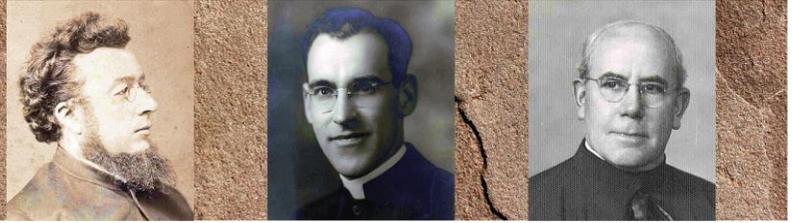


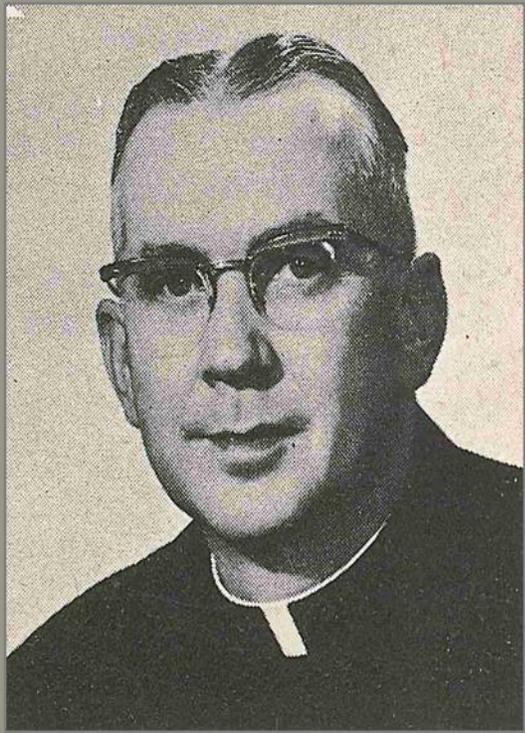
**THESE**  
are our brothers



## **Working Together: A Biography of Rev. Joseph O'Rourke**

“Co-operation, in the sense of men working together for a common end, is as old as society itself,” wrote Father Joseph O'Rourke in a 1952 newspaper article, adding that, “[t]he higher purposes in life are beyond human reach unless man works with his fellow men to make the attainment of them possible.”

There is a good reason Father O'Rourke was known fondly as the ‘Father of Credit



Unions,’ during his tenure at St. Joseph’s in Clinton, but the theme of cooperation goes far beyond that to encompass all aspects of his life. Born July 19, 1911, to Patrick and Margaret O'Rourke, he spent his childhood in Dublin. He attended Dublin Continuation School and the Stratford Collegiate, before entering St. Peter’s Seminary. In 1935, he attained a B.A. from the University of Western Ontario.

Father O'Rourke was ordained July 11, 1938, by Bishop J.T. Kidd at St. Peter’s Cathedral. He was appointed to St. Mary’s Parish in Tillsonburg, while also offering Mass in Norwich. During this time he began many construction projects, including working on the cemetery by adding an iron fence and gateposts. He also collected a thousand dollars to repair and redecorate the church.

He became the first pastor of Walsh (a mission of St. John Brebeuf Parish, Delhi) in 1945, building St. Michael’s Church there, which opened on June 10, 1948. During this time (1945-1950) he was also pastor at St. Cecilia’s Parish in Port Dover. Afterwards, he went to St. Joseph’s Parish in Clinton (1951-1953), during which time he became active with local Credit Unions. He was appointed Diocesan Director of Credit Unions. He also supported co-operatives; for example, during his time in Port Dover he supported fishermen’s co-ops to protect them from the Colby Fish Company.

This theme of cooperation continues even further. He was a “working priest,” often helping in the actual construction of his many projects alongside the professionals. This is obvious in his time at St. Joseph’s Parish in Sarnia (1953-55), and St. Joseph’s Parish in Stratford (1955-1968). During his time in Stratford, his carpentry skills came into good use as he assisted with building a rectory, parish hall and the Loretto Convent. He retired in 1968, during which time he built his own house in Stratford and continued to serve on the Building Commission of the diocese.

In 1988, he celebrated his Golden Jubilee, and he died on April 2, 1994. As is abundantly clear, the theme of hard work and cooperation was a large part of his life – not just in physical buildings, but also in spiritual matters.

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