

## History of the Building of Marija Pomagaj in Toronto

The Vincentian priests, Fr. Kolarič (left) along with Fr. John Kopač (right) were instrumental in the building of the first Slovenian church in Canada. Initially, they were looking to buy an existing building for the church. They looked at many older churches, synagogues, halls, but the purchase never came. Either the price was too



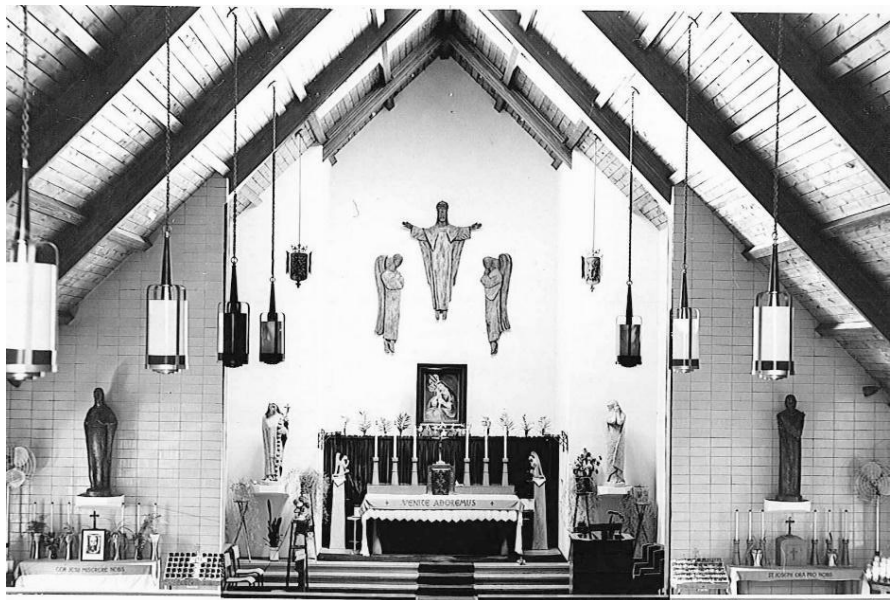
high, the space was unusable or too costly to renovate.

Two and a half years later, after much debate, they found a property in the center of Toronto at 609 Manning Ave. The property was 59 ft x 126 ft and was purchased on February 10, 1953 for \$9,700. The archdiocese of Toronto then gave Marija Pomagaj the permission to



manage their own books, such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. That is when Marija Pomagaj officially became a parish. Records were no longer recorded in the Italian church, Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Peter Dimitroff was selected as the Architect. Engineer Viktor Škof and France Stojc presented the plans to the building department on May 12, 1953 and the plans were approved by the Toronto City Building Authority. There were three bids submitted for the construction and on November 27, 1953, Mr Franc Stojc was awarded the contract as he presented the lowest bid.



### Construction started December 7, 1953.

- The beams for the ceiling of the hall were provided by Laminated Structures. They also provided the ribs for the church.
- The church floor was laid by Stradwick-Poulin Ltd.
- The roof was installed by Fred Whyte Roofing.
- Plumbing and heating by Perfect Pluming.
- The ceiling for the hall was provided by W.L. Brown Fortress

- Electrical by Electric Repair and Machine Co. Ltd., • Light fixtures from Holden Lighting Mfg. Ltd,
- The pews were built by Valley City.

Contributions by parishioners;

○ General carpentry by Anton Ferkul, ○ plastering performed by Rudi Kus, ○ all the glass was donated and installed by Frank Vlahovič, ○ Janez Trpin built the furniture in the presbytery, ○ the communion railing was built by Frank Stražar, ○ the painting was performed by Jože Turk. ○ carpentry in the sacristy was completed by Anton Muhič. ○ Frank Levč, a stonecutter, donated two holy water fonts and the corner stone. ○ Franc Gorše was to make the statues, stations of the cross and the nativity scene.

With generous contributions by many parishioners and for their time, by the end of the construction, the cost to build the hall totaled \$37,876 and the cost for the church totaled \$38,765.

## **Timeline of Construction:**

### ***June 1, 1954***

The house by the church, 594 Manning Ave., was purchased.

### ***December 8, 1954***

The first mass was celebrated by His Eminence Dr. Gregory Rožman, Bishop of Ljubljana, who lived as an exile in Cleveland, Ohio.

By this time, the congregation numbered 240 families (1028 parishioners)

### ***March 1956***

The first telephone for public use is installed in the hall. Local calls were 10 cents.

### ***November 1956***

The cement floor in the hall is covered by parquet and the cement walls are painted.

### ***April 8, 1957***

The church organ is ordered installed by December 22, 1957.

### ***July 1957***

By July 1957, there were three Sunday Masses: 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., and 10:30 a.m.

### ***October 26, 1958***

A plaque commemorating all the Slovenians who were tortured or had died during WWII was installed at the front of the church.

### ***August 1959***

Purchase house at 611 Manning Ave. Lot size 18'3" x 126'

### ***August 1960***

Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul purchased the house on 613 Manning Ave. Lot size 35'x126'

### ***March 1961***

The priests bought their first car, a Pontiac

### ***February 1962***

The hall was renovated by Jože Murgelj, Mr. Žakelj and Mr. Franc Ferkul. They covered the walls in the hall with cedar wood to the height of the doors.

The woodwork was stained by Mr. Jože Turk.

Mr. Franc Levstik upgraded the electrical wiring. New drapes were installed on the stage.

The above works were supervised by Mr. Ivan Kavčič, chairman of the church committee.

### ***October 1962***

Because Slovenska šola needed more space, another house was purchased at 615 Manning Ave. for \$23,500.00. Lot size 21' x 125'

### ***May 1963***

A mozaic of Marija Pomagaj was installed above the front door of the church. ***Sept***

### ***15 1964***

Plans were submitted for the new rectory.

Feb 12, 1965 a permit was purchased for \$360.

### ***May 1965***

New Slovenian missals were introduced as previous ones were written in Latin. This was as a result of the new directives of the Second Vatican council (October 11 – December 8, 1965) under Pope John XXIII. One of these directives was that the liturgy was able to be celebrated in any language. Marija Pomagaj could now have mass in Slovenian, no longer in Latin.

### ***June 27, 1965***

The parish received permission to build a new rectory. Two buildings and garages were demolished by Greenspoon Bros. Ltd. for \$925.00.

Plans were made by Vilko Čekuta and the calculations by engineer Viktor Škof.

Construction was undertaken by the builder Ivan Kavčič Sr. The rectory was completed by February 1966.

### ***March 1966***

Because the parquet flooring in the hall was unsafe due to buckling, it was replaced with terrazzo for \$5,000

### ***April 1966***

The old building at 615 Manning was remodeled and painted.

### ***August 22, 1966***

Plans for reworking the staircase in front of the church were made by the Slovenian architect, Mr. Franc Levec. The existing ones were too steep.

The Committee of Adjustments approved the plans and Mr. Janez Kastelic carefully lead the work for the new staircase.

Masonry work was taken over by the parishioner Mr. Lojze Dolenc. Also Mr. Rok Žakelj started working on the refurbishment of the new sacristy.

### ***April 1970***

The lighting and electrical work was upgraded.

### ***February 11, 1974***

According to the directives of the Second Vatican Council, the parish began remodeling the presbytery. The altar was rotated, so the priest now faced the congregation. The communion railing was also removed. The plans were drawn up by the architect Jože Kregar from Ljubljana. Included in the upgrade were a marble altar, new tabernacle, new baptismal font and the new face of the presbytery. The necessary work was carried out by:

- Wood work - General Woodwork, Mr. Janez Šusteršič of Stoney Creek
- Metal object fabrication - Top Grade Machining, Mr. Jože Slobodnik
- Work in marble - C.B. Marble Craft Ltd of Rexdale
- Electrical wiring - Mr. Frank Levstek
- Masonry work - Mr. Alojz Dolenc
- Upholstery Mr. Ivan Hozjan
- Carpeting - Mr. Joe Žižek

### ***August 31, 1975***

A new floor was installed in the church. The main work was done by Mr. Jože Žižek, Mr. Jože Turk and Mr. Jože Fortuna.

### ***October 1975***

The exterior walls needed maintenance. The plans for the repairs were made by Slavko Erzetič and the work was taken over by Alojz Dolenc.

### ***August 1976***

The property was paved and parking spaces identified. Cracks in the cement along the walkway to the new rectory were repaired by Frank Jerina and Frank Kraljič.

The kitchen was remodeled and new equipment was installed by Toronto Kitchen Equipment (Jože Žoldos and Štefan Vinčec).

The main work was carried out by: Alojz Dolenc, Frank Levstek and Janez Platnar, The wooden parts of the buildings were inspected, repaired and painted by Jože Turk.

### ***December 1977***

The tabernacle was provided with a stronger door and a solid lock. The plan for the exterior decoration of the door was conceived by Vilko Čekuta. The door and security frame were made by Jože Slobodnik and Top Grade Machining Ltd.

### ***June 1978***

The painting of Our Lady Help of Christian needed a face lift. Mr. Zigfrid cleaned and repainted the artwork resulting in a fresher and more youthful image.

### ***November 1978***

John Platnar and Marjan Sevšek installed a new furnace.

### ***February 1982***

Ceiling fans are installed in the church

### ***January 1990***

When the church was being built, the church walls were covered with ceramic tiles, despite the objections of the church committee and the artist Gorše. However, now the old ceramic subway tiles were removed in order to update the walls in the church.

Many other repairs and renovations were made at the church at this time. The walls of the church hall were insulated, upgrades were made towards the electrical wiring in the church and hall and repairs were made to the frames and shelves of the stained glass windows in the church. New lighting was installed for the baptismal font, tabernacle and stations of the cross.

Modifications were made to the entrance staircase, hallway, stage area, bar, kitchen, small hall and the rooms within the small hall, The curtains on the stage and windows were replaced.

The gallery above the hall also got a new face lift. The walls were properly insulated. Safety regulations required fire doors and fire protection devices be installed, upgrading the electrical wiring and use fire retardant paint for the woodwork.

Renovation work performed by; Albion Glass, A.B.C. Fire Door, Etobicoke Sheet Metal, Flegar Plastering & Ceramic Tile, MarPor Consultants, Platnar Brothers Plumbing, Richway Construction, Triglav Electric and WallWood Co. have been involved in the work.

### ***January 1993***

At the end of January the washroom areas under the stairs were repaired. Work was carried out by:

- Insulation, walls and floors done by Mr. Tone Flegar and Flegar Plastering,;
- Platnar Brothers were in charge of plumbing,
- Wallwood Company made the cabinets, and they were installed by Mr. Martin Slapničar.

- Painting performed by Mr. Jože Čemas.
- The walls for the stalls were provided by Mr. Lojze Genor, and they were erected together with Mr. Stane Batič.
- The electrical wiring was taken care of by Mr. Ivan Sluga.
- Mr. Stefan Vinčec and Mr. Herman Tramšek were also involved with the renovation.

### ***May 1996***

After 40 years, the organ needed repairs which were carried out by Alan T. Jackson. Repairs were \$5,000.

### ***June 1999***

New roof

### ***December 1999***

Summit Mechanical's Edi, Stanley and Stane Blas, installed a new furnace for the small hall. Toni Žibert from Metro Mechanical installed a water purifying machine.

A new sound system was installed in the church which included a wireless microphone.

### ***April 2000***

Planning starts to build an elevator inside the church with the architect Mr. Franc Levec.

### ***May 2000***

New windows for the hall and the parish are installed by Just Žigante from Just Aluminum.

### ***October 2002***

Frank Greco repaired the concrete in front of the Parish Church ***November***

### ***2005***

New chimneys are installed for the church and hall.

### ***October 2010***

Work outside the church was extensive due to water and salt damage in the stairs and the walls. Downpour spouts were clogged and needed to be cleaned. The kitchen vents were damaged and needed repair. Among the workers were; Jože, Stane and Tomaž Batič, Janez Tratnik, Denis Gasser and Jože Hozjan. Lift Teck leveled large cement slabs at the entrance to the hall and in front of the church, as well as the stairs and sidewalk next to the rectory. The railing by the stairs was replaced by Mr. Izidor Cimprič and Mr. Silvo repaired the raised tiles at the top of the stairs.

### ***December 2, 2022***

There was flooding from the roof in the rectory. Many people came to help with the clean up and repairs.

## Properties Purchased by Marija Pomagaj

**House at 594 Manning Ave; June 1, 1954**

**Property at 609 Manning Ave; February 1953** \$9,700 59' x 126'

The first thoughts of a Slovenian parish in Toronto began to materialize for the postwar immigrants during the summer of 1949.

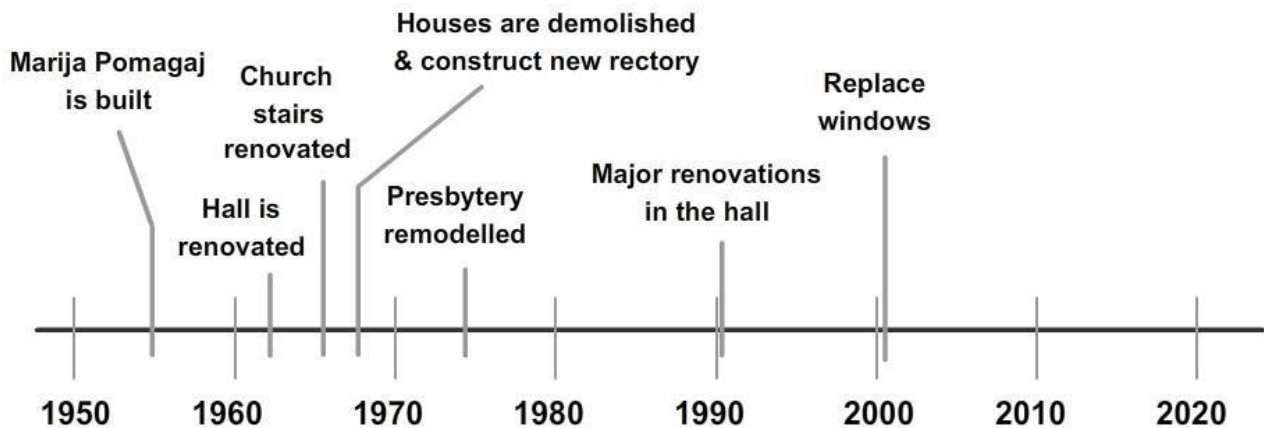
**House at 611 Manning Ave; August 1959** \$16,500 18' x 126'

By purchasing the house, there was a possibility of enlarging the church at some point in the future. Years later, Our Lady of Help Parish had to overcome some difficulties before it was granted permission to use the church house at 611 Manning Ave. as a children's daycare.

**House at 613 Manning Ave. April 1959** \$30,000 35' x 126'

Sisters of Mercy purchased the house at 613 Manning Ave

**House at 615 Manning Ave. October 1962** \$23,500 21' x 126'



**Cornerstone:** It was made by a parishioner, stonemason Mr. Franc Levec. The following inscription in Latin is engraved in the stone: Anno Mariano 1954. S. Mariae Auxiliatricis Christianorum. That is: In the Year of Mary 1954. St. Mary Help of Christians.. A cross is also carved on each corner of the stone. A historical document containing a brief description of the building and its creation was placed in the cornerstone. In a copper box, along with some objects which were typical of the time in which the building was built. After His Eminence Cardinal McGuigan blessed the cornerstone, he symbolically took the first spoonful of mortar and spread it into a niche of the church wall. The stone is built into the northwest corner of the church.

**Pipe Organ:** The price of the organ was \$6,235.00. The organ contract was awarded to Knoch Organ Company of London, Ont., which was the distributor for the world-famous German Walcker firm, the largest organ manufacturer in Europe. The necessary money had already been collected before the organ was installed.

The Rev. Bishop Dr. F. Marrocco blessed it on the last Sunday of Advent, Dec. 22, 1957, which happened to be the third anniversary of the blessing of the church.

## Memorial plaque;

A memorial plaque to all anti-communist victims, is placed in the wall of Our Lady of Help Church in Toronto. It was unveiled and blessed by the parish priest Jakob Kolarič, C, M. on October 26, 1958, in the presence of many Slovenian compatriots

### *IN MEMORY*

*of all Slovenians who sacrificed their lives and have suffered for their faith and homeland during the period of communistic revolution 1941 – 1945 and in the time of communistic persecution in Slovenia.*



**KOLARIČ dr. Jakob:** (1902-1984) He was born in Radomer in the parish of Ljutomer. He attended both primary and high school and then entered the Mission Society on August 14, 1920. He made his perpetual vows on August 15, 1922 and was ordained on June 29, 1928 in Ljubljana. He studied theology and on March 24, 1934 he received his doctorate in theology. He was first intended for Chile but, in December 1948 he was sent to Canada.

He immediately began organizing Slovenian immigrants which arrived after WWII. As the number of Slovenians was growing, Father Kolarič requested Father Janez Kopač to be his assistant. With the Slovenians in Toronto, they decided to build their own church, Marija Pomagaj.

Fr. Kolarič facilitated annual retreats and started annual pilgrimages to Martyr's Shrine in Midland. In 1954, the Superior General of the Missionary Society appointed Father Kolarič as interim director of the Usmiljenke/Sisters of Mercy in Canada.

In 1954, the Superior General of the Missionary Society appointed Fr. Kolarič as interim director of the Sisters of Mercy in Canada. Kolarič was a man of fragile nerves and fragile health. During his time in Toronto, he experienced bitter moments and severe trials.

Unfortunately, Father Kolarič was in fragile health. On March 22, 1960, he left Canada for Austria and died on Christmas Day, December 25, 1984, in Klagenfurt at age 82.

**KOPAČ Fr. Janez:** (1913-1994) Born in the village of Sv. Andrej near Škofja Loka. He attended elementary school in Škofja Loka, and high school in Šentvid north of Ljubljana. He graduated in 1933 and entered the Ljubljana Theological Seminary. He completed his theological studies with a diploma at the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana in 1938. He was ordained by Bishop Dr. Gregorij Rožman on July 3, 1938.

He was a chaplain in the parish of Poljane above Škofja Loka, when he was expelled by the Nazis. He entered the Missionary Society on April 17, 1942 with the desire to devote himself to the missionary work of the



Church in China. On January 18, 1946, he traveled to China, where he served until his expulsion by the communists in January 1951.

His superiors sent him to Toronto to join Dr. Jakob Kolarič. He helped establishment the parish of Mary Help of Christians where he was chaplain until 1959. Then he began preparations for the establishment of a second Slovenian parish in Toronto, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church. The church opened its doors in 1961. From that year until his retirement in 1988, he served as pastor. He served seven terms as House Superior or Superior of the Slovenian Lazarists in Canada, for a total of 21 years.

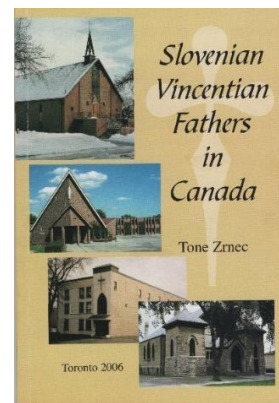
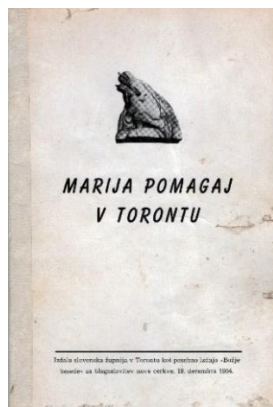
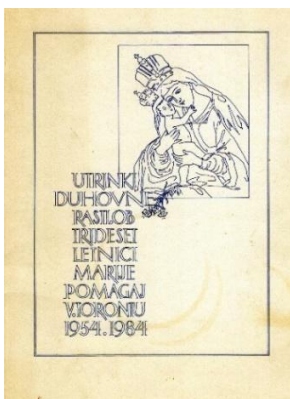
From 1966 to 1981, he edited the monthly magazine God's Word and wrote many articles for various Slovenian publications. He was instrumental in the success of the Slovenian Summer Camp as well as, the building of the seniors home, Dom Lipa. Fr. Janez Kopač died on May 3, 1994 at Dom Lipa in Toronto.

**Sisters of Mercy:** Fr. Kolarič arranged for the Sisters of Mercy to come to Canada to help the parish. So in 1959, Sister Lidija Krek, Sister Cecilija Prebil, Sister Palmina Dvoršak, and Sister Ivana Primožič arrived in Toronto. They helped by running a children's daycare, helping with teaching Slovenian school and participating in women's organizations. After 5 years, June 1964, the order called them back.

## Bibliography

Archival Citation: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 410

30 Letnic Marija Pomagaj / Marija Pomagaj v Torontu / Božja Beseda /Vincentian Fathers



Canadian Slovenian Historical Society



70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Marija Pomagaj