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ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, WEST TORONTO,
which is celebrating its Diamond Jubilee this month with special services.

From
Sea to Sea

The Story of a Parish

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, WEST TORONTO, CELEBRATES ITS DIAMOND JUBILEE

THE Canadian Church is wonderfully rich in its parochial life and many inspiring stories may be told of the faith, the courage and the patience of clergy and people, often in the face of heavy obstacles, as from small and humble beginnings they have developed strong congregations, worshipping in buildings erected to the glory of God and for the Salvation of man. In this article will be outlined the history of one parish, beginning as a suburban congregation and growing into a busy city church. It is the story, typical of many churches, of St. John's Parish, West Toronto, which this year is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary. In the sober record of half a century and more of growth and expansion,

GROWTH

FOLLOWING the resignation of the Rev. J. H. McCollum, St. John's Church became a mission of St. Mark's, Carleton West (now West Toronto), and for a period of several years was served by students of Divinity in Toronto. Many of the Wycliffe clergy, prominent in Church life in Canada and abroad, received their initial parochial training in the mission and have maintained a close and affectionate interest in the progress of the parish. So rapid was the growth of Toronto Junction, an important railroad centre of the day, that application was made in 1887 to have the mission receive the status of a parish. This was granted on November 14th in an episcopal declaration, reading in part: "Whereas a petition hath been presented us by certain parishioners residing in the Parish of St. Mark's, Carleton West and West Toronto Junction, praying that a new parish may be erected out of a portion of the said Parish—now therefore be it known to whom it may concern that we, Arthur, by Divine Commission, Bishop of Toronto, do hereby declare that the portion of the aforesaid Parish of Carleton West and West Toronto Junction, which is contained within the boundaries hereinafter described, shall henceforth constitute a new and separate Parish by the name of the Parish of St. John, Runnymede."

The appointment of a rector was made forthwith in the person of the Rev. A. C. Miles. A year later plans were undertaken for the construction of a brick building as the church and the enlargement of the frame building to serve as a hall. The second church opened on January 26th, 1890, had a seating capacity of 330 and cost \$8,737. During the incumbency of the Rev. R. P. McKim from 1892 to 1895 the parish buildings were centres of great activity. Various parochial organizations, such as the Woman's Auxiliary, the Willing Workers, the Men's Association, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew and the Boys' Brigade, flourished and a newsy, well-edited Parish Magazine kept all informed about the progress and programme of the church. An excerpt from Robinson's *Landmarks of Toronto* (1899) gives an outsider's impression of the church in this period: "St. John's, Toronto Junction, on the old Humber plains is in sight of the lake. It stands in the woods to the south side of Dundas Street and is a pretty little building in modern Gothic architecture. It is pleasing to the eye in its exterior and of exceedingly neat appearance within. The congregation attending St. John's is



HOME OF MRS. B. W. MURRAY

there is little of romance or adventure, but much to encourage and uplift, and, in these days of stress and perplexity, it is the encouraging, uplifting word we need.

ORIGIN

EVERY church owes its start to the vision, the energy and the zeal of some person and St. John's holds in honoured memory Mrs. B. W. Murray, as its foundress. There were only a few houses scattered throughout the West Toronto district in 1879, and the nearest church was some miles distant. Mrs. Murray was deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of the children in these homes and resolved to open for them a class of instruction. On a Sunday afternoon in August she started out in a buggy to call for the children and, taking them to her home in the Swansea district, south of Bloor Street between Windermere Avenue and Jane Street, began to teach them the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Mrs. Murray's work is memorialized in a bronze tablet within the present church which includes these words: "Through her devoted energy and her great love for little children, the foundation of the Parish of St. John was laid."

Later that year the men of the community became active and arrangements were made to hold religious services in Mrs. McGregor's home, situated at what is now the corner of Runnymede Road and Annette Street. The Rev. J. H. McCollum, rector of St. Thomas' Church, was in charge of the mission and he presided at the first vestry meeting, attended by seven laymen, and held on Friday, December 19th, 1879. Some months later Messrs. A. Fiske and V. Wadsworth offered the vestry a parcel of ground, comprising two and one-half acres, as a site for a church and parsonage. This offer was gratefully accepted, and the land, at the junction of the present St. John's Road and Dundas Street, was held for the purpose named.

The work of building a church was begun in 1881 and on Sunday, November 20th, the opening service was held. The building was of frame construction and cost the modest sum of \$700. Bishop Sweatman headed the subscription list with a personal donation and arranged to be present at the service of consecration. A valued memento of the opening is in the form of a lectern cloth bearing the words: "St. John's Church, Runnymede, opened Sunday, November 20th, 1881, by the Bishop of Toronto, Arthur Sweatman, G. A. Street, Mrs. B. W. Murray. B. W. Murray and Hugh Dempster, Church Wardens." Mrs. A. A. Keele, formerly Miss G. A. Street, is still a worshipping member of the church, and profoundly interested in its progress and activities. Mrs. J. Jarvis, another charter member of the congregation, also is found in her accustomed place each Sunday.



THE FIRST CHURCH

Opened Sunday, 20th November, 1881, by the Right Rev. Arthur Sweatman, Bishop of Toronto.

numerically a good one, but there are few well-to-do people among them, and the amount raised for the Church and other expenses is not large."

ACTIVITIES

THE evangelical note, characteristic of St. John's Church, was sounded clearly during the ministry of the Rev. R. P. McKim and that of his successor, the Rev. F. H. DuVernet, B.D., Professor of Practical Theology in Wycliffe College from 1885 and appointed third rector of St. John's in 1895. Both were noted for their deep sincerity, their pastoral faithfulness, the fervour of their preaching and their passionate interest in missions. Under them St. John's became and remains an intensely missionary-minded congregation and, in the course of its history, has sent various of its members into the mission field. Miss Collinette V. Harris, a deaconess, church organist and Sunday School teacher from 1892, left in 1904 for mission work in Egypt, where she laboured until her retirement in

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1920. She remains an active and devoted member of the church. Her example has been followed by others of the Sunday School teachers in the persons of Mrs. Minchin (née Kathleen Kells) of the Indian Residential School, Elkhorn, Manitoba; Miss Hilda Holland, formerly at The Pas, Manitoba; Mrs. G. C. Cowley (née Elsie Shaw), now at Split Lake Indian Reserve, Manitoba; Mrs. S. J. Stewart (née Florence Giles), who served for a period of four years at Pangnirtung, Baffin Land, and Miss Edna Elliott, R.N., who is now on her way for service in Kangra, India, following three years of work in Japan. Much of the zeal for missions in St. John's Church is due to the influence of Miss Hilda May, who has completed forty-six years of constant activity as a teacher in the Sunday School and a directress of children's and boys' work.

During the Rev. F. H. DuVernet's ministry the A.Y.P.A. and the Gleaners' Union were organized and a splendid social service work was inaugurated in the form of a real estate scheme by which the rector helped workingmen to obtain land and build their own homes. As a rail centre, Toronto Junction had many social problems, including that of drink, and Mr. DuVernet was tireless in his efforts to promote the cause of temperance, a work that was carried on with great earnestness by his successor, the Rev. T. Beverley Smith. He also visited the local factories in the noon-hour and held brief services for the men. Due to the growth in the congregation it was found necessary to enlarge the church in 1904 and this work was completed and entirely paid for just a few months before the rector was elected to the Diocese of Caledonia. A tribute to Archbishop DuVernet's life is found in the Parish Magazine of May, 1928: "The secret of his life was that he ever attended promptly to the little details and courtesies of daily



THE SECOND CHURCH

Opened Sunday, 26th January, 1890, by the Right Rev. Arthur Sweatman,
Bishop of Toronto.

life and sat where others sat, sharing his life without reserve with his friends and with his flock, ever ready to give himself uncomplainingly and unreservedly to the best interests of his fellowmen."

FOURTH AND FIFTH RECTORS

WITH the appointment of the Rev. T. Beverley Smith, B.A., on December 31st, 1904, the parish entered upon a fresh chapter of its history. The new rector was especially interested in children's work and conducted various services for children both on Sunday mornings and evenings as well as at the afternoon session of the Sunday School. He continued the Cottage Prayer Meetings begun by the Rev. F. H. DuVernet and inaugurated courses in Teacher Training. With a constantly increasing membership it became evident that the frame school-house could no longer accommodate the needs of the growing parish and in September, 1911, the corner-stone of a new parish house was laid (the present West Toronto Y.W.C.A. building). But even an enlarged accommodation was inadequate to serve the spiritual and social needs of the community and within a few years two missions were opened, that of St. Paul's on December 5th, 1909, and that of the Church of the Advent on February 26th, 1912. Subsequently both mission churches received parochial status and are today centres of an ever-growing and important work. A pleasing feature of the Anglican Church life of West Toronto is the cordial relationship which exists among all churches, marked by the occasional exchange of pulpits by the rectors, and the goodwill visits between parishes, as arranged by members of the parochial organizations.

During Mr. Smith's ministry, the first World War broke out, and the rector was called to bear a great part of the sacrifice and sadness of the years that followed. By the end of 1916, 172 members of the congregation were either in training or on active service and a number had made the supreme sacrifice. These experiences told heavily on a constitution far from strong and in 1918, in his 54th year, this loyal servant of God was called to higher service. A Toronto paper, in

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commenting on his death, referred to him as "one of the noblest of men" and said: "He worked so hard that his health was undermined. No one who met him could escape the infection of his burning zeal for service."

The Rev. Richard MacNamara, L.Th., as the fifth rector, entered upon his ministry in 1917 and for seventeen and a half years, the longest period of service given by any incumbent of St. John's, laboured with all diligence and ardour for the parish of which he was the spiritual leader. Of dynamic personality and abounding energy, he soon realized that as a result of changing residential tendencies and also the creation of the two new parishes of St. Paul's, Runnymede, and the Church of the Advent, St. John's Church was no longer in the location best suited to the needs of the parish. Thus he gave all support to the new and daring policy of erecting a church building at the corner of Quebec and Humber-side Avenues, the geographical centre of the parish. This meant the abandonment of the original site of the church and the removal of its materials to the new site, where already a rectory had been built, but the subsequent growth of the parish and the flourishing condition of the church have well-justified the action taken. The corner-stone of the present commodious edifice, seating 600 people, was laid on May 5th, 1923, and the church was opened for worship by the Right Rev. J. F. Sweeny, Lord Bishop of Toronto, on November 4th of the same year. The following Sunday, Bishop Reeve dedicated the beautiful chancel window, with its inspiring theme of the Ascension, as a memorial to the thirty-nine men and boys who had fallen during the World War. Other memorial windows, since dedicated, are in honoured and loving memory of the Rev. T. Beverley Smith, Archbishop DuVernet, Mrs. R. R. Hopkins, Dr. R. R. Hopkins, Mrs. C. J. Cliff, Miss Sarah Griffin, and the triple window of the Crucifixion in the East Transept was erected by the members of the Bula Matadi Church Boys' Bible Class on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the church. There are also bronze tablets as memorials of Rev. T. B. Smith, Canon R. P. McKim, Rev. the Major R. MacNamara, Mrs. F. Cowan and Mrs. G. H. Kimmis. The pulpit is a memorial to a former church warden, Mr. Robert Drewitt. The carillon of ten bells, installed through the assistance of Mr. T. W. Chadburn and the late Dr. A. A. Jackson, is a distinctive feature of the church and brings the message of the Gospel, in music, to the whole community.

Much of the effort of the parish during the past eighteen years has been devoted to the task of paying for the new church, which cost upwards of \$100,000, and on which a sum of \$28,000 is still owing. But apart from this necessary financial undertaking, Mr. MacNamara, aided by his talented and energetic wife, carried forward a great expansion in all parochial organizations and developed the Bible class department, one of the strongest aspects of Church life.

For reasons of health, in the late Fall of 1934, Mr. MacNamara considered it wise to resign as rector of the church towards the upbuilding of which he had made such a valuable contribution. Five years later he entered that rest reserved for the people of God. At the funeral service, held in St. John's Church on December 14th, 1940, Archbishop Owen paid tribute to this rector as "an enthusiastic teacher of the Bible, a pastor who knew and helped his people, especially in times of trouble, a builder, not merely of material structures, but of the Holy Structure in the human heart, one whose memory we revere and by whose example we have been strengthened, for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

THESE ALSO LABOURED

NO review of the history of a church would be complete without a reference to those clergy who have acted as assistants, and St. John's, in its sixty years, has had a noble succession of young men who have made, each in his time and way, a worthy contribution to parish life. Among those whose names may be recalled are Charles McKim, William Simpson, F. J. Lynch, Edward Morley, R. S. Mason, J. E. Ward, H. L. Nicholson, Leonard Smith, Albert Simpson, R. E. Lemon, F. V. Abbott, Henry Roche, Herbert Naylor, W. F. Barfoot, Minto Swan, G. F. Banks, R. C. Good, B. R. English, T. E. Jones, C. D. Cross, G. R. Bracken, and the present curate, D. G. Churcher. The Rev. H. R. Hunt is the present rector of the parish, having succeeded Mr. MacNamara in February, 1935.

Article Nineteen of the Articles of Religion reminds us that the Church is not merely "a congregation in which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments duly ministered", but more particularly a "congregation of faithful men". St. John's Church throughout its history has been blessed in the loyal and devoted service of hundreds of faithful men and women and, apart from them, their enthusiasm, their interest, their advice and help, the clergy could not possibly have carried forward the progress of the parish. An ancient writer spoke in praise of "famous men": this article would speak in praise of these faithful men and women who, year by year, in good times and bad, have been the mainstay of the Church and through their worship and work have upheld the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ and His standards for the Christian life. The congregation is also blessed in the faithful service of an admirable voluntary choir, which under the direction of Mr. Percy MacDonald, F.C.C.M., organist and choir-master for the past nineteen years, aids in a reverent and worthy manner in the musical part of the Church liturgy.

THE RECORDS

A STUDY of parochial records is always a fascinating pastime, for records are replete with human interest. The Baptismal Register for St. John's Church begins with the entry of a baptism just five months after the opening of the first church, and regularly, every few weeks or months, the record is enlarged by the inclusion of fresh names. In respect to marriages, however, the first entry for August, 1882, is followed by one in November, 1888! Courting apparently was a far lengthier or a more difficult task in those days than it is today. Passing over the years, we find that in the sixty years of its history 2791 children or adults have been baptised, 1366 couples have been united in the bonds of Holy Matrimony, and 1537 Burial Services have taken place. The record of Confirmation Services dates from 1890 and shows that in the past fifty years 1211 people have renewed in St. John's Church their baptismal vows.

DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

A N anniversary is always an important event, and a diamond jubilee is a special cause for thanksgiving and praise. Thus on November 16th and 23rd special services are arranged, with the rector preaching the morning of the 16th and Bishop Broughall of the Diocese of Niagara in the evening. Bishop Beverley will preach at the morning service the following Sunday and the Rev.

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Briarly Browne, rector of St. John's, Norway, in the evening. On Tuesday, November 18th, a congregational meeting of celebration will be held at which Dr. Cody, president of the University of Toronto, will be the principal speaker. On Thursday, the 27th of the month, the Men's Club will present an historical sketch, "The First Vestry Meeting", reconstructing scenes from the early history of St. John's Church, and Mr. James Nicholson, lay secretary of the Synod, will give an address, illustrated by lantern slides, entitled "The Stately Homes of England". It is with a thankful remembrance for past mercies that St. John's Church will celebrate its diamond jubilee and a fervent faith in God's Providence as its members face the tasks and opportunities of the future.

CHANGES AND APPOINTMENTS

Rev. C. E. Ward, incumbent of Port Daniel (Q), has been appointed to Dixville.

Rev. A. V. MacLaren, incumbent of Marbleton (Q), has been appointed to the parish of Fitch Bay.