



Durham Catholic District School Board



St. Bernadette Catholic School

Motto: "Family, School, Parish"



In the Beginning

St. Bernadette Catholic School opened its doors to 148 students on September 4, 1951. The original structure was donated to the St. Bernadette Mission by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The building had originally served as a canteen for Defence Industries Limited (DIL) and was moved from its original location in north Ajax to the present site of St. Bernadette Catholic School.



The school in 1951. The white cross (visible on the far left wall of the building on the left) remains with the school community in the front foyer of St. Bernadette Catholic School.



The cross from the original building

Camilla Flanagan, the first principal of St. Bernadette C.S., wrote in 1952, "When Father Vincent McGivney arrived in the area, he soon saw the need for a Separate school to accommodate the large number of Catholic children in the district. He went to work on this project with such zeal and enthusiasm that September 1951 saw the opening of a four-roomed school." The St. Bernadette

Catholic School community will be forever indebted to Father McGivney and his vision for Catholic education in the area.

By 1954, enrolment had increased to 230 pupils and it became necessary to add a second building containing four new classrooms. The junior building was built immediately to the west of the original structure. As enrolment increased in 1957 (357 students) and in 1960 (507 students), more additions were built. In 1961, St. Bernadette became the first school in the district to build a Senior Separate School for Grade 9 and 10 students. The new structure included six classrooms, a general purpose room, an office, a staff room, two storage areas and a gymnasium. By June 1966, enrolment in Grades 9 and 10 declined and the school returned to serving students in Kindergarten to Grade 8.

During the 1970s, enrolment continued to rise with the increase in housing developments in south Ajax. The decision was made to dismantle the original Primary building and build an addition connecting the Junior and Senior buildings. The addition included two Kindergarten classrooms, an office, a staff room, library, three additional classrooms and a multi-purpose room. The pastor of St. Bernadette, Father McCarroll, officially blessed the new addition in January 1979.



Father McCarroll's mural depicting the life of St. Bernadette was unveiled at the official opening of the new addition on January 21, 1979. A replica of the mural greets visitors at the entranceway of the new school. The growth of St. Bernadette C.S. continued and reached its peak in 1985–1986, with the addition of 12 portable classrooms to accommodate 1,009 students and 45 teaching staff.

By the end of 1987, with the opening of St. James Catholic School, the school population of St. Bernadette was reduced to 685 students. The school became the temporary home of the future students of St. Jude, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Patrick Catholic Schools.



St. Bernadette's life displayed in her school

Rev. P. J. McCarroll displays this mural depicting the life of St. Bernadette, which he painted and donated to the Durham separate school board to

hang in the lobby of St. Bernadette's School in Ajax. More than 300 people attended the official opening of the \$750,000-addition to the school. Consisting of five

classrooms, a library and resource centre, the addition was several years on the planning board and took longer to build than expected. The 8 ft. by 20 ft.

mural was done in acrylics and took Father McCarroll eight days to complete. Father McCarroll is the parish priest of St. Bernadette's. The mural shows

the life of St. Bernadette and in the foreground is shown the spot where she first saw the vision of the Virgin Mary.

—Times staff photo

In the fall of 2008, construction began on a new environmentally friendly two-storey building to replace the existing structure. In September 2009, staff and students started the school year in a beautiful new building.



The first day of school: September 8, 2009

Our Patron Saint

St. Bernadette was born on January 7, 1844, in Lourdes, France. Born Marie Bernarde Soubirous, she was nicknamed Bernadette as a small child. Bernadette was the oldest of six children. Her family was very poor. They lived in the basement of an old building. For much of her life, Bernadette was in poor health. Although often ill, she always helped her younger brothers and sisters and was a good, obedient and kind person.

During her life, Bernadette experienced 18 visions of our Holy Mother Mary. On February 11, 1858, Bernadette and her sister were gathering firewood when a vision of a beautiful lady appeared. This lovely lady was God's mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary – she was dressed in blue and white and appeared in a grotto called Massabielle. Our Lady smiled at Bernadette and made the sign of the cross with a rosary made of ivory and gold. Bernadette immediately stopped what she was doing and prayed the rosary with Mary.

Many people did not believe Bernadette when she spoke of her vision. One day, Our Lady told Bernadette to dig in the mud near a place where people could come and pray. As she did, a spring of water began to flow and continued to grow larger and larger. Many miracles happened when people began to use this water. Today, many people continue to visit Bernadette's grotto in Lourdes to remember these special times in Bernadette's life and to pray. When Bernadette grew up, she became a nun and dedicated her life to helping the sick and infirm. She was canonized in 1933 on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Her feast day is April 16.

School Prayer

Blessed St. Bernadette,
Let our hearts and minds find peace in you.
Lead us, the members of your school community,
As we strive to follow your loving and serving ways.
Your life was founded on faith and compassion,
which guided you in all that you did.
May your graces strengthen us
so that we may follow your example
in our thoughts, words, and actions every day.
Amen.

Principals

Camilla Flanagan (1951–1952)
Sister M. Laetissima (1952–1958)
Sister M. Claudette (1958–1967)
Sister M. Faustine (1967–1968)
Grant Andrews (1968–1977)
John Vesters (1977–1982)
Gerry Noonan (1982–1986)
Brian Vrebosch (1986–1991)
Brian Livet (1991–1995)
Colin Edgecomb (1996–2000)
Jennifer LeClerc (2000–2004)
Anne O'Brien (2004–2007)
Mary Lou Laramée (2008–2011)
Jerry Huxter (2012–present)

Contributors:

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We appreciate the contributions and dedicated efforts of all members of the St. Bernadette Catholic School community in the creation of this historical summary. It is adapted from the many scrapbooks, photo albums, letters and articles compiled over the years. We look forward to the next 60 years of our history here at St. Bernadette Catholic School.