



Durham Catholic District School Board

St. Leo Catholic School

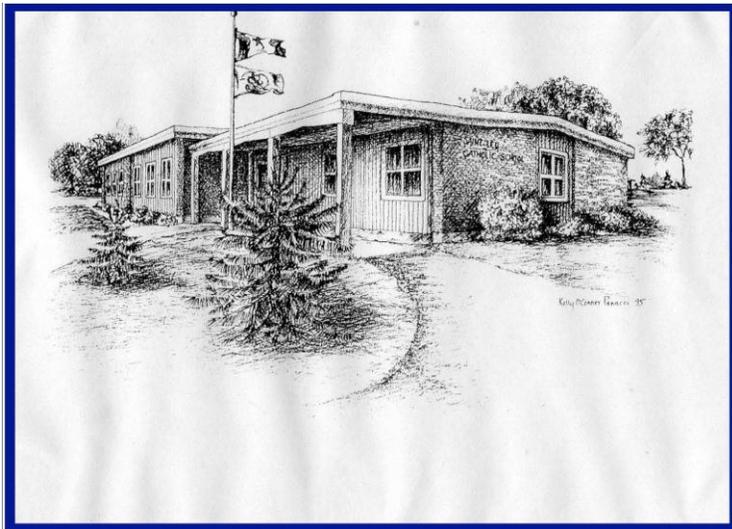


In the Beginning

The earliest reference to a Catholic presence in Brooklin dates back to around 1834, when priests from St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church in Oshawa travelled to Brooklin to celebrate Mass with the residents. Later, when St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Whitby was built, the Catholic population of Brooklin travelled to Whitby to attend Mass there. At that time there were no Catholic schools in Brooklin. However, when St. John the Evangelist Catholic School opened in September 1955 at 1103 Giffard Street, Whitby, students from Brooklin who wanted to attend a Catholic school were given the opportunity to enroll.

St. Leo Separate School, 1964 – A Story of Collaboration between Church and School

On September 8, 1964, through the efforts of Father Leo J. Austin, the pastor of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, and Mr. Eugene Dopp, Secretary-Treasurer of the Board, St. Leo Separate School opened its doors to welcome 81 students under the leadership of the founding principal, Noel Woods.



St. Leo Catholic School, 1964

The school was named in honour of Father Leo J. Austin, in appreciation of all his efforts to spearhead the building of a Catholic school in the town of Brooklin. The school was a little four-room brown building with a very small office and a staff room. Shelves, cupboards, most books and kindergarten furniture were not on hand at the start of the year, and the 14 Kindergarten tots spent September sitting on the floor. Furniture for the other two classes had been stored in the Dopp household until the school was ready. And it took many years before St. Leo Separate School was to experience the luxury of a paved driveway! Despite all the first-year trials, two young ladies, Monica Brown and Mary Anne Goreski, were the first Grade 8 graduates of St. Leo Separate School in Brooklin, Class of 1964.



Noel Woods (centre), founding principal of St. Leo Catholic School, Brooklin

The very next year, in 1965, St. Leo Separate School ceased to offer Kindergarten and Grade 8 classes due to the high cost of busing. Brooklin students in these grades had to register at St. John the Evangelist Catholic School in Whitby.

The "little school" in Brooklin did not have a library or a gymnasium. However, the school was surrounded by open space and soccer fields owned by the Sorichetti family, who generously allowed the students to play on those fields morning, noon and night and in all seasons. In January, the local fire department was kind enough to flood and

maintain a skating rink, which offered another avenue of activity that the students loved. The two west-facing classrooms were fitted with a moveable partition to allow for school assemblies, in the absence of a large gathering space, such as a gymnasium. In 1982, this space became the centre for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist for the residents of Brooklin, under the care of the first pastor of St. Leo the Great Catholic Church, Father Oliver J. Moloney. The people of Brooklin could now attend Mass in their own community instead of travelling to St. John the Evangelist Church in Whitby. The teachers would clear the area on Friday and put everything back together on Monday. At one Sunday morning Mass, a small child tipped over a paint easel and paint poured across the floor. Father Moloney, undeterred by the episode, continued with the celebration of the Eucharist as if nothing had happened. God would certainly bless this co-operation between school and church.



Classrooms were converted into a chapel for Mass.

In July 1983, the new St. Leo Catholic Church, a prefabricated building from St. Mary in Bolton, was relocated to Highway 12 behind St. Leo Separate School. Sunday Masses began to be celebrated at this new facility.



Celebration of the Eucharist by Father Oliver Moloney at Brooklin's first pre-fabricated church from St. Mary in Bolton.

By 1996, the prefabricated church was too small to accommodate the growing population of Brooklin. Arrangements were once again made with Father Phillip Jones, the pastor of St. Leo the Great Catholic Church, to share the school's space. This time, it would be the gymnasium of the new St. Leo Catholic School that was built in 1999. The church and the school would continue this sharing of space until the new St. Leo the Great Catholic Church was built in 2006.

"Necessity is the mother of invention..."

Back in 1964, when St. Leo Separate School first opened, it had a very small staff of six to eight. Without textbooks or easy access to an in-house library, teachers had to work creatively and with each other to enhance the curriculum in the Arts and Sciences. Due to the small space within and the vast expanse outdoors, outdoor education thrived in every sense of the word. As mentioned earlier, at one time, there was a skating rink on the school field. In later years, teachers would walk their classes to Luther Vipond Arena for regular skating periods throughout the winter. There were annual winter outdoor Play Days, Fall Spirit Days, and summer Water Play Days. The wonderful fields

made for great soccer and cross country training and power walks for the little ones. Parents enrolled their children in extra-curricular sports to assist the teachers' delivery of a Physical Education program.



Halloween Parade



Outdoor Play Day

The great outdoors was also used for assemblies, school Masses and the annual Crowning of Mary. Teachers made good use of the fields and woods to instill in their students a love of science and stewardship

of God's creation. Each Remembrance Day, teachers and students would walk to the Vipond Memorial Arena to honour those who served this country in the Armed Services. The students always sang the Canadian national anthem and recited "In Flanders Fields."



Students of St. Leo Catholic School reciting "In Flanders Fields" at Luther Vipond Memorial Arena

Since the school did not have a library, students, along with their teachers, would walk on a regular basis to the Brooklin Public Library to avail themselves of books to read. Time spent outdoors and all the walking that the students did proved beneficial, as the students of St. Leo Separate School won several banners for soccer and cross country runs. The love of science was rewarded by gold medals earned at the Durham Science and Technology competitions. The teachers at St. Leo Separate School fostered in the students a love for visual arts, and student artwork was always prominent in the school. Students who graduated from St. Leo Separate School moved on to become engineers, architects, environmental workers, nuclear engineers, and graphic artists, among other professions, bearing testimony to the school's focus on the Arts and Sciences and the great outdoors. Other students earned honours as members of Canadian rowing, mountain biking and lacrosse teams. One former student, John Fusco, was named to the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 2010.



St. Leo Separate School students explore the world of science

Proposal to Close St. Leo Separate School

There were times when the threat of closure would concern the community of St. Leo Separate School. The school was built to accommodate 135 students. The Ministry of Education required school boards to justify the existence of schools that did not meet the standard for full capacity. The enrolment at St. Leo Separate School at the time was around 80 students. The Durham Separate School Board would cite that the growth of neighbouring Catholic schools would overcrowd those schools, should the students of St. Leo Separate School be sent there in the event of a closure. The overriding and most compelling argument used to keep the "little school" open was the attitude of the parents, staff and community. They were willing to undergo whatever sacrifices were necessary to keep the school available to the children of Brooklin. To save costs and to enable the

school to remain open, it was decided that there would be no custodian during the day; instead, custodial services would be available only after 3:00 p.m. The school would have only a part-time secretary and the principal would teach in addition to administering the school. The fine efforts put forth by the community have proven that Catholic education in Brooklin is here to stay.

Opening of the New School – St. Leo Catholic School, 1998

Thirty-four years later, Brooklin had seen a phenomenal growth in its population. It soon became apparent that the “little school” in Brooklin, once threatened with closure, would not be able to accommodate the growing numbers. It was time to tear it down and build a bigger school

On April 7, 1995, the Board of Trustees approved the plan to build a new school on Watford Street. In 1998, the teachers and students moved to the beautiful new school under the guidance of principal Jeananne Ralph.



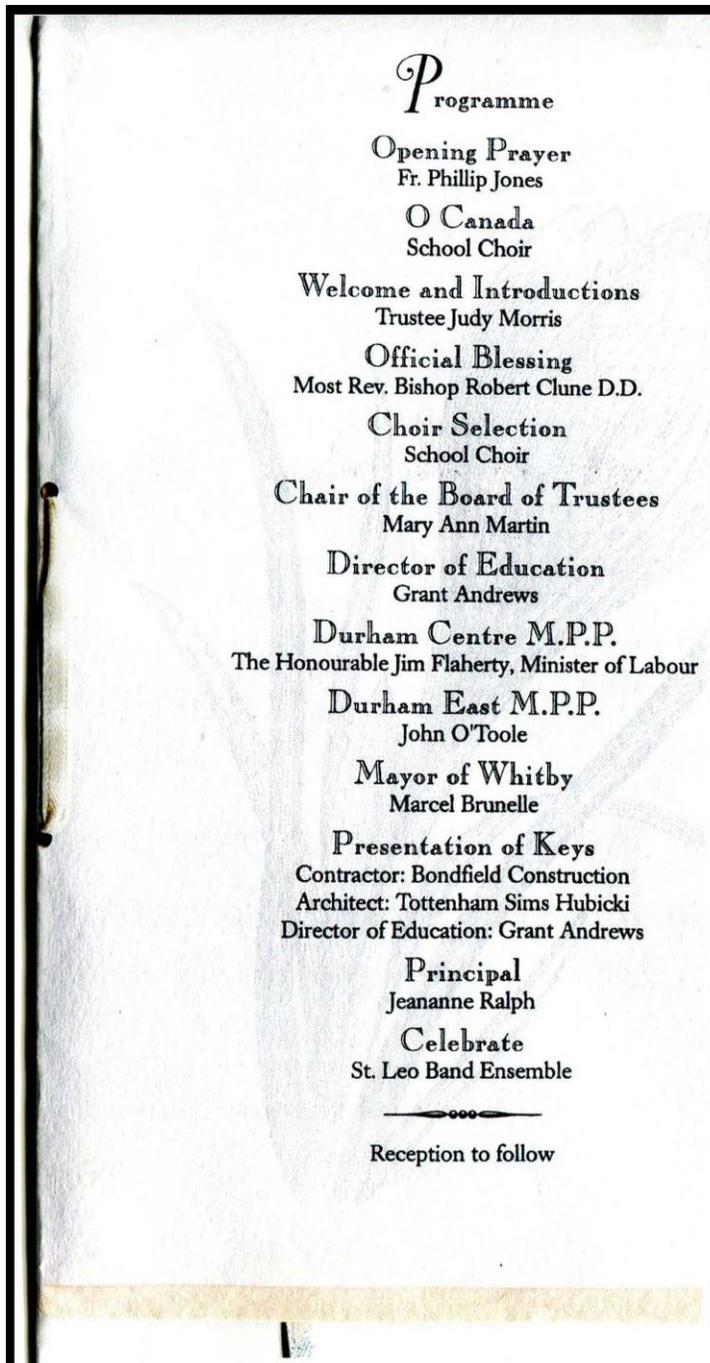
The new school



Principal Jeananne Ralph

The new school, located on 120 Watford Street, was placed under the patronage of St. Leo the Great, a fifth-century Pope. St. Leo is remembered as being a defender of the faith through his 96 sermons on faith, hope and charity. Despite the new school being named after St. Leo, it would never be forgotten that Father Leo J. Austin, parish priest of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Whitby, initiated the community resolve to have a Catholic school in the Brooklin area.

St. Leo Catholic School was blessed and officially opened by Bishop Robert B. Clune on April 18, 1999.



Program from the official opening and blessing of the school in 1999

However, the "little school" that was torn down would not be forgotten! The architects of the new school, Tottenham, Sims & Hubicki, paid for a representation of the former school to be engraved in the wall of the new school.



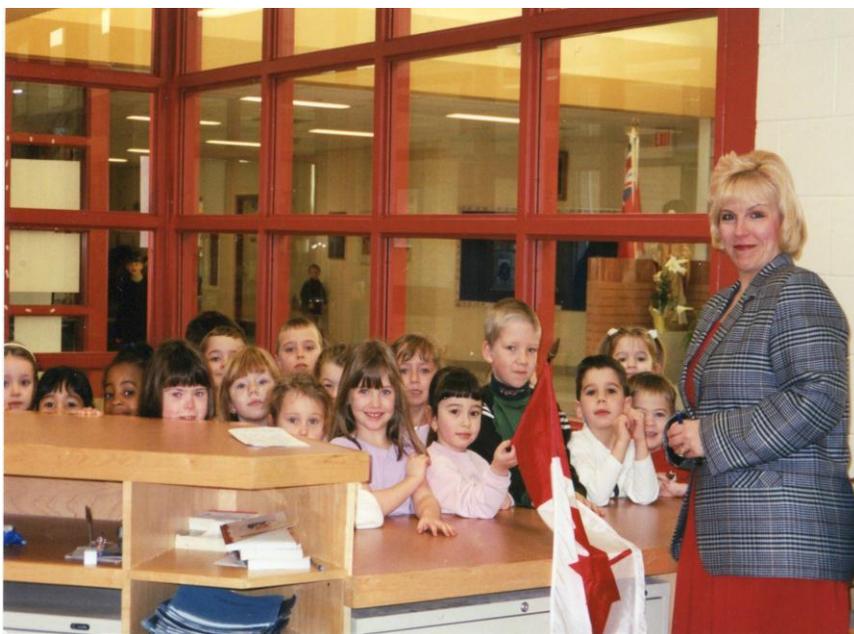
Engraving of the "little school" in the "big school," based on the original sketch by Kelly Panacci, a parent of the school

It is refreshing to note that the "small school" experience can still be felt within the walls of the new, larger St. Leo Catholic School. A sense of community, stewardship of the environment, a love for the Arts and Sciences and a drive for academic excellence still prevail. Students at St. Leo Catholic School continue to excel in cross country runs, volleyball and basketball. The school has carried on the tradition of honouring Canadian veterans on Remembrance Day every year by sending classes to the Luther Vipond Memorial Arena, just as it did in the past. The collaboration between school and church also continues. The school is fortunate to have St. Leo the Great Catholic Church next door, where children are able to attend Mass and forge a respectful and loving relationship with the Catholic faith.



Principal Betty McDonald speaks to Grade 8 students in 2012.

As the population of Brooklin continued to grow, it became necessary to build a new addition to the existing school and to build yet another Catholic school in Brooklin, as students at St. Leo were being housed in 10 on-site portables. In 2004, under principal Kim Walsh, an addition was built to the existing school to accommodate eight new classrooms. Also, a new Catholic School, St. Bridget, opened in 2004 on Carnwith Drive in Brooklin. The student population at St. Leo Catholic School peaked at 650 students before the opening of St. Bridget Catholic School. It was very difficult for the community to say goodbye to the students of St. Leo who would move to the new school as a result of a change in boundary.



Principal Kim Walsh with Kindergarten students

In September 2010, St. Leo Catholic School offered French Immersion and Extended French tracks for interested students. Despite the school's growth over time, the pervading feeling within the school is one of "the country welcoming the city." The "small-town warmth" is here to stay and a sense of community prevails. Enrolment at St. Leo Catholic School in 2012 was approximately 600 students, and the school population continues to grow. A new Catholic school in Brooklin is projected to open in September 2013.

Our Patron Saint

Pope Leo I, also known as Leo the Great, was Pope of the Christian Church from September 440 AD until his death 21 years later. He was an Italian aristocrat who was the first Pope to have been called "the Great."

During the time he served as Pope, Italy was being attacked by barbarian armies. He is best known for having met Attila the Hun in 452 AD and persuading him to turn back from his invasion of Italy.

St. Leo the Great was not only renowned for building and restoring churches, but was also known for the spiritual leadership he provided

for the Roman congregations. His sermons, of which nine have been preserved, are remarkable for their depth, clarity and style.

St. Leo died on November 10, 461 AD. His remains are buried in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome with a special altar over them. In 1754 AD, he was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Benedict XIV. St. Leo's feast day is observed on November 10.



Current Principal : Colleen Strong

School Prayer

St. Leo the Great, you always followed God's ways.
Please teach us your ways and guide us
So that we too can be faithful and successful in our everyday lives.
We pray that you keep our staff, students, and school community
Safe, healthy and happy.
Help us to do our very best every day
And to reach out to those around us
Who need our support and guidance.
Guide our hearts, souls and minds as we try
To follow in your footsteps and try always to do our best.
St. Leo the Great, as we look up to you,
Please keep us in your loving heart and teach us
To be caring, loving, and gentle as you, our patron saint.
Amen.

Principals

Noel Wood
Ted Hickey
Allan Oerton
Bryan Livett

Wilma Hurley
Frank Corrigan
Cleary Smith
John Quinn
Tim O'Connell
Frank Zochodne
Jeananne Ralph (1994-2001)
Kim Walsh (2001-2006)
Betty McDonald (2006-2012)
Colleen Strong (2012-present)

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