and Mass was celebrated for the first time in a new, parishioner constructed church on November 20, 1953.



Father Lynett continued to serve the parish of Our Lady of Grace well past the normal retirement age, and in 1974 the parish celebrated the fortieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. After having served over thirty years as Pastor, Father Lynett retired on February 29, 1980. Father Paul J. McCarthy, ordained in 1967, came to Our Lady of Grace as Father Lynett's successor and quickly put in motion plans for the modernization of the building. After conducting an audit of the building, Father McCarthy and the Parish Council decided to undertake the building of a new Parish Complex that would include an 750-seat church, as well as a parish rectory and hall. With over 8000 hours of work contributed by parish volunteers, construction of the current church complex was completed ahead of schedule in August 1983.

Father Donald MacLean, who was ordained in May 1960, was appointed Pastor of Our Lady of Grace Parish in December of 1990. Father MacLean had a special love of children and was very involved in visiting and supporting the parish schools in Aurora. During his sixteen years as pastor steady growth necessitated the opening of three new elementary schools (Light of Christ, St. Jerome and Holy Spirit) in addition to the two existing schools (Our Lady of Grace, St. Joseph's), as well as the opening of one new Catholic High School in 1990 (Cardinal Carter) and the planning of a second one (St. Maximilian Kolbe) scheduled to open in September 2009.

It was during Father MacLean's time that he co-ordinated the refurbishing of Lynett Hall, organized Jubilee Year Millennium Celebrations at Cardinal Carter High School (two Masses with over 2000 people in attendance at each Mass), and special events marking World Youth Day in 2002. World Youth Day celebrations at Our Lady of Grace included an outdoor Mass at Cardinal Carter High School (with G. Emmett Cardinal Emmett Carter in attendance), as well as a procession of the World Youth Day Cross from the high school to the parish.(with founding parishioner Bill Menton, one of Our Lady of Grace's original parishioners, carrying the Cross).. Father MacLean retired from Our Lady of Grace Parish in June of 2007, and the parish looks forward to celebrating his 50th anniversary of Ordination to Priesthood with him in 2010.

In June of 2007, Father Timothy K. Hanley, our current pastor, came to Aurora to lead Our Lady of Grace's 4700 families as Father MacLean's successor. Many things have changed since the days of rotating Masses in private homes, but even more has stayed the same. Our Lady of Grace is still a vibrant faith community, the same statue that gave the Parish its name is still in the body of the church, and the spirit of volunteerism and community that existed in the original Catholic community in Aurora is still present in our parishioners today. Most importantly though, as stated by Father Hanley, "The parish continues to be a haven, offering people a chance to reflect and remember Christ's presence."

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