

About Our Church

A Brief History

St. Mary of the Assumption parish is in the Diocese of Peterborough, and began as a mission of St. Patrick's parish in Kearney, a small community about 25 kms north of Huntsville. The parish priest, Father Fleming, would travel on Saturday by railroad from Kearney to Chumley's Tavern. As there was not a Catholic church in Huntsville, Mass was said in people's homes once every three weeks in the winter and every week in the summer. Eventually, Father Fleming undertook the construction of a permanent structure. A new stone church was completed in 1899 on a hill overlooking Huntsville's bay in the west-end of Huntsville. The church however was without running water or central heat. It was used until the present Saint Mary's church on Centre Street opened in 1960. The stone foundation from the original church can still be seen on the vacant church site.



St. Mary's parish was formed in 1923 and the first pastor was Father Michael O'Brien who was fluent in Italian. Many Italians had been brought over from Italy to work in the tannery and to play in the band the tannery owner C.O. Shaw had started. Father O'Brien died suddenly in 1928 and Father Maher was appointed the new pastor. He remained in Huntsville until 1940.

Father Fitzgerald came to St. Mary's as the pastor in 1953. He realized that the stone church on the hill was too small especially in the summer tourist season. Albert and Bapsteate Baley, two parishioners at the time, donated the property on Centre Street where the present church now stands. Various means were used to raise funds and the church was built at a cost of \$225,000. The present Saint Mary of the Assumption church opened in 1960.

In 1970 Father John Hickey was named pastor at St. Mary's and he decided to build the rectory beside the new church. He sold the old stone church property to finance the construction of the new rectory.

In 1981 Father Clare Hickson became the pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption. Father Hickson's task was to build a new Catholic elementary school in Huntsville. He and a group of dedicated parishioners worked tirelessly to bring Catholic education to north Muskoka. In September of 1983 the Nipissing District Roman Catholic Separate School Board opened an "unnamed" Catholic elementary school consisting of eight portables on the site of the present Ontario Hydro building on Ravenscliff Road. Shortly after the opening of the school was officially named Saint Mary's. The present school, located on the corner of Hunter's Bay and Silverwood Drive, was completed in April 1988. Saint Mary's school became part of the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board when the Ontario provincial government restructured school boards across the province. During the construction of Saint Mary's school Father Hickson oversaw the construction and opening of the new church in Baysville, "Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Mission". Masses are said each Sunday in Baysville as well as Huntsville.

In 1988 Fr. Clair Hickson who had been the driving force in building the new Mission church in Baysville and also St. Mary's Elementary School went on a sabbatical for one year to study Canon Law in Rome. As has been the case, in the history of the Parish of Huntsville then followed two brief Pastorates of Fr. Robert Papi followed by Fr. Eric Sikora. In some of that time of those years 1988 to 1992, the Diocese of Peterborough, at its high point, had a total of 97 Priests. These two Pastors were assisted for short periods by Fr. Neil Roy, Fr. Witold Michalski, Fr. Paul Hickey and Fr. Michael Mulhall. In the early 1990's Fr. Andrew Broda, a native of Sandomrtz, Poland was named Pastor, moving to Huntsville from Powassan. After 8 years in Huntsville, Fr. Broda was appointed Pastor of Ennismore on the death of Fr. Joseph Collins. Msgr. Michael Mulhall succeeded Fr. Broda in the midst of massive preparations for World Youth Day in Toronto. Msgr. Mulhall had served briefly in Huntsville in the late 1980's and had been an official of the Congregation for the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite in Rome. As a result of World Youth Day, and the tremendous impetus in preparation and in housing 100's of 1000's of young people from all over the world coming to Toronto, (as a result of World Youth Day, a new Parish organization was born, The Friends of St. Mary's). World Youth Day 2002 was a tremendous success in the life of the church not only world wide but in Ontario. Towards the end of 2002 came the retirement of the longest serving Bishop of the Diocese of Peterborough, The Most Reverend James Doyle. Shortly after the arrival of Bishop Nicola De Angelis, CFIC who had served for many years as Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto, and in a reorganization of Diocesan personnel, Msgr. Mulhall was appointed Chancellor of the Diocese and Moderator of the Curia and transferred to the Parish of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Hastings because of its proximity to the Diocesan Office in Peterborough. Fr. Brian McColl, who was in Hastings moved to Huntsville. In 2005 Fr. McColl was named Pastor of St. Mary's in Lindsay and later given a leave of absence to care for his ailing mother.

It had become apparent as with any buildings, the toll of a church almost 50 years old and a townhouse joined to the Church as a Rectory, everything had taken its toll. Most of the property in