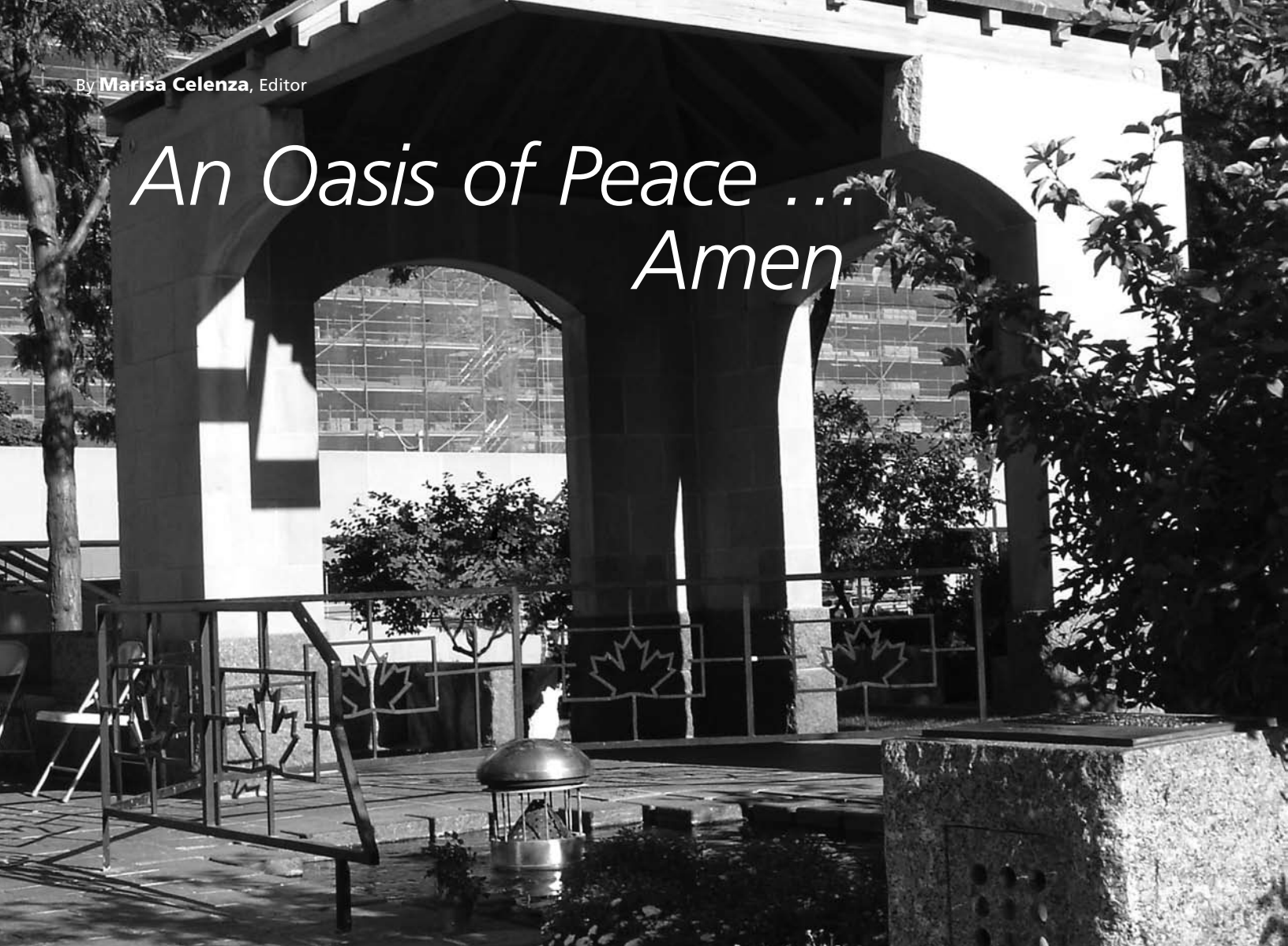


# An Oasis of Peace ... Amen



In the fast-paced hustle and bustle of downtown Toronto, there is a little known oasis of peace and tranquillity, the Peace Garden. The Peace Garden sits in the square of Toronto's City Hall, giving residents and visitors the opportunity for a retreat from their hurry. The commemorative plaque at the Peace Garden states:

*This Peace Garden represents the desire of the people of Toronto for peace among the nations and peoples of the world. The structure in the gardens symbolizes shelter and community and with its incomplete roof, the vulnerability of our efforts to achieve peace. The eternal flame is our hope; the water represents our faith in the renewal of life.*

Toronto's Father Massey Lombardi convinced Toronto city council in 1983 to support the idea of a Peace Garden. On March 5, 1984, during the city's sesquicentennial (150th anniversary) celebrations, then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau turned the first sod for the Peace Garden's construction.

In September 1984, His Holiness Pope John Paul II lit the eternal flame in the Peace Garden with an ember from the Memorial for Peace in Hiroshima, Japan. The Holy Father poured a vial of water from the rivers that flow through Nagasaki into the pool.

Father Massey personally travelled to Japan and carried the embers from Hiroshima and the water from Nagasaki to Toronto. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II formally dedicated the Peace Garden in October 1984.

Father Massey's dream became a reality. The Peace Garden idea developed from Father Massey's work when he was the director of Social Action for the Archdiocese of Toronto. In 1981 he initiated a series of discussions on Race Relations and Multiculturalism in the Metro Toronto area and with the Metropolitan Separate School Board (now the Toronto Catholic District School Board), which resulted in the development of their Race and Ethnic Relations and Multiculturalism Policy.

The Peace Garden symbolizes the desire for peace and understanding among all peoples and reflects the Toronto Catholic District School Board's (TCDSB's) Mission and Vision for all of its students and staff. In particular, it speaks to the tenets of its initial Race and Ethnic Relations and Multiculturalism Policy that embraces the board's diverse student population and teaches respect and understanding for the racial, ethnic and cultural plurality of its school communities and society.



On September 29, 2009, more than 4,000 Catholic students gathered at Nathan Phillips Square to commemorate the silver anniversary of the Peace Garden. The event was hosted by the TCDSB and attracted many speakers including: the Most Reverend Archbishop Thomas Collins, archbishop of Toronto; the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, minister of education; and His Worship David Miller, mayor of Toronto. Twenty-five years after Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau turned the sod to launch the Peace Garden, his son, the Honourable Justin Trudeau, Member of Parliament delivered the keynote address. Hiroshima survivor Setsuko Thurlow also spoke to the students of her experiences. Ann Perron, TCDSB director of education and Father Massey provided the closing remarks. Students from the TCDSB also played a prominent role in the celebration, not only as participants, but also as the Masters of Ceremony, in the choirs, bands and the theatrical presentation. Students addressed the topic of peace and what it means to them. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Peace Garden celebration served as a commemoration and recommitment to peace, harmony and non-violence in the world and in our communities.

Grade 7 students from Epiphany of Our Lord Catholic Academy wrote thank you letters to Father Massey. Three areas were highlighted repeatedly in the letters, Justin Trudeau's message, Setsuko Thurlow's reflections and Father Massey's role in initiating the Peace Garden.

Trudeau's talk entitled, *Peace and Harmony in our Communities and the World* focused on peace, race relations and multiculturalism. His words and sincerity truly touched the students and they took his message to heart. He encouraged students to take action today to become peacemakers and leaders. He suggested that by making small peace actions every day, they would contribute to a more peaceful world and become leaders today, not tomorrow.

Several students recounted Hiroshima survivor Setsuko Thurlow's story. She was 4,550 kilometres from the bombsite. She told students that she had to go to the nearest river to wash the blood and dirt from her body. Then she ripped off her shirt and soaked it in water to carry to the dying people. Students were touched by the fact that she was their age when she experienced the bombing of Hiroshima.

Lastly, students thanked Father Massey for his role in bringing the flame from Hiroshima and the water from Nagasaki to Toronto, for initiating the Peace Garden and for his part in the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

Father Massey told the 4,000 students gathered in Nathan Philip Square that it was so inspiring and uplifting to be celebrating 25 years of the Peace Garden. He was inspired by the number of young people who were listening fervently to messages of peace, love and hope. Father Massey said he had the same feeling as when he gave the flame from Hiroshima and the water from Nagasaki to Pope John Paul II 25 years ago. He reiterated the messages of the previous speakers and told the students:

*You are the peacemakers blessed by the Almighty God and Our Lord Jesus Christ with power, not the power that destroys and tears down but a power that heals and makes whole. A power that brings hope, that inspires and is life giving. A power that motivates, transforms and helps make people grow to their full potential. A power that can make our community, country and the world a better place. A power that can transform actions into acts of peace, of love, of justice, of compassion, of forgiveness, of faith, of hope and of solidarity.*

*These actions happen when we identify with those who suffer violence, injustice, poverty, sickness, addictions, racism, discrimination, conflict, hunger and homelessness. When we identify with those who are "not us", when we commit ourselves to walking in the shoes of those whose feet are bruised and swollen and blistered, when those whom we too often see as objects, as things, we learn to see as subjects, as human beings like ourselves.*

Ann Perron, TCDSB director of education, said, "This celebration delivers a message of peace and hope that we all pray for in our schools, in our communities and in the world."

As part of the celebrations, the TCDSB launched a new program that will create 400 Peace Ambassadors who will further the peace initiative in Toronto Catholic schools.

Father Massey would like to see this program, *Peace...Amen* extend throughout the province. He envisions Urban Peace Camps, where peace ambassadors from each school will come together to share, discuss and celebrate their peace initiatives. He concluded his remarks with the following:

*We must never forget that there is only one race, the human race, one family, the human family. We must never forget that this good earth on which we live and are nourished must be protected and cared for. You are the light of the world and salt of the earth.*

*Peace Amen, Peace Amen.*