

Thomas Barrett Armstrong

1929 - 2009

Monsignor Thomas Barrett Armstrong, P.H., A.R.C.T., B.A., L.C.G., L.C.S.C., a priest of the Archdiocese of Toronto, a graduate of St. Michael's Choir School, served the archdiocese for many years as Director of Music for St. Michael's Cathedral, Toronto, Ontario.

In 1942, Monsignor Armstrong came to St. Michael's Choir School as a student, where he received his early training in music. After completing studies in philosophy and theology at St. Augustine's Seminary he was ordained a priest in 1955. He then studied for three years at the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome, under the tutelage of Monsignor Domenico Bartolucci, the conductor of the Sistine Chapel Choir and Dom Cardine, eminent Gregorian scholar from Solesmes. While in Rome he obtained Licentiate Degrees in Gregorian Chant and Sacred Composition.

He returned to the Choir School in 1958 where he continued to work closely with the founder and director, Monsignor John Edward Ronan. In 1962 he succeeded Monsignor Ronan as Director of Music for St. Michael's Cathedral and Choral Director at the Choir School.

As a dedicated and selfless teacher and choir director from 1958 to 2004, he engendered a love for music in the hearts of hundreds of students who passed through St. Michael's Choir School. Many of his students went on to careers in music, either in the service of the church, in education, in composition, or on the concert stage. Humour was a constant element in his teaching style, the pun being a favourite device.

In his forty year tenure as Director of Music, he regularly conducted the choirs in weekly services at St. Michael's Cathedral, as well as in concerts, recordings and tours across Canada, in the United States, the Caribbean and in Europe. He composed a great deal of music for the liturgy. Some of his psalm settings, for example, have been used across North America. He oversaw the music for the National Televised Daily Mass, and wrote a setting of the psalm for every day of the two-year cycle of daily readings.

Monsignor Armstrong has been above all an exemplary priest of the Church, a person whose devout Catholic faith is reflected in every facet of his life. He has always been generous to the needy and underprivileged, and has been a consistent supporter of the pro-life movement. He was awarded the Papal medal "Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice" in 1987; the Catholic High School Commission's Award of Merit in 1990; and was invested as a Prelate of Honour (Monsignor) in 1992.

In addition to his work at the Choir School, Monsignor Armstrong served on the national committee which produced the first and second Catholic Book of Worship. He has been actively involved with the Knights of Columbus and the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre.

In September 2002, Monsignor Armstrong received the Queen's Jubilee Medal for his contribution to music in Canada. He was named Conductor Emeritus of the choir in 2003, and retired in 2004. At the time of his death Monsignor was living at the Houses of Providence in Scarborough.