



## « THE MARVEL OF CONSECRATED LIFE »



Bishop François Thibodeau, C.J.M.

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- I – The Threefold Mission of All Consecrated Life
- II – Part One: Religious Institutes
- III – Part Two: Societies of Apostolic Life
- IV – Part Three: Secular Institutes
- V – The Trees Have Not All Been Planted
- VI – Appendix: « Dieppe-Québec, 1639 »

Pastoral Letter of Bishop François Thibodeau, c.j.m. of Edmundston  
On Consecrated Life  
for Pentecost Sunday 2003  
8 June 2003

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### Table of Contents

#### The Threefold Mission of All consecrated Life

##### Part One: Religious Institutes

- Marist Family (S.M. and F.M.S.)
- Daughters of Wisdom (D.W.)
- Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption
- Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph (R.H.S.J.)
- Religious of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur (N.D.S.C.)
- Servants of the Blessed Sacrament (S.S.S.)
- Sisters of Charity of Montreal (S.G.M. - the "Grey Nuns")

##### Part Two: Societies of Apostolic Life

- Congregation of Jesus and Mary (C.J.M. - the Eudists)
- Prêtres des Missions Étrangères (P.M.É.)

##### Part Three: Secular Institutes

- Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (O.M.M.I.)
- Voluntas Dei Institute (I.V.D.)

#### The Trees Have Not All Been Planted

#### Appendix: "Dieppe-Québec 1639"

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## « The Marvel of Consecrated Life »

### I – The Threefold Mission of All Consecrated Life

This is the tenth pastoral letter I write, on the occasion of Pentecost Sunday. Last year, with the publication of *Mission of Love: 'You Have Seduced Me, O Lord, and You Have Prevailed'*, in which thirty-five priest-confreres wrote about their vocation odyssey, I mentioned that in 2003 I would continue in the same vein with a reflection on consecrated life and that in 2004 we would conclude with God's call to married life

## Similar Goals

When Saint John Eudes founded the Congregation of Jesus and Mary - the Eudists - he mentioned three goals he had set for his institute, goals which must be closely connected and which, at least through the first of these, must relate to those of other religious institutes. He wrote: "You must remember that the Congregation has been established in His Church by God, and that He has given you the grace of calling you for three reasons. The first is to give you the means to achieve the perfection and holiness proper to the priestly state. The second is to work for the salvation of souls through missions and other priestly functions, in other words, to do the work of the Apostles, the work of our Lord, so great and so divine a work that there can be none greater nor more divine. However, there is one which surpasses it, and it is to work at the salvation of the clergy, in other words, saving the savours, directing the directors, teaching the doctors, shepherding the shepherds, enlightening those who shed the light, and sanctifying those who are the sanctification of the Church. This is the third goal for which God willed to establish our small Congregation in the Church, to which He has called us in His unfathomable mercy and of which we are totally unworthy."

## Gratitude and Challenges

Sharing in this feeling of radical unworthiness, I nevertheless boldly but with gratitude broach the subject of a marvellous work accomplished by the Holy Spirit, a work He continues to carry out among us, the work of institutes of consecrated life: religious congregations, societies of apostolic life, and secular institutes. The cry of the Church in her liturgy - "Deepen in us a craving for holiness!" - seems to apply to every person consecrated to God in a special way, through the Holy Spirit. By introducing you to the institutes of consecrated life, the religious congregations, institutes of apostolic life, and secular institutes now working and ministering in our midst, I want to express on behalf of the entire Church of Edmundston my deepest gratitude for the wonderful witness they give us and for the priceless services they render. I also wish that, moved by this same Spirit, others among us, especially young people, answer the Lord's call made through me and my brothers and sisters. I thank all those who have made this pastoral letter possible. My hope is that it bear much fruit. I also draw your attention to the Appendix which tells about the coming of the first nuns to New France, the Hospitallers of Québec and the Ursuline Nuns. Like the Acts of the Apostles, their story is about the enthusiasm of religious beginnings, about the world's first women missionaries. They are the heralds of the consecrated life, the apostolic life, and the life of secular institutes.

## Disturbing Statistics

What would have become of our diocese, without the presence of religious priests, brothers and sisters, and of consecrated men and women in the midst of the world? From its very beginnings in 1944, the diocese comprised 42 diocesan priests, 10 religious order priests and 170 sisters, serving a Catholic population of 37,702. Fifteen years later there were 63 diocesan priests, 32 religious priests, 360 sisters, 24 religious brothers and 60 members of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate secular institute, for a Catholic population of 53,000. The most recent statistics show that the diocese now has 37 diocesan priests, 9 religious priests, 117 sisters, 1 religious brother and one Oblate Missionary of Mary Immaculate, for a total Catholic population of 54,300... Those religious houses which were our pride in the still recent past are no longer in the hands of religious communities: for the most part, schools and hospitals have been turned over to the state or to private corporations: the Sanatorium Saint-Joseph, the Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Joseph in Edmundston, Grand Falls, Saint-Quentin, and Perth, the Université Saint-Louis, the École Maillet and Collège Maillet, the Christian Brothers' Juvenate, the École Notre-Dame, the Convent of the Grey Nuns, the Foyer Notre-Dame in Saint Leonard, the Académie Conway, the École Saint-François, the Major Seminary at Red Rapids, convents, etc. Major divesting has taken place, these past forty years, with fewer and aging personnel, a change of direction in social and charitable work, a lesser visibility of religious brothers and sisters. Yet, despite all these changes there continues to burn the sacred flame animating every consecrated person, an unconditional love of Jesus and his work, for the glory of his Father and the salvation of the world.

## A Continuing Sacred Flame

In his unforgettable post-synodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996), Pope John Paul II pointed out the threefold mission of all consecrated life: "Confessio Trinitatis, Signum Fraternitatis et Servitium Caritatis," which could be translated "Consecration to the Trinity, Communion of Fellowship, and service of love." It seems to me that more than ever all consecrated persons desire to profess through their whole lives their belonging to the Blessed Trinity. Their vocation is really an initiative of God; consecrated by the Holy Spirit, they want to follow in the footsteps of Jesus by living the evangelical counsels. Guided by the Spirit of

holiness, they seek to remain faithful to the charism of their institutes while being creative and remaining open to new concerns. Under the sign of communion, their aim is to truly live the lasting values of love, fellowship, and truth. Wishing to show God's love in the midst of the world, they do not hesitate to respond to the call of Christ through the offering of their lives in the prophetic witness of a chaste, poor, and faithful life, in freedom and compassion. Remembering the three expressions of Pope John Paul II, recalling the words of priest-poet Robert Label, and thinking about all those consecrated persons in the diocese of Edmundston, I cannot but repeat "Happy, blessed, lucky are you that God has chosen you!" As I consider your mission of love and compassion, the meaning of your commitment, and remembering these words of the Gospel of Saint John (15:16), "You have not chosen me. I have chosen you." - I am reminded of the words of Elizabeth: "Blessed are you who have believed. Happy, blessed, lucky are you! God has chosen you!"

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## II - Part One: Religious Institutes

Marist Family (S.M. and F.M.S.)  
Daughters of Wisdom (D.W.)  
Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption (F.M.A.)  
Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph (R.H.S.J.)  
Religious of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur (N.D.S.C.)  
Servantes du Très-Saint-Sacrement (S.S.S.)  
Sisters of Charity of Montreal (S.G.M. - the "Grey Nuns")

"Religious life, as a consecration of the whole person, manifests in the Church the marvellous marriage established by God as a sign of the world to come. Religious thus consummate a full gift of themselves as a sacrifice offered to God, so that their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity. A religious institute is a society in which in accordance with their own law, the members pronounce public vows and live a fraternal life in common. The vows are either perpetual or temporary; if the latter, they are to be renewed when the time elapses. The public worship which religious are to give to Christ and the Church involves that separation from the world which is proper to the character and purpose of each institute" (Canon 607).

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*"In a difficult mission, we must be saints!"*

### Marist Family - Society of Mary (S.M. and F.M.S.)

#### Historical Note

Pierre Chanel (1803-1841), is not the only Marist to have been canonised, but he is the first Marist martyr to have laid down his life for the cause of Christ. The natives of the South Sea Islands had named him "the man with the perfect heart." He was only thirty-eight when he was murdered on order of the local chief who was furious at the conversion of his son to Christianity. In the Eulogy of the liturgy of the hours in his honour (April 28), we read: "Burnt by the sun's rays, in his labours, often suffering of hunger, he would come home drenched in sweat and dead tired; he was always courageous, vigilantly attentive and happy, as if returning from a delightful place. This attitude was noticed not once but practically every day." Pierre Chanel once told a confrere, "In a difficult mission, we must be saints!"

Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840), the founder of the Marist Brothers, beatified 29 May 1955 and canonised 18 April 1999, wrote: "God has called us to be saints. We therefore beg you to walk more and more in His love, to strive to live in peace, and to apply yourselves to the task at hand so that everything in you, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved spotless for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ."

In 1812, Father Jean-Claude Courveille undertakes a pilgrimage to the shrine of Notre-Dame-du-Puy in France, where he is given an inner inspiration: "I desire a society which bears my name and is known as the Society of Mary. Its members shall be called Marists." At Fourvière in 1816, twelve young seminarians sign a promise to found the Society of Mary: "We solemnly pronounce that we shall give ourselves totally with all our possessions, for the salvation of souls by every means possible, with the aid of the Virgin Mary and under her patronage."

The Society of Mary is composed of four branches: the Fathers, the Brothers, the Sisters, and the Third Order. In the Marist Sisters handbook we read: "Could the Society not be compared to the Blessed Virgin's mantle open to take in all God's children, and its four branches as paths leading to this protective mantle?"

It was in the context of the French Revolution, a context of spiritual and social upheaval, that Marcellin Champagnat, Jeanne-Marie Chavoine, Jean-Claude Collin and the other founders of the Society of Mary were born. Jeanne-Marie Chavoine (1786-1858) was a young woman of Coutouvre, as the Virgin Mary was a young woman of Nazareth. Jeanne-Marie had a preference for the poor and the nameless. She refused proposals to enter the religious life offered her and waited instead to more clearly discern the will of God for her. Father Lefranc had told her: "God wants you not in a community already established but in one which is yet to begin." Father Jean-Claude Collin, appointed his brother Pierre's curate, shared with him a project he had in mind: "I was intimately persuaded that the idea was from God, and that the Society would be a success." Pierre Collin, former curate at Coutouvre, called Jeanne-Marie Chavoine and Marie Jotillon to start the female branch of the new Society of Mary. The women responded immediately and arrived at Cerdon in the fall of 1817. After having had lodging for two years with the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Jeanne-Marie settled down in the rectory to live and work; she took an active part in developing the Marist project. On September 8, 1823, feast of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Jeanne-Marie Chavoine, Marie Jotillon, and Marie Gardet established themselves in a hayloft, and then in a very unsuitable house. Theirs became a life of silence, prayer, work, and sharing, a life devoted to service to others. Many postulants joined them. People would see them only in church, and among the poor and the sick. They were vested in the Marist habit on December 8 of that year in the first ceremony ever in the Marist family. Jeanne-Marie was elected superior.

From their beginnings at Cerdon the two founders, Mère Chavoine and Père Collin were in full agreement regarding the charism and the mission of the Society of Mary, despite the fact that they were both very different by character and training. In 1836, seven Fathers and two Brothers left for the South Sea Islands. The Marist Sisters left at a later time, but Françoise Perroron left for the Islands as a lay missionary in 1845. This missionary movement gave birth, years later, to the congregation of the Mission Sisters of the Society of Mary.

To the end of her days Mère Chavoine was deeply involved in the development of the Rule of Père Collin. The Rule would be approved only in 1884, twenty-six years after the death of the foundress. Saint John Mary Vianney (1786-1859), wrote of her: "Love God with all your hearts, like the Superior of the Sisters. She is a saint. She reaches God in prayer with the simplicity of a child." The Marist Sisters today number 500, in 17 countries throughout the world.

## In Our Diocese

Jean-Claude Collin (1790-1875), founder of the Marist Fathers, was a very privileged instrument of the Society of Mary. Through word and example he animated the young community with a marian spirit. "The Marists are always to remember that through a gracious gesture, they belong to the family of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus. In all things they must think like her. Our spirit, the spirit of our Society, do you know where it is to be found? I myself find it entire in the house of Nazareth. Never to say or do or undertake anything, not as much as two words to say, without referring first to Mary." And he added: "I know that I am nothing, I see so clearly that it is the Blessed Virgin who does and says everything." The Marist Fathers are 1500 in the world, where they witness in the manner of Mary, to a Church in search of Jesus Christ, humble and servant, close to all, especially to the forsaken. The Marist Fathers came to the Edmundston Diocese in 1995, to take up ministry in Saint-Basile Parish and Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur Parish in Edmundston; one of the priests was also coordinator of the diocesan seminary's formation team. Today, besides parish ministry in Saint-Basile the Marist Fathers are also involved as parish assistant at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral Parish, and in chaplaincy work at the Hôtel-Dieu of Saint-Basile and the Foyer Saint-Joseph, there.

Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840), touched by the spiritual turmoil of the youth of his day, especially rural youth, established in 1817 the Marist Brothers Institute dedicated to the instruction of youth and to Christian education. Champagnat would often repeat: "We need brothers to teach catechism, help the missionaries, run schools and, in this way, spread the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ." Criticism, defamation, cares and worries of all kinds became his daily lot, but he overcame them and the institute quickly grew. He also contributed with enthusiasm to the establishment of the priest "branch" and its mission. He was professed a Marist priest in 1836, and was involved in the founding of the Marist Sisters, encouraging young girls to enter the new congregation. He also supported the "lay" branch, the Third Order. At his death in 1840, there were 280 brothers in 54 fraternities in ten dioceses, including the one of the South Sea Islands. Today the Marist Brothers congregation comprises 5000 religious in 75 countries, with thousands of lay collaborators. We have been privileged to have with us in the diocese one of these Brothers, here since 1999, involved in pastoral ministry in Southern Victoria Deanery.

Several experiences have been made in inter-branch collaboration, with uneven success. Things were not turning out as had been desired. Unity between the branches having each its own identity, was modified due to their approval as distinct congregations. Nevertheless, this fact reminded all of the richness of the original vision and to need to dig deeply into the common Marist heritage. Despite the fact that for many years the congregations developed separately, we believe that this was the will of God and of Mary, so that today they may come together, stronger and richer, to witness in diverse ways to the unity of the Marist charism. From

what was originally known as the Third Order has sprung a rich bouquet of Marist-minded laity in several countries, in touch with local culture, and known by a variety of names.

“According to Father Jean-Claude Collin, Mary is the Mother of Mercy. Her family is made up of several branches open to all kinds of people. Unity will be found in the name and the spirit. The communities have a mission to carry out in the world, and it is to proclaim Jesus Christ, reveal the mind of Mary, and continue her presence. Bearing the name of Mary, Marists aim at resembling her and following Jesus as she did. When they contemplate Mary in the mysteries of Nazareth and Pentecost, and her role at the end of time, they also share in her zeal for the mission of her Son in battling evil and in responding quickly to the most urgent needs of God’s people” (Constitutions, 8).

## Our Stories

“How beautiful you are, Mary!  
Standing in the light,  
And in total freedom your YES is heard.  
Yes to the full realisation in you of  
God’s own dream,  
Little servant of the Lord.

How beautiful you are, Mary!  
You hasten to bear the Good News:  
Heaven’s joy is in our midst,  
Elizabeth and the Baptist are filled with joy.

How beautiful you are, Mary,  
With a radiant mother’s face!  
You welcome into your maternal arms  
The Love become man,  
And you worship in wonder your son, your God.

How beautiful you are, Mary!  
Humble woman of Nazareth,  
and kindly neighbour.  
You watch over a growing Jesus,  
Watchful presence, teacher of God,  
Loving and tender presence: Mother!

How beautiful you are, Mary!  
Faithful to the end, loving,  
Standing at the foot of the Cross, believer,  
Hoping against all hope  
While already in you, Jesus is risen!

How beautiful you are, Mary!  
Simple believer among the Apostles,  
Enveloped in the wind of Pentecost,  
Your bursting heart reaching  
as far as your son’s,  
Mother of men, Mother of the Church!

How beautiful you are, Mary!  
In the midst of the Church of your Son  
You kindle a spark of fire, a humble family...  
The Marists: men and women of today  
Who experience your Mystery:  
Presence of life, Presence of Love.”  
- **Sister Constance Gervais, S.M.**

“When I realized that the Lord was calling me to become a Marist Sister, I hesitated several years. Fear and doubt: that is why I love so much the Gospel story of Doubting Thomas, the story of a doubting man who becomes a model of faith. In his mercy, Jesus gave Thomas the proof he needed in order to respond wholehearted, “My Lord and my God!” Like Thomas, I asked God for many proofs, which He mercifully gave me. I personally believe that at the moment of baptism a seed is sown. When I was eight I was influenced by

the witness of a Marist Sister who was very close to us children. She would play and laugh with us, and she gave me a pair of beautiful blue prayer beads. I was given the intuition that one day I, too, would be a Marist Sister. The college where I planned to continue my studies after high school closed. My desire to become a sister was discussed in the family and I entered the convent as a postulant. It was a two-year visit, because I was too young and was not ready for that kind of commitment. I returned home and started my career in Ontario as a teacher of French. This marked the beginning of a long period of negotiating with God. I was searching for meaning to my life, and the thought of becoming a Marist Sister was always there. In Edmundston, a Sister asked me, "What do you do when a few days' annual visit is no longer enough for you?" I didn't answer, but I began a discernment process, assailed by doubt and fear. I asked for proof. I asked questions: "Who is God, for me? Who am I, to God?" My older sister asked why I wouldn't make a retreat, to help me think about it. My answer was... "If God wants me to make a retreat He'll set one up in my parish!" And that Saturday evening I read in the parish bulletin about a vocation retreat that was to be held. I went. A sheet of paper fell out of the hymnal: it was the Song of Hosea, "Come back to me with all your heart. Don't let fear keep us apart... Long have I waited for your coming home to me." I accepted the invitation. I asked God to prepare my family who were opposed to the project and to my visiting the Sisters. It was a new beginning, a new life with the Marist Sisters in Edmundston. And before I turned 40 I professed my perpetual vows with the same trust that Thomas had, when he saw the Lord with his own eyes, before he even expressed his faith.

- **Sister Teri O'Brien, S.M.**

"I was born May 21, 1934 in Tingwick, Diocese of Nicolet, Québec, the sixth of eleven children, of whom there are still seven boys living. I entered the Marist Brothers' Juvenate in August, 1948. In August, 1950 I began my noviciate followed by my first religious profession in 1952. I studied in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. at Marian College, from 1952 to 1955. After I returned to Québec I taught at different places in Québec: St-Jean, La Tuque, Granby, Beloeil, Weedon, Iberville, and Waterloo where I was from 1971 to 1988. I held the positions of school principal, assistant director general of the school board, director and superior of the community, parish secretary, and director of elementary schools. After six months of study in spirituality, in Rome, in 1989 I accepted the position of National Secretary of the Mond'Ami mission organisation. In 1992 I became director of the Marist Brothers Bookstore and, in 1996, superior of the Marist Brothers Infirmary at Iberville. In 1999 I came to New Brunswick, to the Southern Victoria Deanery. The 2002-2003 jubilee year gives me the opportunity to thank the Lord for all the wonders He has worked in me and through me. A religious vocation is a free gift of God, which we must accept as such; and persevering in the vocation is another marvel of Providence."

- **Brother Germain Cantin, F.M.S.**

Note: The stories of Marist Fathers Gaston Duchesne and Romain Trépanier were published in the Pentecost, 2002 pastoral letter.

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**"Wisdom for God, Folly for Man"**

**Daughters of Wisdom (D.W.)**

**Historical Note**

In the imposing 1360-pages *Dictionnaire de spiritualité montfortaine* published by Novalis in 1994, Jean Bulbeau offers us one of the most cherished gifts of the Montfort family, the Cross of Wisdom, in Poitiers, in France. Towards the end of 1702, while Father Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort was chaplain at the Poitiers General Hospital and was working with every ounce of his strength to give a human face to the institution, he also tried to transform the mind of its administrators, but the demanding Gospel requirements were disturbing to some and raised lively opposition.

Père de Montfort then decided to choose a dozen or so boarders at the institution, crippled, otherwise disabled, blind... to start a community which would bring a permanent spiritual presence to the house. To this end a room at the hospital was set aside, which became known as "the Wisdom."

In the middle of the room the chaplain installed a great cross 185 cm. by 135 cm., covered with signs and inscriptions which make up a demanding life programme for the disciples of the Wisdom. Across the arms of the cross one could read: "If you deny the Cross of Jesus Christ, he will deny you before his Father." The upper part of the vertical piece has the words: "Denying oneself, taking up one's cross to follow Jesus Christ." The sentence is framed by two monograms: the upper one has Christ surmounted by a small cross, thus identifying Wisdom with the Cross; the lower one bears the figure of Mary, surmounted also by a small cross, signifying in this way Mary's place in the mystery of Redemption. The lower part of the upright bears several important messages for the one who has already started on the road of following the Master: "love of crosses

and desire for crosses, contempt, pain, insults, indignities, grace, persecution, humiliation, slander, illness, abuse,” “Long live Jesus! Long live his Cross!” Then follow the conditions for carrying his cross: “humility, submission, patience; total, prompt, joyful, blind, persevering obedience.” The two last emblems on the cross are: three nails in a crown, representing the instruments of the passion, but represent also, for the “Wisdom” community, the religious vows; and the star representing Mary, a final joyful note to the difficult lesson.

At Nantes in France, in 1716, the Dauvaise sisters were planning on opening a hospice for incurable illnesses. Father Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, whom they approach, advises them - three weeks before his death - : “The first thing that will need to be done in this house will be to put up a cross so that the institution acquire its name, grace, and glory for ever. This is to be the first piece of furniture.” For some fourteen years, from 1702 to 1716, Fr. Montfort had been faithful to the maxim that whoever wants to follow Christ and serve him in the poor must have the cross in his or her house, as part of the furniture. Always within sight, the cross is a stimulant to the disciples of a crucified God, to carry one’s own cross.

The two episodes of 1702 and 1716 reveal in a small way the deep motivation of the man who, along with Marie-Louise Trichet, founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom. 1703-2003: it was three hundred years ago that the Daughters of Wisdom saw the light of day in the meeting of two lovers of Wisdom, Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort and Blessed Marie-Louise Trichet. Montfort could foresee in the future a seedbed for the development of the Daughters of Wisdom animated with the desire to contemplate Wisdom so as to present it to the love of the poorest of the poor. Mademoiselle Trichet, for her part, implemented the foundation’s project, a mission to which she devoted all of her formidable energy. The two brought dignity to the destitute and fed the hungry of their time with bread and kindness.

Born 31 January 1673 in Brittany, France, Louis Grignion de Montfort lived only to the age of 43. When we realise all he did in so short a time, it is stupendous! He entered Saint Thomas Becket College in Rennes in 1685, and in the fall of 1692 he sets out for Paris to study for the priesthood under the Sulpician priests. After his ordination on 5 June 1700, his wish to leave for the Canadian missions is thwarted. He then goes to Nantes to live with and among the poor to whom he had been drawn from the days of his youth. He would in turn be a hospital chaplain and a preacher; his “originality” often caused him trouble. He would be expelled from one diocese and welcomed into another. However, this “originality” could have another name - great holiness or a personal response to the calls of God. At times he would be alone, at other times there would be a few priests with him, and a small community of future priests. He spoke words of fire and was a prolific writer and composer of religious songs. In everything he extols the love of God for the poor and his trust in the Virgin Mary. The Treatise of True Devotion to the Virgin shows us his great love for her. His greatest satisfaction was preaching at parish missions.

He had the overwhelming experience of the passionate love of divine Wisdom for humankind, and his desire was to reveal this love to the men and women of his day. He was daily aware of his powerlessness before the countless marginalised people in society whom Providence confides to his care. To a young lady of the Poitiers middle-class society, Marie-Louise Trichet, he said: “Come to the hospital.” Marie-Louise did so, but as a poor person. A mystical journey would unite these two figures in a common destiny, a passionate love for Christ the eternal and incarnate Wisdom. On 2 February 1703, in the humble hospital in Poitiers, Marie-Louise became the first Daughter of Wisdom. Today more than 2500 of them, in twenty-two countries, continue the spiritual adventure of seeking Jesus among the wounded of society. A tricentennial project is the opening of a mission on the island of Flores, Indonesia.

## **In Our Diocese**

Less than two centuries after these humble beginnings, the Daughters of Wisdom began work in Canada, in 1844. In 1905 they came to the parish of the Immaculate Conception in Edmundston. In 1929, the future Académie Conway was turned over to them. In 1945 they took over the school at Saint-François-de-Madawaska, and in 1948 they were asked to staff the domestic arts department at École Cormier; in 1956, they took over the direction of the school in Clair. Today, the sisters are no longer in the schools, but we meet them in pastoral ministry in the Upper Madawaska and Edmundston, and with the residents at Foyer Monfort, Foyer Plein Soleil, and Foyer Marie-Louise.

“They shall have the beautiful name of Daughters of Wisdom and shall be dedicated to the Wisdom of the Incarnate Word, in love with the folly of the Gospel” (Original Constitutions).

***“If we risk nothing for God, we do nothing great for him”*** (Montfort).

***“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I feel obligated to recommend to all present and future Daughters of Wisdom to never stray from the original spirit of our saintly Founder, a spirit of humility, poverty, detachment, charity, and union with others”*** (Marie-Louise Trichet - Testament, 1759)

*"All that matters in everything is the pleasure of the heart of Jesus"* (Marie-Louise de Jésus).

## Our Stories

"My parents were people of faith for whom God showed himself in nature and in events. They taught me to love him and to love life. I became a child of God in the parish church of St-Joseph-de-Madawaska. I attended the village school, and there I was struck by the May and October devotions to the Virgin Mary; I remember the daily rosary, how it was prayed with devotion by both the young and older children. At the age of twelve I came to Edmundston to continue my studies at the Académie d'Edmundston, and it was then that the Daughters of Wisdom invited me and three other girls to board at the convent. It was there that a desire to become a sister developed in me. I dedicated myself to Mary; she directed my steps, and at eighteen I joined the Sisters as a postulant. I discovered there a love of the eternal Wisdom present in my daily life and in those I come across daily. The following sentence is a beacon in my life as a baptised and consecrated person: 'From all eternity I have loved you...'"

- **Sister Rachel Morency, D.W.**

"From my first year at school I had the Daughters of Wisdom for teachers, and it was with them that I prepared my First Communion. It was that day that I received in my heart the desire of becoming a sister. I must mention here with gratitude a neighbour whose two daughters were nuns: she prayed daily for my vocation. She would invite me over to pray the rosary with her, and charged me with inviting other girls. I lived in the quiet certainty that I would be a nun until the age of sixteen, and I never questioned the fact. It was as if I was guided and supported by Holy Wisdom. My attitudes and choices in daily life were influenced by my gradual discovery of Wisdom. At sixteen, however, I began doubting: Was God really calling me? My parents and those around me were far from being enthusiastic about religious life, and I was embarrassed about discussing the topic. A lady helped me discern God's call, and it took only three weeks for me to become a postulant with the Daughters of Wisdom, where for two years I was moulded by Wisdom. In this austere environment I discovered Wisdom's kindness, and her desire to have me with her. I was learning the spiritual journey which had transformed Montfort and Marie-Louise, and the legacy that could be mine for a lifetime. I was professed a nun in a joy whose memory is enough to keep me faithful. A text from the Eucharistic liturgy sometimes reminds me of this: 'God has created such strong ties with us that nothing can ever break them'. This has ever been my joy. I was a teacher for ten years, carrying in my heart a concern for passing on the spirit of Wisdom. In 1975 I was asked to work on a project for a home for the handicapped. Wisdom had prepared me for this by leading me to Jean Vanier's l'Arche, where I began discovering the beauty of these people and how important they were, in keeping me on the path of Wisdom. For twenty-five years, now, Wisdom is shown to me through the people at Foyer Montfort, and Wisdom asks me to show them her face. I am happy in my vocation. Wisdom's desire is to abide in me, and in fidelity and love I want to welcome her. 'Whoever seeks wisdom finds it seated at the door. Wisdom is not found at the end of the road, but along the path. You would not be looking for me if you had not already found me'."

- **Sister Lucie Gagnon, D.W.**

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## *"A Sign Appeared in the Heavens"*

### Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption (F.M.A.)

#### Historical Note

In the album *Sur les chemins de l'Évangile* published on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, Sister Julie D'Amour, F.M.A., the former superior general, writes about the Institute's beginnings: Empowered by the Spirit, with hearts filled with faith and hope, fourteen young women joined together in 1922 to commit themselves to an heretofore unprecedented adventure directed to the world and full of promise for the Church in Acadia. With courage and determination, these young women lay the foundations of a work marked with both greatness and humility. Practically despite themselves, they were the Labourers of the First Hour of an institute of consecrated life in the Church, the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption. With the passage of time we can sense the solidity of their enterprise, the resonance of their joy, the generosity of their commitment, the simplicity of their devotedness, the fervour of their prayer, the faithfulness of their attachment to Christ, and the beauty of their devotion to the Virgin Mary of the Assumption. Following their Master, they are teachers of youth and adults, they minister to orphans, and visit and take in the needy; they open their homes and share their resources. Where their Founder, Father Arthur Melanson -the humble pastor of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Parish at Campbellton and first archbishop of the new diocese of Moncton - had marked the way, they were lovers of the land, sown the seeds of education, catechetics, free service to others, love of Mary and the Church, and a preferential option for the poor.



## In Our Diocese

It is in 1924 that the Sisters come to Saint-Quentin; they are in Saint-Jacques in 1925, Kedgwick in 1927, Saint-André and Edmundston in 1939, Lac-Baker in 1949, Red Rapids in 1971, Plaster Rock in 1972, Saint-Martin in 1977, Saint-Jean-Baptiste in 1987, and Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes in 1992. In all these parishes they worked for the most part in area schools, but they also worked in homes for the mentally handicapped (Beth Shalom) or for the elderly (Green River, Mont Assomption, Grand Falls Manor, Villa Des Jardins). In the Restigouche, Grand Falls and Edmundston deaneries they collaborate in parish ministry. They worked for a while at the bishop's residence in Edmundston and at the retreat house. They have also been (and still are) members of the diocesan services staff: at some time or other they have headed the offices of religious education, missions (especially through "Parrainage Tiers-Monde"), the École de la Foi, and pastoral agent formation. They are actually involved in a number of formation programmes in both Bible and catechetics, both at the parish and diocesan levels.

In her wonderful book, *Du fleuve à la source*, Sister Yvette Arsenault, F.M.A., in sketching the spiritual itinerary of the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption and looking at the personality traits of Bishop Louis-Joseph-Arthur Melanson and words he wrote in 1925, writes that the words written then have a prophetic bearing: "The Institute will discover the mystical sense of its raison d'être in the mystery of Mary's Assumption... And in the mystery of the Annunciation it will find ample example of all the virtues helping the Institute carry out its task faithfully.

The Incarnation is the mystery of the transcendent and the immanent, the mystery of a transcendent God taking on human form to dwell among us, immanent in human history. We never cease to marvel with Mary at the meaning of this reality which transcends all others, that of Jesus Christ hidden in humanity in order to reveal the face of God. Jesus Christ, hidden in Mary, who has fully revealed the face of God; Jesus Christ, hidden in me, so that I may reveal the face of God; Jesus Christ hidden in the community, in the Church, so that we may, in communion, show forth the face of God. To honour Mary in her Assumption is to believe deeply that, through her, the open welcome of God by humankind is effected. Up to her, the welcome of God could only happen in God. With her, it is achieved in a creature. To honour Mary in her Assumption is to acknowledge that in the one who was radically redeemed the Resurrection was perfectly received. To contemplate Mary, fully associated with the life and mission of her Son is to allow ourselves to continually be illumined with the light of the incarnate Word, which is also the light of the Risen Christ.

More than sixty Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption are natives of the diocese of Edmundston. Besides, more than 160 have worked in the diocese. Among the first of the Labourers of the First Hour, there were two from the Madawaska Region: Sister Edmée Martin and Sister Hélène Lang. Five superiors general were from our diocese: Sisters Edmée Martin, Andrina Dubé, Régina Bois, Marie-Paule Couturier, and Jeannette Leclerc. As of June 2003, we are happy to have with us nineteen Sisters of the Filles-de-Marie-de-l'Assomption.

The zeal and the courage of these home missionaries have led the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption to bring their Gospel witness to different corners of the world. The poet-priest Robert McGraw, of the Bathurst Diocese, wrote the theme song for the Congregation's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations:

You choose us from the midst  
of the world  
And mould us like wet clay.  
May we be fertile soil  
In the garden of the Church.

## Our Stories

A woman in her nineties, Sister Patricia Chiasson, f.m.a., writes the following delightful piece, as she reaches back in time:

The small grain of wheat  
Sown in fertile soil  
Grew in time  
To the ends of the earth.

By training, by their way of living the reality which is the Church, and by the way they live the community experience with their men and women associates, the Daughters of Mary of the Assumption are moved to pass on the charism of their founders, by "teaching" according to the minds of Jesus and Mary.

"I grew up in a good family with exemplary parents. The whole family prayed the rosary together every

evening. My mother, especially, prayed for vocations, and her prayer was answered: three daughters became three Sisters! Every time the Assumption Sisters came by seeking subscriptions to their magazine and thereby introducing their community, Mother would ask them to pray for us to discover our vocation. Every one of the children had a chore, at home. We lived on a farm and there was a lot to do. In the summer, at berry picking time, we would walk to the end of the farm to gather the wild raspberries. We would sell them and the money would go towards buying our school things. My mother was a school teacher, and she would do the weekly wash and entire housework on Saturday. She taught us how to keep house, etc. My parents did not have to ask, "Children, are you coming to church?" Their example was enough for us. Today I am a Sister."

- **Sister Éveline Collin, f.m.a.**

"Mine was a very happy childhood, I felt accepted and loved, by my family. I was probably not rich, but I never thought about it, I never lacked anything. My parents' love was enough for me. In adolescence, my happiness continued. I would have loved continuing my studies, but I never asked, I trusted in Providence. I was happy at home and wanted to stay there, but this could not go on forever, I had to make a decision. The choice of a vocation worked on me. My father would often say: 'The Lord draws a path, but be careful to take the right one!' This made me think. I had three older sisters who had already entered the religious life, but it seemed to me that this was not where I was called. Besides, I did not want to allow anyone or anything to influence me. I prayed a lot for my vocation, and I dare say that I was afraid of the Lord's answer! I loved life, so I didn't want to answer 'Yes'. I remember that on May 15 of my fifteenth year, the very evening of my birthday... I had to make a wish. The belief was that a wish made on one's birthday was granted... always! I didn't want to make my wish too quickly. Why? I said to the Lord: "I want to become a Sister... but I hope that it never happens!" It wasn't due to a lack of generosity, but perhaps because life was beckoning me too much for me to turn from it. However, once my decision was made - I can still hear my father's voice: "You're going to find it difficult, my girl. But never forget that if you are not happy in religious life, you will always have a father to welcome you home with open arms." As for mother, she had little hope that I was called to that vocation, but she never raised any objection. The Lord himself was probably surprised at my decision! I must say that my parents helped me a lot by their wise advice and good example. When I left for the convent, it was like death visiting the house a fourth time. For my parents, giving up a fourth daughter in such a manner created a great void, but they accepted this with great generosity. Little did they know that in time there would be a fifth one. Here I would like to mention the great devotion my parents had for the Blessed Virgin. When my father asked a favour of the Blessed Virgin, he was certain to be granted it. How could we children not be affected by such deep devotion for the Virgin Mary? Their example spoke louder than words. I owe everything to my parents. I can also say, now, that I also owe much to my Congregation from whom I have received so much. Life is beautiful! The Lord keeps me in his love! This I truly believe.

- **Sister Cécile Bois, f.m.a.**

"My parents had a deep faith and trust in God. Their charity, self-sacrifice, and example certainly had a great influence on me. We never talked of vocation, at home, but never would they have kept a child of theirs from answering God's call: there were a priest, an Oblate Brother, and a Sister, in my family. My high school was made with the Sisters of Charity of Halifax. Although I was considering the religious life, at the time, and the Sisters would bring it up sometimes, it never occurred to me to join them, although at that time I was drawn to the religious life, even though I didn't talk about it. I loved their company. I had and still have a particular devotion to the Blessed Virgin. I have always prayed to her. We had the Month of Mary "exercises", which I attended quite regularly despite the fact that we lived quite a way from the Church. I would also attend Mass during Lent, and this required quite a bit of self-denial because mass was very early and the weather was extremely cold. The main reasons leading me to the religious life was that I would have greater freedom to serve Christ in my brothers and sisters, and the love which the Congregation had for the Virgin. The religious vocation is a great calling, and there is great joy in responding."

- **Sister Rita Hachey, f.m.a.**

"My religious vocation grew in me much like a flower seed in a seedbed looked after by an experienced gardener. I had the chance of being born of devout Christian parents, and I grew up with brothers and sisters in a big family. Our parents gave us a taste for prayer. I was deeply marked by the family rosary and the special prayer for discerning one's vocation which we prayed every morning before leaving for school. Sunday Mass was a highlight in our life as a family. I very often heard my father hum the tunes of the Mass which he would sing with the choir. Another event on my vocation journey was the Eucharistic Congress in my parish, a period of grace for our parents, and so for us children, too. There was also the visit of the pilgrim statue of Our Lady of the Cape which made its rounds of all the homes. The example of my parents kneeling with us before the Virgin left a deep impression on me. I studied with the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption in Gaspésie. I dearly loved these devoted, unsophisticated and happy women. I eagerly wanted to be like them, and the calling was becoming louder and irresistible. I had to respond, He had gotten hold of me without my realising it... and He has prevailed!

- **Sister Jacqueline Poirier, f.m.a.**

"There used to be a saying that in every large family there was either a priest, a brother or a sister. I am the tenth from a family of eleven children. As I witnessed my older siblings getting married one after the other, I

would often think: What if I were the one to become a nun? And then, why me? I still ask myself these questions today. Ours was a very ordinary family. Nothing, not work nor play nor tiredness could cancel family prayer after supper. I often did not really understand why. I remember that what most impressed me was seeing my parents fast during Lent. These people knew what it was, to persevere in something! And I wanted so much to be like them. I am the only one in my family to have completed high school and beyond. Some in the family had to work to help Father support the family, and others had poor health. My parents were proud of me and Father counted a lot on me to help them financially and look after them in their old age. Right after my graduation in June I started looking for a job. There was a convent of Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption Sisters in my parish, and when Sacré-Cœur School opened I had one of them as my grade 6 teacher. That was where the seeds of my vocation grew and questions arose in my mind. I had the opportunity of having many contacts with the Sisters and it was always a pleasure to have them visit my family when they came around seeking subscriptions to their monthly religious magazine. I never broached the question of vocations with them and didn't know much about their order except that they were accepting admissions in September and another one in March... One December evening, one of the Sisters called to tell me that the March admissions had been moved to February 8. Nothing else was mentioned. This bit of news and the questions I had had previously returned, especially this nagging one: Why did she call to tell me this, when there has never been any question of my going to the convent? However, that very evening, with God's help I had made a decision. I would go... I received much from my Congregation, it challenged me a lot, and I accepted the challenges in a spirit of faith. I tried to give the best of myself, and to be faithful to my commitments. Along the way I had great joys and a few trials, which I always tried to go through peacefully. Why get all excited? I had everything to gain by reaching deep within me for this peace which propels us serenely forward. This feeling still animates me today. I believe in my religious life, I love it, I live it intensely, and I thank the Lord who walks with me faithfully.

- **Sister Irène Pelletier, f.m.a.**

"My parents were devout Christians, and at home, family prayer was said every evening. Speaking ill of our neighbours was not allowed for any reason whatsoever. I felt called to the religious life around the age of 16. This was not easy for my, I experienced loneliness because I had never left home before. My mother let me make my own decision regarding this call, and I hesitated. Around the age of twenty-three I had to decide because I felt the call becoming more insistent. A lot of tears were involved... I must confess that I have always been happy in my vocation, knowing that the Lord is always there, even in stormy weather."

- **Sister Rita Martin, f.m.a.**

"I thank God every day for my vocation, and I hear his voice as He says: 'I have chosen you; I have called you by name, you mean a lot to me and I love you.' My father and mother were people of deep faith. I see it as a gift from God to have been born in a family where love and mutual respect were important. Religious values were paramount, and it was doubtless in this atmosphere that my brother Aurèle, who became an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, and I received a call to the religious life. My mother, who was a schoolteacher, never missed an occasion to speak to us of God, the Blessed Virgin, and the religious life. I answered God's call on September 8, 1956, and it was in the Congregation of the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption that gave Him my life. In 1974, after nine years of teaching in Québec Province, my superiors asked me and four companions to go to the missions in Honduras. I am certain that St. Theresa of the Child Jesus whom I consider as a childhood friend had a hand in this, because my life's dream became a reality! The ten beautiful years I had with the people there, materially poor but so spiritually rich, are a precious gift that have enriched my whole life. After returning from the missions I continued to respond to God by collaborating in parish ministry and in family-based religious education.

- **Sister Alberte Gallant, f.m.a.**

"I am from a poor family where Christian values existed and were practised. This gave me the great privilege of being able to dedicate myself to others. This great heritage of faith and love was given to me by my parents; along with my brothers and sisters I was taught about justice, honesty, truth, and love. I dreamed of being a missionary in a foreign land, but I hid and tried to disregard this call of the Lord by telling others that I wanted to be a nurse - a profession I would have loved. On my graduation day I really felt that I had to respond to the Lord's call. It then became impossible for me to say no to Him or to invent excuses. In the congregation of the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption I professed my final commitment to the Lord. This brought me into the teaching profession. At one of the retreats I attended, a big surprise, a special grace from the Lord, was awaiting me: the realisation of my dream - going to Honduras. These years spent in the Third World taught me that being a missionary is simply "blooming where one is planted." The physical place is not all that important; what is important is to carry out what God expects of me, and to answer the call to the best of my abilities. Through all these years, what has often kept me on the right course has been daily contact with the Word of God, the Source of life who constantly invites me to adjust my itinerary to the plan and path which God has set for me. The older I get, the more I love the religious life and my congregation."

- **Sister Thérèse Daigle, f.m.a.**

"Every vocation is a reflection of the mystery of God and of the person who, through the power of grace from on high, answers the call from God. I grew up in a deeply Christian family where religious life was always held

in high esteem and the priesthood, in deep respect. I was marked by my parents' involvement in the Christian community, especially in their struggle for a school where the children would get not only instruction in school subjects, but also a good, Christian education. It was a great privilege for me to have the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption Sisters as teachers. These sisters and their lay collaborators were "models" for us kids. I can honestly say that at their school I learned about the joy there is in giving oneself in service to others. During all these years of my growing up there was developing in me the dream of being a missionary. With adolescence, my great desire to become a nun subsided somewhat. As I was nearing the end of high school, I had other interests which seemed to be a lot more interesting! I enjoyed life and was thoroughly involved in it. I registered to attend the Fredericton teachers college, having decided on a teaching career. However, I had hardly made my decision that an event occurred which deeply affected me. One of my teachers mentioned the religious life to me and said simply that she thought I might have a calling to this life. I was bowled over! The call I had carefully covered up had come back to the surface with greater force. So I decided to join the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption. Several years later the superior general came to me and suggested that I join two sisters, in the Philippines. A childhood dream was coming true! And there, we were really experiencing the meaning of our charism: 'Education in every form, but with a preference for the poor'. After nineteen years of missionary life I came back to Canada where I had the pleasure of working in St. Louis-de-Kent, Rogersville, and Bathurst. Since 2001 I have returned to living my dream, as I am involved with the mission-oriented group known as 'Parrainage Tiers-Monde,' in Edmundston, to help needy children in the Third World."

- *Sister Lorraine Gallant, f.m.a.*

"It was neither an apparition nor illumination which helped me discover the Lord's call. I am the thirteenth of a family of eighteen children, and I wonder why I was the girl chosen. My parents had a deep faith, were very devoted, and seemed to always strive to know God's will in all things. I was very young when I first perceived a call to a special kind of life. I used to see the Sisters at the church in Saint-André, and this was like a question to me. Our pastor and one of the assistant pastors would guide those who seemed to have a special calling to the religious or priestly life. That was how, towards the end of grade 8 I was encouraged to attend boarding school in Campbellton to continue my studies. I stayed there four years; it was difficult at times because I was only thirteen at first, and discipline was as strict as any noviciate. I had seriously thought of joining the Carmelites or the Trappistine nuns. After more serious study of these cloistered nuns I realised that my health would not hold under such an austere lifestyle. It was on Holy Thursday 1945, while praying before the Blessed Sacrament, that the call became clearer and I made a decision. A few times when I found the going too hard and was tempted to go back home, I would think about my Holy Thursday experience, and this would reassure me. Didn't the Lord promise that he would always be with us? I was an elementary school teacher for thirty-five years, and I loved the experience. The simplicity, openness, and spontaneousness of the children have helped me discover in them the risen Christ; they have also helped me keep young!"

- *Sister Lorraine St-Amand, f.m.a.*

"I envy those who claim to have heard a call, who know when and where the Lord knocked at their door. It was very different, for me. As far back as I can recall I always knew that I would someday be consecrated to the Lord. My adolescent years were spent close to the nuns, but I was not attracted to their lifestyle all that much - not at all, would be closer to the truth. However, one thing was clear, and that was how I would arrange to be "betrothed" to him. I remember perfectly my prayer of thanksgiving, at my first communion, my prayer was very fervent, I simply asked Jesus to choose me. I cannot say where that particular prayer came from. My parents were good Christians, and at family prayer in the evening my father always prayed for vocations. As for me, when I said, 'Lord, help me know my vocation,' it really meant, 'Don't make my leaving here be too hard!' A native of the Magdalen Islands where I was born and spent my early childhood, my first years of school were in the beautiful Saguenay region of Québec with the Sisters there. I was nearly twenty when I left for Campbellton, like going to a foreign land! I was really out of my element. For over twenty years I saw my parents but once a year. However, nothing made me doubt my vocation and I have never looked back. How did I come to the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption? Having heard about them, I decided to visit them. Events then quickly progressed, I left my beautiful region, my school, and entered the noviciate. I was "conquered" at first sight, by the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption and their smile, their joy, their simplicity, and their total dedication. As my personal mission was the same as the congregation's, I felt totally at ease teaching every grade, but especially Christian education. The work involved in this ministry has always been a pleasure to me, and an opportunity to grow. It fulfills several of my desires: ongoing study, relating to children and youth and, later, with adults, an understanding of people, a thirst for the spiritual, and love of poetry and creativity. It would be hard for me to say which image of Jesus is the more attractive to me: the shepherd, the man bent over the sick, the praying Jesus, the teacher, the Son of the Father? Fortunately I can choose all of them: 'I have been grasped by Christ' (Ph. 3:12). This word remains, for me, an assurance, and the trust I have in the One who will eventually make me totally his, despite the difficulties and detours along the path of my life, which is life itself."

- *Sister Claire Lafrance, f.m.a.*

"After God, I owe my vocation to my parents. Their piety and Christian values nourished my life and prepared the soil for a positive response to the Lord's invitation. I had been told that if one made a wish on the birth

date coinciding with one's particular age (v.g., 10 years old on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month), the wish would surely be granted. The entire day of my tenth birthday I thought about what would be the best wish for me to make. My attention was drawn to two holy pictures on the wall, pictures which I had never payed any particular attention before, except that very day: an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and one of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Jesus gazed down on me as I came down the staircase. As I was most attentive, that day, to recognise all the signs given to me, I interpreted my attraction to the holy pictures as an invitation. In my heart rose the desire to "become a nun," without thinking about the consequences of such a decision except that for me a nun was someone who was very close to Jesus. In days following, my wish was quickly forgotten. Soon after I went to the juvenate of the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption Sisters, in Campbellton. It was there that the call to a religious life was felt more intimately, and I recalled Jesus' gaze on me, and my birthday wish. I hesitated entering this community because the nuns were all school teachers and I didn't want to become a teacher. I searched elsewhere, but the kindness of the sisters, their devotion to Mary, and - I must confess - their religious habit attracted me. At sixteen I decided to join the f.m.a. with the certainty that they would certainly find other work for me besides teaching. At the time, my family would really have needed me at home. I was the eldest of eight children. But the more I thought about it the more I was convinced that I had to answer this call. My parents said: 'God will provide!' And this was fifty years ago! Nevertheless, my 'yes' has had to be renewed daily. It was sometimes difficult to live that 'yes', but Mary had not set any conditions to her 'yes', and she was my model. That is how I came to say 'yes' to teaching, 'yes' to going to the Philippines, 'yes' to being the director of the noviciate, and 'yes' to coming back to Canada... Go... It is the Lord calling, it is he who sends forth. And his mercy for my weaknesses is always there. His grace has never lacked me, to help me renew my initial 'yes'."

- *Sister Viola Côté, f.m.a.*

"It was at the age of nine that I first heard the Lord's calling. Oddly enough, it was before my mother's casket; Mother died in 1941, at the age of 44. As I approached the casket I heard these words: 'Albertine, you shall be a nun, some day.' These words would eventually get lost in the tumult of life. I finished my studies and went into teaching. Every so often I would feel drawn to a life totally dedicated to the Lord, but how could this come about? It was at the age of 23, while in the full swing of things, my head full of projects, and a desire to have a family, that the Lord prevailed. It was during prayer that he called me. The words I had heard at the age of 9 and which I had forgotten, continued to echo in me especially in moments of intimacy with the Lord. I then asked to join the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption. Forty-six years have elapsed since that September 8, 1957, and I confess that every day brings new surprises in intimacy with the Lord. In letting the Lord prevail over me and in saying 'yes' to him, I have received much more than I have given. Following work in Africa, I dedicated myself to twenty-five years' pastoral ministry, and today I find joy in accompanying those who are hurt through the loss of a loved one, a separation, unemployment, illness, and the like. If I am glad to fulfill my vocation by helping people who hurt, it is because the Lord's grace has always been there for me, ever since my birth. It is with a heart full of gratitude for his wonders that every day I repeat my 'yes' to the Lord of Surprises!

- *Sister Albertine Cormier, f.m.a.*

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## *"In Holy Freedom"*

### Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph (R.H.S.J.)

#### Historical Note

In his last CD disc, priest-songwriter Robert Lebel wrote a song dedicated to the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph, called *Dans la sainte liberté*, a reference to the charism unique to this Congregation founded by a French layman, Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière, husband and father of five children, a humble tax collector, in 1636 at La Flèche, France, in collaboration with Marie de la Ferre, a congregation known as the "Congregation of the Daughters of Saint Joseph."

In the holy freedom  
Of children of God,  
May we ever keep  
An attentive heart...  
Attentive to Him,  
attentive to oneself, and  
attentive to neighbour.

Building our unity  
On what is true,  
We shall love one another

As he has loved us...  
Through this bond of love  
By which the Son is united  
to the Father.

With tenderness and care  
Filled with joy,  
And with compassion as we nurse  
the body...  
May we touch the hearts  
Of the suffering!

“Let us be open to and welcome new situations. Many people count on us: youth in distress, broken families, the aged and the lonely... But most of all, let us be women of faith, of prayer, of compassion.”

“Let us renew our faith in God who calls, let us challenge the young especially through the witness of our life of union with God, and of the gift of ourselves lived in simplicity and joy.”

## In Our Diocese

The Hospitallers spread out in response to pressing needs in Kingston, Ontario, in 1845, in Tracadie and Chatham, N.B., in 1868 and 1869, and in Saint-Basile-de-Madawaska in 1873. Of their coming among us, Father Thomas Albert writes that 4 October 1873 was a day of rejoicing, that day when four Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph arrived in Saint-Basile from the Hôtel-Dieu of Montreal. They had answered a request of Bishop James Rogers to open a house in the Madawaska Region. On 10 November, the bishop moved them in what was no more than an abandoned house belonging to the Sisters of Charity. There were seven Sisters arriving in two groups, October 4 and 11: Reverend Mother Davignon, the superior, and Sisters Guérin, Brisette, Maillet, Colette, Philomène, and Rachel. The school and hospital would open the following year. The beginnings were painful, with the death of the superior four months after her arrival, poverty close to destitution, and countless worries.

It was with admiration and gratitude that Father Albert writes about the work of Sister Maillet: “It is with reason that we say that the hand rocking the cradle governs the world. The hand of a woman consecrated to God, bearing in her heart the devotedness of the likes of Jeanne Mance and the zeal of Marguerite Bourgeoys, rocked the cradle of the Madawaska. The Hôtel-Dieu was the sole refuge for the sick of an entire region, for over a quarter of a century. Mère Maillet watched over it. Under the intelligent and patriarchal direction of Monsignor Louis Dugal, the establishment developed in a remarkable way and wrought in the Madawaska a transformation which we would be hard to measure the greatness and calculate the happy results. Wonderfully adapting to the needs of the region, the convent became somewhat of a centre of higher learning, a primary university where all branches of science were taught, and where every talent could develop according to its aptitudes.”

In the last 130 years the Religious Hospitallers established with imagination and perseverance a number of remarkable works: a boarding school for girls and one for boys, the Hôtel-Dieu, the Academy, the public school and the “Petit collège Mgr. Dugal,” the Hotel Dieu of Van Buren, the Nursing School, the Saint Joseph Sanatorium, the Hotel Dieus of Edmundston, Saint-Quentin, and Perth Andover, the Teachers College, Classical College, the Troupe Folklorique du Madawaska, Centr’Aide Le Royer, the kindergarten and nursery school, the P’tits Vilolons Mgr-Lionel-Daigle Fiddlers, Aid to Women in Difficulty, the Foundation for the Works of the Hôtel-Dieu-de-Saint-Basile, etc., without forgetting their missions in Peru and Mexico. These represent as many responses as there are needs felt.

## Our Stories

“I left my father and my family for a far-off, unknown country, to serve my Peruvian brothers and sisters afflicted with leprosy. I left for Lima, Peru, and from there to Iquitos and finally, San Pablo in the Amazonian forest. To get there I sailed down the Amazon River for 39 hours in a thatch-covered outboard. On Sunday we attended Mass with our future co-parishioners. What a shock it was! I had never seen any human beings so disfigured as them, with legs covered with open soars. They were in a wretched state. The heat was stifling, and the sickening smell from bodies decomposing from the terrible sickness. I was put in charge of the kitchen, and in my free time I visited the sick. They would often come to visit me. Through spirit of faith it became possible for us to discover Jesus, in these suffering brothers and sisters, and to bring them comfort and relief, while at the same time we overcame our human sensibilities. These words of Jesus truly bolstered our courage: ‘Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do to me.’ I ministered to these members of the Suffering Christ for 36 years, and I developed much affection for these poor people who had nothing to their name, a true, disinterested love. My 41 years of missionary life in Peru were very precious to

me, as well as enriching, both spiritually and temporally. I thank the Lord for having chosen me for his Mission.”

- *Sister Eugénette Therrien, R.H.S.J.*

“I had the chance of growing up in a family of twelve children. From a family of modest means I inherited a great spirit of faith, a taste for prayer, and respect for life and persons. My parents also bequeathed me with love of work, courage, and fidelity. I learned what it meant to be of service from my father: ‘Help others as much as you can, and do not hinder others in service they can offer;’ and from my mother: ‘When you give, give the best, and never the second best.’ When I was in school one of my teachers asked us to discern our vocation. At the time, the religious vocation seemed to be too high an ideal, one which was not meant for me. I continued with my studies, I went into teaching while helping my parents and supporting family members as they continued their studies, just as my older siblings had done. It was at this time that I heard the Lord voice: it was not what I was giving that He desired; He desired my person and my love. However, as love cannot be imposed but only proposed, it depends on each one to receive it and respond accordingly. I wanted to succeed in life. After having consulted and prayed, someone told me: ‘At the last moment of your life, what is it that you would have wanted to be and to do? Then, go and do it!’ I chose the religious life, not an easy choice. I was 25. I left with my share of the inheritance, my strengths and weaknesses, to walk the path of the religious life in answer to the Lord's invitation, giving the best of myself to those who needed me. I am still walking this path and am happy with the choice I made.”

- *Sister Ronilla Sirois, R.H.S.J.*

“I believe that I was still very young when I became drawn to a life of silence. As early as 5 or 6 I would spend hours alone, outdoors, listening to the birds singing. During Holy Week I would listen to the opera on radio, I didn't understand a word nor the story itself, but I enjoyed listening. At my confirmation I was drawn to enlist as a soldier and to fight for the cause of Christ. We were told that [at Confirmation] we became soldiers of Christ, and I felt I was called up for service! Furthermore, I have always kept this desire to fight for the poor. After having consulted and seeing a career counsellor, and after trying the religious life with the Daughters of Mary of the Assumption, I joined the Religious Hospitallers on my birthday. I was 35 years old. Years have passed and in 2002 I celebrated 25 years of religious profession. My life has been filled with happiness, with small and great joys, so important to a life which the Lord wants for himself! My life is not complicated, I take it as the Lord offers it, and each day I try to listen to what is being offered at the present moment, all the while remaining rooted in the strength He has given me. With the R.H.S.J., I can serve the little ones and the sick; this strikes a responsive chord in me.”

- *Sister Évangéline Poirier, R.H.S.J.*

“From a very tender age I felt called to the religious life. The older I got, the more this call got hold of my heart. While very young, I had gone to the convent, with my mother, to visit a sick person. Passing by the chapel, I heard the sisters sing. At the time, they were cloistered, and a white curtain was drawn to hide them from prying eyes. I was quite impressed. My mother said, ‘It's the sisters who are praying,’ I said to myself, ‘When I grow up, that is where I want to be!’ Shortly after I came to study at the boarding school of the Hotel Dieu Academy. This put me in close contact with the sisters. It was at that time that I felt strongly challenged to choose the consecrated life. Since I felt drawn to the lifestyle of the Hospitallers, I decided to join them. I can honestly say that after fifty years of religious profession I have never regretted my decision. As a child I was trained by my parents to help the poor. When I joined the Hospitallers, my ideal became more focussed. I was asked one day, to care for the poor children who came to the school. This made me so happy, I felt like a true Hospitaller! My deepest desires were being fulfilled! For me, I cannot understand consecrated life apart from a life dedicated to serving one's brothers and sisters in the Church.”

- *Sister Alda Boulay, R.H.S.J.*

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“*Under the Sign of Love*”

Religious of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur (N.D.S.C.)

Historical Note

In her book, *Histoire d'une servante centenaire* about the Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur Convent in

Memramcook, Sister Thérèse Vautour, n.d.s.c., ends her fourth chapter, "On the Road to Change," with the following words: "A new day would dawn for the fifty-three francophone Sisters of Charity who had opted to separate from the mother congregation. The Acadian Region of south-eastern New Brunswick would have its own Acadian religious congregation, one which would speak its language and strive to maintain the Acadian culture and work at preserving the Catholic faith of an entire people." The Congregation of the Religieuses Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur is a daughter of an anglophone congregation, the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception.

Following a long series of consultations both internal and external, on Sunday 17 February 1924, twelve delegates to the first General Chapter, duly convened and authorised by the Church's legitimate authorities, met together at Memramcook and elected their first Superior General, Sister Marie-Anne. Born Suzanne Cyr in 1850 in St. Bruno, she had attended school in the small convent at Saint-Basile. She then became a Sister of Charity of Saint John. At the age of 73 she founded a new congregation known as the Religieuses Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur. Despite her age she set to tackle the enormous task to be accomplished. Seven young ladies were expected for February 23 coming. In the first year there arrived twenty-nine postulants, twenty-three of whom were to persevere. It is said of Mother Marie-Anne that she could admirably combine her sense of administration and her determination with a truly remarkable spirit of prayer and availability to Providence. In other words, she was like Teresa of Avila in Spain and Marie-de-l'Incarnation in New France who lived by the same principles but applied them in differing circumstances. Sister Marie-Dorothée writes, in her book *Une pierre de la mosaïque acadienne* that the likes of these strong women mark our history and modified the destiny of our people.

As a matter of fact, the new congregation, although fully independent, kept the same constitutions and maintained the same spirit as their mother-congregation, the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception. The founders of the Saint John, New Brunswick Congregation were Bishop Thomas Louis Connolly, O.F.M., bishop of Saint John, and Mother Vincent Conway. Around 1854 they had established an institute to look after orphans and the elderly, and to ensure the Christian education of youth. This same finality appears in the first Constitutions of the Religious of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur (1924). It is interesting to note that according to some sources, the new congregation in Saint John, because of its Capuchin founder, would be stamped with the Franciscan spirituality. But as the founder became bishop of Halifax, it was especially through Mother Conway who studied in New York with Mother Elizabeth Seton's Sisters of Charity, that the Sisters of Charity of Saint John and, therefore, the Religious of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur draw principally from the spiritualities of Saint Elizabeth Seton (1774-1821) and Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), whose rule they adopted.

A few words are in order, about the first woman born in the United States to be canonised. According to A. Melville in his history of saints, Mother Elizabeth Seton is a special model of holiness, in many different settings. Wife, mother, teacher, nurse, religious, director of schools, superior of a community, she can serve as a role model to any group of women, especially to those who through circumstance or otherwise must raise children while pursuing a career. She is as venerated by Protestants as by Catholics. In fact, she was a non-Catholic Episcopalian for longer than she was Catholic. She lived only till the age of forty-seven, and she had been a Catholic only since the age of thirty. She was beatified by Pope John XXIII 17 March 1963, who said, on the occasion: "The Blessed came to Catholicism not by denying her past but rather as to a providential end offered to her study and reflection, prayer and works of charity, and which her preceding life had prepared her." If Mother Seton's spiritual journey was roundabout, there can be as much, in the life of a community.

The Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Saint John was the first centre where women's religious vocations developed, in Acadia. The contribution of this community has probably greatly surpassed what the community itself could have intimated, writes Sister Marie-Dorothée. From the very first, the anglophone sisters understand as though instinctively that the education of children was an urgent need. At first the community was strictly English-speaking; however, they adapted to the Acadian milieu and as much as possible would despatch Acadian sisters there. In 1924 there were over 70 francophone sisters in an anglophone congregation. Rather than join francophone communities in Québec, they had opted for Saint John. However, francophone parishes in southeastern New Brunswick, priests were becoming more and more venturesome and started pressuring authorities of the congregation. With the accession of Bishop Édouard Leblanc, the first Acadian bishop, to the Saint John Diocese, a turning-point would be reached. Although a moderate in his undertakings, the new bishop was sympathetic to the plight of his compatriots. On several occasions Acadian sisters directed by Sister Marie-Anne met with him in order to obtain what seemed to them certain legitimate rights. With the assent of the Mother General and her council, the francophone sisters petitioned the Holy Father to separate and form a new congregation. The project grew slowly and became a reality in February, 1924. The work of the Sisters of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur greatly benefited Acadia, their schools and convents were veritable sources of French culture where French language and history took their places alongside the arts and religious instruction. The sisters were pioneers in the evolution of women on Acadian soil, especially through the agency of their Collège Notre-Dame-d'Acadie.



The very year of their being founded, the sisters were already working in Grand Falls on the invitation of Father Thomas Albert who was to die 16 November 1924, a few short weeks after their arrival. He had so much desired to have the school in his parish in the care of French-speaking sisters! Today there are twelve sisters still with us, working in the Grand Falls Deanery, in the parishes of Saint-André, Assumption, and Drummond, and also involved in evangelistic and humanitarian work, especially among the needy both here and elsewhere.

May these words of the theme song of our seventy-fifth anniversary continue to inspire us:

We walk in faith, Lord, by loving as you do.  
We live from your faith, Lord, and we are with you.  
Strong with the strength of our ancestors, we are walking to you,  
Simply by loving one another, for we believe in you.  
In our daily life, we work for you,  
Simply by loving one another, for we believe in you.  
Through your Word, you make us witnesses of your voice.  
Simply by loving one another, for we believe in you.  
You have nourished us with your bread, to strengthen our step.  
Simply by loving one another, for we believe in you.

As a true spiritual master, Saint Vincent de Paul has left us a beautiful text on charity:

“You must know that love of Our Lord can be expressed in two ways: one way is affective, and the other, effective. Affective love comes from the heart. The loving person is full of attraction and tenderness, is continuously in the presence of God, seeks satisfaction in thoughts of Him, and has a life imperceptibly given to contemplation. Thanks to this kind of love, the person accomplishes easily and even with pleasure the most difficult tasks, and is ever watchful to accomplishing everything which makes that person pleasing to God. Finally, the person swims in this divine love and has no greater pleasure than in thoughts of God. Affective love is tender love. Effective consists in doing things which the person we love commands or desires, and this is to this kind of love that Our Lord refers when he says, ‘Whoever loves me will keep my word.’ There is affective love when we act for God, without necessarily any of the Lord’s love; however, the Lord still produces the effect and accomplishes his work. There are some among you who do not feel God. They have never felt Him, and have no idea what it means to taste the Lord in contemplative prayer, and they feel that they have no spirit of devotion; nevertheless, they do not miss their period of mental prayer, and they practice the rules and virtues, and work very hard at this, though it may be with distaste. Does this mean that they do not love God? Of course not, because they do everything the others do and with as much love, though they may feel this less. This is effective love which keeps on hoping, even though it may not show. The first kind of love is not enough. From affective love one must go on to effective love which is the exercise of acts of charity, service to the poor, joyfully accomplished with courage, constancy and love.”

## Our Stories

“Since my parents were great believers and devoted practitioners of their faith, I believe that they were a great influence on my life as a baptised person. My father who was a carpenter and a fiddler, a man I did not know much because of his often being away, to work, died two days before my tenth birthday. My two older brothers were in the army, and the youngest was only fifteen months old. My mother, who had very little schooling, had no trade to fall back on, but she succeeded in looking after the five children remaining at home. At 12 years of age I started taking piano lessons in the neighbouring parish. This was my first contact with the Religieuses Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur Sisters. What struck me about them was their smile, their kindness, their calm and mild manners. I quickly acquired a taste for classical music which was unknown to me, then, and I realised that one day I, too, would be teaching piano. A few years later a few sisters came to teach at our parish school, and this helped me get to know them better. I started singing at weekday masses with a classmate: a taste for prayer was developing in me. One day the parish priest, as if talking to himself, said that I would one day become a nun. These words touched a chord in me and probably awakened something that was still dormant and fully conscious, and so confirmed a probable calling. Until then I was under the impression that only ‘special persons’ could become sisters, so, this wasn’t for me, because my self-esteem was somewhat to be desired. Nevertheless, the idea grew in me. What was special was that God was calling me to this vocations despite my limitations. He gave me the courage to respond when it came time - something I have never regretted.”

- *Sister Irène Cormier, N.D.S.C.*

“I was born in Upper Nigadoo in a Catholic family dedicated to attending Sunday Mass and evening prayer together. I studied six years with the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, first at their convent in Bathurst West and then at their boarding school in downtown Bathurst. Around the age of six I had my first contact with a Sister, a Sister of Charity of Halifax, my father’s sister who had come to my grandfather’s for a visit. I was somewhat

impressed by her. A few years later this aunt was appointed to their convent in Bathurst West; the sisters' convent was attached to the school, and as the sisters were looking for a housekeeper; my older sister accepted the job. My aunt suggested to my father that he send along another daughter as a companion to my housekeeper sister: I was the one chosen, and this allowed me to continue my schooling. For room and board my father would only be required to give the sisters some of his farm produce. I was very happy to have been chosen for this privilege. I was twelve, I enjoyed school, and mine was a very happy life: free to go out (in the daytime) with my classmates. The sisters who were very kind, seemed very happy. I would return home, happy to share in the housework with my mother, enjoying my father's company as well as the presence of my younger sisters and brothers. In 1935 I met two cousins who were Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur Sisters from Memramcook. This was how I got to know the Congregation. At the end of June I decided to request admission to their noviciate and I was easily accepted. I truly believe that through the events I have lived, the Lord was leading me to a French-language community, a community whose foundresses were keenly aware of the needs of the Acadian minority, had made it their work to promote the survival of the Acadian people. Though I am most grateful to the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, I am very happy to be a sister of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur."

- **Sister Hélène Roy, N.D.S.C.**

"I come from a family of nine children, six girls and three boys, sixth in the family, and fourth girl. Mine was a deeply religious family where respect for priests and religious was of the utmost importance. I remember having to go every Sunday and very often the pew was over-filled, and since it was right behind the sisters' pew it often happened that one of the sisters would turn back toward us and invite one or the other of us to share their pew; in this way, contact was established with them. My three older sisters and I went to boarding school at the sisters', before entering noviciate with them. At the time, life as a boarder was not much different from the sisters' own lifestyle. There was a lot of praying. Having inherited a strong piety from my parents, I would often go to the chapel to pray. In front of the main altar there was a scroll with the words, 'The Master is there and he calls you.' Without necessarily believing that these words were addressed to me, they somehow did not leave me indifferent. When my older sister told me that she was going to the convent, I said to myself: 'Why not me?' The following two years, the idea of becoming a nun matured in me and became more persistent. Having completed high school, I joined the Sisters of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur. Each person's vocation is a mysterious thing. While I am still a nun, happy and fulfilled in my vocation, my sisters and several other nuns have left and taken new directions. Why me, remaining a nun? The views of God are full of mystery: mystery of the call, mystery of the response, and especially mystery of perseverance which is renewed daily."

- **Sister Delma Bastarache, N.D.S.C.**

"The Lord did great things for me when he called me to the religious life. Discerning God's call is not an easy matter. The divine call is so mysterious, discrete, and very often unobtrusive. I was born in a small country village, the eleventh of fourteen children, two of whom died as children. I was certainly influenced by my milieu: my parents were deeply religious, devout Christians, with much respect for priests and nuns. My father was a man of faith, a farmer, a tireless worker. My mother had complete trust in the Lord and a great devotion to Mary. She was a woman devoted to duty, courage, and perseverance. Vocations most often come from families steeped in faith and nourished by prayer. When I was seven my older sister - my godmother - graduated from the Bouctouche convent school, and in the fall she joined the Sisters of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur. At that time I told myself: 'One day I shall join her!' A child's dream. I was the privileged one in the family, because every time the family visited at the convent, I was taken along to see my godmother! This was a real holiday for me. Everything in that big house impressed me: the quiet, the beauty, and the joy that were there. A few years later, another one of my sisters joined the convent, following in her older sister's footsteps. Later, I myself went to that boarding school to study home economics, perhaps subconsciously to test whether I, too, should choose the consecrated life. It was then that I became aware that my greatest desire was to become a nun. This was nearly fifty years ago. I have found in this life great fulfilment, and, like Édith Piaf sings: 'No, nothing, nothing, I regret nothing!'"

- **Sister Jeannine Cormier, N.D.S.C.**

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**"Fascinated by Christ in the Eucharist"**

**Servantes du Très-Saint-Sacrement (S.S.S.)**

**Historical Note**

At their 1999 General Chapter, the Servantes du Très-Saint-Sacrement set down their deepest convictions:

We believe:

- in the inspiration of our charism received from Saint Pierre-Julien Eymard and Mother Marguerite Guillot
- in the value and timeliness of our Eucharistic experience: the celebration of Holy Communion in a spirit of peace and joy, and adoration in spirit and in truth.

We live this faith:

- in union with Mary at prayer in the Upper Room, Mary the model of life received and given
- through the witnesses of Eucharistic Centres where we are established
- by strengthening our prophetic role of women consecrated to witness to Love and to celebrate Life
- by working to promote feminine values needed to attain full maturity in Christ.

We want to be women who are burned by the fire of the Eucharist, to spread its devotion.

The Congregation of the Servantes du Très-Saint-Sacrement was founded in Paris in 1858 by Pierre-Julien Eymard (1811-1868), a French priest, with the collaboration of Marguerite Guillot (1815-1885), a worker. Two years previously, Saint Pierre-Julien had founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, for men. On 26 May 1864, feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, the seventeen first sisters and their five postulants settled in Angers; a few months later, they already numbered well over thirty. On 1 August 1868, Father Pierre-Julien Eymard, the Founder, died at the age of 57. He was beatified by Pope Pius XII on 12 July 1925 and canonised by Blessed John XXIII on 9 December 1962, during the first session of the Second Vatican Council. This man of fire had been seized with the love of Christ revealed in the Eucharist, and his aim was to witness to this to the people of his time. His life, nourished by the Eucharist celebrated and contemplated was rich in all kinds of ministries. Through the Holy Spirit he perceived the Eucharist's power for renewal of Church and society: "We take all of the Blessed Sacrament! We want not only to worship and adore, serve and help the Eucharistic Jesus, but we especially want to make him known, worshipped and loved in every heart. Until now the sun of the Eucharist had not risen, but all the great Eucharistic riches now open before us. This is amazing! What will it be like, later?"

The Foundress, Mère Marguerite, died 7 July, 1885, after having been for over twenty years blind, suffering, and an invalid condemned to a wheelchair. During her lifetime she had received the final approval of the Holy See for her Congregation and its Constitutions. She also worked on a book of rules, a directory, and a manual for the sisters, and founded two convents.

### In Our Diocese.

The Servants of the Blessed Sacrament arrived in Canada, in Chicoutimi, 21 July 1903 - one hundred years ago, this year. From there they gradually prepared the founding of the Edmundston Cenacle, as their convents are called. In July, 1945, at the time Father Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M. is appointed the first bishop of the newly-erected diocese of Edmundston, he was replacing chaplain at the Chicoutimi Cenacle. The very day of his episcopal ordination - 15 August 1945 - the sisters let it be known that they would like to open a cenacle in Edmundston. One of Bishop Roy's first reactions reminds one of the reaction of Pope Pius IX, when he approved the project for the new Society of the Blessed Sacrament; when the project was presented to him by its founder, Father Pierre-Julien Eymard, in 1856, the Pope exclaimed, "The Church needs this Work!" For Bishop Roy, also, "his diocese needed this Work." So, after consultation with clergy and laity of his diocese, on 27 March 1948 the bishop signified his agreement to the sisters' coming: "The Blessed Sacrament Sisters have requested to come to our episcopal city. We and our clergy have granted their request with happiness and joy, though we ourselves should have approached them on both knees, and crying tears of blood, begging them to come to us!" On 10 April, 1948, he wrote to his people: "Contemplatives, perpetual adorers of the Most Blessed Sacrament, [the sisters] desire to open a centre for the spreading of Eucharistic devotion, where the faithful shall have easy access and where they shall be able to nourish and renew their devotion. There is no need to demonstrate that by their prayer and sacrifice they shall bring much to the diocese. They shall draw to us the graces which enlighten the mind, purify the heart, and sanctify souls. Their uninterrupted prayer will bring us further blessings from God." On a photo of himself he autographed a few weeks before his death in 1948, he wrote: "To the Reverend Sisters Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament, living links connecting the Eucharistic Christ to the Diocese of Edmundston;" this confirmed once again the mission he had given them for all the years to come. Their mission is to make known the indescribable gift of the Eucharist, through constant praise, adoration, atonement, perpetual intercession for the needs of the world. Their mission is also one of reminding us that all the baptised are called to this, according to one's state in life. The faithful who desire to participate in a more committed manner to this mission can join the "Agrégation du Saint-Sacrement" which now has a membership of over 700, in the diocese. They can also practice meditating on the Word of God through the lectio divina method. "Everything must flow from the divine Eucharist and return to it: our spirit must be one and return to it," wrote Saint Pierre-Julien.

### Our Stories

"From earliest childhood I sought grace from the source of mercy. One day I discovered that my birthday fell

on June 9, which was when, in 1895, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus dedicated herself to the merciful Love of Jesus. Was this only coincidence? Fascinated by this merciful Love, it seems that the gaze of Jesus bore through me and set itself like a seal on soft wax. Throughout the years grace has followed upon grace, all stemming from the spring of the Lord's own heart. The call to follow Jesus became louder by the time I was about 16, as I read letters inflamed with love, from an aunt who was a Sister Servant of the Blessed Sacrament. The Lord's freely-given Love still incites me to say yes to his requirement of total love, to worship and have him worshipped by all who love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The beauty of eucharistic adoration is a strong attraction for my heart, and it sustains my energy. The life of a Sister Servant is a vibrant symphony of praise, in response to the Father's merciful love in Jesus".

***Sister Yvonne Bouchard, S.S.S.***

"My desire to be totally dedicated to God is rooted in the daily reception of holy communion. My mother watched over all her growing children (there were ten of us); she knew how to forge characters without sermonising. My vocation was well 'cultivated' by my parents' example and virtues, in the happy atmosphere of poverty, and the habit of early rising to attend the seven o'clock mass, each morning, despite distances, in every kind of weather. The joy of this daily encounter invigorated our energies. When the Eucharistic Crusade was established in our parish, I became its chief apostle and I worked at applying its motto to my life: Pray, receive communion, sacrifice yourself, be an apostle! Jesus fascinated me more and more and I burned with the desire to offer him my whole life. At 15 I felt that it was urgent for me to 'fix my dwelling place' and to fulfill my desire for a life of silence and adoration, withdrawn from the world. I was 17 when I finally discovered this place so earnestly longed for. I just happened to see the address of the 'Servantes du Saint-Sacrement de Québec' in a religious magazine. Just the name told me all I needed to know! I was ready to cross land and sea to answer the Lord's call. There before the Eucharist - like Mary in the Upper Room - I would sustain the zeal of the apostles and carry the needs of the whole Church in my prayer. Mary, the humble Servant would be my model, in her hidden life. Today, I can say that my 63 years of service to the Lord have brought me happiness which grows greater every day, despite family and health setbacks. I taste the joy of pure and total devotion!"

***- Sister Jeanne Aylwin, S.S.S.***

"My story is one of conquest, of being won over. I felt called to the religious life around the age of six. Jesus in the Eucharist was a strong attraction to me. I would dream of a community of sister adorers where I could live in his presence, for the sake of the world. At 17 I had the joy of joining the Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Today I thank the Lord for the Bread of Life and His Word of Life. The wonderful meditation of Scripture is at the heart of my life. The contemplated Word takes me deeper each day into Jesus' Easter mystery, and teaches me the joy of giving. Thank you, Lord, for your gift of the Eucharist, the infinite gift of Love."

***- Sister Marie-Thérèse Dugas, S.S.S.***

"Trying to write as shortly as possible about a love story about which I became aware at age 7, at my first communion, is quite a challenge. God is infinitely kind! Jesus invited me to follow him in the religious life through discrete invitations. I wanted to be a missionary, to teach the little ones about the love of Jesus. My mother's intuition told her about my secret, and she made me realise that this vocation would be beyond my strength. In his mercy the Lord showed me the way to live in his eucharistic presence. The lifestyle of the servants of the Blessed Sacrament was an answer to a secret thirst I had for the hidden life. Like a watchful sentinel, I adore and pray for the Church and the world. I am grateful for the Lord's faithfulness, for his attentive love which gives me the courage to overcome difficulties. It is such a grace to drink each day at the fountain of God's Word and the Eucharist. I have remained in my vocation, and I pray the Holy Spirit to inspire young people to carry on the essential work of prayer."

***- Sister Christine Lapointe, S.S.S.***

"From the age of five I always wanted to become a nun, though I had no idea where the Lord was calling me. During adolescence grace led me along the path of greater attraction for prayer. Naturally timid, I forced myself to register for a closed retreat which was taking place at the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament in Sherbrooke, Québec. A few months later I asked to be admitted to the noviciate. Noviciate was a happy period for me. I made my first profession with a great desire of giving myself totally to Jesus, trusting in the support of his good mother Mary. Two years later a new foundation was announced for Melbourne, Australia... I was surprised to be among the pioneers there. I was ten years in Australia. When I returned to Canada I was pleased with being simply a sister adorer and to work for my community by baking altar breads: this job kept me busy for over thirty years. Now retired, I adore, I pray, and I do volunteer work throughout the day under the watchful eye of Mary. Long live Jesus in every heart! I offer everything through my good Mother Mary, in service to the Blessed Sacrament."

***- Sister Cécile Saint-Laurent, S.S.S.***

"My vocation as a Sister Servant of the Blessed Sacrament is a gift of God. I also owe this vocation to my parents, especially to my mother who had so much love for the Eucharist. From the very first I was enveloped in the presence of Jesus, especially in church where I was entirely his. My teachers, the Assumption of the

Blessed Virgin Sisters, spoke so beautifully of this presence! What care, what respect, what inner silence we needed, in order to belong entirely to Jesus. I was enthralled by this. Every evening during the month of Mary [May] and the month of the Holy Rosary [October], adults and children would meet in church to pray and sing together. I have such beautiful memories of this! I would leave the church enwrapped in an indescribable silence. At 18, at the end of high school, I answered the call of Jesus. Our Rule of Life was similar to that of the Carmelites in its austerity. Poverty had pride of place, but I found there a response to my inner craving for silence and for heart to heart communication with Jesus. Like him, my desire was to lovingly surrender everything for the sake of my brothers and sisters. In the religious life I was several years at the service of the sick sisters: in this very simple ministry I journeyed in a spirit of freedom and detachment, and was always happy. Today, it is the same love that is growing, the same love as the one I had at eighteen, though it seems to be more intense, and with awareness of the needs of the world today. My vocation is a life of happiness which I would love to share with our young people today.”

- *Sister Denise Aylwin, S.S.S.*

“Then I passed by and saw you... I said to you... live and grow’ (Ez. 16:6). The first conscious awareness of Jesus’ love in me was at my First Communion. I remember Mother preparing me for the Great Day: dressed in white, with a fire I felt burning within, the same I feel today for the Blessed Sacrament. Father, who had joined the Church at 22, and Mother, orphaned at the age of 3, had chosen the Virgin Mary for mother. At fifteen, Father sent me to the convent at Saint-Basile to study music. I accepted, despite the fact that I harboured in me the desire of becoming a sister. As a matter of fact, I joined the convent at seventeen, only to be told that ‘You don’t have a vocation.’ I am absolutely devastated, but I thought to myself, ‘The door remains open...’ Seven years went by, and then I made a retreat. The priest asked the question: ‘What are you doing with your life?’ And I answered the same as to everyone else: ‘I am waiting for God to tell me. I want to become a nun, but I don’t know where.’ ‘Well, here is God’s answer to you: We have the Sister Servants of the Most Blessed Sacrament, newly-arrived in Edmundston: they work and adore the Blessed Sacrament.’ At the death of Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M. in October, 1948, I approached his casket, touched the hand of the Shepherd, saying: ‘I want to be a religious!’ On January 6, 1949 I sought admission in Québec; I was accepted February 11, and on May 1 I started my noviciate. I was twenty-four years old. I left my beloved family for another one, or rather, He chose me to belong to the Blessed Sacrament family. I continue to thank Him every day for such a kindness and for His trust in me. After fifty years of religious life, I must sing: ‘Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo.’”

- *Sister Gertrude Gibson, S.S.S.*

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## *“To Serve the Poor For Ever”*

### **Sisters of Charity of Montreal (S.G.M. - the “Grey Nuns”)**

#### **Historical Note**

The congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, better known as the “Grey Nuns,” were founded in 1737. The foundress, Marguerite d’Youville, was then a widow and mother of two children. Besides raising her family she cared for the poor and the helpless, the marginalised of eighteenth-century society. In them, in their broken hearts, bodies, and minds, she sees Jesus Christ. Along with three friends who, like her, share a desire to serve the poor, she opened a house for them, where she welcomed them and cared for them with courage and devotion. Despite countless criticism and difficulties, she never gave up her work. She died in 1771.

At her beatification, Pope John XXIII proclaimed her “Mother of universal charity.” In 1990, she was declared a saint, and has become to everyone a role model of love and compassion.

Marguerite d’Youville (1701-1771) bequeathed to her contemporaries and to generations to come a spiritual legacy steeped in boundless compassion for the poor, and in inexhaustible faith in God the Father and His Divine Providence. Early in her life she acquired the certainty that all humans are brothers and sisters before God. She does not hesitate to defend such principles as the dignity and equality of all. Her example is a constant source of inspiration for those who labour to bring about a civilisation of love and justice.

“The rule of the Institute urges one to recognise Christ in the person of the poor, among whom they have the honour of being counted. Poverty, humility, and submission do not negate understanding and humanness. Three words describe the spirituality of Marguerite d’Youville: Father, Providence, Poor. Her charity was so well attuned to all kinds of distress that people would say, “Go see the Grey Nuns, they never refuse!” (Celebration booklet on St. Marguerite d’Youville)

The Grey Nuns follow in the steps of their venerated Foundress, Marguerite d'Youville. Their aim is to reflect in their lives God's love for all, but especially for the marginalised, the poor, and the destitute. Among other things, they operate women's shelters, homes for single women and women in difficulty, food kitchens and clothing depots for the poor, residences for the elderly, centres for the handicapped, and a variety of health services. Besides, they are involved in the life of their milieu and come to the defence of human rights. They work with young people, with those addicted to drugs and alcohol, AIDS patients, the homeless, and refugees. Several sisters do pastoral work either in health care services, or in schools and parishes, sharing in this way in the task of evangelisation.

A number of lay people share the mission and values of the Grey Nuns. Thanks to them, Mother d'Youville's charism is kept alive and timely in responding to the ever-growing needs of the poor of our times. Whether these people be associates, volunteers, or collaborators, they all follow in the Foundress's footsteps and like her, they serve the poor and the needy with the same devotion and the same world view.

## In Our Diocese

For more than two hundred and fifty years, the disciples of Mère d'Youville carry on with the same devotion and enthusiasm the work of their foundress. The Grey Nuns have been among us since 25 July 1944, when they opened the Hospice Sainte-Élisabeth, in Baker Brook, later to become the Foyer Sainte-Élisabeth, a home for the elderly. There are some common traits between Saint Marguerite d'Youville and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231), especially their love for the needy and the poor. (A lack of personnel obliged the Sisters to give up the Foyer in 1985, after 41 years of service, there.) Five years later, in August 1949, they accepted direction of the school in Clair, with about 160 students. Besides regular teaching, the sisters offer courses in music, sewing, and other complementary activities. In July, 1956 the sisters left Clair and were replaced by the Daughters of Wisdom. In 1951, the Grey Nuns accepted the home for the elderly and the poor, in Saint Leonard. In 1990, war veterans are also taken in. The sisters eventually moved from the seniors' home itself and moved to an adjoining residence. Fifty years after its founding, the new Foyer Notre-Dame residence was inaugurated in August, 2001, thanks to the generosity of the local population. The work of Saint Marguerite d'Youville continues, there, and its effect is felt even beyond the village, with the same concern for bringing security and comfort to the elderly of the region.

Through their consecrated life, the Grey Nuns witness to the Father's love for all His children; they witness to the love of Jesus our Saviour, and they witness to the love spread throughout the universe by the Holy Spirit. This love to which they witness, they find it in prayer and intimacy with God. It is in God himself that they find that communion they seek to establish with all humankind. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, was fond of saying: "The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace."

The Foundress of the Grey Nuns and inspiration of all these works of mercy is often addressed as follows: "O Saint Marguerite d'Youville, woman of a listening heart and of compassion, your life is a page of the Gospel inspiring our actions. Give us your eyes to discover the most pressing needs of our times. Give us your ears to hear the cries of suffering and distress. Give us your hands to bind the wounds and relieve the pain. But most of all, give us your heart, that we may manifest divine tenderness in love that knows no bounds. Pray the Father to give us as He did to you a daring faith, invincible hope, and universal charity."

## Our Stories

"I owe my vocation first and foremost to the Holy Spirit who placed in my heart the intense desire to love God, to have Him loved, and to serve Him. These words of st. Matthew really touched me from my youth: 'As often as you did for the least of these my brothers, you did it to me' (25:40). These words guided my life, even in my choice of religious congregation. I used to tell myself that with the Grey Nuns I would certainly have more opportunity to serve the poor and the needy: this was what I have always had the pleasure of doing. I thank the Spirit for His action in me, and I thank Him, too, for all those who have crossed my path and have helped me grow in Love."

- **Sister Geneviève Michaud, S.G.M.**

"I was born in Saint Quentin where the family atmosphere promoted my love of God and of the Virgin. The ten children would gather together after supper for the family rosary and evening prayer. As we lived six miles from the church, at age seven my parents boarded me with a family in the village, for first communion preparation. It was at this time that I met a nun who, because of her kindness to me, developed in me the desire of becoming a sister. Every day I would pray Our Lady to lead me to God and to grant me the favour of religious life. At nineteen I met the Grey Nuns from Saint Leonard who came to open a home for the elderly. I had the chance to get to know them, to love them and their works of charity. Six years later I joined the community. I have never regretted this life choice which has allowed me to serve in my community for nearly thirty years as a cook, of which twenty were spent at Chesterfield with the Inuit of Hudson Bay."

- *Sister Rose-Anne Bérubé, S.G.M.*

"I am the tenth of seventeen children" At a very young age I learned from my father, a farmer, to surrender to Providence and time, to allow the seed to grow, to weed the garden and bring in the harvest for the sustenance of the family. My parents were very close to nature, they knew how to contemplate it and be grateful for it. They passed on to me this respect and admiration for the wonderful works of the Creator, but to them the most beautiful of all His works were their children: each one had a special place in their hearts, at the table, in the sharing of tasks, and before God at family prayer. I experienced deep happiness in this family atmosphere imbued with love, trust, and generous giving. At thirteen, as a boarder with the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, in an atmosphere of silence, prayer, and happiness, I heard the Master's call. These nuns seemed to be so happy! Their joy was contagious, it fascinated me and challenged me. At twenty-two I took the step which led me to the Grey Nuns, because I was drawn to their work, 'to be dressed for service to the suffering Christ, to the needy'... The happiness of belonging to Jesus, the thread which wove the cloth of my days, helped me discover, in God, an extraordinary Spouse! Through trial, suffering, darkness, He has always been my 'Sheltering Rock', and if I could start over again, my choice would be no different."

- *Sister Réjeanne Fortin, S.G.M.*

"Sing, my soul, sing, my heart, sing of the love of your Lord': this verse often comes to my mind, especially today as I recollect the story of my vocation. I was born in Padoue, in the Matapedia region of Québec, the fifth of seven children. I was very young when the thought of the religious life developed in me, because I could hear my mother say: 'How happy I would be if God chose a priest or a sister, from my children!' We had deeply Christian parents who were role models for prayer and service to the elderly and the needy. In such a milieu, vocations freely blossom. So, one should not be surprised to see the three daughters in the family join the Grey Nuns of Montréal, in this way answering a mother's generous prayer many times over."

- *Sister Anita Rioux, S.G.M.*

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## Part Two: Societies of Apostolic Life

"Societies of apostolic life resemble institutes of consecrated life. Their members, without taking religious vows, pursue the apostolic purpose proper to each society. Living a fraternal life in common in their own special manner, they strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of the constitutions. Among the societies are some in which the members, through a bond defined in the constitutions, undertake to live the evangelical counsels" (Canon 731).

### Congregation of Jesus and Mary (C.J.M. - the Eudists)

#### Prêtres des Missions Étrangères (P.M.E.)

*"Long Live Jesus and Mary!"*

### Congregation of Jesus and Mary (C.J.M. - the Eudists)

#### Historical Note

"The year 1643, Our Lord and his most holy Mother gave us the grace, through their special bounty, to establish our little Congregation on 25 March, the day on which the Son of God was made man, and the Blessed Virgin was made Mother of God." It is in these words that Saint John Eudes (1601-1680) sets down in his Memorial of God's Benefactions one of the most precious graces of his life. An author, apostle, and doctor of religious service to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, he contributed, through his Missions and his seminaries, to the building up of the Kingdom of God. In this way he was one of the great artisans of Christian renewal in seventeenth-century France. John Eudes was only 42 and his six companions, between 35 and 45, when they undertook, in a rented apartment known as "The Mission," the project they had presented in pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-la-Délivrande, 10-miles away. This apostolic project was the training of priests who would specialise in proclaiming the Word of God and in training future Gospel workers. With everyone in the Eudist family I feel that the founding of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (C.J.M.) was truly a gift of God to humankind, a gift of the Heart of Jesus and of Mary, a gift that has always produced abundant fruit, even in the worst crises of our existence.

The Eudists have been in New Brunswick for over one hundred years. In 1898 they opened a college in Caraquet and started ministering throughout the Acadian Peninsula. In 1903 they even settled down in the actual territory of the diocese of Edmundston, at Tobique where they ministered to Maliseet and Plaster Rock. A new house was opened in 1912 in Bathurst, the Blessed Jean Eudes House which later became the Université

Sacré-Cœur, following the fire which destroyed the college at Caraquet. In 1946 the Eudists founded Collège Saint-Louis in Edmundston. In the twenty-five years they served at what became the Université Saint-Louis, 116 Eudists staffed this first institution of higher learning in our region. This monument to the memory of these teachers will serve as a reminder to coming generations of the daring of these "visionary" educators. They are not forgotten, Simon Larochelle, Louis Cyr, and Roger Lizotte, as their names have been given to the buildings of the Edmundston Campus of the Université de Moncton, and to the hockey club.

## In Our Diocese

There were over forty Eudists born in New Brunswick, seventeen of whom are from the Edmundston Diocese. For over thirty years several Eudists have been doing parish work and preaching. In the course of this 2002-2003 pastoral year, two Eudists have the pastoral responsibility - with help from religious sisters and lay people - of six parishes (Clair, Connors, Saint-François, Saint-Léonard-Parent, Saint-Léonard-Ville, Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes). Since 1989, a Eudist has been in charge of the Centre Sérénité Counselling Centre. In his great mercy the Lord has given me the pastoral charge of the Diocese of Edmundston; I believe that this wonderful mission, far from distracting me from my mission as a Eudist, anchors me in it even more strongly through proclaiming the Gospel and training and forming Gospel workers.

On 14 November, 2001, the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of St. John Eudes, I dedicated the chapel of our Diocesan Centre to the glory of this great saint. I did this considering the strong ties which bound the Eudist family and the Church of New France from the very beginning, especially those ties between Saint John Eudes and Blessed François de Laval, first bishop of Québec. I did this also in thanksgiving for the presence of the Eudist congregation in North America since 1890, and especially for the training given to several of our very own priests who studied with the Eudists at Holy Heart Seminary in Halifax (1895-1970). I also had in mind the appointment of two Eudists as third bishop and fifth bishop, respectively, of the diocese of Edmundston - remembering also our fourth bishop, who did his studies at the Halifax seminary and who gave the episcopal ordination to our actual bishop of Edmundston. I did this, finally, to thank the Lord for the wonderful work of Saint John Eudes and for his apostolic influence today.

Saint John Eudes can still help the baptised of today discover their dignity as children of God and help at building up the Kingdom of Jesus, in areas as varied as the cultural, social, economic, and political. They are called to boldly blaze new paths for Christ Jesus. "Open! Open wide the door to the Lord Jesus! Do not be afraid!" Saint John Eudes can still inspire priests in their task of the new evangelisation, in the wonderful work of apostolic preaching, and in their ministry of reconciliation. Through his spiritual writings, Saint John Eudes can help all people, through his love of Jesus and his Mother. Wanting his spiritual sons to be missionaries of mercy by "bearing the misery of the most miserable," Saint John Eudes moves us to search out our brothers and sisters who are affected by all kinds of misery, and to reveal to them through the example of our lives the greatness of divine mercy. In a very special way, St. John Eudes wanted his spiritual daughters, the Order of Notre-Dame-de-Charité, to help young women in difficulty.

"In submission to the Spirit, Eudists share in the mission of the Church, sacrament of salvation for the world, through proclamation of the Good News, bringing liberation to captives, healing to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed" (Constitutions, 13).

"Filled with love of Jesus, John Eudes carried in his heart the distress and the needs of his brothers and sisters. He boldly blazed new paths for expanding the Kingdom of Jesus. It is in him that the members of the Congregation find their deepest inspiration. Following him, all strive to remain faithful to the covenant made with God through their baptism. Responding to the grace of their ordination, the priests strive to fully realise the ideal of holiness proposed by their founder, so as to become shepherds after the heart of God" (Constitutions, 14 and 15).

I express my deep gratitude to the authorities of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary for the Eudist presence in our beloved Church, and I invite my brothers and sisters to come as many as possible, to open new ways for the growth of the Kingdom of Jesus among us.

## Our Stories

**Note:** I published in the 2002 Pentecost pastoral letter my vocation story and that of my confrere Claude Côté.

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***"Go and Teach All Nations!"***

**Prêtres des Missions Étrangères (P.M.E.)**



## Historical Note

On 12 April 1922, the Archbishops and Bishops of Québec wrote a pastoral letter to the Catholics of the province, announcing the founding of a Foreign Mission Seminary, in Montreal. Here are a few excerpts:

“The Church, established on the plains of Acadia and along the Saint John River, is rooted in French soil. At the time this generous union took place in the furthest reaches of the eastern apostolate and a most important place, several of its most devoted religious came to our country to sow the seeds of faith, and the first bishop of Québec, François de Laval, a close friend of the Société des Missions Étrangères, started, in close collaboration with that Institute’s seminary in Paris, the establishment of his own seminary and of the missions confided to his care. We, too, through divine grace, and we can say so without boasting, are the sons of a nation of apostles. We have reached a historical moment of our national development where it is not only allowed but also necessary to ask ourselves whether our Province does not have a special mission to carry out in the ever urgent propagation of the true faith among the pagan nations. Providence has been very generous towards us. Throughout the course of much agitation and unrest in the political and religious life, we have never ceased being blessed with most signal favours. Has the hour not come for us to organise in our own midst a crusade which other countries, especially France, give us such a grand example? Our Province is given an apostolic mission and this mission, if it is to produce all its fruit, requires on our part a new deployment of apostolic efforts, which we must mention to you. For some time now the Bishops of this Province have been thinking about founding a seminary for recruiting and preparing Gospel workers for work overseas. We bear in mind the words of the Master: “The harvest is great, but the labourers are few. Pray therefore the master of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.” We also know of the great desire of the Holy See to have us take a more official place alongside other Catholic nations, in the apostolic endeavour. A year ago, at a meeting of the Archbishops and Bishops of the civil Province of Québec, this matter was the object of serious deliberation, following which the prelates unanimously decreed the erection of a Foreign Mission Seminary in the city of Montreal.

This new seminary, which we have the pleasure to announce, shall be on the one hand under the overall direction of the Sacred Congregation De Propaganda Fide and on the other hand, under the immediate supervision of the Archbishops and Bishops of the civil Province of Québec legally constituted as a Corporation or the “Québec Foreign Mission Society.” The seminary shall be named after Saint Francis Xavier in honour of this valiant apostle and venerated role model of all missionaries, and secondary patron of the Province of Québec.

It is with this in mind, as well as in the interest of the new task and in the interest of our Province and of all of Canada that we call on your patriotic spirit and your generosity, today.

At a time when pagan powers are in closer communication with Christian nations and are more tolerant of the Christian religion, the time seems ripe for all Catholic countries to join in an effort surpassing anything experienced thus far, to bring to unbelievers the word of life. And this is the moment we have chosen to set the foundation of an establishment which will ensure our people a most honourable share in the apostolic endeavour and which, far from weakening it, will serve to strengthen its religious and social future. Full of confidence in this enterprise, we want to pursue it with all diligence possible, and we dare hope that neither the grace of God nor the help of our people shall be wanting.”

A year and a half later, on 11 September 1925, was held the first missionary departure of Canadian missionaries for China. The Superior, Canon Avila Roch, exclaimed: “Go forward courageously to save souls! Go work to the glory of God, for the love of Christ! Keep on practising detachment, especially of yourselves, to attach yourselves only on Jesus Christ. As a pledge of your success I give you the cross of Christ. Love it and find you support in it!” As early as 1929 the Apostolic Prefecture of Szepinghai was given to the P.M.E., and in 1932 the prefecture was elevated to the rank of Vicariate Apostolic with Bishop L.-A. Lapierre, P.M.E., as its first Vicar Apostolic. In 1937, the Prefectures of Lintong and of Davao in the Philippines were given to the P.M.E. In 1938 Archbishop Ildebrando Antoniutti, Apostolic Delegate to Canada, saw Father Émile Charest, murdered by highwaymen, a martyr of the faith. Soon after coming to China, the P.M.E. Society took on expansion following requests from Japan, Central America, South America, the Sudan... War, persecution, and imprisonment do not stop the missionaries. Throughout many difficult years of imprisonment, Bishop Gustave Prévost, P.M.E., was a witness of exceptional fidelity and courage. Results of missionary work are not always evident, sometimes groups even question the timeliness of aid offered by foreign priests: for example, in the 1970 a Bolivian institution estimated that one in four priests thought that it was time for foreign clergy to leave. There was similar reaction in the Philippines; in Cuba, social upheaval threatened to wipe out altogether the work of years of missionary endeavour. Despite such trials, the missionaries maintain that the cross leads to the resurrection, and that the missionary must be a man of joy, enthusiasm, and zest for life. During the seventies, the Society had a membership of some 350 priests. “We are but a handful,” stated Father Viateur Allary, the superior general, “while there are 33,000 missionary priests circling the globe!” Quick calculation shows us that the P.M.E. are directly involved with two million Christians and as many, if not

more, non-Christians. In several places the P.M.E. are in charge of the training of future clergy in minor and major seminaries, they work in parishes and at the diocesan level, in chaplaincies and social organisations.

## In Our Diocese

In December 1971 the Bishops agreed in principle that the Société des Missions-Étrangères is a Church service mission ministry and that its members may be incardinated in their home diocese, as it used to be before 1938, so as to better signify the ties existing between Churches. That is how the following P.M.E. priest were “incardinated” in our diocese: Fathers Claude Dumont, Joseph Godbout, Guy Lévesque, Patrice Picard, and Guy Sirois. The P.M.E. Society also allows for the possibility of priest and lay associates to work in their mission fields. It was in this way that Father Roger Dionne was associated to the Society for four years. At the beginning of this new millennium, the Society has taken another step by welcoming among them people who are not only from Canada, but from other countries, too. The mission remains the same, though: to contribute to the Church’s mission “ad gentes.”

## Our Stories

**Note:** We can profit from reading, in my pastoral letter for Pentecost, 2002, the vocation stories of Fathers Claude Dumont, Guy Lévesque, Patrice Picard, and Guy Sirois, as well as that of Father Roger Dionne, who is actually Vicar General of our Diocese.

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## III - Part Three: Secular Institutes

“A secular institute is an institute of consecrated life in which Christ’s faithful, living in the world, strive for the perfection of charity and endeavour to contribute to the sanctification of the world, especially from within” (Canon 710).

### Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (O.M.M.I.) Voluntas Dei Institute (I.V.D.)

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### “*With Mary’s Help*” Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (O.M.M.I.)

#### Historical Note

On 2 July 1952 Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I., Miss Luce Lacombe and Miss Oliva Clavette, founded in our diocese of Edmundston the secular institute of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate. It was the idea of Nurse Luce Lacombe to found the Institute, an idea which was then a novelty in the Church. The idea had been germinating since the Holy Year of 1950. Some twenty women were on retreat at the Edmundston retreat house founded by Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M., and lodged in the old Canadian Army barracks in the Sacré-Cœur quarter of Edmundston. “The Oblates of Mary Immaculate were directors, at the time, of the retreat house. Mr. Jean Pedneault wrote in the Journal Le Madawaska newspaper of 17 July 2002, that Mme Luce Lacombe had Mme Doris Plourde contact Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I., at the Hôtel-Dieu of Edmundston. It was then that she decided to become an Oblate Missionary of Mary Immaculate. Mme Plourde’s speciality was accounting, and she remembers the work of the Oblates in Grand Falls to make the old hospital there more functional. Mme Plourde also remembers that Mme Lacombe had previously been a member of the White Sisters of Africa. At first, the Oblates all lived together in Grand Falls, 65 of them, Rome shortly asked them to decentralise and to be closer to the people.”

From the very first the Oblates settled down in several places in the province of Québec, working in different areas: hospitals, schools, businesses, etc. I remember that the Oblates were the first to staff the kitchen and laundry at the new Saint-Jean-Eudes Seminary at Limbourg, in Québec’s Ottawa Valley: early in the morning we would hear them sing the praises of the Lord! Shortly after they came into being, in response to requests from other Churches or to carry out projects of international cooperation, a few of them left for Europe, South America, the West Indies, and Africa. The group was officially recognised as a secular institute in 1962 and was raised to the status of a secular institute of pontifical right on 24 March 1984. There are actually some 600 Oblates in over twenty countries. Their headquarters is located in Trois-Rivières, Québec. The Founder, well into his nineties, is still very much alive! At 93, he is still a very appreciated spiritual and tireless spiritual writer.

Members of a secular institute, the Oblates are consecrated to God and are committed to live the Gospel

message in the midst of the world. They live in the same secular environment as their neighbours and share their concerns, as they work at their chosen job or profession. In prayer, the Oblates contemplate Christ Jesus, to let themselves be fashioned by him. In one movement of love of God and neighbour, they work at developing attitudes of welcoming openness to persons and events and strive to be of service to all. All Oblates are united by a common charism: "Constant availability to the will of God so as to live everywhere the charity of Christ in service, with the aid of Mary." The Institute shares in the Church's mission in the world through its own particular mission. "Like Christ, to show the Father's unconditional love to every person by showing signs of God's presence at the heart of everyday reality." This mission touches each Oblate in her apostolic project, and expresses fidelity to the inspiration of the Foundress and the unity among the members who carry out the mission task in a great diversity of culture and political systems.

Mme Rosanne Roy composed a song on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the O.M.M.I.

With hearts celebrating, we sing our past.  
With hearts celebrating, we live our Now.  
With expectant hearts, and filled with hope,  
We walk towards tomorrow.

Like a soft breeze  
in the midst of the Church,  
The Institute came.  
Grown to a mighty gust,  
Started to blow  
Across the world.

Strengthened by the charism,  
With energy  
we live the mission.  
Along the ways and byways  
Let us cast to all  
The joy of the Five Points.

With hearts aflame,  
Let us create spaces  
Of Love and beauty,  
Witnesses to the Spirit.  
Let us dare the untried,  
That life may triumph.

### Our Stories

"I am a native of Clair, N.B., the sixth in a family of eight children. I used to work as an aide in the old Hotel Dieu of St. Joseph hospital in Edmundston, under the supervision of Nurse Tobin. One morning she had me bring water to one of the patients who happened to be Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I.. He was preaching a retreat to the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph. When he saw me, he said: "Join a community, this is not your place." He also asked a few questions. As soon as I left the room I said to myself: "If he only knew what he doesn't know, he would certainly learn that I am not 'a vocation!'" For me, it was a closed case, but not for Father Parent who mailed me a vocation questionnaire. I took a lot of time to answer it. When my sister saw the letter she said, "Answer him!" She, too, had heard about a new project to found a new institute, because she had met Ms. Lucie Lacombe, R.N., who was to become the first director general of the Institute; she too was a native of the Edmundston region. Finally, on July 2, 1952, we had our first vocation retreat, in the old army barracks. we were in total twenty candidates. Here we are, all Oblates, and we start working at the small hospital in Grand Falls. I myself worked in the accounting department for over forty years. Regarding the Oblates: we have a spirituality, the well-known "spirituality of the 5 fives:" five attitudes to develop, five religious exercises, and five random acts of charity to compensate our failings."

- Ms. Doris Plourde, O.M.M.I.  
Edmundston

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### "Loving, Loving You!"

### Voluntas Dei Institute (I.V.D.)

### Historical Note

On the occasion of the fortieth birthday of the Voluntas Dei Institute, Father Robert Lebel, I.V.D., wrote the following song for his Institute:

Loving, loving You...  
Everywhere in everything  
Loving, loving You  
In us and in others.

Held us stand firm,  
Happy at your presence.  
It is so close to us,  
While being so immense.  
With a child's heart,

May our eyes marvel  
At the waking seasons  
And at the present moment. Loving You!

Help us maintain joy  
Even at difficult times  
Without burdening ourselves  
With useless complaints.  
Aware that there are, yet,  
Things to be said,  
Help us speak, then,  
Simply, without hurting others. Loving You!

Help us open our hands  
Even to those who hurt us,  
By looking further  
Than all our weaknesses.  
Sharing as bread  
Our strength and our riches, To ever serve You  
In all the needy. Loving You!

Help us create happiness  
In every circumstance,  
Help us live in respect,  
Despite differences.  
Zealously searching  
To be just, to be free  
To live and to let live  
Each one according to his heart.  
Loving You!

It was on 2 July 1958 that Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I., founded the Voluntas Dei Institute at Trois-Rivières, Québec. As a response to the ideal set by Pope Pius XII through the creation of secular institutes, priests and laymen joined together in total service to the Church, on the basis of universal charity. In order to allow a greater number of the baptised to answer this call of the Church, the Institute is composed of intern and extern members, missionaries, and auxiliaries. Among the "interns" there are priests and celibate laymen, professionals, students, and ordinary workers who, freed of all social obligations, dedicate themselves by vows to services which the Institute offers them. The "extern" Voluntas is a priest or celibate layman who, while living within his usual apostolic and social milieu, is dedicated by vows to making of his life a witness of Christian holiness in his ministry, the workplace, or at rest. The lay missionary is one who dedicates a few years of his life in service to the Church in the missions. The "auxiliary" Voluntas joins the Institute to collaborate in its work by helping in some way or other in the ministry of the members of the Institute, according to their capacities. The energies of the members are directed towards a single end: to give to God the greatest glory possible through passionate love of Holy Church. The Institute desires to develop in its members a divine and fraternal charity such as could transform the entire world! That is why there is no milieu which is excluded from its field of endeavour. The Voluntas Dei member must be present wherever people need to see the countenance of the living Christ, in a loving brother!

## **In Our Diocese**

To tell the story of the Voluntas Dei Institute is also to recall some of the story of the Diocese of Edmundston, since Father Louis-Marie Parent, following meetings with Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon, second Bishop of Edmundston, opened in 1962 a seminary at Red Rapids, in the Southern Victoria Deanery, for 165 students coming from different parts of the world: Haiti, Ceylon, the United States, etc. St. Joseph seminary was completed in 1963 and, from 1964 on it became a school of theology for candidates to the priesthood. From the Maritime Provinces and from Québec, from Ecuador, Grenada, Colombia, France, India, Sri Lanka, Laos, and South Africa, Voluntas Dei seminarians came to Red Rapids. This went on until 1971. At that time, a number of candidates opted for theological studies in the great urban areas or transferred to other congregations or dioceses. For nearly forty years the Voluntas Deis ensured pastoral ministry, after the Franciscans, in Southern Victoria. Among these priests were Fathers Leo Grégoire, Alfred Irving, Germain Côté, Yvon Carpentier, Arthur Beaulieu, Michel Villeneuve, Jean Lacaille, Paul Boulay, Laurier Albert, and Louis Pearson, who also ministered in Saint-Quentin. According to Father Marc-André Lafrenière, director of the Institute's Canadian District, the spirituality of the Institute insists on the need to focus on the human qualities of each person. To the ideal of life which the Institute proposes its members is grafted an appropriate spirituality known as that of the "Three Fives." The first "five" describes the spiritual exercises

through which members develop intimacy with the Lord: daily prayer, especially meditation and mental prayer, the reading of the Word of God and of other works of spirituality, celebration and adoration of the Eucharist, and Marian devotion. Through the practice of the second "five," the members strive to develop a spirit of contemplation, of humility and of fraternal charity by developing the following attitudes: taking advantage of every opportunity available to intensify one's union with God (Presence of God), having positive regard for others and welcome the Christ in every person (absence of criticism), opening oneself to a sense of wonder and welcoming Christ present in events (absence of complaint), being fully responsible and giving generously (being of service; availability), not fearing to compromise oneself for fostering an evangelical climate of justice and fellowship (being a peacemaker). The third "five" incites the member to daily ensure the performance of five acts of charity as training in developing positive contacts with others, in imitation of Christ.

Through secular institutes, the Church wants to make its mission in the midst of the world more effective.

## Our Stories

**Note:** We can profit from reading, in my pastoral letter for Pentecost, 2002, the vocation story of Father Leo Grégoire, I.V.D., the new Vice-Chancellor of the Diocese, who has given over thirty years of ministry to the Church of Edmundston.

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## IV - The Trees Have Not All Been Planted

What a grand pilgrimage we have made as we read the story of all these institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, and secular institutes! However, our journey was made even more interesting by becoming acquainted with some of their members, all of whom showed a different aspect of the face of Jesus: the contemplative, Jesus the teacher, Jesus the healer, the compassionate Jesus, Jesus the Son of God and son of Mary, Jesus choosing and training his apostles, Jesus the Missionary sending forth his disciples, Jesus the preacher, Jesus the infinite Wisdom filled with kindness, etc. We already have on earth the possibility of looking into the face of Jesus; Pope John Paul II's invitation to do that can therefore be done in a beautiful way. However, the members of these societies are not only "reflections" of humankind and of the divinity of Jesus: they are pre-eminent builders of the Body of Christ. Saint Paul's words to the Ephesians apply to them also in a special way: "You are strangers and aliens no longer. You are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit" (2:19b-22).

Brothers and sisters, by your many discrete and constant services you have helped and continue to help in building up our diocesan Church. On behalf of all in the diocese I express my deepest gratitude. However, your task is not yet done, far from it! As Saint Paul says: "Let us profess the truth in love and grow to full maturity of Christ the head. Through him the whole body grows, and with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself up in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). And, "To him whose power now at work can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine - to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, world without end. Amen." (Eph. 3:20-21).

The limits of this pastoral letter have kept me from explicitly thanking every Congregation that worked in our diocese, but eventually left. Still, our gratitude extends to them also: the Holy Cross Fathers, the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception of Saint John, the Oblate Fathers, the Franciscan Fathers and Brothers, the Brothers of Christian Instruction, the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, the Servants of Notre-Dame, Reine du Clergé, the Sisters of the Love of God, the Auxiliaires Rurales, the Dames de la Congrégation, the Ursuline Nuns, and the Religieuses de l'Enfant-Jésus de Chauffailles. I can only repeat what I wrote in 1995 on the occasion of our Diocese's Golden Anniversary: "This has been a quick remembrance of the religious congregations in our Diocese. They were our benefactors, and we are their heirs. Their discrete ministry to children, youth, young adults, priests and future priests, the sick and handicapped, as well as the entire Christian community must be pursued with the same intensity, the same boldness, and according to their way of doing, though with new modalities. Their respective spirituality - Franciscan, Ignatian, or French - has marked our Church for ever and has marked for us the path of fellowship and of mission" New shoots are already sprouting up, in the Church, so-called "new communities" are being established: the Holy Spirit will continue to surprise us! As Patrick Picard sings: "The trees are not all planted; the seeds are not all sown." Heirs to history, let us continue being witnesses and builders. Even if the sprouting takes long, even if it is foolish to act thus foolishly, despite rocks and underbrush, our Church tells us "Trust in the men and women of flesh and blood!" Even if the waiting period is long, even if it is foolish to wait up, despite movements of impatience, our Church says: "Trust the pregnant silence!" Even if the long

harvest period is long, even if it is foolish to dream so foolishly, despite feelings of revolt, our Church says: "Trust in a people of prophets!"

May the prayer of the Church maintain us in unity and hope, and may the prayers of the mass for religious accompany those dedicated to God in the Consecrated life:

"Lord, you have inspired our brothers and sisters with the resolve to follow Christ more closely. Grant a blessed ending to the journey on which they have set out, so that they may be able to offer you the perfect gift of their loving service."

"God our Father, you have caused the grace of baptism to bear such fruits in your servants, that they now strive to follow your Son more closely. Let them rightly aim at truly evangelical perfection and increase the holiness and apostolic zeal for your Church."

"Lord, holy Father, confirm the resolve of your servants. Grant that the grace of baptism, which they wish to strengthen with new bonds, may work its full effect in them, so that they may offer you their praise and spread Christ's kingdom with apostolic zeal."

Let us celebrate together the kindness of the love of Christ for all these brothers and sisters of his who desire, in the Holy Spirit, to achieve holiness by dedicating themselves to Christ for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Through this covenantal mystery - as the Preface for Virgins and Religious says - may our human condition recover its first innocence, that we may taste on earth the gifts of the world to come. May young people and adults remain open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and may they have the courage to respond to his loving but urgent invitation to answer the needs of the people of God.

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## Appendix

### "Dieppe-Québec 1639"

#### Sr. Cécile de Ste-Croix, R.U.I. Québec

On 4 May 1639, three vessels - the "Saint-Joseph" among them - set out from Dieppe, France, for New France. Listed among the passengers were three Augustinian Sisters; Mother Marie Guenet de St-Ignace (29 years old), Mother Anne le Cointre de St-Bernard (28 years old), and Mother Marie Forestier de St-Bonaventure de Jésus (22 years old); three Ursuline nuns: Mother Marie de l'Incarnation (40 years old), Mother Marie de St-Joseph (23 years old), and Mother Cécile de Ste-Croix (39 years old); six Jesuits: Father Barthélémy Vimont (45 years old), Father Antoine Poncet (29 years old), Father Pierre Joseph Marie Chaumonot (28 years old), Father Jacques Bargon, Father Charles Lalemant (52 years old), and Brother Claude Jager; and two lay women: Madame de la Peltrie (36 years old), and her companion Charlotte Barré (18 years old). The group landed in Québec 1 August 1639.

Below is the letter written by Mère Cécile de Ste-Croix to the mother superior of the Dieppe Ursulines, describing the unforgettable crossing and the historic arrival. The text was published in Paris and Québec in 1935 in the book called Marie de l'Incarnation, écrits spirituels et historiques, by Dom Claude Martin and reedited by Dom Albert Jamet (volume 3). For lack of space, the very interesting notes are not published, here.

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Dearest Mother,

Peace and love in Our Lord!

I had planned to keep writing your letter to the last, but realising that I had little time, I decided to leave everything else aside to write to you. I am not disciplined enough to write you a short letter, and I know that you are impatiently awaiting this missive. I also know that you will have me respond to those letters that need answering, for example one to M. de la Tour.

I sent you a letter by the fisherman when we were about 150 leagues from Dieppe; I have no idea whether you received it. Thank God, we were preserved from the dangers coming from the ships I told you about, but we ran into other dangers which I shall tell you. It has often crossed my mind, especially at times when I was sea

sick, what I suffered from the most, and which lasted the longest while. I shall try to tell you everything so that you may be forewarned if ever you come to this pass.

As far as the food is concerned, concerning which we endure much, at sea, and about which there is quite a bit of complaining, we were exempted from this and were treated better than would have been at home itself and this, especially while we were on board the ship of M. Bontemps, who had ordered that we be refused nothing we asked. Food, thank God, is the least of our mortifications. I speak from experience: we were happier with un buttered cod fish than with the choicest meats we could have had. I often thought that experiencing the unpleasantness associated with voyage at sea is quite different from merely hearing about it. When one is only a step away from death, one is quite surprised. It may be that the others, who are more mortified than I will quietly overlook this, but here I am simply telling you of my weakness. A good feeling is when this has passed, there is only at realising that it was for God that one was in danger, and one does not wish to not have been there, in danger. It seems that this is how Our lord rewards us, and were it not for the fact that my non-mortification has me say this, as well as the company of our dear Sisters, I would not think myself outside France. Those who think that there is much suffering, here, are mistaken. The first lesson I learned from Reverend Father Le Jeune, and which I have verified for myself, is that we in Canada have no more crosses to bear than we do in France. I experience this daily.

Hardly after I had written you my last letter we encountered a furious storm which lasted fifteen days with very little break, so much so that throughout Rogation Week including the Ascension Thursday, we were prevented from hearing holy mass and from receiving holy communion. We had the same mortification, Pentecost Sunday; the ship was so tossed about throughout the time that it was utterly impossible to remain standing, to move about or even sit without holding on to something, otherwise we would be immediately tossed across the room. We were forced to take our meals sitting on the floor and it took three or four of us together to hold onto a platter and we still had difficulty keep it from spilling. The majority of us were so sick that even the most humble - like Mme de la Peltrie among others, did not have Canada in mind, then, the place she usually calls her dear country - thought only of getting some respite from the storm. In fact, as soon as we get this, we are cured. Mme de la Peltrie was also quite beset with upset stomach, and you can imagine what relief there was for her delicate health, since second to sea sickness the stench and filth of tar and tobacco. I discovered for myself the truth drawn from the New Testament by our Mothers at Tours that To the one who has, more will be given, since being so greatly inconvenienced with water running from my mouth, especially when I lay down, I do not believe I exaggerate when I tell you that there must have been a bucketful, to the point that I had no greater enemy throughout the crossing than the bed! So it was that in the great storms I did not lie down, preferring day and night to stand and lean against something, since there is none other way to keep one's head steady. Besides which I would have needed a lot of clothes changes, to remain in bed. You were troubled at allowing me to put a board under the mattress, but there is no other way to sleep, on board a ship the high seas: there is no way that one could use a mattress.

It took everything I had, from early morning until evening, to prepare myself for confession when it was my turn to go, and I have no recollection of having found it difficult to fast during the Ember Days of last Pentecost.. On Trinity Sunday, at around ten in the morning, as we were saying the office of None of the Great Office, we heard the terrible cries from a sailor: We nonetheless continued since we knew not what it was about, when Father Vimont came down to us and said: "We are doomed, unless Our lord have mercy on us. There is an iceberg drawing the ship like a magnet, and it is no further than ten paces from us, and it is as big as a town!" Then kneeling down, and we also, he prayed these words which Saint Francis Xavier had prayed in a similar danger: "Jesus, my Redeemer, have mercy on us!" Mother Saint Joseph said to him, "Father, let us make a vow," to which he replied, "One must not do so unadvisedly," remembering that in a similar situation he had once done so, which he had great difficulty in carry out. But he decided to make only one for those who were in the room with him, which was to say mass in honour of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, and [each sister] to offer two communions, as soon as we reached land. The vow being made, he said: "I am going to see the sailors and then I shall return to give you absolution. We still have another half hour." He also gave orders to call the good Brother who was with him, so that we would all die together. When I heard Father say, "We are doomed," I was not afraid, no sin came to mind, nor fear of judgement or hell; the only fear I had was to die at sea, and this feeling lasted until Father left the room, and when I asked myself whether I wanted to die in this disposition. I had no time to answer because M. Bontemps came into the room and said: "We are saved, but it is a miracle!" And he pointed to the iceberg behind the ship; the ice was so high we could not see the top because of the thick fog which lasted a long time, so much so that we were once again found ourselves in peril, yet so close to the land we could not see. We credited our deliverance to your prayers for us, and I in fact heard experienced sailors say that they had never been in such imminent danger and that, morally speaking, it was impossible to escape [the tragedy] since we were then on the high sea and there was not time enough to turn the sails. One man who was at the helm turned the wheel so skilfully that the ship was prevented from crashing full speed into the iceberg; we are convinced that such a manoeuvre by one man was impossible to make. The following day we saw several other icebergs, but since they were at a distance, they were no cause for alarm; however, they were still close enough, especially one of them which was estimated to be as big as a small town. This one was as clear as crystal, unlike the others which seem covered with snow (which in fact they are not, as we can see by the sun shining on it). Shortly

before seeing them, it was as cold as January. As for myself, I have not suffered from anything since.

Here is a bit on consolation. From Blessed Louis de Gonzague Day until our arrival we did not miss hearing one or several masses, and to receive communion each day, every day since our boarding, unless we were sick. Reverend Father Vimont did not miss a day explaining us our subject for mental prayer. He told us that one of the reasons religious do not profit from mental prayer is that they too often change the subject. All the time we were at sea, he changed our subject very seldom. In case of saints' days, like St. Peter's Day, he would direct our attention to the feast while keeping the topic at hand. He had also given a daily rule. Each superior presided the office, at it was her responsibility to see that the rule was kept. We said the Office and our readings in public twice daily; we also took turns reading during meals. Father had also ordained that from the end of evening recreation until the following morning after mental prayer, silence would be maintained, and he used to say that even by keeping a religious spirit as much as possible, we still lost enough of it! We went to confession whenever we pleased, and every day if we had that devotion, although we did not receive communion. There was preaching on Sundays and holy days. Through all this Father showed the same charity he had while we awaited sailing. I believe that we would have died, without him! I have never met his like before.

The first time we saw native people was while we were a few leagues from Tadoussac. It was a chief by the name of Juenchu (known to the French, and the father of the one who was presented to the king of France and greeted him on behalf of his nation). The captain was brought shipboard to us by Rev. Fr. Gondouin, S.J., in which event we had two Fathers in our company. These native people are from Miscou and are a little better than those from these parts. Through Rev. Fr. Gondouin who was a long time among them, they expressed astonishment and delight, and it was to him that the king ordered that the clothes he distributes to the natives be given - as we could see on the women as well as the men who were themselves dedicated to God - and from the time they came to see us in Québec. - [The captain] repeated that if we wanted to visit his country, he would ensure that we lacked nothing. He listed everything that we could have to eat. We reached Tadoussac July twentieth, all three ships together. You can imagine our happiness!

The following day we disembarked from the admiral ship to transfer to the Saint-Jacques, commanded by Monsieur Ançot, the only one of the three vessels to continue to Québec. We were in such close quarters on that ship that when we were all seated around the chest on which four masses were said every day - which was a great joy to us - and where we took our meals with the four Fathers, Rev. Fr. Vimont, Fr. Gongouin, Fr. Poncet, Fr. Chaumonot and good Brother Claude... As I was saying, when we were all seated around the chest, those at the end could not move without the others standing to let them pass because there was only the space occupied by each one, and very narrow at that. And for sleeping, we add to fit boards on the chest and place our mattresses on top; for food consisted of cod pickled in vinegar, with no butter, or a bit of milk, and this lasted throughout the journey, though ours was an inexplicable contentment. The first time we touched land was on the feast of St. Ann, during which we accomplished part of the previously-mentioned vow. Once again we thought we would perish. As we were disembarking from the ship to the boat, we nearly capsized. We were aboard the Saint-Jacques until July 29 when we disembarked, because of contrary winds, and then we continued to Québec by boat. There was no shelter except for a small room filled with cod practically to the rafters, so that we could fit in only by squeezing in one next to the other, packed like loaves in an oven. And since it was not possible to remain there any longer because of the stench and the stifling heat of the overheated cod, a whole group of us was forced to remain night and day on deck in the rain which fell quite often, then. Truth to say, though, that there was less mortification involved in remaining on deck in the rain than in suffering the inconvenience of the room; even those who would leave the room smelled so strongly that we could hardly bear it. The afternoon of Saint Ignatius Day when we had planned on reaching Québec but could not because of contrary conditions, rain started to fall and continued for five or six hours without cease, and since I was one of those who could not support [the stench of ] the room, I was forced to letting myself be drenched by all the rain that pleased to fall on me. I was so sopping wet, as were others, and our petticoat was wet several days after our arrival at Québec, so much so that it was a minor mortification to me, to be so dirty before such honourable people. Reverend Father Vimont, seeing us and His Reverence as well as others in such a state, and realising that no fire could be made on board the boat, requested that we be set ashore, of which we were quite close. Which was done. A good fire was kindled and we dried ourselves a bit. We had supper on the seashore, of salt cod, but no butter. A native-style cabin was made for us, and despite the fact that our bed was but a blanket on the ground, I slept very well. We embarked again the following morning and reached Québec about eight o'clock in the forenoon, on the feast of St. Peter-in-Shackles.

As soon as our boat was sighted. Monsieur le Gouverneur despatched two men by canoe to see who was coming, and once assured as to who we were, he sent us a comfortable boat to take us to shore. He came to us accompanied by Monsieur de Lisle his lieutenant, and he showed us such courtesy! As soon as we were ashore we knelt and Rev. Fr. Vimont said a prayer on our behalf. We marched forthwith to the church; the Te Deum was sung and we attended holy mass and received communion, following which we paid a courtesy call on M. le Gouverneur, at his home where we lunched. From thence the Hospitallers were taken to a house given to them by M. le Gouverneur, a house close to the fort, for them to use while their buildings are being



constructed. We accompanied them, and then we ourselves were led to where Madame de la Peltrie rented a house from Messieurs de la Compagnie; the house has two quite spacious bedrooms, a cellar and an attic, and is built on the shore of the great river. We enjoy the most beautiful sight in the world! Without leaving our room we can see the ships come in; they always drop anchor in front of the house, all the time they are here. A stockade fence is put up, about as tall as a small fortress wall. This is not so well joined that we cannot see through, if we care to do so. However, this separates us from the seculars who will not have access to the house once the door to the chapel is finished. We were quickly visited by the Ladies and Demoiselles of the colony. They are very happy at our having come.

You may be pained that they fed us because there was no way of setting up a kitchen this soon, because the boat taking us to Québec held but our poor bodies. M. le Gouverneur set up a kitchen for us and the Hospitallers in the Fort, and continued thus until he was told that our belongings had arrived. The evening of our arrival a bonfire was lit in honour of the birth of Monsieur le Dauphin. Reverend Father Vimont permitted us to attend since we were not yet enclosed. He had us get M. de Lisle, which we did. You shall read about all of this in the Relation.

The following day we were sent to Sillery where several natives live, both Christians and catechumens. There is a residence for the Fathers, there. The church resembles a small native parish church. The place is about one and a half leagues from Québec, which we reach by water. M. le Gouverneur lent us the use of his boat, and we learned from the soldiers manning it that M. le Gouverneur had sent them with refreshments to meet us, as soon as he had heard of our arrival, because as soon as we reached Tadoussac, he sent a bark which took only a few days to get to Québec, and we were eight days aboard the Saint-Jacques which stood dead in the water for lack of wind. These good men told us that they had come twenty leagues after us, but had been forced to turn back when they failed to see us. We had our confessions at Sillery. After that there was the baptism of a young girl of about ten; Madame de la Peltrie was her godmother, and she named her Marie. The young girl was then handed over to Mme de la Peltrie as a boarder; she was our first boarder. You can imagine the joy we have at having been able to practice our institute to this newly baptised, small creature, the second day after our arrival. Most of the assembly shed tears of joy, at the ceremony. Before it began, the natives sat on the benches and Rev. Fr. Le Jeune had them pray God in their language, and sing the Credo and other hymns, in their native tongue. Had I had the time I would have copied the texts to send to my sisters. It may be for another year. I find nothing more agreeable than hearing the natives sing in their native tongue, so sweet in their song, and so well they sing together. I admired the charity of this good Father: taking pains to sing with them and, another time, a young native girl having received communion, he knelt before her and helped her, word by word, make an act of thanksgiving. As a matter of fact, he is an apostle in these parts, and father to the natives.

The following day, the third of August, we went out to Notre-Dame-des-Anges, about half a league from Québec. This is the Fathers' most spacious residence. On our way we saw the building of the Hospitallers. The following day, which happened to be Thursday, we looked at a site on which to construct our building. I accompanied our Mother. The place is very agreeable and near enough the Fort; the ground is already a bit cleared, and M. le Gouverneur, who was there, stated that this had been done a while ago, to settle the Ursulines. We went out again on Friday and Saturday to attend holy mass, and we have not gone out since. Beginning Sunday Mass was said at our house. We have it every day at the same place, a boarded-up corner behind the fireplace, just room enough for the altar and the priests and his server; we have the favour of having our Lord among us, to whom we can tell of our needs. You understand that it is the Blessed Sacrament we have, in that small place. The day of the Assumption there was a general procession of the French and the natives. Madame de la Peltrie served as captain of the native women, walking at their head with two of our little seminarians at her side. The procession came to our house; we had decorated the room and set up the altar there. Rev. Fr. Le Jeune had the natives pray and sing; we also sang. Everyone is thrilled at hearing our Mothers sing! Every Sunday and hoy day, people come to hear us sing Vespers. There are five of us: our Mother on one side; Mme de la Peltrie, Mother Saint-Joseph and Sister Charlotte on the other, and I alongside our Mother. It is pleasant to see the natives by the viol, when we play it; they are simply enraptured. One of the first Christians (his name is Nouel, and he is mentioned in the Relation) said that the instrument must be taught to their girls. The viol is used and shall be used only to attract the natives. Several native people re baptised, both adults and children. Rev. Fr. Le Jeune baptised as many as seven, one night since our arrival, and were it not for a contagious disease among them, like some kind of the smallpox, which kept them from gathering together, there would surely be more conversions. Madame de la Peltrie was godmother to several, Pigarouich among them, the sorcerer about whom there was much talk, but who is now a Christian.

We now have six native boarders registered, and many others on a sporadic basis, and if we could find them clothes, there would be no lack of them. It is a pity that, for lack of a bit of food, so many people perish. Our Mothers at Tours ask all the sisters of our community to beg one shirt apiece from their parents, for the little native girls. I make the same request to you and to all the Mothers of our other convents, if you deem it advisable, as I do also for woolen capes which the natives quite appreciate; - Pigarouich who is now called Étienne, after losing the one we had given him, came the following day to ask us another one. We also have young French girls who come as externs, seven or eight of them. I believe that we had not been here eight

days, that they were sent to us.

Judge for yourself whether we have much time left, with the beginnings of a house. Madame de la Peltrie looks after the getting up and dressing of the little native girls. We have some who are but two or three years old, and they are quite a challenge to stout-hearted. Mother de Saint-Joseph's obedience is looking after the sacristy and the clothes, which keeps her busy; regarding the care of the externs, she and I share in the task; those who are free also help. As for me, I was assigned the outbuilding: you can deduce that there is not always someone to do the cooking, so it usually falls on me. Though it is not that big a task, there is still enough to keep me busy, though I am not much of a cook. I have already learned how to cook Indian porridge, the biggest treat we can give them.

We met here Rev. Fr. Le Mercier. I have never met as modest a man as this good Father, just the sight of him commands religious devotion. He said mass for us and brought us Joseph, who already has the makings of a saint. He is much pleased to see us and to know our reason for coming. We gave him a small present, for which he could not thank us enough. Not satisfied to have it explained to us what he wanted to say, the poor man's eyes themselves spoke to us. It seems that he was the one mentioned in the Relation.

There would be so much more to write about if time permitted, but I have to end. Adieu, dearest Mother. I hope that you will always consider me what I am in fact, dearest Mother,

Your most obedient and unworthy daughter in Our Lord,

Sr. Cécile de Ste-Croix +  
R.U.I., of the Ursuline Seminary of Saint Joseph, at Québec  
This 2 September 1639

*+ François Thibodeau ym*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.  
Bishop of Edmundston