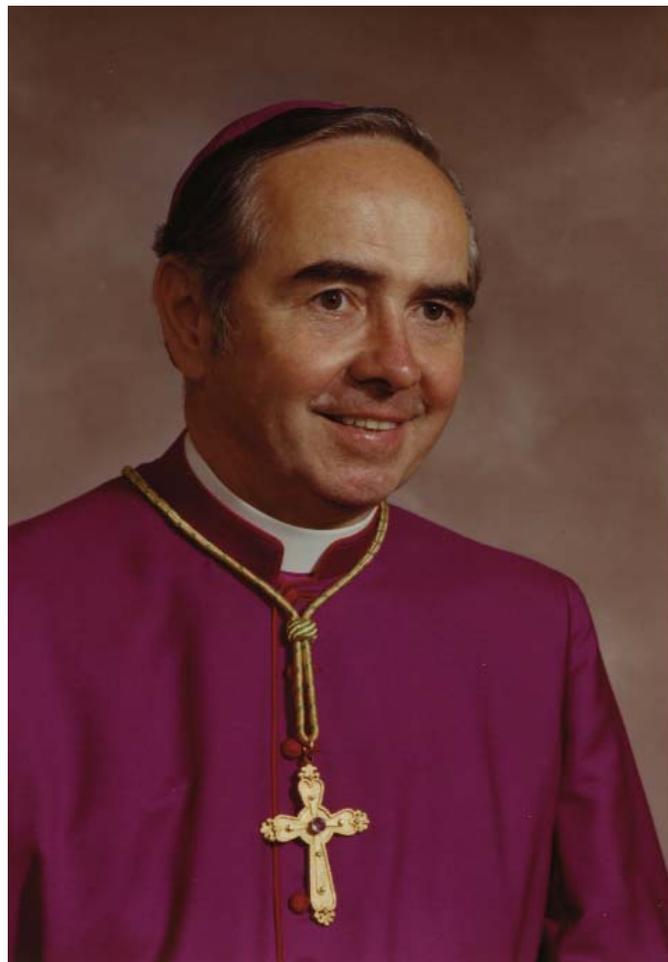




The Most Reverend John A. O'Mara

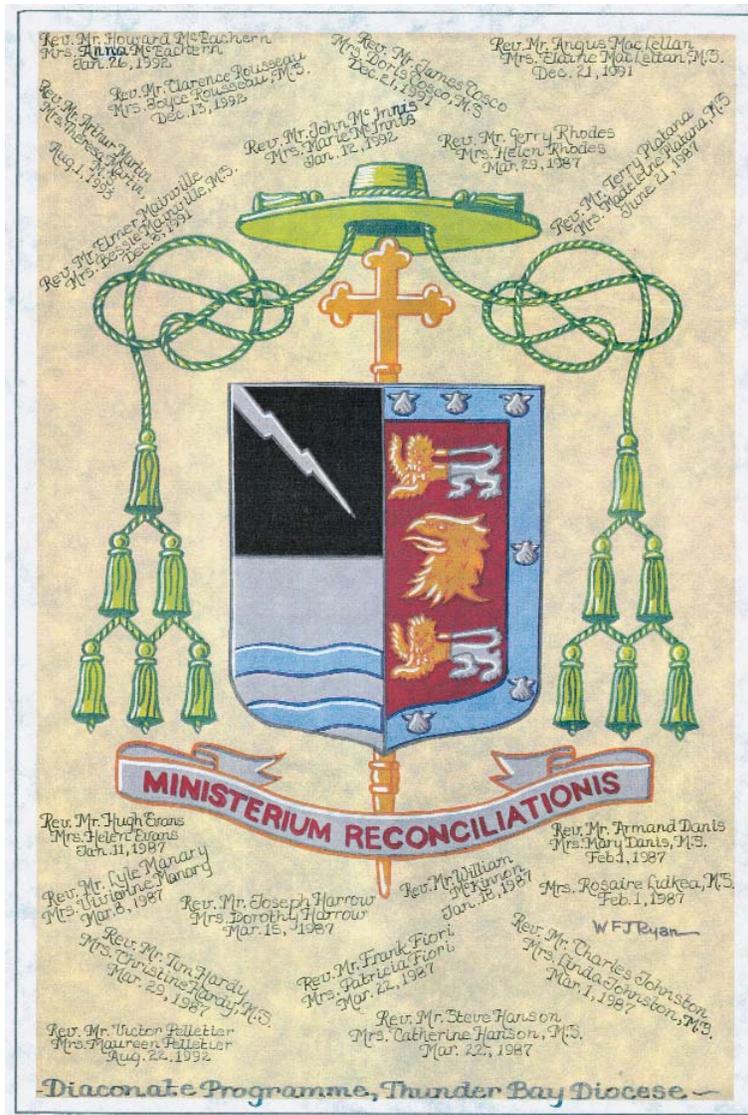


*The Most Reverend John A. O'Mara, D.D.
Third Bishop of Thunder Bay, 2 July 1976-2 February 1995*

John Aloysius O'Mara was born in Buffalo, New York on 17 November 1924, the second of six children born to John Aloysius O'Mara Sr. and Anna Theresa Schenck. The O'Mara family had been engaged as fruit farmers in the St Catharines area since the 1860s.⁷ John O'Mara Sr. and his family moved to Buffalo, New York where they opened a grocery business in 1916. When John Jr. reached school age he attended St Joseph Elementary School and the Jesuit Canisius High School in Buffalo. By 1940, the O'Mara grocery business in Buffalo was failing and John's father returned to the fruit farming business in St Catharines. At 15, John O'Mara Jr. continued his secondary education at Toronto's St Michael's College School graduating in 1942. After spending one year studying engineering at the University of Toronto and another out of school, he entered St Augustine Seminary, Toronto in 1944 spending the next seven years studying philosophy and theology where his formation as a priest took place in a traditional cloistered environment. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Toronto on 1 June 1951. Two years later he earned a Licentiate in Canon Law (J.C.L.) from St Thomas University (Angelicum), Rome.

For the next twenty years Father O'Mara's religious career was divided between pastoral and administrative duties in the Archdiocese of Toronto. In the fall of 1953, he was appointed assistant chancellor of the Archdiocese of Toronto and the following year was made secretary to His Eminence James Charles Cardinal McGuigan. At the relatively young age of thirty, he was named a Prelate of the Papal Household with the title Monsignor. He was appointed Pastor of St Margaret Mary Parish, Woodbridge, Ontario which in 1957 had approximately forty families. "It was there that I learned to be a priest", recalled Bishop O'Mara. "It was the first time I had a lot of involvement with people in a pastoral sense, with baptisms, funerals and marriages, people who were struggling to live their lives in a Christian sense." In addition to his responsibilities as a parish priest he accompanied Cardinal McGuigan to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) where he attended each session and had access to all conciliar documents. From 1969 to 1975 he was Rector of St Augustine's Seminary in Toronto when it became a charter member of the Toronto School of Theology (TST). It and its member schools later entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Toronto making possible the conjoint granting of basic and advanced degrees in theology. Since the main currents of Anglican, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions were represented at the TST, seminarians from St Augustine's Seminary were part of a rich environment for ecumenical education in a pluralistic age within a major North American University. Monsignor O'Mara did some teaching in canon law at St Augustine's but most of his time was spent in organizational matters leading to the formation of the TST and in the administration of the seminary. During his last two years as Rector at St Augustine's he also assumed the role of Pastor at St Lawrence Parish, Scarborough. In May, 1976 Monsignor John A. O'Mara was appointed the third Bishop of Thunder Bay

by Pope Paul VI and his Episcopal ordination was held on 29 June 1976 at St Michael's Cathedral, Toronto by Archbishop Philip F. Pocock. By the time he had come to Thunder Bay, Bishop O'Mara's administrative experience within the Roman Catholic Church was conducted at some of the highest levels and his theological and pastoral outlook was firmly grounded in the teachings and principles of the Second Vatican Council.



The Most Reverend John A. O'Mara Coat of Arms
Motto: "Ministry of Reconciliation" is taken from the Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians and expresses both an ideal and a program of life. Appearing on the coat of arms are the names of deacons and their wives (Ministers of Service) from the Permanent Diaconate Programme, 1987.

On 2 February 1994 the Most Reverend John A. O'Mara was named third bishop of the St Catharines diocese. As he looked back on his eighteen years as Bishop of Thunder Bay, he could take some satisfaction in leading the diocese from a state of adolescence to maturity. Once the Ontario Government announced its intention to extend full funding to Catholic high schools in 1984, he worked in concert with the Lakehead District Roman Catholic School Board in successfully implementing a dream which had eluded his predecessors, namely, the establishment of fully composite Catholic high schools in Thunder Bay. Moreover, participation in Development and Peace initiatives and the establishment of diocesan agencies such as the Catholic Family Development Centre and the Diocesan Office of Refugee Services to New Life (D.O.O.R.S.) afforded parishes the opportunity to look outward and to cooperate with other Christian denominations in assisting the poor, the working people and the marginalized in northwestern Ontario, Canada and the world. The regular publication of a diocesan newspaper *The Northwestern Ontario Catholic*, the organization and continuance of the "Sharing The Challenges Campaign" and the construction of a Catholic Pastoral Centre in Thunder Bay all contributed to a sense of unity and belonging among the parishes of the diocese. Above all, the steadfast support and encouragement Bishop O'Mara gave to parishes throughout the diocese in the construction of "second generation" churches placed its physical infrastructure on sound foundations for the new millennium.

*Source: Roy H. Piovesana, **Hope and Charity: An Illustrated History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Thunder Bay** (2002), pp. 214-265.*

