

Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School owes not only its name but also its beginning to the parish of the same name. The formation of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in 1947 to serve the needs of the growing Catholic population of the area, crystallized the need for a local Catholic school and provided the impetus to have it established.

The story of Our Lady of Fatima Parish and, by corollary, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School, is intertwined with the story of the post-war growth of Ottawa westward along the old "Britannia Line" streetcar tracks. Prior to this post-war growth, the area west of what was then Ottawa included a number of streetcar whistle stops such as Highland Park, McKellar, Woodroffe and Britannia itself. Catholics in this area belonged to the vast St. George Parish, which had been established in 1924 outside the western limits of the City of Ottawa, to care for the needs of Catholics all the way to Britannia.

Following World War II, Ottawa began to expand in many directions, including westward. New residential housing developments sprang up to unite the whistle stops into a solid continuation of the city. In 1947, Archbishop Alexandre Vachon created a separate parish in the western half of St. George Parish. Being especially devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he chose "Our Lady of Fatima" as the name of the new church, dedicating it to her as its patroness.

Woodroffe was chosen as the location for the new parish because of its central position between the more built-up areas of Britannia and McKellar Park. Eleven lots, part of the historic Honeywell Farm, were acquired and became the site for the future church, rectory, parish hall and school. The parish first constructed a temporary church building, which eventually

OUR LADY OF FATIMA

CATHOLIC SCHOOL



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became the church hall after the construction of a larger, permanent church in 1957.

The creation of Our Lady of Fatima Parish and the building of a church in 1947 made the new housing developments in the area attractive to a steadily increasing number of Catholic families. The original 168 families of the parish nearly doubled by 1951, a growth that was to double again to nearly 600 families by 1957. With more and more Catholic families moving into the area, the need for a local Catholic school became increasingly urgent.

At the beginning of 1949, a Catholic school board was formed comprised of Gordon Bender as Chairperson, Mrs. Edward Hebert as Secretary-Treasurer and Edward Hebert and Edward McEvoy as Board Members. The area of the parish, at that time, was still not part of the City of Ottawa and so this small, newly-formed school board had to reach agreement with the provincial government, organize all of the matters regarding the new school and award the contracts for the construction of the planned one-storey school building. The trustees carried out their tasks efficiently because all of the plans for the school were approved, the provincial government financial aid was granted and the school was in the process of being built when the area was annexed by the City of Ottawa on January 1, 1950, with the Ottawa Separate School Board assuming jurisdiction over Catholic school matters. The Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception were put in charge of the new school, with four staff and 120 pupils occupying four of the six rooms as of September 11, 1950.

On September 17, 1950, His Excellency Archbishop Vachon was on hand for the solemn blessing of the new school, an event attended by clergy, educational authorities, parents and friends. The next September, two additional classrooms were put into use. The three new staff members were Misses J. Desjardins, A. Rice and S. Rousselle.

Enrolment in 1951 reached 216 pupils, not only because of the growing area around the school but also because pupils from Rockcliffe Air Base attended the school. This lasted for only one year, but despite their withdrawal, enrolment at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in September 1952, was 202 pupils, coming not only from Our Lady of Fatima Parish, but also from the Crystal Bay and Bells Corners areas.

The staff at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in 1952 consisted of Sister St. Thaddeus, Sister St. Christopher, Mrs. M. B. Bradley, Miss A. Rice, Miss J. Desjardins and Mrs. G. Hughes.

As the parish and community continued to grow rapidly, so did the school population at Our Lady of Fatima, outgrowing the six-room facility. In May 1954, construction began on a one-storey four-room addition on the north end of the original building, converting Our Lady of Fatima into a ten-room school. These four new rooms were completed and occupied on November 17, 1954. Four new staff members were also added at this time — D.J. Lefebvre (who replaced Miss Rice), Mrs. L. Ferguson, Mrs. N. Morel and Mrs. M. Charbonneau.

By September 1956, pupils from the Crystal Bay and Bells Corners areas were repatriated to their own new schools, but continued growth in the area meant that enrolment at Our Lady of Fatima School continued to soar, peaking at 505 pupils. This meant another addition. While it was being built, four classrooms were rented in the nearby old Woodroffe Public School building, which was vacant at the time. Additional accommodation at Our Lady of Fatima School took the form of a second storey on the original building, with six new classrooms. Work on this addition began in October 1956, and four of the six new rooms were ready to use on April 1, 1957.

Our Lady of Fatima School, even in those early years, benefited from a parent-teacher association whose aim was to coordinate the spiritual and educational forces of the home and school and to focus on the education and training of Catholic children. The group held regular meetings of parents and teachers, focusing on discussions of mutual problems in child training and education. The parent-teacher

association began in April 1954, with M.L. Kearney as the inaugural president. The association also worked to help the school, arranging for classes in boxing, hockey, skiing, tap dancing, figure skating and bowling. Plans were also made to landscape the school property.

Our Lady of Fatima School built a tradition of spiritual and educational growth for its students over the years, maintaining close ties among home, school and church.

In the late 1960s, enrolment at Our Lady of Fatima began to decline due to the aging demographics of the area once filled with young families. There were also more schools in the general area resulting in the decision in 1971 to close Our Lady of Fatima School, ending this first phase of its life.

In the mid-1980s, a number of factors came together which led to the reopening of Our Lady of Fatima in September 1985. Several schools in the general area were facing declining enrolments, like the decline, which had forced the closure of Our Lady of Fatima in 1971. At the same time, Father Gerald Dunnigan of Our Lady of Fatima Parish was advocating the reopening of the parish school. As a result, Our Lady of Fatima School was re-established by the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board, serving students from three closing schools; St. Leonard, St. Basil and St. Andrew. Students and staff were housed at St. Leonard School in Ottawa until the original building could be refurbished and made ready for occupancy after its 15-year hiatus as a school facility. In January 1986, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School was re-occupied, marking the return of Catholic education to this facility.

The school now serves a wide area of the west part of the City of Ottawa. In

2004, the school counted among its more than 300 students a diverse number of cultures, representing at least 25 different nationalities and languages. A Catholic curriculum is offered, along with a variety of activities such as choir, sports and dance. Regular events at the school include a family Christmas night, winter and summer play days, multicultural activities, a curriculum night and Education Week activities.

Present Principal

Diane Fournier

Principals

(since re-opening in 1985)

Alan Morissette
Michael Blimkie
Fergus Lyons
Brenda Mulvihill

First Teaching Staff (1950)

Sister Maureen of the Grey Sisters
of the Immaculate Conception,
Principal
Sister St. Christopher
Doris Scott
Florence Salmon

Former Student

Mike Walton, player in the
National Hockey League

School Colours

Blue and white

Logo

The Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School logo contains the motto "A Place Where We Belong."

A Teacher Remembers

Teacher Theresa Smith began her teaching career at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School. She shares her memories of her time at the school as well as her teaching career.

My probationary contract with “The Board of Trustees of the R.C.S.S.B. for the City of Ottawa” is dated May 7, 1969. The salary of \$4,600 seemed huge and I was certain that “Easy Street” was just around the corner. In June, I hopped a bus from Toronto to begin a two-week induction with the Board. On the first day, I was informed that I would be teaching core French. Panic set in! For the past year, I had been immersed in the *Hall-Dennis Report, Let The Child Discover, Living and Learning*, open concept schools and multi-media learning. Second language teaching had not been part of my year. After a stressful two weeks, I went home to New Brunswick and enrolled in a French conversation course at the University of Moncton.

Virginia Smith was my first principal. Our Lady of Fatima was my first school. I traveled from classroom to classroom, carrying a huge tape recorder and the “J”ecoute, je parle” manual and charts. My survival that year I owe to Virginia Smith. She was blunt and strict, but fair. By November, my confidence was depleted. Missing home and family, I asked her if I could leave three days before Christmas break began. She agreed and I returned to New Brunswick. In January I managed to get on track. By June, my confidence was growing and I was registered for summer courses.

Not having really read my contract, I was soon to find out that my last paycheck was in June! The summer of bread and peanut butter began. Nothing else hit my stomach until my father picked me up and we left for New Brunswick. The first

year of my probationary contract had ended! I went on to teach for the Board for five years and then, after teaching in a Montessori school and at a private Jewish school for a number of years, I returned to teaching with the Board and never looked back.

My success came with experience, dedication, my eagerness to learn and my love of teaching. My constant goal was to capture the interest of my students at the beginning of the each day. My energy came with the knowledge that we were going to experience each day together and learn together. Looking back on my years of teaching makes me feel good, makes me smile and makes me grateful to have had such an experience.

