

---

## The Valuable Legacy: Community Life

1889. Very few people thought about emigration from Hungary, but the Leskó family from Kaposvár was among those few. Their plans were soon realized as they arrived in Toronto. Their son, István, who became a dentist, was born here.

1925. Count Albert Apponyi visits Toronto on his last North American tour. Dr. István Leskó is among the handful of Hungarians in the audience of the Count's lecture in Convocation Hall. He notices that two people behind him were praising the lecture in Hungarian. At the end of the lecture he approaches them, and finds to his surprise that there are a number of other Hungarians living in Toronto. He asks for their addresses, and together they locate and visit the other Hungarians in the city. As there is a clear need for spiritual leadership, Leskó approaches the Archbishopric of Toronto and manages to arrange for some visits by Hungarian missionaries.



It is 1928. The number of Hungarians is increasing rapidly. Archbishop Neil McNeil realizes that a solution must be found for the pastoral care of Toronto's Hungarians. Thus he requests a Hungarian-speaking pastor for the community from Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi, Primate of Hungary. As he can't spare any priests, Cardinal Serédi responds with an interim solution: he sends a seminarian, near the end of his studies. The head of the Esztergom Seminary delegates László Forgách, who, with the approval of Archbishop McNeil, arrives in Toronto on September 21, with a then significant travel allowance of \$ 300. Despite the fact that there was no Hungarian Church, and he was not yet a priest (until June 12, 1931), the Archive of the Toronto Archdiocese refers to László Forgách as pastor of the Hungarian Parish.

On September 6 1928, Kelemen Burka, a Franciscan friar who has also previously visited the Hungarians, is also appointed to care for the small community, and begins to look after administrative matters. As there is no Hungarian church, births, deaths and funerals take place in other community churches, Fr. Burka copies and maintains their records. These handwritten pages form the core of the historical records of our Parish.

Thus by the end of September 1928 conditions are favourable for the initiation of parish life: we have a receptive community, a pastor - László Forgách, and a priest - Dr. Kelemen Burka OFM. The organizational work begins with family visits. Initially, due to the intervention of Archbishop McNeil, Sunday mass is held, rent-free in the chapel of the Carmelite Sisters on Ossington Ave. Later Father Charles Barron celebrated mass in St. John's Lithuanian church, at the corner of Grace St. and Mansfield Ave. It is typical of the difficult times, that on one occasion the congregation could not raise the \$5 Sunday rent, and next week they found the church locked. Thus on occasion they held mass at St. Francis Church or in St. Patrick's Church at Dundas and McCaul St. social functions and theatrical performances were later held at St. Francis Hall.

The situation improved, when with the intercession of Archbishop McNeil, masses were held in a chapel on the North-East side of St. Michael's Cathedral.

1939. A chapel is built in a rented building at 15 Grange Rd., but the final solution is reached only in 1944, when the community buys an unused Anglican church on Spadina at Dundas Sts. This becomes the first church of the parish, which is consecrated by Archbishop J.C.A. McGuigan on March 19, 1944. The church is dedicated to St. Elizabeth of Hungary as its patron saint.

---

It seemed natural that during the organizational work the two groups active in the Hungarian community, László Forgách, Dr. Kelemen Burka and Dr. Leskó would find each other. The work continues, and in November 1929 the Magyar Katolikus Kör (Hungarian Catholic Circle) is formed with 18 members, and Dr. Leskó is unanimously elected honorary president for life. Dr. Burka becomes the parish president. As the members feel that *to aid successful organization and to attract new members the Circle requires a permanent home where members can be entertained and can get to know each other*, the meeting decides to rent a hall, where they can address these needs and hold English language courses.

As a result they immediately rent the large hall in 147 Beverley St. for a club house, and in December initiate English language training. The Magyar Katolikus Kör becomes the cultural centre of Hungarians, frequented by large groups, where Hungarians feel at ease. The Kör holds regular monthly meetings, and through their minutes we can reconstruct the difficult life of our pioneers, their struggles, sacrifices, unshakeable faith and never ending hope for a better, more beautiful future.

The crash of 1929 makes life much more difficult for the next decade. People who lost their jobs need help. Naturally many turn to their priest, who during these difficult times becomes more than just their spiritual counsellor. Within two years László Forgách rents five houses, using them mostly to house needy Hungarians. In August 1930 in concert with the Kör he rents 210 Beverly St. furnished partly by 25 chairs donated by the Archdiocese. They combine 3 of the 14 rooms to form the Kör's clubhouse and dance hall. They use a fourth room for English lessons and they start Sunday school. The rest of the rooms are rented at minimum cost to needy Hungarian families. This house is followed by a second one on St. John St., two on Grange Rd. and one on Augusta Ave. László Forgách accepts responsibility for the rent of four of these. At times the money is just not there, and he has to approach all of his acquaintances to borrow the rent money. We know the name of only one benefactor, Frank O'Connor, later Senator O'Connor, owner of Laura Secord confectionary. Mr. O'Connor's generosity on one occasion extended to donating 25 dollars to the Kör.

To quote László Forgách, "nothing unites people more than misery", during the depression there was lots of it for the Hungarians as well. Perhaps as a result, a very lively social scene developed. The library is established, they receive a radio and a billiard table, they build a bowling alley, they hold teas, dances and dinners. They meet several times weekly to discuss and solve problems or just to have a chat. The school is a success. The first teacher, Miss Égli, as she lives far away, receives TTC tickets in lieu of pay.

At the 1933 May meeting of the Katolikus Kör Ft. Forgách announces the formal recognition of the Hungarian parish, and recommends that the Kör function as a subunit of the parish. The motion is carried unanimously. Shortly József Ender is appointed as the first cantor.

Our predecessors, despite their own difficulties, tried to help others in need. As an example, in March 1935 the parish community sent \$117.75 through the consulate to aid Yugoslavian refugees, leaving only a total of \$ 65.30 in parish accounts. In November they move to rented premises at 15 Grange Rd, where they remain until the purchase of the first church in 1944. The intervening 9 years are eventful. The first crisis comes shortly: Ft. Forgách moves to Welland, and the small community is left without a priest after December 1935.

The parish council elected in 1936, still lead by Dr. István Leskó, faces a year full of problems. At the September monthly meeting they decide that the council members will resign at the October meeting, and the parish will be dissolved. The intervening month gave time for reflection, and at the meeting of October 4, devoted to the question of the parish's survival, a motion for maintaining the parish won 29 votes to 6. Thus "it was decided that point 8 in last month's minutes be struck down, and the Hungarian Catholic Parish will remain in its present form". They elect a three-member delegation, consisting of István Leskó, Antal Naár and József Ender, to appeal to the Archbishop for a Hungarian priest. Clearly the delegation is successful, as the opening prayer of the regular December meeting of the Council is

---

delivered by Ft. Vilmos Szöllösy, who is named pastor by the Diocese. On December 27 the archbishop visits the parish, where he is welcomed with Hungarian hospitality. This solves the first major crisis, and normal community life resumes. New groups are formed, old ones dissolve and are reformed. The cultural program flourishes, with theatrical performances, dinners, picnics and high teas. On June 13 1937 the first Toronto Hungarian Catholic Day is held, with the blessing of the flag. The problem of a church building is not yet solved, but the question of buying or building a church is widely discussed.

In September 1938 a second shock follows: Ft. Szöllösy leaves the diocese, once again bringing doubt about the viability of the parish. Another delegation approaches the Archbishop. Although there is no possibility of a Hungarian priest, an acceptable compromise is reached. Ft. John Harris becomes the pastor, and on Sundays Ft. István Horváth from Montreal reads the gospel and preaches in Hungarian. This arrangement is maintained until July 1. 1939 when Ft. Leo Austin is appointed as pastor to the Hungarian parish community. Although he can't speak Hungarian either, he begins a new active chapter in the life of the community.

Shortly after taking up his post at his suggestion a chapel is formed by community effort within 15 Grange Rd. They join two rooms, furnish it with chairs and kneelers and build an altar dedicated to St. Elizabeth of Hungary – Árpádházi Szent Erzsébet.

On April 1, 1943 the parish receives notice that they have to vacate 15 Grange Rd. This forces the parish to seriously deal with the problem of finding a permanent home. They decide to buy a church building. In a few months they set their sights on St. Philip's Anglican church, built in 1885 at the corner of Spadina and Dundas St. The asking price is reasonable, and they are granted three months to raise the money. A fund raising committee is established.



James McGuigan, Archbishop of Toronto lends a helping hand: if the community can raise half of the funds he will make up the rest. Ft. Austin provides weekly updates on progress. Sister Mária leads the fundraising effort of a core of active volunteers. Ft. Austin goes on an extensive fund raising tour in the U.S. At the beginning of June the deal is signed. The cost: \$ 23,000.

By December 1943 more than \$ 13,500 is collected. In the meanwhile the whole community is involved in fundraising, but renovation of the building also begins. Some parish members devote 50-100 evenings to the renovation work, greatly reducing the cost of completing the work.

Finally the great day arrives: on March 19, 1944 the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church is consecrated. The finalé of church building comes on December 14, 1947, when the congregation singing the Hungarian national Anthem burns the debt contract with the Diocese in the presence of the Archbishop, signifying that all of the Parish' debt to the Diocese is paid.

In June 1947 Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty, Prince-archbishop of Hungary visits the church. On this occasion he states to Ft. Austin that „ he has no right to stay here unless he learns the language”. No doubt this stems from his strong conviction that the nation lives in the language as much as the language lives in the nation. In otherwords, the mother-tongue must be maintained in the emigrants.

---

We must not forget that since 1939 Ft. Austin has enthusiastically served the Hungarian community with his organization skills, with physical and intellectual efforts and love for the congregation. Indeed, in his will he asked to be buried in the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church.

Despite his efforts, time has come for Hungarians to have a Hungarian priest, and Cardinal McGuigan shares this conviction. He calls on Sister Mária, who informs him that in the New England Province, in Boston there are a few Hungarian Jesuit priests. Cardinal McGuigan contacts the Provincial, Ft. McElemery SJ, and asks him to send a Hungarian priest to Toronto for a month, to assess the situation. Ft. István Békési SJ comes to Toronto, and offers mass in our church on November 21.

On July 1 1949 Ft. Békési is appointed pastor. From now on, Ft. Austin works in English parishes, but retains his close ties with the Hungarian congregation until his death.

With Ft. Békési a new era begins in the history of the parish. He is the first of the Jesuit pastors of the church. He consolidates the parish, and ensures its continued operation as a Hungarian parish. The post-war emigration rapidly expands the Toronto Hungarian community, and the parish membership expands to the point that an additional Hungarian priest is appointed in 1952, and a third in 1953.

In 1955 the activities of the congregation expand. They buy a property in Streetsville (Mississauga), which they name Mindszenty Park, where they hold regular picnics, camping and excursions. (The property was probably sold in 1966). The church windows are replaced by beautiful stained glass windows showing Christian symbols. Fundraising for a new organ is initiated.

After the 1956 revolution the church effectively becomes a refugee relief centre. The congregation provides for the needs of the newly arrived refugees, by finding shelter, food, aid with administration and English language classes, especially since initially there is no government support for the refugees. Although later both levels of government step in to help the refugees, the parish community continues its charitable work.

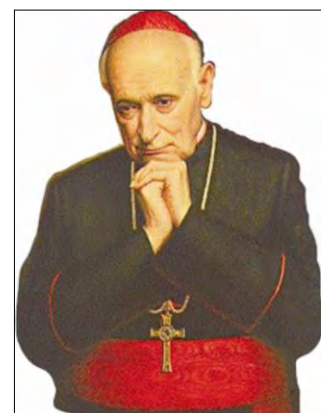
Thus there is ample work for a fourth priest, and the congregation grows to the point that four Sunday masses are needed.

The many recently arrived immigrants need financial advice and assistance, thus, on the advice of our Jesuit fathers, the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Credit Union is formed in 1958. (Dissolved in 2006). The Credit Union provided loans to more than 1000 Hungarian-Canadians for house and car purchases and in support of small businesses.

The increased numbers of children and the need to provide instruction in language, history and geography makes it imperative to expand the school. Thus in 1961 the parish buys 263 Spadina Ave., to hold the school, and the St. Ignác hall.

In 1962 the Hungarian Jesuits buy a 130 acre farm property in Orono, which they name Loyola Park after the founder of the Jesuit Order. The park is made available to the whole community, year round. It becomes a favourite destination for scouts, youth groups and the whole community. It was the location of the Hungarian scout jamborees in 1975, 80 and 90, where some 1000 scouts and scout leaders assembled from Hungarian communities around the world.

In 1973 the congregation marked the millennium of Christianity in Hungary. The celebrations were organized by a committee led by Ft. József Máté – and was highlighted by the second visit of Cardinal Mindszenty to our parish. His ten day visit, starting on September 18. 1973 included a procession by



---

several thousand Hungarian-Canadians from City Hall to St. Michael's Cathedral. Philip Pocock, Archbishop of Toronto remarked that "these old walls have never contained such enthusiastic faithful crowd, or such heavenly singing." At the evening banquet the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario R.R. McDonald and Mr. Sharp, federal Minister of Foreign Affairs were among the dignitaries. In his address Mr. Sharp praised Cardinal Mindszenty as a hero and martyr of truth and the true cause, and without doubt among the greatest heroes of our generation, and the greatest among those living.

1978: 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish. Indeed it was built on a solid foundation. The church hall is too small to hold the gala dinner, so it is moved to the Árpád hall of the Hungarian-Canadian Cultural Centre. A new pipe organ, a Cassavant 2 manual organ with 1120 pipes, designed by Dr. Ferenc Gergely and György Zadubán is inaugurated in the golden anniversary celebrations.

The life of the community is active. As the years pass, the members of the congregation become better established in Canadian life, and many move away from the downtown area. Parking at the church becomes an insoluble problem. The church is no longer close-by for nearly anybody in the community.

In the second half of 1983 the question of finding a lot for building a new church is raised. With the consent of the Archdiocese a new location is selected and on June 7 1984 a purchase agreement is signed for our new location at 430-432 Sheppard Ave. East. Plans for a new church, parish office, hall and youth wing are completed. In the spring of 1985 the sod-turning ceremony is held, and on July 28, Sunday, the move from Spadina/Dundas is completed. The first mass is held on August 4, while the consecration of the church is held on Saturday, October 5 at 5 pm. Cardinal Archbishop Emmett Carter officiates, with the assistance of Dr. László Irányi, Bishop of the Hungarian Emmigrées. With this, the home of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary parish is ensured for a long time to come.

The design and execution of the building proceeded with the unfailing energy and enthusiasm of our pastor, Ft. Blaise (Balázs) Jaschkó, who was assisted by George Birinyi, an expert member of the community, and the representatives of the congregation.

The new location revitalizes parish life. The new hall attracts many events organized by the various church groups. The role of the school becomes more important. Enrolment swells in all classes, but there is room to learn, take part in activities as well as in spiritual events for everyone from youths to retirees. In 1993 a third floor is added to the school wing allowing further expansion of school enrolment.

In 1989 Pope John-Paul II names Attila Miklósházy SJ, professor of theology and past rector at St. Michael's University, University of Toronto, as the Bishop of Emigrée Hungarians. His ordination is held in St. Michael's Cathedral on November 4, and the next day our new bishop celebrates mass in our church. In the reception following he urges us to unite in following the path laid down by St. Stephen of Hungary (Szent István), as highlighted by his motto on his coat of arms "Cor unum et anima una" i.e. "one heart and one soul".



On April 26 1997 he ordains Csaba Cabafi SJ in the second ordination in our church's history, and first in the new building. Ft. Cabafi's first mass is celebrated on May 4 at 10.30 a.m. In September 1997 he is named associate pastor, and in July 2000 he assumes the role of Pastor.

In July 2002 the 17<sup>th</sup> World Youth Congress is held in Toronto. The movement was initiated in 1984 by Pope John-Paul II. The Toronto meeting was attended by 250,000 youths



representing 172 countries. Our parish members, young and old, are deeply involved in the organization of the huge event. Our parish coordinates the housing, feeding and security of 180 pilgrims from Hungary and Transylvania.

In 2003 we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our parish. The celebrations continue with numerous events over a six week period.

In 2006 Ft. László Marosfalvy is appointed Pastor, and Ft. Cabafi moves to Hungary as assistant to the Hungarian Jesuit Provincial. Ft. Marosfalvy initiates the programs celebrating the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of St. Elizabeth of Hungary – including the development of this memorial album.

In May 2008 Ft. Szabolcs Sajgó is appointed Pastor.



---

## The Present: Foreshadowing The Renewed Future

As this album clearly illustrates, the membership of our parish is aging physically, even if not in spirit. This will inevitably lead to many changes in the parish. We have to accept these changes, and use them as an opportunity to revitalize our parish.

Our St. Elizabeth parish has been shaped by waves of immigration from Hungary, brought about by political and economic upheavals. We hope that no future calamity will strike the Carpathian basin, and our parish will be revitalized internally, rather than by another wave of poor displaced persons.

Over the decades our parish family became integrated into Canadian life, and most of our younger parishioners consider Canada to be their native land. The church represents to them the Hungarian culture in multicultural Canada, rather than a small Hungarian island that offers refuge in the sea of foreigners and foreign influences. Our parishioners' children are Canadians. They have Canadian friends and often marry Canadians of different ethnic background.

Clearly, the younger members of our parish do not have perfect command of the Hungarian language. Indeed, the language in Hungary evolved away from the language spoken and written 50 or more years ago and we operate in an insular version of modern Hungarian. While it has been said that "the nation lives in its language", this cannot be the basis of the survival and flowering of our parish.

We must embrace young people who have Hungarian roots and sentiments, yet do not speak the language. We must enable them to take part in the liturgy, and enjoy the rich cultural offering of our parish members. We need to expand the social and cultural activities at the church, without compromising the values or eliminating the activities that have made this church such a vibrant centre of Hungarian culture outside Hungary.

Our clergy are also getting older, and their level of activity will decrease. As it is, our priests carry a huge burden, and they will need ever more support from our community.

The political scene has changed completely in the past 20 years. Hungary is now a free, fledgling democratic society with huge financial and social problems. The Church must rebuild after 40 years in virtual exile. The demand for priests is much greater than the supply, and the Jesuits' commitment to Toronto must be justified by having a large active faith community based on Hungarian culture.

The Roman Catholic Church has continually renewed and revitalized itself during the past two millennia. Its goals remain constant – the spreading of the "good news" of Jesus Christ. A fully anglicized, active St. Elizabeth parish would not be a loss to the Church, but it would be a great loss to Hungarian culture in Canada, and a political, commercial and cultural loss to Hungary.

We have started on building a revitalized church community that will survive into the next century of our parish.

Our builders initiated many worthwhile programs that have survived, and should survive. Much of our popular culture is focused on food. Food is not just a source of nourishment of the body, but has a great social significance. It establishes where we came from, and helps to provide a social setting where we can interact. Our Lord often spread his teaching at social occasions, and included meals as focal points of social interaction in his parables. The Eucharist itself is a re-enactment of a ceremonial meal.

Several of our social groups focus on the making of food, and consuming food in social settings: breakfasts, lunches, dinners and balls. Preparing these meals is a major undertaking, requiring professional skills. By nature of the Hungarian social customs, all of these events depend primarily on a slowly decreasing number of ageing predominantly female volunteers.

---

With the leadership of Ft. Sajgo we initiated a program to coordinate, and rationalize all of the programs run primarily by women. The new KNT (Katolikus Nők Társulata - Catholic Women's League) will ensure that activities of the different women's groups will be coordinated, and the work of all groups will be aided through cooperation based on understanding of the goals of each initiative, and eliminating potential conflicts in terms of the use of facilities and volunteers' time.

The "Young Married Couples' Club" has been one of the first, and most effective organizations in the church. With time they remained young in spirit, active and formed strong bonds of friendship among their members. The demographics have made the club more like the grandparents' club: an eminently viable, active member organization of the parish community. While they were and are always open to new members, it is hard to combine the fast lifestyle of today's business world with the traditional operational style of the club.

Clearly we have a large group of young families who share similar problems and aspirations. There is an initiative to activate a new, younger married couples/families club.

The many members of the church must get to know each other if we are to form a large, cohesive faith community. Introductions are awkward, and opportunities to meet new people are limited by time constraints, natural reticence and the urge to quickly meet with our own friends and acquaintances. While new parishioners are always welcome, it is not easy for them to find their way in a long established parish, which has many close-knit subgroups. To help bridge this problem the Welcoming Committee (Isten Hozott Csoport) was established. It is still trying to find ways of engage parishioners with each other, and the activities of the church. Hopefully the group will expand, and will find ways to reach all members of the parish, and involve them in the many worthwhile spiritual and social programs of the church.

A fine balance must be maintained between traditions, and modernization of the church. The Mass itself has evolved in the universal church, and within the Hungarian Church's interpretation. While we must carefully preserve traditions that have their roots in 1100 years of Hungarian Christian tradition, we must make these traditions relevant to today's, and tomorrow's believers. We have broadened the musical base of our services. A new "youth choir" was formed, which uses modern instruments, and sacred music developed in Hungary during the past three decades. This reflects the trend to modern, popular music in most of the Church, yet retains its strong roots in the Hungarian sacred music tradition. Classical sacred music is nurtured by the Scola Cantorum, while our cantor accompanies services by traditional Hungarian sacred music.

The 10.30 mass continues with traditional music, occasionally broadened by larger musical forces, such as the youth choir and the Scola Cantorum. Efforts are made on more solemn occasions to bring the full majesty of Catholic sacred music to the service.

The 12 o'clock mass is focused on more modern music, provided by the youth choir, and on younger (or young at heart) parishioners, who are less familiar with the Hungarian language. A part of this mass is now offered in English, while retaining the musical and procedural traditions of the Hungarian service.

Clearly, to attract back our parishioners in mixed marriages, and youth with limited or no Hungarian fluency, we need to make all services more accessible to all of our parish community. We plan to project the text of the service in English, when that part of the service is performed in Hungarian, and vice versa.

We have initiated a survey among those who visit the church only on the major feast days, to determine what would involve them more closely with the activities of the church.

In the future our pastor and clergy will require increased support in both the secular and worldly affairs of the parish. The new advisory council was established by Ft. Marosfalvy with the view to improving



communication between the parishioners and the clergy, and for providing expertise and support in the administration of the church. As this elected body matures, hopefully it will become more responsive to the needs of the parishioners, and will take on the management of specific tasks, relieving the clergy from many of the onerous problems that arise in the day to day running of this complex enterprise.

The foundation for a bright future has been laid by our predecessors, and the presently active members of our faith community. We need to seize the opportunities offered by the present to ensure that our children and grand children will find a home in our church, where they can enrich their cultural heritage and nourish their souls.

