

The Catholic Church in Canada has a young history that spans a little over 400 years.

Catholicism took root in Canada with the Europeans' arrival in the New World. On July 7, 1534, on the shores of the Gaspé peninsula, a French priest accompanying the explorer Jacques Cartier celebrated Mass for the first time on what was to become Canadian soil.

## **A Missionary Country**

Colonization began in New France with the founding of Quebec City in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain and the establishment of Ville-Marie, now Montreal, by Sieur Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve in 1642.

Many French religious congregations sent men and women to New France to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, thus beginning a major missionary initiative. The Recollect Franciscans, the Jesuits, the Ursulines, the Augustinians of the Mercy of Jesus\*, the Sulpician Fathers, and the Hospitallers of Saint-Joseph founded schools, set up hospitals and opened seminaries. Two major Canadian religious orders were founded: the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, by Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys in 1658, and the Sisters of Charity of Montréal (Grey Nuns), by Saint Marguerite d'Youville in 1737.

In 1658, Bishop François de Laval was named Apostolic Vicar for Canada. He later became the first Bishop in America. He was responsible for most of the territory which today covers Canada and the United States. In the early Church of the New World, six Jesuits and two lay associates were killed between 1642 and 1649 thus becoming martyrs.

## **From Atlantic to Pacific**

In 1759, despite the abolition of the French regime, after the defeat of the French forces at the hands of the British, the Catholic Church continued to grow. Many years later, with the restoration of rights for Catholics in Great Britain, the Church was able to expand into English Canada. The Archdiocese of Kingston was established in 1826, the Archdiocese of Toronto in 1841 and the Archdiocese of Ottawa in 1847. In 1841, the Act of Union gave the Church in Canada full legal standing.

In 1820, the episcopal district of the Red River was established; In 1871, it became the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface. This was the start of a large missionary endeavour by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Western and Northern Canada, particularly among the Aboriginal peoples. The Church was established from the Atlantic to the Pacific with the creation of dioceses in St. John's in 1784, Halifax in 1842, Victoria in 1846, and Vancouver in 1873.

## **The Rich Diversity of the Church in Canada**

The Eastern Churches have also played a major role in the development of the Catholic Church in Canada, especially in Western Canada, where there were large migrations of people from Eastern Europe, particularly from the Ukraine. Today, the Ukrainian Church is the largest of the Eastern Churches in Canada. Its founder, Bishop Nykyta Budka, was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2001. Other Eastern Churches in Canada serve Slovaks, Armenians, Greek-Melkites, Maronites, Syrians and Syro-Malabars.

## **A Canadian Portrait**

Canada is a vast territory with a northern climate. Most of the population is located along the country's southern border with the United States, leaving many large areas of the interior and north with few inhabitants. The Canadian society is a mosaic of many languages and cultures from around the world. As a reflection of its historical development, Canada is constitutionally bilingual, with English and French as the two recognized official languages. According to statistics from the Government of Canada, 83% of the population calls itself Christian. There are more than 30 Christian denominations in Canada. The major Christian Churches include Catholic, the United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Orthodox and Pentecostal. These Churches account for 91% of all Christians. Catholics in Canada account for more than half of all Christians. There are 71 dioceses in Canada, including the Military

Ordinariate and eight eparchies (jurisdictions of the Eastern Catholic Church).

\*In 1966 the order changed its name from the Hospitallers of St. Augustine of Mercy to officially adopt the name Augustinians of the Mercy of Jesus.

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