CHAPTER 3
THE ERA OF
RALPH HUBERT DIGNAN: THE BUILDER, 1934-1958

Bishop Ralph Hubert Dignan served as Bishop of Sault Ste. Marie during two papacies: those of Pius XI (1922-1939) and Pius XII (1939-1958). Until 1952, his territory continued to include Port Arthur and Fort William (now Thunder Bay) but with the population increase, the Vatican created a new Diocese that year for those parts of Ontario west of the District of Algoma. Like his predecessor, Bishop Dignan faced opposition from Ottawa’s *Le Droit* (as well as from Montreal’s *L’Illustration* and *Le Travailleur* of Manchester, New Hampshire.) None of these newspapers thought that there should have been a second bishop of Irish extraction in the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie, especially one whose mentor had been the notorious Bishop of London, Michael Fallon, so responsible for Regulation XVII.¹ For his part, Bishop Dignan could and did speak French, in public and in private, but he deplored what he regarded as French Canadian nationalism. In 1936, a French Canadian sought dispensation to marry his half-sister, with whom he had sired a child. When Dignan responded negatively, the man accused him of prejudice against French Canadians. Dignan commented: “Nationalism is a curse. It blinds men to the truth.”²

In September 1935, Bishop Dignan made an episcopal visit to what he called a “strictly French” parish in Hanmer. Hoping to make a favourable impression on the bishop, the parish priest–whom Dignan described as “a most ardent nationalist”–arranged for everyone to speak to the bishop in English. On this occasion, Dignan responded entirely in French and refused to “speak English...at all.”³

Nevertheless, historian Robert Choquette is particularly harsh on Bishop Dignan. “If the

¹. Rev. Gregory Humbert also edited Bishop Dignan’s Journal, copies of which are available in the diocesan archives in North Bay. For this reference, see p. 7. Cited hereafter as Dignan Journal. For further evidence of francophone opposition to the appointment of Bishop Dignan, see Choquette, *La Foi*, pp. 65-66.
². Dignan Journal, p. 93.
francophones of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie,” he wrote, “distrusted Bishop Scollard, it would be no exaggeration to say that they detested Dignan.” In 1941, Judge Symaune Plouffe complained to the Apostolic Delegate that Bishop Dignan must take responsibility for the disproportionate number of anglophone priests in the Diocese: 51 out of 80. Some of those 51 were pastors of French-language parishes, and Bishop Dignan was much more zealous in finding English-speaking priests than ones who were fluent in French. In 1949, a North Bay priest, Father J.A. Chapleau, accused Bishop Dignan of inappropriate priorities. Since his arrival in 1935, charged Father Chapleau, the number of priests of “British” (presumably including “Irish”) origin had increased from 29 to 65, while the number of French-speaking clergy had fallen from 43 to 42. In 1948, Sudbury’s 10,000 francophones had two parishes, while its 7,000 anglophones and allophones had four. The French-speaking churches were over-crowded, but Bishop Dignan was slow to erect new ones. Monsignor (Msgr) Racette of Verner accused Bishop Dignan of maintaining a double standard. If 75 to 200 anglophone families wanted a parish, he would create one, but francophones needed a minimum of 300.

A movement to create a separate French-language diocese within the districts of Nipissing and Sudbury attracted the attention of some important people. A petition to Pope Pius XII for such a diocese, whose cathedral city would be Sudbury, went forward 22 March 1948 over the signatures of Senator J. Raoul Hurtubise of Sudbury, Judge J.A.S. Plouffe of North Bay, Léoda Gauthier (Member of Parliament for Nipissing), and J.A. Lapalme (president of the Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario). They noted that of 27 parishes within the districts of Nipissing and Sudbury, 17 were entirely French Canadian; five were bilingual, with a French Canadian majority; and five had substantial francophone minorities. Giovanni Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, received the document in Rome, but nothing came of it.\(^4\)

Another voice of complaint was that of a Jesuit later involved in the creation of the University of Sudbury, Alphonse Raymond. A typed testimonial of his noted that in 1946, two-

\(^4\): Choquette, *La Foi*, pp. 66-70. The quotation comes from p. 66.
thirds of the Roman Catholics of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie spoke French, but that there was a critical shortage of French-speaking priests. For this situation he blamed Bishop Dignan. Bishop Dignan, charged Father Raymond, welcomed priests of Irish extraction but rejected any and all francophones from outside the Diocese.\(^5\)

Like his predecessor, Bishop Dignan faced some formidable challenges to travel around the Diocese. In June 1935, he was travelling by launch down the Goulais River toward Lake Superior. The trip down the river was enjoyable, but at its mouth the waves were so formidable that he expected to capsize and drown.\(^6\) In September of that same year, he was supposed to cross Lake Huron from Wikwemikong on the Manitoulin Island to Killarney, again in very rough water. To his great relief, the motor boat would not start and he went to bed suffering from a cold. Hospitable Jesuits offered him a glass of brandy (for medicinal purposes), the first liquor he had had within the Diocese, he said, since becoming bishop. Ten minutes later a boat appeared. Bishop Dignan had to rise from bed and cross the open water to Killarney, where he arrived at 11:45 p.m., reeking of alcohol.\(^7\)

The following year, Bishop Dignan boarded a small aircraft for a flight from Orient Bay to a mission station at Sand Point. Just before takeoff at 6 a.m., a woman from the reserve appeared at the door and said that she was going too. The woman identified herself as Father Couture’s organist and said that he wanted her to direct the choir at Sand Point. Given the limited space, she spent much of the flight on Bishop Dignan’s knee. The plane landed safely and the Mass took place, but there was no music. When Bishop Dignan asked Father Couture about this, the latter replied, “Unfortunately we have no organ or organist in this little mission.” At that point, Bishop Dignan realized that the passenger “had put one over on” him and his party.\(^8\)

\(^5\). Alphonse Raymond, “Mes Souvenirs”, included in Histoire des fondations de paroisses du diocèse de Sault Ste. Marie (a desk-top collection, available only at the library of the University of Sudbury).

\(^6\). Dignan Journal, p. 29.

\(^7\). Dignan Journal, p. 42.

\(^8\). Dignan Journal, pp. 82-83.
Not all Bishop Dignan’s duties presented hardship. On 21 May 1936, he attended a banquet to honour the Dionne Quintuplets (born 1934) and their doctor, Allan Roy Dafoe. David Croll, an Ontario cabinet minister, was also there.\(^9\)

**Diocesan Politics and International Diplomacy:**

Historians frequently criticize Pius XI for allowing his Secretary of State, Cardinal Pacelli –who in 1939 would become Pope Pius XII– for concluding a Concordat in 1933 with Nazi Germany and thereby granting some degree of respectability to Hitler’s régime.\(^10\) Pius XI remained silent when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia 3 October 1935, but some high ranking Italian clergy cheered their country’s war effort.\(^11\)

Pius XII’s reputation has suffered greatly because of what he did and did not do before and during World War II. His silence on the Holocaust was but one of many problems. Nor would it be fair to ignore the reality that Mussolini’s Italy, an ally of Hitler’s Germany, surrounded Vatican City and could easily have overrun it. Nevertheless, on Good Friday, 7 April 1939, Mussolini’s forces invaded Albania. Pius XII ignored the invasion in his highly publicized Easter sermon. One week later, Pius XII broadcast a message to the Spanish people after Generalíssimo Francisco Franco—whose rebel forces had received substantial military assistance from Mussolini and Hitler—defeated Spanish Republican forces. Spain’s civil war had lasted almost three years, since July 1936. Spain’s short-lived Republican government had been democratic, but it had also been anti-clerical. Taking office in 1931, it had separated Church and state and often turned a blind eye as arsonists torched church buildings and assassins killed

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\(^9\) Dignan Journal, pp. 77-78.

\(^10\) One of the most outspoken of such critics has been Cornwell, pp. 130-156. One who has been far more laudatory of Pius XII’s behaviour toward the Hitler and Mussolini régimes is David Alvarez, *Spies in the Vatican: Espionage and Intrigue from Napoleon to the Holocaust* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

\(^11\) Cornwell, p. 175. See also Duffy, p. 343.
members of the clergy. When Franco triumphed, Pius XII expressed his own “immense joy” and congratulated Spaniards on “the victory which God has bestowed”. Throughout September 1939, as Hitler’s forces invaded Poland and massacred Poles, most of them Roman Catholics, Pius XII remained silent.

While the behaviour of some individuals may have been less than praiseworthy, recent scholarship has recorded that many Roman Catholic clergy were truly heroic. Throughout occupied Europe, convents and orphanages served as hiding places for children. Jewish children received baptismal certificates and learned “Hail Marys”, not because anyone wanted to convert them but in order to deceive Nazis. By 1944, according to British historian Martin Gilbert, “all the monasteries and churches were filled with Jews disguised as monks and nuns.” Indeed, Assisi claimed “the only convent in the world with a kosher kitchen”. Polish peasants risked their own lives to assist strangers.

Like these unsung heroes, Bishop Dignan was no friend of Hitler or Mussolini. Opposed to what he considered excessive French Canadian nationalism, he strongly disliked excessive German and Italian nationalism. In September 1936, the year when Hitler sent troops into the

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12. One of the most authoritative books on the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) has been the one by Hugh Thomas (subsequently elevated to the British House of Lords), *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961).


Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Bishop Dignan stopped in Munich while on his way to Rome. “Preparations for war were in the air,” he wrote. “There was more military activity in Germany then than in Canada even during the Great War [World War I].”

As Italians were considerably more numerous than Germans within the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie, Bishop Dignan had more problems with Mussolini’s Italy than with Hitler’s Germany, at least before the outbreak of war. From 1927 to 1936, Monsignor Andrea Cassulo arrived in Canada as the Vatican’s Apostolic Delegate. In the words of Bishop Dignan, from the moment of Cassulo’s arrival, the Apostolic Delegate “had been pestering” him to appoint clergy of the Stigmatini order to positions in North Bay and Sudbury, even if he had to dismiss some of the clergy who were already there. Bishop Dignan had several objections. At first he was unfamiliar with the Stigmatini, but the more he knew about them, the less he liked them. They were tools of Fascist Italy, supported by Commandatore Luigi Petrucci, Italian consul-general in Ottawa. (Canada and Italy would not exchange ambassadors until after World War II.) Petrucci, the highest ranking representative of Mussolini’s government, wanted to replace the priests at Canada’s Italian-language parishes with admirers of Italian Fascism, and he managed to win the co-operation of Monsignor Cassulo. Bishop Dignan regarded as reprehensible the idea that Mussolini’s government should dictate to the Church, and unpleasant as he found the experience, Dignan was fully prepared to defy Cassulo, the Vatican’s representative. Moreover, Bishop Dignan felt a sense of responsibility to the priests who had served the Church well, and he was particularly determined to retain one recently ordained Rev. Joseph Salini, who had been born and raised within the Diocese. Dignan wrote: “The Delegate [Cassulo] and Petrucci object to my naming to Sudbury an excellent Italian priest, Father Salini. The trouble is, he was born in this diocese and is not a strong nationalist and is not shouting ‘Viva Mussonini!’ For this crime they are trying to prevent his being named to Sudbury.”

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Early in 1936, the Rev. Peter Truffa had arrived from New York State to become a parish priest in Sudbury. Cassulo told the Archbishop of Regina, who informed Dignan, that “he was going to thoroughly investigate Father Truffa’s character.” For his part, Consul-General Petrucci said that the Stigmatini would be coming to the Diocese with or without an invitation. Bishop Dignan wrote, “These Italians are certainly nervy.” Dignan rejoiced when Canada’s Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, told the House of Commons that he would declare Petrucci persona non grata (i.e. force him to leave Canada) unless he stopped “abusing his privilege as Consul-General.”

As the months passed, the pressure increased, and Bishop Dignan refused to accept Stigmatini in either North Bay or Sudbury. Then Cassulo and Petrucci tried to replace Father Murray in Fort William, and again Bishop Dignan blocked the way. Bishop Dignan sought to correct an historical anachronism which left responsibility for Northern Ontario’s Sisters of St. Joseph with the Bishop of Peterborough. So determined was Petrucci to make the Italian parishes “centres of Fascism”, Bishop Dignan complained, that he persuaded Cassulo not to approve their transfer to the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie. Bishop Dignan expressed delight 14 June 1936 when he heard that the Vatican was transferring Cassulo to Romania.

As it was, Fascist influence among the local Italian community was, at most, limited. One Dr. L. Pancaro headed the Sudbury Fascist organization in 1935 when Mussolini launched his invasion of Ethiopia. The Sudbury Star quoted him as saying that no Italians from Sudbury, 99% of whom he estimated had become Canadians, would be participating in that war. They were interested in the conflict, said Dr. Pancaro, but not to the point where they would want to participate. Bishop Dignan’s position on the Stigmatini guaranteed that parishes of the Diocese

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18. These words and interpretations are those of Bishop Dignan. The words of Mackenzie King are not quite so precise, but the general meaning is what Bishop Dignan thought it was; Canada, House of Commons Debates, 2 March 1936, p. 684.


would not encourage participation in the conflict.

**Bishop Dignan and Certain Religious Orders:**

When Hitler’s armies defeated France in June 1940 and established a German-friendly government based at Vichy in southwestern France, many saw a silver lining. Some French clergy saw France’s defeat as divine punishment for the sins of the Third Republic (noted in Chapter II), and called Marshal Philippe Pétain, head of the Vichy régime, “Sauveur de la Patrie”. Cardinal Gerlier declared, “Pétain c’est la France et la France, c’est Pétain.”.  

Pétain’s government rescinded the laws which banned crucifixes from classrooms, and crucifixes began to reappear both inside and outside school buildings. As far as some believers were concerned, a government with such policies could not be entirely bad. There certainly were consequences within the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie itself. In 1942, the last year when Canada maintained diplomatic relations with Vichy France, Guillaume Belcourt, S.J., a teacher at Sudbury’s Collège Sacré Cœur, wrote to René Ristelhueber, Minister (chief diplomat) at the French Legation (small scale embassy) in Ottawa. Graduation ceremonies were approaching, and Father Belcourt reminded Ristelhueber that the Legation had established a tradition of donating books to some of the graduates. Under the circumstances, Belcourt wondered, would there be a donation in 1942? If the Legation was unable to be generous, Belcourt assured Ristelhueber, the Jesuits would certainly understand. However, Belcourt ended with the comment that even if there were to be no books that year, the letter offered the Jesuits an opportunity to express their admiration for Pétain’s government.  

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23. The Canadian government did not trust the representatives of Vichy France not to reveal military secrets to Hitler’s Germany. Accordingly, it hired officials to intercept mail to and from the Legation in Ottawa and Vichy France’s consular posts across the country. These officials
Bishop Dignan appreciated Jesuit achievements but questioned much of what they were doing. The Jesuits, French Canadians, did not want to anglicize the Indians at their mission posts, and this he believed to be unrealistic. If the First Nations people were to prosper, they must learn English. Also, the Jesuits were too tolerant when the First Nations people did not attend Mass regularly, and Bishop Dignan thought that they should accept the authority of any priest, not just the Jesuits. The Jesuits did not always co-operate with, or even provide shelter for, secular clergy. Many were “too old” for their work. Some were “rabid” French Canadian nationalists “who kept the people in a perpetual turmoil on racial matters.” For better or for worse, and Dignan thought that it was for the better, the Jesuits were gradually transferring their responsibilities to the Diocese.

Another order which Bishop Dignan questioned was that of the Daughters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who taught school at the Garden River Indian Reserve near Sault Ste. Marie. That order had begun in 1790, during the French Revolution, when identification of oneself as a member of a religious order might mean a trip to the guillotine. Accordingly, it was part of their tradition for members to wear secular clothing and to keep membership a secret, even from their parents and other clergy. Bishop Dignan found this “ridiculous”. Their out-of-style clothing marked them as distinctive, he noted, and their neighbours referred to them as “the Sisters” and to their home as “the Convent”. They were fooling no one. Their work was good, but the order was disappearing. In view of the lack of recruits, the Daughters had already withdrawn from Nipigon, Fort William, West Bay, and other places. In 1953, members of the

purloined the letters from the mail, read, copied, and, when necessary, deciphered them, then sealed the letters shut and sent them to their destinations. The letter from Guillaume Belcourt, S.J., to René Ristelhueber was one of those intercepted letters. The intercepted letters are now available at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa; Record Group 25, G1, vols. 1924-1927.

Order received permission to declare themselves publicly—in large measure because it was next to impossible to attract new recruits into an entity which had to pretend that it did not exist.\(^3^0\)

Nevertheless, Bishop Dignan believed that religious orders had a place. The Sisters of St. Joseph resembled Martha of the New Testament (Luke 10: 38-42.); they were busy women who nursed in hospitals and taught the young. They had arrived at Port Arthur in 1881 and served throughout what would become the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie, where they continue to serve. While the English-speaking Sisters of St. Joseph laboured at Sudbury’s Immaculate Heart of Mary Hospital (later the Sudbury General Hospital), French-speaking Sisters of Charity at Ottawa (also known as Grey Nuns of the Cross) operated Sudbury’s St. Joseph’s Hospital. A third group in the tradition of Martha was the English-speaking Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (also known as the Grey Nuns of Pembroke), who operated a hospital in Sault Ste. Marie. Bishop Dignan also believed that there was a place for a contemplative order, who might resemble Mary, Martha’s sister. To that end, in 1936 he attracted the Order of the Precious Blood. The Sisters of that Order, who would live lives of prayer, first lived on Klock (Algonquin) Avenue in the Precious Blood Monastery beside the Pro-Cathedral. Decades later they moved to the hills near Nipissing University, site of the Precious Blood Monastery today.

**Multiculturalism and Church Extension:**

On this side of the Atlantic, in 1921 and 1924, the United States government had taken steps drastically to curtail the influx of European immigrants. With the United States no longer a possible homeland, people from overcrowded or politically turbulent countries began in unprecedented numbers to consider Canada as a possible place to live. Quite apart from the Depression, it was humanly impossible—perhaps undesirable—to shed one’s own or even one’s parents’ previous identity. The Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie thus included priests and parishioners who saw themselves as hyphenated Canadians, if Canadians at all. (After all, Canadian

\(^{30}\) *The Register*, 16 Feb. 1963.
citizenship did not exist until the post-World War II period. Until then, everyone born in Canada was a British subject.) Three years after Bishop Dignan’s retirement, the 1961 census reported 8,268 Italians or Canadians of Italian extraction in Sault Ste. Marie; 6,343 in Sudbury; 1,591 in North Bay. By that time, Sudbury’s Polish community numbered 2,302, while that of Sault Ste. Marie was 1,051. Sudbury’s had more than doubled since 1941, probably because the horrors of Nazi occupation until 1945 and a pro-Soviet government after that had encouraged those who could to emigrate. Bishop Dignan designated Father Henry Murphy, pastor of Holy Trinity in Sudbury, to meet immigrants at the railway station and to make them feel welcome. Many new arrivals appreciated such hospitality.

How could Bishop Dignan keep all these people within the same metaphorical tent? How could he reconcile Poles, whose homeland had suffered the most brutal Nazi aggression; French Canadians, many of whom opposed conscription but many of whom supported the war effort enthusiastically (Theo Doucette, winner of the Distinguished Flying Cross, was Sudbury’s ace who shot down many German aircraft before he himself was killed in action); those of Irish descent, whose families had lived in Canada longer than most others but whose European homeland was a World War II neutral; Italians, whose place of origin supported the enemy? That Bishop Dignan succeeded was no mean feat. In his favour was Canada’s post-World War II economic boom which allowed each component to have its own building and its own priest. The Dignan era was an era of church construction.

Church construction could begin while much of the rest of Canada suffered from the Depression because Sudbury was one of the few bright spots. Sudbury owed its good fortune to the nickel, which Sudburians, unaware of or blind to Hitler’s intentions, happily supplied to Germany’s rearmament programme. Hitler had become Germany’s leader in January 1933, and the economic recovery followed in short order.  

enjoyed full employment throughout World War II and until the late 1950s, about the time when Bishop Dignan retired. By then the European and Japanese economies were well on the way to recovery, and Canadian exporters faced increased competition. Also, toward the end of World War II, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom developed nuclear industries, for both peaceful and military purposes. Elliott Lake supplied uranium. Churches built during the Dignan era included Ste-Agnès, Azilda ((1953); St. Alexander, Azilda (1962); St. James the Greater, Blind River (1947); St. Paul the Apostle, Coniston (1954); Our Lady of Fatima, Elliott Lake (1958); Ste-Marie, Elliott Lake (1958); Good Shepherd, Espanola (1947); Holy Spirit, Garden Village (1948); St-Augustin, Garson (1954); St. John the Evangelist, Garson (1935); St. Pius X, Lively (1953); Our Lady of Lourdes, Manitouwadge (1958); Corpus Christi, North Bay (1954); Holy Name of Jesus, North Bay (1947); St. Peter the Apostle, North Bay (1954); SS-Ange, North Bay (1954); Ste-Rose-de-Lima, River Valley (1936); Our Lady of Good Counsel, Sault Ste. Marie (1950); St. Gregory, Sault Ste. Marie (1954); St. Jerome, Sault Ste. Marie (1956); St. Veronica, Sault Ste. Marie (1936); La Résurrection, Sturgeon Falls (1947); Our Lady of Sorrows, Sturgeon Falls (1947); Holy Redeemer, Sudbury (1949); Holy Trinity, Sudbury (1937); L’Annonciation, Sudbury (1953); La Toussaint, Sudbury (1938); Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Sudbury (1938); St. Andrew the Apostle, Sudbury (1955); St. Anthony, Sudbury (1953); St. Casimir, Sudbury (1955); St. Clement, Sudbury (1936); St-Dominique, Sudbury (1956); St-Eugène, Sudbury (1949); St. Patrick, Sudbury (1953); St. Elizabeth, Temagami (1936); Ste-Marguerite d’Youville, Val Caron (1958); Notre-Dame-de-la-Rivière, Wahnapitae (1958); St. Monica, Wawa (1937); St. Lawrence, Webbwood (1935). Among all these parishes with British and French names was Sudbury’s St. Casimir, an indication of the strength of the local Polish community. Bishop Dignan had a talent for fund raising and recruiting priests from elsewhere to supplement the local talent in an era of expansion.

The Dignan era was also one for the proliferation of Roman Catholic secondary schools in Sudbury: Collège Notre Dame, founded by Grey Nuns of the Cross of Ottawa in 1946; St. Charles College, founded by Basilians Fathers for young men in 1951; and Marymount, founded

**The Corpus Christi Procession:**

One memory of the Dignan era was the annual Corpus Christi Procession, held in the spring when a walk through the streets of North Bay and other cities was possible. Bishop Dignan usually carried the Blessed Sacrament in procession either along McIntyre Street West and back to the Pro-Cathedral of the Assumption, or from there to Scollard Hall. Children, religious sisters, adults, altar boys, and priests followed. This was in keeping with a tradition introduced by Pope Urban IV (1261-1264) around the year 1263. Pope Urban hoped that it would be an annual event to take place on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday (in late May or early June). The procession was an imitation of the Old Testament March of the Ark, and one of its planners was the mediaeval Christian philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas saw the purpose of the procession as that of asking God to “make all the congregation taste efficaciously the fruits of our Saviour’s resurrection, of whose passion this sacrament was a commemoration.”

The tradition reached France no later than 1313, England by 1318. There were similar Processions across the Diocese.32 There were similar Processions across the Diocese.33

**Canada’s Perennial Challenge:**

Bishop Dignan’s successor, Bishop Alexander Carter, said that when he first went to North Bay early in 1957, shortly after the Vatican nominated him to head the Diocese, the Apostolic Delegate to Canada, one Archbishop Panico, was also there. Panico was livid about a

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perceived injustice. Elliott Lake was a boom town within the Diocese which had gone from forest to Canada’s foremost source of uranium almost overnight. Some 10,000 French Canadians lived there, and for more than two years they had been asking Bishop Dignan for their own parish. The bishop, who was seriously ill, kept procrastinating.  

According to Bishop Carter, when he arrived in the Diocese there was a backlog of children awaiting confirmation because Bishop Dignan had been too ill to confirm them.

**Other Diocesan Workers:**

Meanwhile, the Sisters of St. Joseph remained active. In 1937, the Vatican responded favourably to a request from Bishop Dignan for a diocesan community of the Sisters of St. Joseph. It had its Mother-house in North Bay. In order to teach schools, provide music lessons, nurse in hospitals, and care for orphans, the aged, and the poor, 106 Sisters and 13 novices provided their services. Some worked among alcoholics, others at a rehabilitation centre for prisoners at the Lakehead, yet others as assistants to the Jesuits on the Manitoulin Island or in special education for the deaf.

Various male orders came to the Diocese and founded secondary schools for boys. Resurrectionist Fathers from Kitchener went to North Bay in 1930 and established Scollard Hall; the Basilian Fathers of Toronto arrived in 1951 and created St. Charles College in Sudbury and St. Mary’s College in Sault Ste. Marie. Redemptorist priests staffed Holy Redeemer Parish in Sudbury’s Minnow Lake region, while Passionist Fathers operated Sudbury’s Catholic Information Centre.

French-speaking orders for women included the Assumption Sisters, who taught at St.

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37. *United in Faith*, p. 11.
Vincent de Paul in North Bay; the Daughters of Wisdom, who served as nurses and teachers in Sturgeon Falls; and the Little Sisters of the Poor, who provided charity to Sudbury’s needy.

Assisting the clergy were lay apostolic organizations such as the Legion of Mary, whose first branch or praesidium within the Diocese was that of Creighton Mine, formed in 1939. Members still visit homes, hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons, and they attempt to persuade lapsed Catholics to return to the Church. A group with a similar name, the Sodality of Mary, provided a social outlet for young people in the early 1950s.38 A number of priests, especially from the District of Sudbury, went to Antigonish, Nova Scotia (site of St. Francis Xavier University), studied credit unions at what is now the Cody Institute, and introduced credit unions to the Diocese. They continue to operate, although no longer officially connected to the Diocese. French-language credit unions have become branches of the Caisse Populaire, and the English-language ones have merged with others.

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