

St. Anthony Catholic School today, just as at its beginnings as the Dante Academy, is a Catholic school that serves a high proportion of children from immigrant families living in the Somerset Street West area of Ottawa. It has always enjoyed a close partnership with St. Anthony Catholic Church and the Italian community of the area. This partnership continues today as the school has evolved into a community blessed with a rich tapestry of cultures. Many of today's students are multilingual, learning both English and French at school while maintaining their heritage language in the home.

St. Anthony School was founded as the Dante Academy in 1925. On June 8, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported on the official opening of the school as follows: "The official opening of the Dante Separate School for Italian children took place yesterday morning, and a special Mass, honoured by the presence of Monsignor L.N. Campeau, representing the Archbishop, was celebrated by Rev. Father L. Larocque at the Church of St. Anthony. Luigi Scarcella, Chairman of the Organizing Committee, thanked the school board, stating that 'an opportunity has been given for preserving our tongue and for our progeny to retain our native individuality while training them to become good citizens and lovers of their country, which has adopted them.'" Following the Mass, an imposing and beautiful bronze statue of Dante, executed by Ruotolo, was blessed and unveiled by Monsignor Campeau. Mayor Belharrie spoke of the dedication to Dante, "whose name is synonymous with patriotism, religion, devotion to excellence and poetic inspiration." The Dominion horticulturalist, Mr. W. T. Macoun, responded with a promise to provide a generous donation of trees to serve as a background to the statue.

ST. ANTHONY

CATHOLIC SCHOOL



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Catholic education in this area of centretown Ottawa pre-dates the opening of the Dante Academy.

St. Agnes School on Louisa Street existed as early as 1890-91 as indicated by the Ottawa city directory of that time. St. Agnes School later had an annex on Booth Street near the current site of St. Anthony School. This is how the early Catholic education in the area was delivered. At around the turn of the century, approximately 300 people from Italy had settled primarily in an area that eventually would be the home both to St. Anthony Church and the Dante Academy.

In 1908, Capuchin priest Father F. Fortunato responded to the needs of this growing Italian community by holding religious ceremonies in a rented chapel on Murray Street. This continued until the completion of St. Anthony Church at the corner of Booth Street and Gladstone Avenue in 1913. The Servite Fathers, beginning with Father Aurelio Prosperi, became responsible for the parish in 1914. The burgeoning Italian population in the neighbourhood convinced the Ottawa Separate School Board to build a school next to the new church. In addition to English and French, the school also provided instruction in Italian. It appears that at first the school was a part of the French-Catholic school system in the city but that there was an early transition to the English-Catholic system thanks to two early Italian teachers, Gino Tiezzi and Louise Guadagni.

The school was originally named after the famous Italian writer Dante Aleghieri who ranks as one of the greatest writers in Western European literature and whose epic masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*, was completed in 1307. A bust of Dante graced the entrance to the school until the Academy was renamed in the late 1940s at the request of Father Jerome Ferraro, Pastor of St. Anthony Parish. It was believed that "St. Anthony School" would better reflect the close affiliation of the school with the parish. St. Anthony of Padua is the patron saint of the poor and the oppressed. During these early years of the Dante Academy and later St. Anthony School, there was a close association of the area with St. Agnes School as well, as the schools served the same community and students flowed between the two schools at times. In recent years and even to this day, St. Anthony School continues a close connection with the parish including the Servite Priests and the Servite Sisters of the Addolorata, as well as parish groups such as the Ladies' Aid and the Knights of Columbus.

Over the years, the school has witnessed many special events. On January 12, 1928, His Excellency Monsignor Cassulo, the Apostolic Delegate to Canada and Newfoundland, together with other distinguished visitors including the Consul-General from Italy, were received as guests of the Dante Academy by Sister Vincent Ferrier on behalf of the staff. Six-year-old Albert Constantini and students Ernest Dilabbio and Rose Fusi welcomed the newly appointed representative of the Vatican to Canada.

In the early years of St. Anthony Church, the students of the Dante Academy did their part to help pay off the debt associated with the building of the church. One event was a concert presented by students under the direction of Mrs. Richards.

Winter carnivals were part of the life of the school for decades. On February 20, 1950, the *Ottawa Evening Citizen* reported, complete with photograph, on the carnival festivities that took place on the school rink with students of both St. Anthony School and St. Agnes School in attendance. John Curran and Eleanor Romani of St. Anthony were selected as king and queen of the carnival that year with Raymond Verdon and Judy Larocque of St. Agnes serving as the prince and princess.

March 15, 1955 was a significant date in the life of St. Anthony School as it was the day of the blessing of a new six-room addition, as well as the opening of a school library. The Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception were responsible for the school at that time, with Sister Mary Ida as principal. Father Prosperi, who laid the cornerstone for the original school in 1925, was present at this ceremony. There were also 30 altar boys and 15 teachers present in addition to various dignitaries.

A student from St. Anthony School made headlines in the Ottawa daily papers in December 1956. Daniel Miller, a 12-year-old student, received the Jack Hammell Traffic Safety Award for the Ottawa District in recognition of his excellent service as captain of the school's safety patrol, which he had served faithfully and competently for four years. He was subsequently sent to participate in the first annual Safety Patrol Rally in Toronto, thanks to the parent-teacher association.

In February 1960, the students of St. Anthony School sent a pair of baby's socks to Queen Elizabeth on the occasion of the birth of her son, Prince Andrew. They received a reply from Buckingham Palace on March 9, 1960, thanking them for their gift, with the words, "The Queen is most pleased to accept this gift, and deeply appreciates their very kind thought, both for her and for the infant Prince."

In recent years, St. Anthony School has received national and international recognition for its schoolyard transformation project. In 1998, the students, staff and parents were determined to plant trees in the schoolyard. At one time, there had been trees on the property, but they had died or had become a safety concern and had to be taken down. The school, along with dozens of others, applied to win the "Ugliest Schoolyard Contest," sponsored by Earth Day Ottawa-Carleton, the Canadian Biodiversity Institute and Nortel Networks. St. Anthony won the contest, which was held to encourage schools to take positive environmental action. The Honourable Christine Stewart, federal Minister of the Environment, was present when the school received the award on Earth Day 1998. By winning the contest, St. Anthony received \$5,000 to help plant trees and make the schoolyard greener. This award, as well as the recognized need, resulted in outstanding parish and community support for the

project. The students of St. Anthony, along with some from nearby Cambridge Public School and other youngsters called the Willow Street Angels, received many local, national and even international awards and recognition for the impact of the project on the school and the community. Awards were received from the City of Ottawa, the Arbour Foundation and the Canadian Wildlife Federation. In its publication *Real Leaders*, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy highlighted the work done by the students, citing the difference this had made within the community.

Cambridge Public School students and parents participated in the project, helping with the planting of shrubs. They were involved because the students were enrolled in the St. Anthony summer day camp program.

The Willow Street Angels are a group of young children in the St. Anthony area, led by community activist Angela Ierullo, who regularly donate their spare time to pick up litter in their neighbourhood. The group is so named because Angela collects angel figurines. In helping with the schoolyard improvement project at St. Anthony, the Willow Street Angels realized that they could improve the neighbourhood not only by picking up litter but also by planting flowers, shrubs and trees.

Because of this project, St. Anthony Catholic School has been featured in a variety of publications including *The Green Teacher and Greening School Grounds – Creating Habitats for Learning, A Guide to Transforming School Grounds*, and *Asking Children*, and *Listening to Children*, a guide which includes a video. In 2002, Duke and Northwestern Universities in the United States, as part of a special project, sent teachers to St. Anthony School to learn about the reasons for its success in serving an ethnically diverse population.

Present Principal

Theresa Swanson

Past Principals

Sister Joseph of the Sacred Heart,
the school's first principal in 1925
Sister Bertha Bradley
Sister Francis Morris Tap
Sister Ann of the Cross
Sister Mary Ida
Margaret Wallace
Mary Meagher
Douglas Goodwin
Francesco Lipari
Georges Bouliane
Clifford Foley
John Dorner

First Teachers and Support Staff

Gino Tiezzi
Louise Guadagni
Miss Desormeaux
Mr. Belanger
Miss McCarthy
Miss O'Dare

Former Staff and Students

One teacher of note at the school was Claire Fox who taught Grade 2 for a period of 37 years, followed by an additional three years as a substitute teacher in her retirement, totaling 40 years teaching at St. Anthony.

Dennis Boucher won the CAHPERD (Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance) award in 1998 for his work in creating playground materials and activities for students.

John Dorner, who was principal of St. Anthony School from 1997 to 2003, received the Capital Educators' Award in 2002 and the For the Love of Children Award sponsored by Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa in 2003.

Principal Sister Mary Ida was well known for making donuts to be sold at the school to raise funds for necessary school items. She also sent students to the school board with donuts, requesting funds in return.

Jean-Yves Paul, the coordinator of the St. Anthony after-school program, won a Community Builder Award from the United Way of Ottawa-Carleton.

Bob Chiarelli is current Mayor of the City of Ottawa and a former chairperson of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. He is also a former Provincial MLA for the riding of Ottawa West.

Mary Ierullo, a former student of the Dante Academy, was recognized by the Italian-Canadian Women of the Village for her lifetime of service to the people of the Preston Street area. The award is now given annually in her name. Mary and her daughter, Angela Ierullo, also a former St. Anthony student, opened the doors of their home to the children who became known as the Willow Street Angels.

In 1992, Marina Molinari received a Terry Fox Humanitarian Award for exemplary volunteerism in a variety of settings serving children and the aged.

Angelo Sgabellone is an internationally acclaimed creative director and art director with *Maclean's Magazine*.

Dr. Aurelio (Fred) Sirianni is a prominent scientist who developed technology that aided the allied forces during the Second World War.

Patsy Guzzo, a student of the Dante Academy, played for the RCAF hockey team that won the Olympic gold medal for hockey in 1948.

Jennie Prosperine, a student of the Dante Academy, has served in a leadership capacity with the Ladies' Aid of St. Anthony Parish and has been consistently generous to the school.

Frank Nasso was the first Italian Canadian lawyer in Ottawa.

Tony Licari is a well-known hockey player. A right-winger, he played nine games for the Detroit Red Wings in the 1946-47 season. He was known as a reliable scorer in the minor and senior leagues and in Great Britain. He played in both the American Hockey League, with the senior RCAF squad and with the Harringay Racers in Britain where he scored 134 goals in three seasons.

Johnny Ostipic became a notable swimmer.

Ivy O was the primary speaker at the Citizenship Reaffirmation ceremony held at the National Arts Centre in 2002 with many dignitaries present. She is the daughter of Vietnamese-Canadian parents who were among the boat people who settled in Ottawa, one of the more recent immigrant groups to make their home in the centretown area.

John Chiarelli became a trustee with the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board and then the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board.

Sister Emelia Testa, a former student, is now a strong supporter of St. Anthony School. For years she has provided daycare for the children in the neighbourhood.

Italo Tiezzi is a former student who is a well known supporter of the arts in Ottawa.

School Colours

The original school colours of the Dante Academy were red, green and yellow, the colours found on the flag of Italy. The school colours were changed to blue and silver after the renaming of the school.

Logo

The school logo is a circle with the name “St. Anthony School” around the outside at the top and the motto “We Help Each Other” around the outside at the bottom. Inside the circle is a globe-like map of the world as well as the faces of four children. This is meant to be a representation of the entire world with the children of various cultural backgrounds representing the diversity of the student population at St. Anthony and the spirit of unity, which exists in the school community. The logo was developed by Theresa Gardner who was a teacher of English as a Second Language at St. Anthony.

Motto

The motto of St. Anthony School is “We Help Each Other.”

