

ST. BONAVENTURE'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Don Mills, Ontario, Canada

THE BEGINNINGS: by Gerry Collins

Postwar urban Toronto, like all cities, had severe housing shortages which created the inevitable expansion to the adjacent suburbs. In this instance, although in approximately the geographic centre of the metropolitan area, Don Mills was almost totally working farmland. Access roads, service utilities were absolute minimum, if indeed any existed.

With the utmost secrecy and discretion, one of the E.P. Taylor conglomerate companies, The Don Mills Development Company, began acquiring parcels of land until they had something approximately 2500 acres. Detailed and comprehensive planning for the ultimate in modern suburban communities was begun. Every known facet of graceful living was incorporated into what was to be the most modern and finest community in Canada if not North America. Streets planned to minimize traffic density and hazards, commercial fringe areas to decrease the home-owners tax burden, fire & police departments, sewage disposal system, even an artificial lake created by a dam, were all included in the planning to make this community self-contained, independent of Toronto, and one with the lowest realty tax rate in Canada.

Housing was planned to the minutest detail, color schemes, sitings, elevation, greenbelt areas, etc. by builders selected after careful screening. Price structures were set tot attract the family trade, with NHA 5½% mortgages and small down payments. Water, hydro, paved roads and lighting were installed and paid for by the builders. In each of the four sections 1¼ acres of land were provided for denominational churches. The site for these were fixed by the developer.

The area was bisected north and south by Don Mills Road, and east-west by Lawrence Ave. East. The resultant segments were known as quadrants. Work was begun in the northwest quadrant on single-dwelling homes in 1953 and some of these homes were occupied before the end of the year. From that time forward, growth was rapid. With this growth it was inevitable that a percentage of Catholics would be included. The influx of Catholic families immediately began to make its presence known. School and Church requirements were served by Saint Gabriel's Parish, on Sheppard Avenue, about 4½ miles from Don Mills, staffed by the Passionist Fathers.

Primary-school children were bussed to and from school and those attending half-days at kindergarten, were taken to and from by taxicabs. This temporary arrangement was not satisfactory to the majority of involved families in Don Mills.

As a direct result of a confrontation with North York civic officials, including the incumbent member of Metro Separate School Board during a Holy Name Society "CIVIC NIGHT" held a Saint Gabriel's Parish Hall, the core group from Don Mills were told publicly from the platform that if the need for a new school could be conclusively proven, a new school would be forthcoming immediately. The Separate School Board at the time

2.....ST BONAVENTURE'S

owned 25 acres of prime land at Leslie Street and Lawrence Ave. East, a speculative venture which enabled the Board to make capital gains on resale and thus purchase more parcels of land in outlying areas. This gain supplemented the tax grants from the Government.

A group of laymen, headed by John Keefe, Duncan Stewart, and Gerry Collins immediately began a door-to-door canvas of the Don Mills area, gathering precise school data and projections of same. The comprehensive result was formally and properly presented by John Keefe to the weekly meeting of the Separate School Board. This body tried to repudiate the members promise, but it was eventually resolved and planning for the new school began. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the school took place on Sunday, April 26, 1956, with Monsignor T. Fulton turning the first sod.

From the information obtained from the parish canvas, a member of the parish phoned the Archdiocesan Chancery Office and spoke to the then Chancellor, Monsignor T. Fulton, requesting that a priest be assigned to serve the needs of the Don Mills area. This occurred at 7:15 p.m., Saturday January 15, 1956. The Monsignor said that the request was impossible to fill. On Monday, January 17, 1956 at 8:00 p.m. Father Patrick Donlon, O.F.M. Conv., telephoned this same parishioner and announced that he had been appointed pastor of Don Mills. A meeting was convened on Wednesday, January 19 at the Collins' home at 4 Ternhill Crescent.

At this meeting several important decisions were made. Formal request was made to the North York Public School Board seeking permission to use the gym-auditorium of Overland Drive Public School for Sunday Masses. Purchase of a suitable dwelling for Father Donlon, as well as a car, furniture etc., were agreed upon. Arrangements for meals was temporarily arranged with various parishioners.

The following Sunday, Father Donlon spoke at all the Masses at St. Gabriel's Church, introducing himself and announcing the formation of St. Bonaventure's Parish. The following week a general meeting of all parishioners was held at the Overland School and explanations given of all the plans made to date. On Sunday, February 5, 1956 the first the first Masses were celebrated in the school.

At the Easter School vacation, the Board notified Father Donlon they would be unable to use the school facilities. Father immediately contacted the Vice President of Perfect Circle Piston Rings Company and asked to use the factory cafeteria for Sunday Masses. Permission was granted and on March 16, 1956, Masses began at Perfect Circle. Chairs were transported by the men each Sunday morning using the truck from Elborn's Esso Service Station.

October 28, 1956, as the new school neared completion, a double classroom in the basement was set up as a chapel and Sunday Mass commenced there. Our first Christmas Midnight Mass was held here, complete with parish choir, celebrated by Father Donlon.

3.....ST BONAVENTURE'S

In Holy Week, April 15, 1957, Father Donlon was stricken and Father Ronald Schultz came in to take the Holy Week ceremonies.

April 21, 1957, Father Jordan Goeke was appointed Administrator and Father Cecil arrived on May 31, 1957.

Land on Leslie Street, south of Lawrence was acquired from the Separate School Board, 6 acres, for Church, Hall and Rectory, although the area at Don Mills south of Lawrence was seriously considered. The 1¼ acres set aside by the development company was considered to be too small. Father Kieran Patnode arrived as pastor of Don Mills August 10, 1957.

March 30, 1958 the first sod was turned for the church and hall.

August 3, 1958 became the scene for Sunday Masses at the new hall, which was nearing completion.

The church opened on Palm Sunday, March 22, 1959.

Cardinal McGuigan formally blessed the new church on June 14, 1959.

April 1960 - Friary started. Opened October 27, 1960.

PERSONNEL:

Sept. 8, 1960 - Fr. Ives Purcell arrived as assistant.

Sept. 15, 1961 - Fr. Benjamin Dykas arrived as assistant.

Sept. 4, 1963 - Fr. Cecil Harcar appointed Pastor.

- Fr. Briant Cullinane arrived as assistant.

Oct. 4, 1964 - Fr. Basil Corbett arrived as assistant.

Aug. 31, 1966 - Fr. Regis Rodda arrived as assistant.

Jan. 23, 1970 - Fr. George Mullin arrived as Assistant.