

*Discovering the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre,
a church at the heart of a neighbourhood, in the hearts of the people.*

Stop 1 - Introduction



The construction of a parish church in a city, village or neighbourhood was an important event, as the building would become the cornerstone of the community. Social and community life revolved around it, organized not only by governing religious authorities, but mostly by the parishioners themselves who, year after year, contributed to making the building a testament to their history and pride in having taken part in the construction of such a magnificent building and brought it to life, creating a place for gatherings and instilling in people a sense of belonging to the community.

Although today's reality is dramatically different, especially in large cities like Montréal where meeting places have multiplied and become increasingly exclusive, the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre remains the exception. In the words of Helen Haslam:

“Religious buildings remain key identifying elements of our neighbourhood cores. Alive with social and cultural activities, they are also a special place for community organizations and many citizen services.”

The Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre has remained a true gathering place, despite the passage of time and numerous historic and social upheavals. It is an open space, where unconditional hospitality reigns, and whose reputation transcends the physical boundaries of the parish.

For the next hour, we invite you to discover one of Victor Bourgeois's most beautiful masterpieces. Built between 1851 and 1853, the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre is his first creation as an architect. He would go on to design hundreds of places of worship in Québec.

We are pleased to accompany you on the tour to recount the history of this welcoming parish, and of its church, a jewel of Québec's religious heritage.

To begin the tour, please proceed to the corner of de la Visitation Street and René-Lévesque Boulevard.

The visit begins outside with a tour of parish territory, located between de la Visitation Street, René-Lévesque Boulevard, and Panet and Sainte-Rose Streets. This part of the tour will allow you, on the one hand, to admire the exterior architecture of the church and surrounding buildings and, on the other, to better understand the social and historic context surrounding the establishment of the parish and evolution of the neighbourhood.

We will then lead you into the church to see the sumptuous decor, enhanced over the years while preserving great uniformity. The decor attests not only to the involvement of parishioners, who strived to make their church one of the most beautiful in Québec, but also to that of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who were there to meet the needs of parishioners. The creation of the Chapelle de l'Espoir, dedicated to the memory of AIDS victims, is a prime example of their contribution.

The flyer you received or downloaded with this podcast shows the recommended tour route and points of interest. The numbers appearing on the diagrams indicate the starting point for each of the Stops on the tour.

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We now invite you to discover the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, from yesterday to today, a church at the heart of a neighbourhood, in the hearts of the people.

To begin your visit, please select Stop No. 2.

Stop 2 – History

You are now standing at the corner of de la Visitation Street and René-Lévesque Boulevard, in Montréal's Centre-Sud neighbourhood, characterized by the imposing Société Radio-Canada tower on the opposite side of René-Lévesque. This part of the city, located between Saint-Denis, Sherbrooke and Papineau Streets and René-Lévesque Boulevard, is officially known as Montréal's gay village.



In the early 19th century, the neighbourhood sat to the east of the city fortifications. It was populated primarily by French-Canadian families having relocated from rural areas, and Irish immigrants who had abandoned home and country in search of a better life. They settled near the major employers, including Molson's Breweries, MacDonald Tobacco and the Port of Montréal. They lived in modest rentals, two- or three-storey buildings like those still found north of René-Lévesque Boulevard today.

High demographic growth made living conditions in the neighbourhood increasingly difficult. Many people were out of work, jobs were scarce, and wages rarely adequate to meet family needs. Officially known as the Faubourg Québec, because the road to Québec ran through it, the area was quickly dubbed the Faubourg à m'lasse [molasses suburb], in reference to the residents who went out on the docks to scrape up molasses spilled from barrels unloaded off ships in the port.

Until 1865, the city of Montréal was composed of a single parish, governed by the Sulpicians, and a single church, Notre-Dame. Despite the high concentration of people in that part of the city, there were no chapels or services in the Faubourg Québec. Residents had to travel to Notre-Dame, some two kilometres away, for baptisms, weddings, funerals and other religious services, often under difficult conditions.

This was a time of high infant mortality. Newborns were baptized within a few hours of birth, so their souls would not be lost in limbo if they died. Imagine the hardship for a family having to travel to Notre-Dame in the wee hours of the morning, in the dead of winter, to have their newborn infant, who might not even survive the trip, baptized.

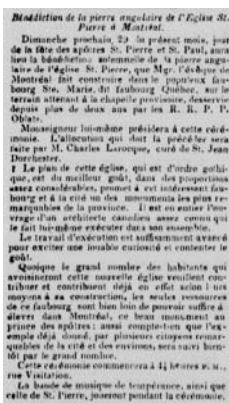
Mgr Ignace Bourget, second bishop of Montréal, who served from 1840 to 1876, was moved by the marginalization and misery of the people of the Faubourg Québec. In 1841, following an important meeting in Marseille with the founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Mgr Eugène de Mazenod, Mgr Bourget invited a small group of Oblates to settle in the Faubourg Québec.

For a better view of what is to come, we invite you to focus on the buildings neighbouring the church.

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In 1848, Pierre Beaudry, land owner, butcher by profession, and benefactor, bequeathed four lots of land to Mgr Bourget. That same year, the temporary wooden chapel of Saint-Pierre was built, honouring the memory of its benefactor. The Oblates quickly became very popular and, following their arrival, attendance at services grew to the point where the chapel could no longer contain its flock. It was then decided that a church would be built in its place, despite reservations on the part of the Sulpicians.

The church's design was entrusted to Victor Bourgeau, already known for his efficient, reasonably priced and refined work. The Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre was Bourgeau's first mandate as an architect. Under construction from 1851 to 1853, this neogothic sanctuary would become the pride of the "Bourragans," a name assumed by neighbourhood residents to confirm their status as full citizens, in response to contemptuous treatment from people residing within the city limits.



After years of being ignored, the Bourragans became actively involved in building this majestic church at the heart of their very modest suburb. On June 23, 1851, an article in the newspaper La Minerve already described the site in glowing terms:

The plans for this Gothic-style church are in the best taste and of rather significant proportions, promising both this interesting suburb and the city itself one of the most remarkable monuments in the province. They are the work of a somewhat well-known Canadian architect, who is also overseeing their overall execution. The work is sufficiently advanced to raise considerable expectations and satisfy requirements of taste.

The generosity of local residents, proud of having such a church erected in their neighbourhood, was equalled only by that of the Oblates, who struggled, through various crises, to meet the spiritual, social and community needs of the "Saint-Pierrais" by providing appropriate services.

In that respect, one of their most difficult constraints was not having access to the financial security the title of parish would have afforded them. It was not until 1866 that Mgr Bourget obtained authorization from the Vatican to divide the parish of Notre-Dame, which was, until that point, the only parish in the city. In compensation for their lost monopoly, the Sulpicians were given first choice of a new parish. Having already erected a chapel two streets east of the Church of Saint-Pierre, they decided to build their new parish there, and the Church of Sainte-Brigide-de-Kildare. The parish encompassed the territory of the Saint-Pierre neighbourhood, forcing Saint-Pierre residents to help finance the parish of Sainte-Brigide. This explains the unusual proximity of the two Catholic church towers: Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, a conventual place of worship, and Sainte-Brigide-de-Kildare, a parish known within the area for its Anglophone, of Irish descent, and Francophone communities.

The people of Saint-Pierre did not officially get their parish until 1901, when the Sulpicians, overwhelmed by the needs of the population, decided to give up a section of their parish to form a new one for the Oblates. The missionaries thereby became legally responsible for a tiny, overpopulated quadrangle. Still today, following a second legacy of land in 1904, the limits of the smallest parish in Montréal remain unchanged. It extends between Saint-André Street, de Maisonneuve Boulevard, Panet Street and the Port of Montréal.

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Despite everything, the people of Saint-Pierre, in cooperation with the Oblates and large French-Canadian bourgeois families, including that of Sir George-Étienne Cartier, managed to turn Saint-Pierre-Apôtre into a beautiful parish. In time, a number of families settled there permanently and prospered. They consisted primarily of small shop owners, and became people of note in the community. Most often, they led the lay congregations, such as the Dames de Sainte-Anne, the Enfants de Marie and the Temperance Society. They were responsible for collecting donations, holding bazaars, enriching the church and liturgical life, such as parish processions, the choir, and other recreational activities of the parish. These activities, along with tithes and other donations, enabled the Saint-Pierre parishioners to enrich their religious heritage.

Please select Stop No. 3 to learn more about major upheavals that affected life in the neighbourhood.

Stop 3 – Major upheavals

We now invite you to focus on the urban surroundings of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre.

The 1960s were marked by important changes in the urban fabric. After World War I, economic, social and city life was greatly transformed, resulting in a drop in participation in the community activities of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre. With the city's expansion, the parish became the centre of the Francophone neighbourhood experiencing tremendous commercial growth. Sainte-Catherine Street was alive with boutiques, cafés and theatres. People's involvement, especially that of the younger generation, in community and parish organizations was increasingly diminishing. Attractions unrelated to the church were now on offer, and within physical and financial reach.

However, it was the major construction work carried out in the middle of the 20th century that radically changed the structure and unity of the neighbourhood, in addition to considerably reducing the number of parishioners. The first exodus, between 1912 and 1916, resulted from the construction of the Canadian Pacific rail yards, near the port. A second wave followed, in the early '60s, with the gigantic construction site for Maison de Radio-Canada, south of Dorchester Boulevard – now René-Lévesque Boulevard – which would tear the fragile urban fabric of the neighbourhood.

In 1963, more than 678 families, or some 5000 residents, were expropriated, and just over 260 buildings were demolished to make room for the imposing infrastructures of the Société Radio-Canada. The buildings demolished included housing, a dozen or so restaurants, a few garages, and approximately 20 factories. The studio of Québec sculptor Armand Vaillancourt would also fall prey to the demolition workers' picks.

As you can imagine, this was a great tragedy for the families and workers who had to leave their modest homes and move farther away from their places of employment. The most upsetting aspect for the expropriated was saying goodbye to their old familiar lifestyle and neighbourhood, where many had lived since the day they were born.

And life in the neighbourhood would be further disrupted, in the 1980s, with the construction of the Viger tunnel, the eastward extension of the Ville-Marie Expressway, which led to more demolition and the relocation of numerous residents.

The neighbourhood would never be the same.

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We invite you to walk slowly east, along René-Lévesque Boulevard, to the corner of Panet Street, taking the time to admire the area's architecture.

For more information about important individuals who marked the history of the area, please listen to Stop No. 4.

To continue with a tour of parish property, please select Stop No. 5.

Stop 4 – Historical figures

Mgr Ignace Bourget



Mgr Bourget was born in Saint-Joseph-de-la-Pointe-de-Lévy, on October 30, 1799, and passed away in Sault-aux-Récollets, on June 8, 1885. His accomplishments and visionary spirit marked the history of Montréal. As the city's second bishop, serving from 1840 to 1876, he strengthened ties uniting local Catholic churches and the Vatican, while helping Curé Labelle and colonization movements. Among other things, he was responsible for the construction of the Mary Queen of the World Cathedral, which he modelled after St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Under his reign, the Vatican agreed to divide Montréal's one and only parish, Notre-Dame, kept under Sulpician hegemony. Sharing with Mgr Eugène de Mazenod a common vision regarding the importance of the church's activities and social involvement, Mgr Bourget was directly responsible for the Oblates coming to America, by inviting fraternities to settle in Montréal, the Montérégie region and Western Canada.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate



The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate are a community of priests and brothers founded in Provence, in 1816, by Mgr Eugène de Mazenod. The community advocates social involvement of the Church in its evangelization mission, to make a difference with the most indigent and excluded members of society. In the early 20th century, Pope Pius XI called them the "specialists of difficult missions."

The Oblates made a remarkable contribution, and had a major influence on the population. When they arrived in Montréal, the Oblates helped to initiate people coming both from the countryside and abroad to city life. Originally specializing in retreats and missions, they founded parishes in Montréal, Québec City and Ottawa. They also followed colonization movements in Québec, the Great North, and Western Canada, and opened various schools, some of which would become major institutions, such as the University of Ottawa.

Despite the drop in religious practice in Québec, the Oblates managed to reinvent themselves and maintain a presence with the people. Saint-Pierre-Apôtre is a wonderful example of this. Today, there are over 4300 Oblates working in various missions around the world.

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Victor Bourgeau, Architect



Victor Bourgeau, Architect
J.H. Walker, wood engraving
Journal le Bazard (Sept., 18 1886)

Victor Bourgeau was born in Lavaltrie on September 26, 1809, and passed away in Montréal on March 1, 1888. Having apprenticed as a carpenter with his uncle, he inherited skills born of a long family tradition of carpenters and wood workers. He would have been influenced by the drawings and works of American architects, including Minard Lafever and John Ostell. Although little is known about his early career, many specialists agree that he would certainly have worked on a few projects with architect John Ostell, which explains the quality of his work, both in terms of technique and architectural esthetics, making Bourgeau one of the most important architects in Québec.

His first project as an architect, the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, was so well received that Mgr Bourget appointed him official architectural advisor to the archdiocese. This brought him numerous contracts, and he was involved in the construction of over 100 places of worship in Québec. Among other things, he designed the Mary Queen of the World Cathedral, and was highly praised for the quality of his interiors, including the decor of Montréal's Notre-Dame Basilica.

The Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre is recognized as one of his most beautiful accomplishments. Designed in the purest neogothic style, which is rather rare in Québec, it has maintained remarkable integrity through all the years.

To continue your visit with a description of parish property, please select Stop. No. 5.

Stop 5 – Parish property

And now, please proceed to the corner of Panet Street and face the vestry.

Located in the chevet of the church, the vestry was built in 1922 by architects Arthur-Donat Gascon and Louis Parant. This later addition completed the chevet in harmony with the body of the church. The successful integration is attributable to ornamental details and the shape of the openings reflecting the neogothic style, such as the double lancet windows. The firm of Gascon et Parant was very active in the early 20th century. Among other accomplishments, it is responsible for the construction of many places of worship on the island of Montréal, including the churches of Saint-Marc and Sainte-Cécile in the borough of Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie, the Church of Très-Saint-Rédempteur in the borough of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, and the Church of Sainte-Madeleine in the borough of Outremont.

Take a few steps north and stand facing the Centre Saint-Pierre, located at the intersection of Panet and Sainte-Rose Streets.

On October 5, 1977, the parish property of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre was classified as a historic site by the Ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec. The designation encompasses the church, vestry, residence, school, monument of St. Joseph, rectory and land. It is one of the rare parish properties on city territory to remain practically intact.

The buildings you will see have always been in use, for various purposes, and remain to this day the institutional heart of the parish.

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The Centre Saint-Pierre was built in 1905 to serve as a residence for the teachers at the school we will see in a few moments. The five-storey building is in the late Second Empire style. In 1975, the Oblates decided to change the building's vocation, converting it into a training and social intervention centre, with the mission to provide the necessary individual personal development tools to enable people to become active members of their community. The organization's reputation extends beyond the borders of the city, and it defines itself as "an agora for the social movement in Québec." Again, the responsiveness of the Oblates allowed them to reinvent themselves as teachers to meet citizens' needs.

Please proceed to the corner of Sainte-Rose and de la Visitation Street, and take in the surrounding built environment.

Before the arrival of Radio-Canada, the entire quadrangle, down to the port, had this same building density. The buildings surrounding you belong to the parish's "petite bourgeoisie," composed primarily of prosperous shops owners operating their businesses at street level, and living on the upper floors.

You are now standing before the old school, the choir school, known today as the Centre Missionnaire Oblat. This was the first school built by the Oblates in 1868. In the mid 19th century, there were only three small lay schools, managed by the Sulpicians, to provide young boys in the suburb with a summary education.

In exchange for their financial support, some well-to-do families asked the Oblates to open a better quality school. The Oblates quickly obliged, as the project also held certain advantages for them, including that of reinforcing the families' sense of belonging to the community. Moreover, the creation of the new school ensured them a steady supply of altar boys since, at the time, the Sulpicians forbade their students to serve at Saint-Pierre-Apôtre.

The three-storey choir school was erected in 1868, with a large hall on the ground level, and classrooms, a parlour, and a study hall on the upper floors. The construction costs amounted to \$12,000, including the heating and electrical systems. In 1886, the school was managed by the Maristes Brothers, who were new to the country and recently settled in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. In 1912, the choir school was rented out to the Montreal Catholic School Commission, which cancelled the lease in 1972. Today, the Centre Missionnaire Oblat serves as a mother house for national and international missions, and welcomes Oblate missionaries visiting their brothers in Montréal.

Now please move a few steps forward, and stop in front of the monument of St. Joseph before selecting Stop. No. 6.

Stop 6 – The rectory

In front of you stands the rectory and Oblate residence, erected between 1854 and 1857. The site originally held a temporary wooden chapel that, according to historical sources, was sold to the Society of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul to make room for the new structure. The chapel was moved in one piece, a rare feat, to its new location on the corner of Bonaparte and Beaudry Streets. In 1861, it was transferred to the Sisters of Providence, who used it to distribute food and clothing to the poor. This first witness to the arrival of the Oblates in Montréal, and an essential resource for many families, was probably demolished during the construction of the Maison de Radio-Canada.

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The rectory as it stands today was enlarged in 1908, to connect it to the old choir school and, in 1922 and 1923, architect Joseph Venne carried out the work attaching it to the church. Today, the rectory is still in use, serving as a residence to a small group of Oblates. It features a cafeteria, a library, an oratory, and a social ministry intervention service.

The monument of St. Joseph you see here previously stood at the centre of the Oblate's garden, behind the rectory. The garden no longer exists; it was replaced with a paved parking lot in 1966.

Please proceed to the starting point for the exterior visit, at the corner of René-Lévesque Boulevard. Then select Stop No. 7 to continue with a tour of the church, its history, and its architecture.

Stop 7 – Church history and architecture

As we previously mentioned, the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre was built between 1851 and 1853, in accordance with the drawings and specifications of Victor Bourgeau. The cornerstone-laying ceremony was held on June 29, 1851, day of the Festival of St. Peter and St. Paul. To the left of the main entrance, you will see the stone that officially inaugurated the building's outer shell.

The dimensions of the church are impressive, and the treatment of the elevations unusual. Aisles are formed with buttresses, giving rhythm to the side elevations. Buttresses are the interior counterparts of exterior pillars, whose flying buttresses serve to counteract the thrust exerted on the walls by the weight of the arch. Here, the use of buttresses is more esthetic than functional, and reflects one of the principal characteristics of gothic architecture, elegantly interpreted by Bourgeau. The architect's neogothic style is also recognizable in other architectonic elements. You will notice, at the four corners of the building, on the buttresses, pinnacles with crockets, and lancet windows under mouldings closer to the English Gothic style, known as Tudor, than to the French.

You may note similarities of style and composition with some of the American churches, such as Trinity Church in New York, built in 1839, and Holy Trinity Church in Brooklyn, erected in 1844. The Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre is an exceptional structure, in a style not often seen in Québec. It is one of the province's most beautiful places of worship, along with Montréal's Christ Church Cathedral and St. Patrick's Basilica, constructed respectively between 1857 and 1859, and 1843 and 1847.

Although the church was officially inaugurated in 1853, the stone tower, bell tower and metal-covered wooden spire included in the architect's plans were added only 20 years later.

The impressive porch tower, an uncommon feature in Québec religious architecture, supports a bell tower and what was considered at the time an exceedingly long spire, at 71.6 metres. However, the award for the highest spire in Montréal goes to the UQAM bell tower, once belonging to the Church of Saint-Jacques. This Victor Bourgeau creation, built between 1858 and 1860, overlooks the city from a commanding height of 90 metres.

In 1891, a four-sided electric clock was installed in the Saint-Pierre-Apôtre church tower. Being no longer functional, it was removed in 1932, and only the ova remain today.

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If you turn towards the front of the church, you will see the entrance, composed of a series of six small columns on either side of the doors. These columns, known as the abutment, are surmounted by archivolts, forming the pointed arch of the entrance. The archivolts are crowned with a gable, a low, triangular wall surmounting the arch, ornamented with sculpted reliefs representing a coat of arms featuring a mitre, a tall conical headdress with two lappets, and two keys crossed under an open Bible. The coat of arms refers to St. Peter, who, according to Christian tradition, was the first apostle, the one chosen by Jesus as the rock upon which to build his Church. He was also the first Roman Catholic bishop. The keys are those to the kingdom of heaven, given to St. Peter, guardian of the golden gates.



In 1858, at the request of Pierre Beaudry, who donated the land on which the church was built, a statue of the patron saint was added to the top of the gable. The original statue was replaced, in 1941, with the one we see today. Fashioned of pressed cement painted with bronze, it came from the Maison Carli et Petrucci of Montréal. If you move in a little closer, you will notice the rooster at the feet of the saint. This is in reference to Peter, when asked if he was a disciple of Christ, having denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed, as had been predicted.

The crowning glory, and great pride of the Saint-Pierrais, is the carillon of 13 cast-bronze bells imported from the Paccard bell foundry in Annecy, France. The foundry supplied many other Québec churches, including Saint Joseph's Oratory, in 1955, with its set of bells originally intended for the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The carillon being incredibly beautiful, people liked to say that it was because the bells had been christened with sea water. In fact, on July 23, 1890, the ship carrying them sank off the French coast of Saint-Nazaire. Fortunately, they were recovered intact, and finally installed and officially christened, with great pomp and circumstance, on November 9, 1890.

In 1853, when the church was first consecrated, construction costs had already reached \$60,000, and much of the interior decor remained to be completed. Half of those initial expenses were assumed by Mgr Eugène de Mazenod, who wished to contribute to the first Church of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate on Canadian soil. The rest of the money came from the donations and efforts of more or less affluent parishioners, who wanted a church that would make them proud and impress city residents. The parishioners' contribution to the erection of the church, considered a jewel of Québec's religious heritage, should never be forgotten. Through the years, and especially today, the parishioners of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre have always sought to embellish their church, which is not only a place for meditation and prayer, but also an oasis of comfort and mutual assistance, both in spiritual and human terms. And now, let's move inside and visit this beautiful, historic church.

Please select Stop No. 8 before entering the church.



We would also like to mention that there is an entrance for people with reduced mobility to the left of the tower.

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Stop 8 – The narthex



You are now standing under the bell tower, in the narthex, commonly known as the vestibule. It marks the passage from the frenzy of the outside world to the serenity of the sacred space.

The stained glass windows shown here represent various symbols related to the Passion of Christ. Painted on the walls, you will see the coat of arms of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

You will also notice the stairs leading to the belfry and back gallery. In 1894, the original wooden stairs were replaced with a wrought-iron spiral staircase. Admire the finely wrought railing, repeating the architectural forms used in the building's decor, such as double lancet openings.

The interior of a church is designed to inspire awe, elevate the soul, and provide a place for contemplation, while closely reflecting the reality and concerns of its community.

Now, please proceed to the nave, and allow yourself to be impressed by its rich decor. Find a seat in one of the pews, and select Stop. No. 9.

Stop 9 – The nave

The harmonious combination of architectural elements and details in the interior decor of the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre creates a beautiful visual unity. The space is punctuated by the repeated alternation of columns and archways separating the nave from the side aisles. The side aisles are ingeniously designed to continue the pattern and enhance the soaring effect, while creating a private space for the radiating chapels.

Sets of small columns rise from the larger ones to meet at the centre of the ribbed vault. The columns and vault are the only ones in Montréal to be made of stone. In fact, the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre is the only church to be constructed entirely of the 450-million-year-old grey limestone generally referred to as “Montréal greystone.” It is found primarily on the eastern part of the island, in the quarries of the former Côte-de-la-Visitation, located today in the borough of Rosemont – la Petite-Patrie.

The ribbed vault is a distinctive feature of gothic architecture. Although this type of vault had already been used in Romanesque architecture, the structure of those churches could not accommodate large openings in the walls, which had to support most of the weight of the vault. Gothic architecture's innovation consisted in combining the ribbed vault with flying buttresses, transferring the weight to the buttresses on the outside of the building. Thus displaced, the weight no longer exerted strong pressure on the walls. Churches could therefore be built increasingly taller, without affecting their stability. The nave was cleared of its cumbersome columns, and large openings could finally be made in the walls. Such openings would showcase a great profusion of stained glass art.

This architectural feat can be observed right here, at Saint-Pierre-Apôtre. The tall nave rises to catch the light from the glorious stained glass windows, most of them the work of the Maison Champigneulle in Bar-le-Duc, France. The space assumes myriad colours, and the decor comes alive with the rays of the sun shining through a multitude of little pieces of coloured glass.

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The nave ends in an apse with five even sections, composed of immense stained glass windows depicting the Four Evangelists. In the centre, St. Peter, patron saint of the parish, watches over the congregation. The woodwork, main altar, and side altars of the sanctuary are magnificently carved, in keeping with Victor Bourgeau's specifications, and contribute to the sense of unity between the exterior architecture and interior decor, and to the refinement and enrichment of the church, a true haven of peace. Lastly, the architecture of the church provides wonderful acoustics, showcasing the 4-manual 59-stop Casavant organ.

We now invite you to pay close attention to the painted decor of the church, whose harmonious colours bring out the natural colour of the limestone columns. Every opening between the arches, under the gallery, is painted with a motif of gold acanthus leaves smartly surrounding a medallion featuring the profile of an angel. Dating back to 1931, this painted decor, as well as that of the sanctuary, is the work of famous painter, decorator, fresco-painter and master stained-glass window maker Guido Nincheri.

To learn more about Nincheri, please select Stop No. 10. For the Maison Champigneulle, please select Stop No. 11.

To continue your visit, please proceed to the middle of the central aisle, for a better view of the interior decor of the nave, and select Stop No. 12.

Stop 10 – Guido Nincheri



Originally from Prato, in Tuscany, Guido Nincheri was trained at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Florence. He arrived in Montréal in 1914, and was involved in decorating numerous churches in Québec, Ontario, the Maritimes, British Columbia, and even a few New England states. One of his greatest accomplishments is the Church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense, located in Montréal's Little Italy, where he carried out almost all of the work, both in terms of the architecture and interior decor.

Famous for his stained glass windows, he is just as well known for his painted decors and frescoes. He introduced the true fresco technique to North America, as practised by Michael Angelo in the 16th century, a technique requiring great precision and quick execution. After preparing the wall surface and applying several fine coats of plaster, the artist transfers the preliminary drawing, and then covers it with another coat of plaster. To allow the pigments to be absorbed into the plaster and ensure that they adhere well to the surface, the colours must be applied quickly before the plaster dries. If an error occurs, the whole process must be repeated for the section in question. The work involved is therefore quite significant.

To learn more about Maison Champigneulle, please select Stop No. 11.

To continue your visit, please proceed to the middle of the centre aisle, for a better view of the interior decor of the nave, and select Stop No. 12.

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Stop 11 – Maison Champigneulle

The Maison Champigneulle was one of the most renowned workshops in France and Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among others things, it produced many of the stained glass works for the Paris World Fair in 1889.

The Maison Champigneulle was one of the largest stained glass manufacturers of the time. It was founded in 1868 by Charles François Champigneulle of Metz. In 1878, the main workshop in Bar-le-Duc employed up to 120 people, while its competitors only had an average of about 30 employees.

In 1882, Emmanuel Louis Joseph Champigneulle took over the managements of the workshop in Lorraine, while his older brother, Louis Charles Marie, established a Paris branch in the former Maison Coffetier in 1887.



Over a period of ten years, more than 400 stained glass windows were produced and installed throughout France. The chosen iconography was directly related to the name of each chapel and to contemporary devotions, and the artwork often involved no more than one subject.

To continue your visit, please proceed to the middle of the centre aisle for a better view of the interior decor of the nave, and select Stop. No. 12.

Stop 12 – Interior decor

You may have noticed that the Nincheri medallions marking the spaces between the arches under the gallery are reminiscent of the Renaissance style. This may be seen as an anachronism compared with the dominant style of the church. The ornamentation of a church was a gradual process, based on existing needs and, more importantly, available funds. This is why some elements, like the painted decor incorporated many years after the construction, may be more in keeping with the tastes of the time they were designed. Although the Renaissance influence is apparent in the design of Guido Nincheri, the colours and subtlety of the addition do not in any way detract from the homogeneity of the ornamentation.

One of the most beautiful features of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre is this unity and harmony of the interior decor, which have been preserved despite the many years since its construction was completed.

Most of the stained glass in the windows comes from the renowned Maison Champigneulle, founded in Bar-le-duc, in Lorraine, France. Those completed before 1868 are the work of Charles-François Champigneulle of Metz, master stained-glass window maker and founder of the famous workshop by the same name. The oldest, the one at the centre of the apse representing St. Peter, dates back to 1853. The other stained glass windows in the sanctuary date from 1854, while those in the side aisles were installed in 1883, 30 years after the construction of the church was completed.

The iconography of the Saint-Pierre-Apôtre stained glass windows features popular late-19th-century figures. Some of the windows were also donated by organizations such as the Sisters of Charity, also known as the Grey Nuns, and the Society of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, which jointly financed a few stained glass works, reserving the right to choose a subject closely related to their respective devotions.

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The stained glass in the 14 windows higher up on the wall, at the gallery level, were installed in 1902. Replacing previous stained glass works, they were made by the Maison Delphis-Adolphe-Beaulieu in Montréal. The iconography is particularly rare. It is devoted to the different faces of Christ, such as the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Prophet, the Good Sheppard, and Christ Pantocrator.

We now invite you to approach the sanctuary from the south side aisle, located to the right of it.

Along the way, you will see the beautiful confessionals installed in 1872. Designed by Victor Bourgeau, they blend in perfectly with the rest of the furnishings, including the pulpit. You may also admire the neoclassical stations of the cross. Added to the church in 1873, the work is attributed to a Parisian painter by the name of Ciléan. At the time, it was rare to have the stations of the cross painted on canvas. Usually, the images were simply transferred or, later, made of painted plaster. In keeping with the endless attention to detail and search for consistency, the frames of the paintings reflect the architecture of the church.

We now invite you to stop in front of the altar of the Canadian Martyrs and select Stop. No. 13.

Stop 13 – Altar of the Canadian Martyrs



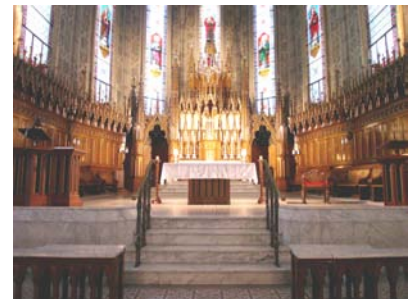
The altar before you, dedicated to the Canadian Martyrs, as well as the altar dedicated to St. Thérèse of Lisieux on the opposite side of the nave, were designed in 1931 by Guido Nincheri, the artist also responsible for the church's painted decor. The lines are simple and well-balanced. The centre is hollow, and a lighting system illuminates the interior, drawing attention to the quality of the material, the veins and subtle shades of the white marble imported from Italy. The altar dedicated to St. Thérèse is made of pink marble, also imported from Italy.

Please sit in one of the pews facing the sanctuary to admire its various elements, and then select Stop. No. 14.

Stop 14 – The sanctuary

The sanctuary as a whole is rather impressive. Take a look at the main altar, majestically rising from the centre of the church like a miniature cathedral, with stained glass windows providing the finishing touches.

The main altar, like the side altars dedicated to St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary, was built and installed in 1854, according to Victor Bourgeau's specifications, by craftsmen Gaspard Moosburgger and Jean-Luc Lévêque, cabinet-makers and master plasterers. Although the main and side altars are made primarily of oak, many of the details are in plaster, thereby reducing costs without affecting the visual quality of the whole through clever use of trompe-l'oeil painting. When the altars were first installed, they had no friezes, and there was no marquetry in the sanctuary. These were added later, between 1879 and 1883, using donations from the Ladies of St. Anne to finance the work. The main altar is ornamented with a bas-relief sculpted by Louis Jobin, early in his career in 1873.



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The spires of the main altar draw the eye upward to the central stained glass window, depicting St. Peter, patron of the parish. The window was created by Charles François Champigneulle, and installed in October 1853. The six other stained glass windows were put up the following year, in 1854. St. Peter, at the centre, is surrounded by the four apostles, authors of the Gospels of the New Testament, and first missionaries. Although an inscription at their feet show the name of the evangelists, they can also be identified by the figures in the top portions of the windows: a winged bull for St. Luke; an eagle for St. John; an angel for St. Matthew; and a lion for St. Mark. Above St. Peter, you will recognize the papal coat of arms, also sculpted on the gable above the outside door of the porch tower. However, here the open Bible is replaced with an escutcheon featuring two lions, representing power and sovereignty. The stained glass on the extreme left shows the Archangel Michael battling evil, and the one on the extreme right the Archangel Raphael, guardian and protector of young souls.

And now let's have a look at the side altars. Fashioned of oak and plaster, they contribute to the cohesiveness of the church decor, being in perfect harmony with the main altar. Always in the neogothic style, although a little more flamboyant with a leaner, more ornamented structure, these altars are rich showcases for the statues of Christ's mother and father. The statues date back to 1877. In the niches along both sides of the altar dedicated to St. Joseph, you will see Joachim, Mary's father, as well as Anne teaching her young daughter. The statues are remarkable for their gentle expressions and fine features, and for the arrangement of colours and realistic draping of the garments.

Some of you will remember that, before liturgical changes in the 1960s, the priest said mass in Latin, facing the main altar, with his back to the congregation. The sanctuary, the sacred space, was separated from the nave by a communion rail. You can still see the communion rail, installed in 1858 and fashioned according to Bourgeau's design. Church decors changed considerably as a result of the liturgical reform following the Vatican II Council, held between 1962 and 1965. Several measures were implemented to bring the Word closer to the people and promote participation in liturgical rituals, including the altar being moved to the centre of the sanctuary. Here at Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, the concept has been taken even further: the altar sits in the nave with the congregation. Again, this is due to the sensitivity of the Oblates, bringing them closer to their parishioners, with no pretension.

Please remain seated and turn towards the back gallery to admire the organ. We invite you to select Stop No. 15, where Professor Christopher Jackson, from Concordia University in Montréal, will talk about this magnificent instrument. You may also listen to a musical excerpt at Stop No. 16.

To continue your visit, please remain seated and select Stop No. 17 to proceed to the pulpit, located in the nave to the left of the sanctuary.

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Stop 15 – The organ

Saint-Pierre-Apôtre and history of its Opus 316



High in the back of the church you will see the organ, a Casavant Opus 316, built in 1908. But the first instrument built for St-Pierre-Apôtre dates back to 1858, the work of Charles Russell Warren, who built an instrument of 23 stops. In 1908, Casavant Frères of St. Hyacinthe, built a new 4-manual 59-stop organ incorporating eleven stops from the first instrument.

Professional organ building began in Canada, in 1836, when the American Warren settled in Montreal. He had been trained at Appleton's in Boston. This remarkable man was the best-known organbuilder in Canada during the 19th century. He brought to the art a new level of craftsmanship, and imported and introduced many innovations from Europe such as the Barker machine (in 1851), the hydraulic blower (in 1860) and new stops such as harmonic flutes and free reeds.

For St-Pierre, Warren adopted the neo-gothic style for the organ case to mirror the architecture of the church interior.

If you look carefully at the case you will see that it is divided into three parts: a central section with three bays of pipes connected to two other larger bays on each side. This central section is the original Warren case, enlarged in the same style by Casavant in 1908.

Warren trained several disciples who became famous in their own right. Among them, Louis Mitchell and Charles-Summer Warren, his youngest son whose children and grand-children were involved in organ building until the 1950s. Later, Louis Mitchell was to become a mentor to Samuel and Claver Casavant at the beginning of their careers.

The Casavant brothers, Samuel and Claver, apprenticed first with their father, Joseph Casavant. In their early 20s, they travelled to France where they met Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, the great French organbuilder, and John Abbey, an English builder working in Paris. After a year in France they returned to St-Hyacinthe and set up their workshop. They quickly established themselves as the builders of choice for churches and institutions throughout North America. Through a combination of ingenuity and talent, they created an establishment that thrives to this day, building instruments the world over. With an opus list approaching 4000, Casavant organs are especially well-known for their high quality of workmanship.

The organ of St-Pierre is built in the English-American romantic tradition. The key action is electro-pneumatic, and the organ sounds at its best when playing symphonic repertoire of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1995, the firm of Guilbeault-Thérien, also of St-Hyacinthe, restored the instrument, conserving its romantic characteristics.

Professor Christopher Jackson, Concordia University

Please select Stop No. 16 to listen to a musical excerpt.

To continue your visit, please remain seated and select Stop No. 17 to view the church pulpit, located in the nave to the left of the sanctuary.

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Stop 16 – Musical excerpt

The piece you will hear is played by organist Jean Ladouceur, on the Casavant of the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre. It is called *Grande Pièce symphonique en fa dièse mineur opus 17*, and will play for 26 minutes 21 seconds. Enjoy!

To continue your visit, please remain seated and select Stop No. 17 to view the church pulpit, located in the nave to the left of the sanctuary.

Stop 17 – The pulpit

The wooden pulpit located to your right is cantilevered to the column and delicately sculpted, again according to Bourgeau's design. This is where the priest would stand to deliver the homily, more commonly known as the sermon, as well as the announcements concerning events in the parish. This piece of religious furniture is usually finely wrought, as it served to amplify and sanctify the words of the priest, who translated the Bible into laymen's terms, reminded people about good Christian values, and sometimes sought to influence his flock on subjects having nothing to do with religion.

The pulpit of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre is a fine example of the richness and complex ornamentation of this important feature of church decor. You will notice the decorative elements elegantly enhanced with gold paint. Totalling 8.83 metres in height, it has a staircase leading to the preaching platform. Above the platform, a sounding board, serving to deflect the voice of the priest towards the congregation, rises like a magnificent Gothic spire. The seven visible panels of the sounding board are ornamented with sculptures standing in niches.

Although the pulpit is an important element of Roman Catholic decor, it is becoming increasingly rare in our churches. Most have been removed, disappearing in the wake of the liturgical reform following the Vatican II Council. Here at Saint Pierre-Apôtre, the beautiful furniture, designed entirely by Bourgeau, is even more priceless for having remained almost unchanged since it was first installed.

The sculpture under the pulpit is a replica of a statue in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. St. Peter is posed on a sculpted seat with massive back and armrests, in reference to the first pope's position of authority, and what is known in Rome as la Sedia Stercorata. He holds in his hand the keys to the salvation of souls and to Heaven. The bronze sculpture dates from 1887. Notice the feet, worn down from the veneration of the faithful who, for over 100 years, have come to touch the statue during their devotions. On the opposite side of the nave, to your left, a sculpture is mounted on one of the columns. Dating from 1995, it represents Mgr Eugène de Mazenod, and is a replica of the original standing in the General House of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in Rome.



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Now, let's move on to the Chapelle de l'Espoir. Along the way, take a close look at the side altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Notice the subtlety of the patterns on her robe and the beautiful expression on her face. It is said that the artist, whose name is unknown, regretted not having kept the statue to show it at the 1878 World Fair. You will pass a second altar, in pink marble, which was designed by Guido Nincheri, and also get a good view of the pulpit staircase and its ramp ornamented with fourlobed medallions surmounted by Gothic arches.

Once you have reached the Chapelle de l'Espoir, we invite you to sit in one of the pews facing the chapel, and select Stop No. 18.

Stop 18 – The Chapelle de l'Espoir



Not only is the parish of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, located in the gay village, one of the oldest in Montréal, but its church is still one of the most largely attended and active in its community. In fact, despite tensions between homosexual Catholics and the Vatican, which officially rejects homosexuality, the church's parish committee has demonstrated exceptional openness to parishioners' concerns by creating the Chapelle de l'Espoir to honour the memory of AIDS victims.

We invite you to listen to Mrs. Nancy Couillard. She will read a text by Mr. Yves Côté, who has been responsible for the parish's social ministry for over ten years, where he explains the reasons behind the parish's popularity and talks about what goes on there.

The Chapelle de l'Espoir (The Chapel of Hope)

Although the Parc de l'Espoir, a park dedicated to AIDS victims, was already established on the corner of Panet and Sainte-Catherine Streets, Guy L'Italien, the chapel's designer, realized how difficult, if not impossible, it was for people to gather in such a venue. He therefore proposed to turn the Chapelle du Sacré-Cœur into a place where people could congregate and put up plaques in memory of departed loved ones. This is why you will see over 100 hundred commemorative plaques, dedicated to people who have died of AIDS, all around the chapel.

What makes the Chapelle de l'Espoir so inviting is the fact that, even though it is located in a Catholic church, it embraces all religions. Therefore, people from all denominations gather there. The chapel's Web page and accounts carried home by visitors to Montréal since its inauguration have drawn people from all around the world to its doors.

To the left of the chapel, you will see a big book where visitors can express their thoughts and comments, which we keep in the parish archives. To the right of the book, a poem entitled *Mal d'amour*, dedicated to people with AIDS, tells of their suffering.

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Since the chapel was inaugurated, on July 22, 1996, a permanent flame in memory of AIDS victims has burned at its centre, adjoining a fountain whose running water reminds us that, despite the disease, life goes on and there is always hope. But in order to share that hope, we need your help. You can show your support by visiting the chapel, making a donation, or lighting a candle.

To put up a plaque in the Chapelle de l'Espoir, please make your request at 1201 De la Visitation Street. Prices range from \$20 to \$35.

Yves Côté, responsible for the parish's social ministry

To hear Father Yoland Ouellet talk about community life in the parish, please select Stop No. 19.

Stop 19 – Life in Saint-Pierre-Apôtre

Saint-Pierre-Apôtre: a “prophetic” Christian community!

I have the good fortune of being the pastor of a Gospel-loving community, inspired by the Gospel not only on Sundays, but every day of the week. It follows the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth: unconditional compassion, hospitality and charity, regardless of status, nationality or sexual orientation, as we are all blessed children of God. Our ministry involves a whole community of people in an inclusive approach and aims to be prophetic of everything a Christian community should be.

The challenge for this community is to form a “body,” right in the middle of an urban environment where individuality, anonymity and indifference are on the rise. Many opportunities are available to develop this community spirit, including: family meetings after Sunday Mass, a brunch bringing together some 175 people from September to May; support and faith-sharing groups on the last Sunday of every month; and many other activities organized by people increasingly involved in the fundraising campaign, helping them to develop community pride and a sense of belonging.

The Eucharist remains the greatest force that can create and recreate such a “body,” and we strive to ensure that our Sunday sermons nourish the soul and strengthen the bonds of “community,” while respecting the spiritual itinerary of each of its members, some of whom may only be dropping in for a spiritual boost. The Church pays particular attention to its dissenters, offering them a venue where they can meet to express criticisms and disappointments regarding the institution, with a view to promoting responsible dissent and developing avenues for communication and for the future.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in communion with the Archbishop of Montréal, who recognizes the importance of this ministry in his diocese, will continue for a few more years, with a whole ministry team, their evangelization mission in an urban environment, at the heart of the Gay Village. Thus, true to its historic origins, the Christian community pursues its evangelical work to promote respect for the dignity of those who are despised, excluded, unloved, and living in all kinds of poverty. A hospitality and companionship service is provided by a highly trained team for those poor people who have known great suffering in their lives.

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The parish of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre is in the process of merging with the neighbouring parish of Sainte-Brigide, left with only a small chapel under the portico of its magnificent church tower following the sale of the property, which is earmarked for a social and community centre with housing units.

Such is life at Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, such is also the beauty of this church!

Father Yoland Ouellet, o.m.i

Before you leave, please listen to Stop No. 20.

Stop 20 – Closing remarks

Although the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre was blessed with exceptional architecture and an important emerging social community, it would yet undergo many changes. The parish's most remarkable asset is the life that drives it. It is a haven for visitors, a meeting place, an open ministry, and a peaceful oasis for meditation and commemoration in a busy metropolis, whose survival depends on its golden rule: unconditional hospitality.

It is now time to say goodbye. We hope that you have enjoyed your visit, and invite you to share with us your comments and suggestions regarding the tour. You may also visit our Web site or speak to volunteers at the church to learn more about the numerous events held there.

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