



# **THE CHAPEL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE:**

*AN ICON OF CHRISTIAN FAITH,  
PRAYER, AND SERVICE.*



*THIS CHAPEL IS GIVEN TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN  
THANKSGIVING FOR THE MINISTRY  
OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE*

*BY THE REV. MARGARET E. AND DR. JAMES D. FLECK*



*Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you,  
for the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)*

Welcome to this house of prayer, dedicated to the Glory of God and in the name of St. John, the “divine” or the “theologian.” While contemporary Biblical criticism suggests that there may have been several Johns in the New Testament, the Sisterhood has traditionally looked for inspiration to the author of the Gospel of John, the Letters of John, and the Book of Revelation. You will see in this chapel and its surroundings evidence of all the “Johns.”



You will also see works of art and furnishings that were created over a period of many years – some old, some new. Some were created for the Sisterhood’s first long-term Convent and Chapel, built in 1892 on Major Street in downtown Toronto. Many of these works of Christian art were later moved to our second long-term Chapel, on Botham Road, in 1956. Some of the items were created for the Botham Road chapel and moved to our new Chapel last year. One item (the font) was a gift from another church. And some features were created especially for this beautiful new Chapel of St. John the Divine, designed by the architectural firm of Montgomery Sisam.

The five angels in front of the lobby windows were originally in the Convent chapel on Major Street, were incorporated into the Narthex of the Botham Road Chapel, and have been installed here in the Lobby of the new Convent – to remind all who come of the protection of God’s angels. They also remind us of the importance of music in the life and worship of the Sisterhood.

Opposite the angels, you will see a large icon of St. John on Patmos, written by Fr. Felix, a Romanian Orthodox priest, in honour of Bishop Henry Hill, who lived with the Sisters for many years and was the Anglican co-chair of the Anglican-Orthodox International Dialogue. Like all icons, this one is highly symbolic, depicting on the right the Sisters’ previous Convent on Botham Road, and on the left some buildings on Patmos, the island where according to legend St. John was exiled, and where he received the Revelation contained in the final book of the Bible.

However, you will notice that the scribe is writing “In the beginning was the Word” – the opening words of the Gospel of John. On one of the scrolls on the right, you will see the words “Do whatever he tells you” – the words that Mary spoke to the servants at the Wedding in Cana, when Jesus turned the water into wine. On another scroll you will see the words “Love one another,” from the First Letter of John.



In this icon we have in one representation the whole Johannine tradition – from the Revelation, the Gospel, and the Letters. It is an icon of the Sisterhood’s spirituality, which is based on St. John’s inspiration to us to pursue the “vision of heaven and the life of love.”

And so as you enter this chapel, you may want to imagine yourself in company with the saints, and particularly with one or more close friends of Jesus – the Johns – whose spirit of prayer, close friendship with Jesus, and celebration of the love of God has inspired the life and ministry of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine.



As you turn toward the chapel itself you will see, on the threshold of the narthex and chapel, the limestone baptismal font. It stands on the axis between the hearth and the altar, symbolizing the link between the secular and sacred, the transformation of our lives in Jesus Christ, and our call as Christians to embrace and protect all of God’s creation.

The font was created for St. George’s United Church in 1924, became part of the merged church Eglinton-St. George, and then was donated to the Sisterhood in 2004.

You will see both stones and water in the font. The stones are a reminder that as beautiful as a church building may be, it is a “spiritual temple” we are called to build – a community of “living stones” where all are welcomed as Christ himself.

Please choose a Living Stone from the baptismal font on your way out of Chapel. Keep it as a reminder to pray for the Sisters as we live into God’s vision for us in this new Chapel and convent. Keep it as a reminder that we also pray for you — our friends, family and visitors.



*Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)*

You will notice three significant limestone pieces in the narthex and chapel: As you enter the narthex, you will see on the right the limestone surround of the fireplace: this was originally the fireplace surround in the Rev. Mother’s office in the Botham Road Convent. It was reconstructed here as a reminder that before our baptism, our Christian journey begins at the hearth – in the homes where we were born and nurtured from infancy, and where we return for comfort and friendship. The new fireplace is gas-burning, so that Sisters and guests may easily turn it on and off, to enjoy its light and warmth while reading or meditating.



The limestone altar was given in 1956 as a memorial to Sister Katherine (d. 1953). It was designed by the Toronto artist Jacobine Jones, and its three carved panels depict three feminine images of God:



*The Phoenix, a symbol of the Resurrection, as the Phoenix sacrifices herself and is reborn out of the ashes.*



*The Pelican, a symbol of the Atonement, as a mother Pelican is said to feed her babies from the blood of her own breast when food is scarce.*



*The Eagle, a symbol of the Ascension: here you see a mother Eagle teaching her babies to fly toward the sun.*

The altar is the climax of our journey from the hearth, through the waters of baptism, to the altar which represents both sacrifice (as we are called to take up our cross and follow Christ) and the nourishment that Christ gives in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. As we gather together around the altar at the time of Communion, we understand the meaning of "living stones, being built into a spiritual house."

***The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come."  
And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:17, 20)***

In the Book of Revelation, John the Divine presents a picture of the newly-born Christian church – a vision which challenges Christians to live the values of the Gospel, and draws us deeply into the mystery of union with God.

The book ends with this invitation of Jesus to us, “Come!” and is answered by that most primitive cry of the human heart to God – “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” Come into our lives, our hearts, our communities; and bring us into your presence.

The Sisters’ dedication to contemplative prayer as well as to public worship is reflected in this chapel which is full of the light of God.

The overall asymmetrical shape of the chapel was designed by the architect to reflect the hands of God enclosing the space in a protective intimacy that creates a sense of safety and security.

As you stand in the centre of the choir and look toward the north wall of the chapel, you will see twelve windows of abstract design. Gold toward the bottom, blending into green in the middle, and blue at the top, they remind us of the golden brown earth on which we live, the green plants which sustain our life, and the blue sky which raises our eyes to heaven.

As you raise your eyes to look through the high north window, you can see the sky with clouds and sunshine in the daytime and the softer light of moon and stars at night.

If you look toward the opposite (south) side of the choir, you will see the light from these windows reflected off the basket-weave pattern of the acoustically designed beech ceiling, reminding us of the way light and shadow interweave in our lives, and the way the love of God sustains us on our life’s journey.



*These windows were originally designed for the Chapel of the Holy Spirit in our previous Convent on Botham Road by the architects – Brown, Brisley, & Brown – and executed by Excelsior Glass Company. Inset as they are in this chapel, with the white surround, they display the beauty and colour of God’s world reflected in this house of prayer.*



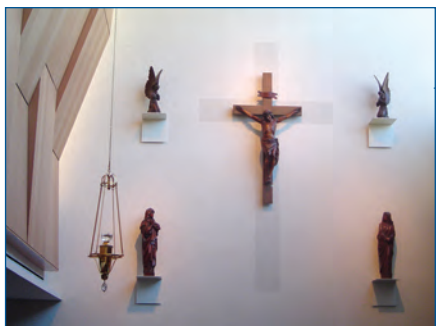
The tracker-action (fully mechanical) organ was made possible by a generous anonymous donor, who asked only that a plaque be placed on the organ saying "Given to the Glory of God."

The organ was built by Hal Gober Organs of Elora, Ontario. Architecturally it was designed to complement the beauty and intimacy of the chapel and echoes the asymmetrical shape of the chapel. Acoustically it was designed to provide both quiet accompaniment for chant, and a full range of tonal colours both for accompanying hymns and for playing classic organ literature.



Creative engineering was required to place the organ high on the wall opposite the altar, where the sound would project the best, while finding a way to connect the mechanical trackers with the keyboard (which normally would be directly under the pipes on a tracker organ) which can be seen behind the glass-fronted music rack.

Musically, the organ contains sets of pipes from every colour group in the organ's palette. It is capable of great dynamic variation while respecting the silence of its setting. The pipes themselves are a metaphor of the people of God.



Above the altar, you will see a crucifix (a cross with the body of Jesus hanging upon it), the figures of John and Mary – who according to scripture remained at the foot of the cross until Jesus died – and two protecting angels. All the figures except the angels were carved in Oberammergau, Germany. The angels were carved to match, in Exeter, England, by Herbert Read. The figures were originally on the rood screen in the Major Street Chapel (the screen

which separated the nave from the choir), and later were installed on the east wall of the Botham Road Chapel much as you see them here in the new chapel.

The Sanctuary Lamp hanging from the ceiling is a sign of the sacramental presence of Christ in the Chapel and signifies that the Tabernacle on the wall behind it contains the consecrated bread of the Eucharist. The Lamp was originally designed and executed by Harold Stacey for the Botham Road Chapel, and given by Associate Isabel Lawson in memory of her husband Wendell Lawson. In 2002, the artist's daughter, Callie Stacey, had the lamp regilded as a gift to the Sisterhood, and it was rededicated at that time.

The Tabernacle to the left of the altar holds the Blessed Sacrament. Some of the consecrated bread from the Eucharist is reserved here for use when needed for ministry to the sick.

If you proceed toward the right, through the glass door behind the altar, you will discover a beautiful “Lady Chapel” – a chapel dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The altar was originally the high altar in the Major Street Chapel. It is crafted of solid oak and was given as a memorial to Sister Ada (d. 1906).

In front of the large window, you will see an unusual stained glass window, dedicated to the memory of the Sisterhood’s first warden, the Rev. Ogden P. Ford. The top panel depicts John taking Mary to his home after the crucifixion. This is a rare subject in stained glass, and is a kind of icon of the Sisterhood’s ministry of hospitality. The inscription under the top panel says “In Pious Memory of the Priest O. P. Ford, Beloved Warden of this Society, September 8, 1884” (our Foundation day).

The five panels below depict five scenes in the life of Mary and Jesus: the Annunciation, the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, the Nativity, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple by Simeon, and the Purification of Mary, who is seen bringing the doves of offering at the time of the Presentation. Under the Nativity window is an inscription which says “He gathers the Lambs in his arms” – a reference to the prophecy (Isaiah 40.11) that the Child in Mary’s arms would become a shepherd to his people.

*Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”*  
(Luke 1:38)



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you walk behind the Mary window and look at the outside wall of the chapel, you will see a statue of St. John, carved by Jacobine Jones in 1956 for the Botham Road Chapel. Both the statue and the window create a much more intimate perspective than they did in the Botham Road Chapel, where they were placed high up on the wall. They remind us of that continual “Come,” that Jesus speaks to us and that we speak to God, as we seek a relationship of intimacy with the Divine.

The Lady Chapel, like the narthex, is open to all for prayer and meditation. The lobby is a place of welcome and gathering. The soft seating in the lobby and narthex has been donated by the DeBoer family. The chapel seats were designed and built by Valley City. The prayer desks were designed by Donald Allen



The bell tower, which calls us to worship three times daily, was given by Mr. T. Richard and Mrs. Thelma Davies, and dedicated to the memory of Rev. Dr. Thomas R. Davies, M.C., D.D., B.A. 1905 - 1987. The bell itself was given in 1911, in memory of Alan MacLean Howard, by his daughter. It was later moved to the Botham Road Chapel before being installed here in the new bell tower.

### Some other features of the Chapel that you will notice on your tour:

The Vestry, Sacristy, and Chapel Office are all off the passageway behind the Chapel, and have been carefully designed to make the work of planning and executing liturgy, and caring for the vessels of the altar, as beautiful and efficient as possible.

If you tour the Vestry, you will discover some beautiful traditional vestments made by Sister Joanna in the 1950's and 1960's. You will also find some beautiful vestments of contemporary design, including a chasuble made of Cloth of Gold brought back from Damascus by Bishop Hill as a gift to the Sisters, and one of Korean silk given to the Sisters by the Order of the Holy Cross in Seoul, Korea.

The aumbry in the passageway was a memorial to Sister Eva (d. 1935), and was designed for the Major Street Chapel where it was used for the reserved sacrament. In this new Chapel, it holds the holy oils used for healing and for baptism (as it did on Botham Road).



Also in the passageway is an interesting collection of icons, which are displayed in the chapel at different times of the year. One of the oldest, of the Virgin and Child, was given to the Sisters by the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch in the late 1970s. The newest was written by Brother James Koester, SSJE, and presented to the Sisterhood by the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The chimes at the entrance to the Chapel were originally in the Chapel on Major Street and later at Botham Road.

The worship that takes place in this beautiful chapel is only as valid as the loving ministry that flows out of it. The Sisters' mission in the Guest House and at St. John's Rehab Hospital next door is a ministry of welcome and hospitality. We pray that all we do may be for the Glory of God.

*I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to*

*drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. (Matthew 25:35-37)*

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