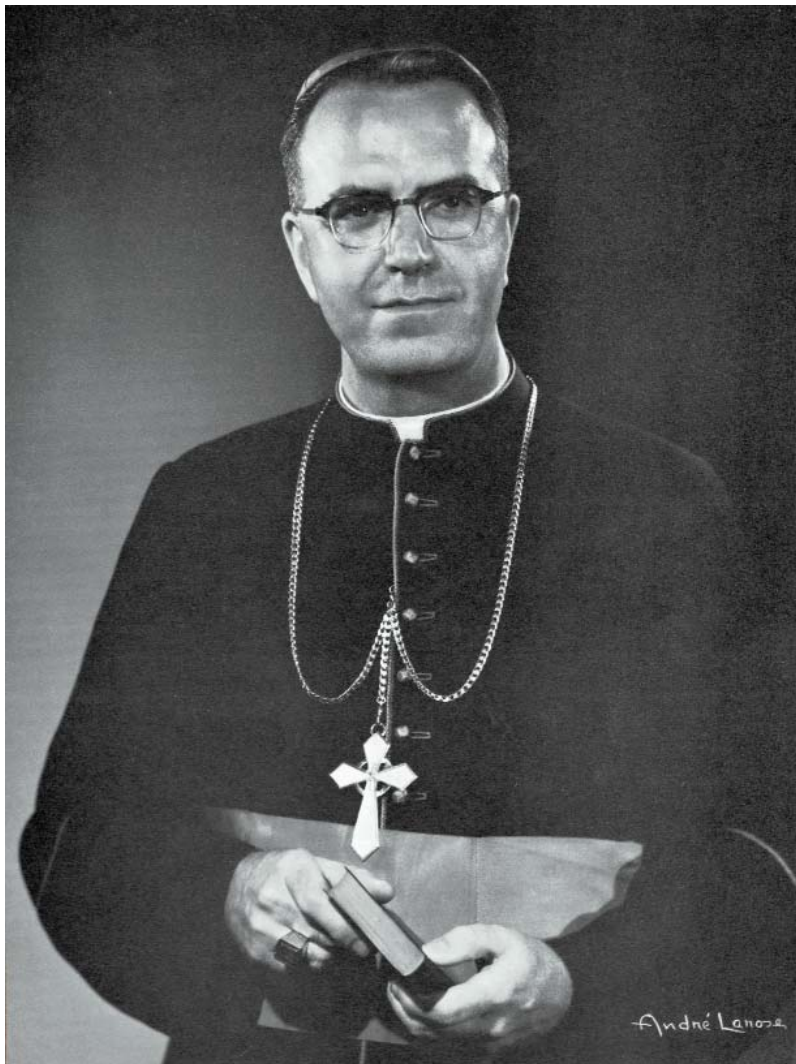




## **The Most Reverend Norman J. Gallagher**



*The Most Reverend Norman J. Gallagher, D.D., C.D. November 1963  
Second Bishop of Thunder Bay, 15 April 1970 - 28 December 1976*

Bishop Gallagher's tenure at the helm of the Thunder Bay Diocese was brief but memorable. He had much in common with his predecessor, the Most Reverend E.Q. Jennings. Both were born of anglophone parents but became bilingual through their formal education and associations. Both were among a select group of Canadian priests who had volunteered for active military service and had been elevated to the episcopate. In a diocese like Thunder Bay that was perceived as having a western orientation, it seemed appropriate that the religious careers of both were formed in western Canada. To their superiors and to those who knew them personally, they both demonstrated a capacity for hard work. Bishop Gallagher, however, did not have the luxury of a buoyant economy in which to administer the affairs of the diocese as did his predecessor. The 1970s were years of rampant inflation, high interest rates, labour unrest, and high unemployment. It was in this economic climate that he had to struggle with an enormous cathedral debt, small parishes east and west of Thunder Bay struggling to survive economically and the increasing deficits from the private sector of St Patrick Arpin Memorial High School. He dealt with these problems and the overall financial administration of the diocese prudently without resorting to a fund-raising campaign. Regretfully, his failing health over the five and a half years he was Bishop of Thunder Bay dampened his enthusiasm and efforts to achieve a unified pastoral ministry throughout the diocese based on the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Norman Joseph Gallagher, son of James Gallagher and Marion McPhee, was born in Coatbridge, Scotland in the Archdiocese of Glasgow on 24 May 1917. Little is known of his family in Scotland except that his father was a blast furnace keeper and that Norman was one of eight children. In 1923, he moved with his family to Canada where they first settled on a farm in Saskatchewan and within a year took up residence in the town of Swift Current. His Catholic education began in the town's separate elementary school under the direction of a French order of women religious, the Sisters of Charity of St Louis (s.c.s.i.). He then proceeded to Swift Current Collegiate and graduated in 1934. At the height of the depression, he wanted to continue his studies at a Catholic college. Two choices presented themselves: the Jesuit Campion College in Regina or the Collège Mathieu in Gravelbourg, 103 km south-east of Moose Jaw. Since the latter was less expensive, Norman Gallagher enrolled in a classical education program where French was the sole language of instruction. In 1937, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree granted by the University of Ottawa. He continued his theological studies at the Collège Mathieu Grand Séminaire (Séminaire Mazenod) and was ordained to the priesthood by the third Bishop of Gravelbourg, the Most Reverend Joseph Guy on 24 March 1941 for the Diocese of Gravelbourg. Shortly thereafter he served for three months as curate of the Gull Lake Parish, 51 km south-west of Swift Current.

The Second World War had a profound impact on the religious career of Father

Norman Gallagher. On 14 October 1941 he enlisted as an Active Auxiliary chaplain in the Royal Canadian Air Force and then transferred to the Active Reserve Force on 7 April 1942. There is no evidence in his early papers or correspondence to suggest why or under what circumstances he was drawn to this apostolate over traditional pastoral work in rural Saskatchewan. Perhaps like many young men in Canada he responded to a call to serve his country during a time of war. Whatever the reason, at 25, he began a long and distinguished career as a chaplain in the Royal Canadian Air Force. After having served in various units in Canada, his first posting overseas was at the picturesque resort town of Bournemouth on the English Channel approximately 150 km southwest of London. Early in the war Bournemouth became the reception centre for air force personnel from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. By the time the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan had become fully operative, Bournemouth received 25,000 to 30,000 servicemen annually. Here, the role of Roman Catholic chaplains like Father Gallagher was to administer the sacraments and to promote and maintain high morale among soldiers preparing to enter the main theatre of war in Europe. On 6 June 1944, together with chaplains from most other Christian denominations and four other Roman Catholic chaplains, he landed on the beaches of Normandy, France with the 2nd Tactical R.C.A.F. Unit.

After the war Father Gallagher was expected to return to the Diocese of Gravelbourg to continue his pastoral ministry in the small parishes and missions of Saskatchewan. The intervention, however, of the Most Reverend Maurice Roy, Archbishop of Quebec and Military Vicar of the Canadian Armed Forces was to change all that. The confidential assessment reports of Father Gallagher's twenty months service overseas strongly suggest that he had found his niche in the chaplaincy service of the Canadian Armed Forces. "His work overseas has been of the highest order", wrote one of his superiors. "Although he has achieved the highest possible popularity with both Catholic and non-Catholic personnel, this popularity was not bought at the expense of priestly dignity." Through his loyalty, tact and good judgement, he had succeeded in maintaining morale among the Canadian soldiers with whom he had come in contact. On the basis of these reports, Archbishop Roy was convinced that Father Gallagher's talents could be used most profitably in the post-war chaplaincy service. Accordingly, he made a plea to Bishop Marcel Lemieux that Father Gallagher be relieved of his responsibilities in the Gravelbourg Diocese. Reluctantly, the Bishop of Gravelbourg agreed. On 1 January 1949, Father Gallagher was promoted to the rank of Squadron Leader (S/L) and became Command Chaplain of Air Transport Command. For the next thirteen years, he served as Wing Commander and Command Chaplain with the Canadian Armed Forces setting up and supervising Roman Catholic chaplaincy services in Canada, Europe, and in any trouble spot in the world where Canadian forces were present to act as peacekeepers.

By the early 1960s the Canadian chaplaincy service had grown to such an extent that it was becoming increasingly difficult for Archbishop Roy of Quebec to oversee its administration without neglecting important duties within his own diocese and the Ecclesiastical Province of Quebec. His request for an auxiliary bishop to the Military Vicar of Canada was granted by the Vatican with the appointment of Father Norman Gallagher to that position in June 1963. This appointment had historical significance for the Roman Catholic Church in Canada. It was the first time that the assistance of an auxiliary bishop was granted to the Military Vicar in Canada. Moreover, after a twenty-one year career in the R.C.A.F. Father Gallagher became the first padre ever to be consecrated a Roman Catholic Bishop in Canada and, as such, Archbishop Roy hoped that the expression of trust and confidence placed in a member of the military would be appreciated by all those belonging to the Canadian Armed Forces. Bishop Gallagher thus became the principal channel of communication between Roman Catholic Armed Forces chaplains and the church itself. His episcopal consecration took place in Ottawa's Notre-Dame Cathedral by the Most Reverend Sebastiano Baggio, Apostolic Delegate to Canada on 12 September 1963.



*The Most Reverend Norman J. Gallagher Coat of Arms*

*On the royal blue shield is the white cross of St Andrew indicating Bishop Gallagher's birthplace. At the top triangle of the shield are silver stars, on the right side a white rose, on the left side a gold wheat sheaf, and at the bottom gold flames. At the very bottom is a silver scroll on which is written in black letters UT COGNOSCANT TE ("That They May Know Thee", John 17:26).*

As Auxiliary Bishop to the Military Vicar of the Canadian Armed Forces and as a participant in the Vatican II sessions, Bishop Gallagher came in frequent contact with Canadian bishops and was reasonably well-known among them. The Archdiocese of Montréal desperately needed an auxiliary with Bishop Gallagher's diplomatic skills and understanding of Canada's two founding cultures to work alongside His Eminence, Paul-Emile Cardinal Léger. Accordingly, in August 1966, he was appointed Auxiliary to the Archbishop of Montréal (and later to Archbishop Paul Grégoire) and was made Director of the Office for English-language affairs. For the next four years, as well as being the pastor of St Patrick's Parish in Montréal (situated on Dorchester Boulevard, now René Lévesque Boulevard), he coordinated the ministry and apostolate directed to the anglophone faithful of the Montréal Diocese. His experiences as an auxiliary bishop in both Ottawa and Montréal made him a likely candidate to fill one of several Canadian dioceses that were without a bishop in 1970...One of the vacant dioceses ...was Thunder Bay. The Most Reverend Norman Gallagher was appointed to succeed Bishop Jennings on 15 April 1970.

What was the legacy of Bishop Norman Gallagher to the Diocese of Thunder Bay? His contributions cannot be found in the physical structures within the diocese but rather in the thinking and theological renewal of the clergy which he fashioned by example and by discussions he had with each one of them. Prominent notice was given to his passing in L'Église de Montréal and the following assessment of the impression he left on the minds and hearts of those who knew him in Montréal would apply equally to those in the Thunder Bay Diocese: "Although Bishop Gallagher spent only a few years in Montreal...he will be remembered for his wise leadership, his warm and friendly relations with people from all walks of life, for his ability to convey deep theological insights in simple language, and for his witty sense of humour." This generalization found universal acceptance among the clergy of Thunder Bay. An Anglican clergyman's first encounter with Bishop Gallagher was at a Thunder Bay Council of Clergy meeting and he felt nervous sitting beside a Roman Catholic bishop. Bishop Gallagher's humility and quiet humour immediately set the young Anglican clergyman at ease. He developed a bond of trust and affection with the Catholic priests in the diocese by treating them as equals and by taking them into his confidence. That he would consult them on the important issue of requesting an auxiliary bishop was a poignant example of this. Above all, he led them in the process of theological renewal. Through his circular letters, personal correspondence, individual conversations, and sermons he encouraged them to reconsider their previously held views on forms of Penance, the native diaconate program, teenage marriages, and ecumenism. "Your leadership", wrote a Jesuit priest, "has been for me a source of calm and consolation." The 1970s were years of momentous change for the Roman Catholic Church. Bishop Gallagher led the priests and laity in the diocese to embrace these changes as an opportunity to renew their faith.



*Source: Roy Piovesana, **Hope and Charity: An Illustrated History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Thunder Bay.** (Thunder Bay, 2002), pp. 180-213.*