



Durham Catholic District School Board

Immaculate Conception Catholic School

Motto: "Together in Learning, Caring and Faith"



In the Beginning

The history of Immaculate Conception Catholic School extends over 12 years. In 1971, Catholic parents of Scugog Township approached the Ontario County Separate School Board, now known as the Durham Catholic District School Board, requesting that a Catholic elementary school be established in Port Perry. The Board decided that this was not feasible, but made arrangements to provide transportation to three Oshawa Catholic schools: Father Venini (Grades JK–6), St. Joseph (Grades JK–8) and Oshawa Catholic High School (Grades 9–10), now called Monsignor Paul Dwyer Catholic High School. Students from Blackstock and area travelled to St. Joseph in Bowmanville. These schools were at a considerable distance, even for those in the southern section of Scugog Township. This arrangement, though difficult, carried on for 10 years.

In the fall of 1980, Father Geoffrey Raymakers of the Dutch Order of the Sacred Heart Fathers formed a six-member parish council composed of Frank Baxter, Allan Frank, Martin Kuypers, Neil Leering, Charles O'Connor and Janet Smith with the objective of establishing a Catholic school in Port Perry. Subsequent meetings were held in the parish hall of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

and the journey continued.

During January and February 1981, the committee initiated a study to determine the number of families wishing to exercise their constitutional right to a Catholic education for their children. The overwhelming desire expressed was followed by a second request for a school to the Durham Regional Roman Catholic Separate School Board. To demonstrate their faith and commitment to the project, 128 students enrolled in March 1981.

The Board approached the Ministry of Education, under John Storie, in April 1981, but the initial decision was that the options open to the children were adequate. Yet this denied many Catholic parents and children their constitutional rights under the British North America Act – a right that has since been transferred to the Canadian constitution.

The Board considered these fundamental rights and made plans to fulfill its obligation to all children in its jurisdiction. Thus another meeting was held, at which Father Raymakers and Frank Baxter presented to Dr. Earl Lagroix (Director) and the Board of Trustees the 128 applications and pledged the total support of the parish by offering the use of the parish hall. With the backing of Trustees, especially Tia Woodcroft and Sally Longo, the Board commissioned the opening of a Catholic school in Port Perry, to be called Immaculate Conception Catholic School. In June 1981, Father Alfred Grima became the new pastor and gave the parish council his full support.

The First School: 1981

The Ministry of Education provided the funds for four portables and the Board negotiated an agreement with the Archdiocese for the use of the church hall. John Quinn became the first principal. He had the formidable task of creating a school from a church hall and four portables. The first staff consisted of Esther Nash, Kindergarten teacher; Brenda O'Donoghue, Grade 1 and 2 teacher; Ellen Herron, Grade 3 and 4 teacher; Linda Calder, Grade 5 and 6 teacher; Bob Daub, Grade 7 and 8 teacher; and Dawn Joyce, secretary.

The church hall housed Kindergarten, the library and the gym. The church kitchen was the staff room and the church coatroom became the school office. The kindergarten room was separated from the rest of the church hall with dividers similar to the ones used in offices. Because the parish continued to use the hall for church functions on the weekends, the Kindergarten room had to be dismantled every Friday for the weekend and then be put back in place ready for Monday morning. The heat was usually turned way down on the weekend and it

often took a while for the space to warm up on Monday morning.

It was an interesting combination of Kindergarten children and a school gymnasium in the same space. Mrs. Nash (Kindergarten teacher) remembers that she often had volleyballs and basketballs flying over the partition into the Kindergarten area.

In October 1981, the school hosted its first Thanksgiving dinner for the entire school. One of the parents commented after the dinner that this was the event that really brought the school together. That first year, the teachers organized the celebration. Today, the tradition continues, and parents now organize this wonderful annual event. This outreach community event brings together community members along with residents from the seniors' home next door, school staff, school volunteers and students. The annual Thanksgiving lunch is a tradition that the Immaculate Conception Catholic School community always looks forward to.

The First School Blessing

On Wednesday, December 8, 1981, Bishop Robert Clune blessed Port Perry's first Catholic School – Immaculate Conception. The ceremony consisted of the blessing by Bishop Clune, followed by words from Tia Woodcroft, a Board Trustee who was representing Mr. J. Brady, the chairman. Father Grima spoke about the positive effects that a Catholic school has on a community. Dr. E. Lagroix, Director of Education, thanked all the people involved in the formation of the school. The school principal, John Quinn, closed the ceremony by thanking the groups and individuals who had contributed to the formation of Immaculate Conception Catholic School. A reception following the ceremony was catered by the Immaculate Conception Catholic Women's League.

By 1982, the enrollment had increased to 169 – approximately 30 percent in one year. In those first few years, the school was very simple but there was a great feeling of community. The teachers knew every student in the school by name.

A New Building: 1986

On May 8, 1984, Ministry approval was given to build a new school. Final approval for the construction was granted on September 24, 1985. The approximate cost was to be \$2 million. The site chosen for the new school building was adjacent to Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. Basic requirements to house 300 students included eight regular classrooms; two Kindergarten classrooms equipped with washrooms, sink, cloakroom and

separate playground; gymnasium; library; children's washrooms; health room; principal's office; secretary's office; work room; art, science, home economics and industrial arts facilities; French and special education or guidance room; storage room; and safety fenced and equipped play area.

Planning began in May 1984, with the groundbreaking ceremony taking place in September 1985.

While the building was being erected (September 1985 to June 1986), the staff and students were moved to an empty little school in Raglan. During that special year, the school community watched the school slowly rising in the vacant lot next to the church.

In September 1986, staff and students moved into the new building. Mrs. Calder, one of the first teachers, tells this story: "It was exciting being in a real building instead of portables. It wasn't quite ready. The doors had all been returned because they weren't quite right, so we had to wait for new doors. The electrical work wasn't complete, so we had to avoid wires as we walked down the hall. Because the wiring wasn't complete, there was no fire alarm system. In order to be able to open, one of the maintenance men had a hand bell. He was the fire alarm!"

The Blessing of the New Building

On Sunday, October 26, 1986, Bishop Robert Clune officiated at the blessing of the new school. Mass was celebrated at 2:00 p.m., followed by tours, entertainment and refreshments.

Immaculate Conception Senior Citizens' Residence

Shortly after the school was built, Father Grima had a vision for the church/school community to include a home for seniors. Immaculate Conception Senior Citizens' Residence, Port Perry, began in 1987 as the dream of two men, Mr. Cochrane and Father Alfred Grima. Under their expert leadership and with the help of the building committee, their dream became a reality. The building opened in 1993 adjacent to the school. Today the students visit the home as part of the school's community outreach program and the seniors are invited to many of the activities at the school.

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church Is Destroyed by Fire

On Pentecost Sunday, 1998, Immaculate Conception Catholic Church burned to the ground. Thankfully, the school, although it is right next door, was not involved

in the blaze. The Immaculate Conception community was devastated by the loss of their church building. However, due to the tenacity of the community, it was not long before plans were under way for a new church. While the new church was being constructed, weekend Masses were held in the school gymnasium.

The new church was finally completed and was blessed by Father Canning on October 14, 2001.

The School Divides and Good Shepherd Catholic School Opens

The school continued to grow and before long housed over 400 students. There were portables on the site to accommodate so many children. A second school had to be built to accommodate the overflow of students. Good Shepherd Catholic School on Reach Road opened in September 1999. The staff and students of Immaculate Conception offered a gift of a cedar sculpture to mark the new school's opening. The sculpture, created by local artist Adam Connolly, was presented to the staff and students of Good Shepherd Catholic School on January 27, 2000.

Immaculate Conception Catholic School Today

Today, Immaculate Conception Catholic School has returned to its roots as a small school. The community Thanksgiving tradition carries on and the school family atmosphere is treasured.

The school continues to make an impact in the Durham community. In 2007, Immaculate Conception was one of the first schools in Durham Region to become an EcoSchool. Being mindful of our world as "God's gift of creation," the students work diligently to protect the environment. In 2010 and 2011, Immaculate Conception celebrated with a Gold Eco Award. In keeping with the healthy schools initiatives, Physical Education and Health Education Canada has given the school a top Diamond rating for three years in a row. With respect to academics, in 2009, the school was celebrated by the Fraser Institute as the top school in Durham.

In 2009, Immaculate Conception Catholic School made history in Durham Region when the school became the first school in the region to embrace a service dog for a student with autism as a member of the school community. "Tito" was a trailblazer for classroom accommodation. A committee was established to develop Board policies and procedures for a service dog in the school; this journey has paved the way for other schools to welcome a service dog into their communities. In 2011, Durham Region honoured Immaculate Conception

Catholic School with the Region of Durham Accessibility Award.

The Ministry of Education introduced the new Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten program in September 2010. The program was to be in full implementation by 2015. Immaculate Conception Catholic School was selected as a site in year one of the program. We opened the new program with 31 Kindergarten children in September 2010. A new position in the field of education was established at this time: the Early Childhood Educator (ECE). Patricia Westcott was hired as our first ECE staff member at Immaculate Conception Catholic School.

Volunteers have always been welcome and celebrated as an integral part of the school community. Mary Westgarth was a volunteer for over 25 years at Immaculate Conception Catholic School. Over the years, she was honoured by the Government of Ontario, the Region of Durham and the Township of Scugog for her dedication to and support of our school.

25th Anniversary of Immaculate Conception Catholic School

The vibrant Catholic learning community of Immaculate Conception celebrated its 25th anniversary on October 26, 2011 with current and former parents, students and community members.

The evening began with Mass at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church at 6:00 p.m. Bishop Vincent Nguyen, Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto, and Father Peter Lackmanec, Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, co-presided. During the Mass, the youth group from the church and the school choir led the music. Jamie Kettrick, a former principal, was the cantor and sang the psalm. The gifts were carried up in the offertory procession by Marita Golphin (1982), a student from the first graduating class, and her son Noah Golphin (2012), who was in the graduating class the year of the 25th anniversary. Rory Tallon, a former student, sang "Ave Maria," which brought a tear to the eye.

Following the Mass, trustee Kathy LeFort, who was the emcee, invited several special guests to say a few words. Jim McCafferty, Chair of the Board, brought greetings from the Board; Paul Pulla, Director of Education, congratulated the school on this special milestone; Chuck Mercier, Mayor of Scugog Township, and Bobbie Drew, Regional Councillor, brought greetings from the local municipality; and the Honorable John O'Toole MPP (former Immaculate Conception parent) also spoke. Margaret Geer, the current principal, made a few closing remarks and invited all in attendance to a reception at the school.

Suzanne Farquharson (a former teacher) made a quilt/banner to celebrate the 25th anniversary. All of the current students (JK to Grade 8) were invited to make and decorate a paper cutout of themselves. These dolls were used as a pattern for all the children in the finished banner. The picture of our Mother Mary holding all the children in her arms was the result. This beautiful quilt/banner was given a special place in the school library.

The students designed bookmarks; four were chosen to be printed and distributed to all guests. On the back of each bookmark was a prayer that was composed by students.

Parents, committee members and other volunteers spent many hours researching and archiving the school history and subsequent events. Every classroom was decorated in a special theme to celebrate the 25 years. A prayer room was set up to celebrate the lives of students and staff who had passed away.

As a result, the entire school was decorated with pictures and displays. Student performances (drumming, school choir) along with refreshments complemented the festivities. All were welcomed and enjoyed their trip down memory lane.

Summary

Immaculate Conception Catholic School has enjoyed over 25 years of Catholic education in Port Perry. Many of the graduates have successful, distinguished careers and many former students often come back to visit the school. The names on the trophies, the sports banners and the graduation photos all celebrate the rich history of the school. Some of the school's graduates now have children attending their former alma mater. A memory box is stored in the library where descriptions of all important events and activities are kept for future reference.

In May 2012, Immaculate Conception Catholic School had 138 students registered with eight classroom teachers, one part-time librarian, one part-time program support teacher, one full-time and one part-time custodian, one part-time Core French teacher, one early childhood educator, three educational assistants, one secretary and one principal. Our Catholic Learning Community is inclusive and faith filled, and encourages each child to be the best they can be. The school has a strong student voice with a student council, Me-to-We Group, clubs, multi-age group activity programs, and student-led faith initiatives. The active parent council makes recommendations on school issues and leads activities in the school. Father Peter Lackmanec, our parish priest, visits the

school often and his spiritual guidance is a blessing. At Immaculate Conception Catholic School, the strong relationship of school, parish and home nurtures children in believing and achieving our Catholic School Graduate Expectations.

School Prayer

Father,
At Immaculate Conception Catholic School, for 25 years,
we have been following Jesus.
We play, work and learn.
We love you, Father.
We pray to you.
Amen.

(Written by the Grade 1 class on the 25th anniversary of the school)

Queen of Heaven, Mother of Jesus,
we show our love towards you.
Help us to respect one another at school and in our lives.
Help us to stop fighting and put peace and love in its place.
Share with us your love and help us be strong in our journey of faith.
Mary, remind me that nothing is going to hurt me and the ones I love.

Please help me, please guide me, and please guard me.
Amen.

(Written by the Grade 6/7 class on the 25th anniversary of the school)

Principals

John Quinn (1981–1984)
Noel Woods (1984–1987)
John Arbour (1987–1990)
Sue McKenna (1990–1994)
Ted Hickey (1994–1996)
Rick Bunt (1996–2001)
Jamie Kettrick (2001–2006)
Margaret Geer (2006–2012)
David Malleau (2013-present)

Contributors:

Margaret Geer

Mary Lou Elliott

Linda Calder

Dave Ellis

Brenda O'Donaghue

Bill Hall

Valerie Cappuccitti