

# *Whose Leaves Never Fade*

THE STORY OF THE  
SISTERS OF CHARITY I.C.






*Whose Leaves Never Fade*

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*Cover photos: Sisters past & present, Vancouver, BC*  
*- Social workers, 1940's*  
*- Street ministry, 2003*

# *Whose Leaves Never Fade*

THE STORY OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION



*“They are like a tree planted by streams of water,  
that yields its fruit in due season,  
and whose leaves never fade.  
May they prosper in all they do.”*

*Psalm 1:3*

# Forward

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*I grew up in an Irish Catholic household, so "the Sisters", as my mother always called them, were as familiar a part of my childhood as Sunday Mass and Saturday confession.*

*Two of my great-aunts were life-long Sisters of Charity, one a teacher, the other, a nurse. Visits to the Convent, where we children sat in silence and, as instructed, "behaved ourselves", occurred at regular intervals throughout the year. These visits invariably involved hugs and kisses and exclamations about how 'big' we had become since the last visit, followed by a lively exchange, among the adults, of family and community news.*

*Often, a little dish of candy served as a welcome distraction, and my brother and I would feast until a paternal glare told us we had had enough. Occasionally, one or the other visited our home, or that of my grandmother, and the 'rules of behaviour' were relaxed, seemingly for both of us.*

*When I turned six, and it came time to venture forth into Grade One, the smiling, black-habited Sister who greeted us in the school yard and hustled us off to our classroom was a familiar sight. The Catholic school I attended spanned grades one to nine, and though many of the instructors were lay teachers, 'the Sisters' were always a real presence in the school, and often the ones who oversaw the Christmas pageants, the St. Patrick's Day celebrations, the Music Festival practices and the famous 'Rhythm Band'.*



*They commanded respect, and though we did not always see eye to eye, one never doubted their competence and dedication. In the younger grades, being selected to erase a blackboard or run an errand for them was considered a privilege, and even as young adults, we all yearned for their approval. "Yes, Sister" became as automatic a response as breathing.*

*Years later, as a teacher myself, I was privileged to enjoy an adult professional relationship with several Sisters, and a more mature relationship with my great-aunt, Sister Bridget, with whom I came to share a deep affection. Only then did I begin to glimpse the real humanity of these women, these "Sisters of Charity", and the power of the call they had chosen to answer.*

*This is their story. It is not a litany of facts or a mountain of names. It is the story of a journey, of the fruition of an idea, the realization of a vision.*

*A hundred and fifty years ago, four young women courageously responded to a call. Though the request for help came from Bishop Connolly, the voice which summoned these women was more ethereal and profound.*



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*Their journey took them out of the convent into the heart of a city teeming with thousands of destitute immigrants, a dirty, bustling seaport still reeling from the after-effects of a catastrophic cholera epidemic. Surely the impetus that drew them to such a place was a powerful one. In the face of so much need, how could a mere four make a difference?*

*But make a difference they did, for in the faces of their bedraggled orphan charges, they saw, as St. Vincent de Paul had said they would, the face of Christ, and in responding to their needs, both spiritual and temporal, they came to know, and engendered in others, the sustaining spirit of charity.*

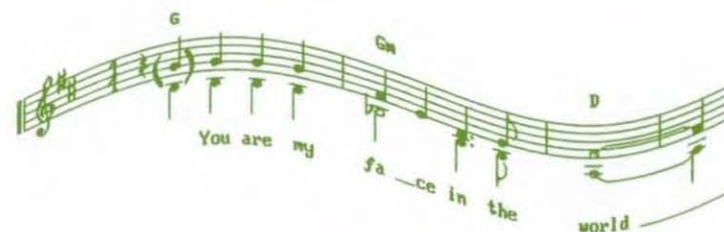
*Buoyed by this spirit, the movement blossomed, and within a short time the Sisters of Charity became a formidable and significant force in the life of the community and the diocese, not only in New Brunswick but in many areas of the Canadian West and Peru as well. They were the heart and soul of a social services outreach that included infants, unwed mothers and the elderly, and the very backbone of Catholic education and health care.*

*Their legacy in all of these fields is all around us. Taking on responsibilities and administrative roles not normally undertaken by women of their day, the Sisters proved to be strong and capable, unafraid of a challenge, and committed to the ideals of their founders.*

*The last few decades have not been without problems and challenges, not the least of which has been diminishing numbers, but invigorated by Vatican II, the Sisters of Charity found new ways to respond to the call to charity which has sustained them from the beginning, finding Christ in the face of an addict, an AIDS patient, an abused woman or a wide-eyed Peruvian child.*

*Through it all, the Sisters of Charity have endured, adapting to meet the needs of a changing society, while at the same time, remaining true to their roots. They have continued to comfort, to teach, to empower and to inspire others with the spirit of charity. They have kept the faith.*

*Mary Kilfoil McDevitt*  
Archivist, Diocese of Saint John







*This tree in King's Square, Saint John, NB, has spanned the life of the Congregation.*



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Honoria Conway,  
Foundress of the Sisters of Charity.



Sketch "Mary Keefe & Daughter"  
by Saint John artist Ray Butler.



## *A Bud Opening - The Story Begins*

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*Mary Keeffe walked barefoot on a road toward hope that Monday morning in 1857.*

*One of the many destitute Irish immigrants who swelled the small township of Portland, the frail woman was headed for the new school that had opened in her neighbourhood, her young barefoot daughter in tow.*

*For several days, four Sisters of Charity of Saint John had toiled to make a poor, dilapidated house they had rented suitable for a school. Once the location of a slaughterhouse, the small building built against a high rock had become overrun with rats.*

*Still, the Sisters persevered. On that Monday morning, June 3, 1857, the Sisters of Charity had opened their first*

*mission house. As they welcomed their first student -- the barefooted Keeffe girl - the Sisters wondered what they were in for.*

*“The Sisters looked at each other and smiled, saying, ‘That does not look very encouraging for us, but thank God, a poor beginning always brings a good ending,’” according to a chronicle from the school. “‘If we can do a little good to even one poor soul, it will be something.’”*

*For the Sisters of Charity of Saint John, that attitude was one that motivated them throughout their founding years - from their formation in 1854 in response to the Great Famine's impact upon Saint John to their first missions outside the city only three years later. ■*

## *A Bud Opening - The Story Begins*

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*When Thomas Louis Connolly OFM Cap. became the second bishop of the Diocese of New Brunswick in 1852, he came to a city of contrasts.*

*Saint John boasted a thriving shipbuilding and commercial sector. One of its shipyards had just launched the Marco Polo, which soon would be proclaimed the fastest ship in the world. At the same time, ships were carrying thousands of destitute immigrants from Ireland to Saint John. In 1847 alone, about 17,000 of the poorest souls ever to reach North American shores landed here.*

*As a result, Ireland's Great Potato Famine was altering the demographics of the city. Half of Saint John's 30,000 residents were Roman Catholics -- the city's largest religious group. Yet the city's only schools were Protestant. Concerned about the vulnerability of the Catholic faith, Bishop Connolly felt the only solution was to have an order of Sisters establish schools in the city. He turned to the Sisters of Charity of New York, but they could not spare any personnel at the time.*

*After months of continued pleading, a deal was made. If Bishop Connolly could send some young women from his own diocese to New York, the Sisters there would train them in the novitiate. In a year's time, they promised, two professed Sisters would accompany the novices back to Saint John to help establish a separate foundation. Bishop Connolly soon*

*found three candidates: Bridget Sweeny; Honoria Conway, who would later become the foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Saint John; and one other woman, who would leave before the year was up.*

*It seems, however, that no one told Honoria about the plan to found a new congregation. She had gone to New York intending to become a member of that congregation. When God's plan for her was revealed a year later, however, she was eager to respond.*



*Ships in Market Slip, Saint John. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum)*



## *A Bud Opening - The Story Begins*

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*While the novices from Saint John were studying in New York, Bishop Connolly was back in Saint John dealing with a city under siege.*

*Ireland's potato blight was leaving little food fit to eat, so Irish landlords were jamming their poor tenants and their empty promises of a better life into North American-bound ships. The ships crossed the Atlantic, their cargo of passengers arriving more dead than alive. Many who survived ship's fever were immediately sent to the city's almshouses.*



*The almshouses and the contract system were the 19th century's idea of a social welfare system. Almshouses gathered the sick, aged and orphans together in paltry conditions. In the contract system, the poor - including children as young as seven -- were let out in the custody of whomever asked the least remuneration for boarding them.*

*Despite its commercial prosperity, Saint John was notoriously dirty, lacking a proper water supply and sewerage system. When the coffin ship "Blanche" arrived from Liverpool in 1854 carrying cholera as well as immigrants, the disease was quick to take hold. That summer, an estimated 5,000 of the city's 30,000 residents became ill and up to 2,500 died, in the worst epidemic in the history of British North America. Many fled the city, shops closed, and the dockyards were deserted.*

*"Arrival - New Brunswick", painting by Ray Butler depicting the devastation of famine & sickness.*

## *A Bud Opening - The Story Begins*

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*Thomas H. Connolly*

*In less than six weeks, Bishop Connolly found himself in charge of 70 orphans, whom he refused to send to the city's almshouses. He needed help immediately and turned once again to the Sisters of Charity of New York. But the Sisters had already decided they could not even fulfill their earlier agreement to send two professed Sisters to Saint John as mentors for Bridget Sweeny and Honoria Conway. As a compromise, they agreed to let the bishop plead his desperate case before the community's novices.*

*One can only imagine his sales pitch: Come to a dirty city, rife with disease, and full of desperate orphans to set up an orphanage and a new community from scratch. Even so, three novices, including Honoria Conway, abandoned their plans to join the New York community and agreed to come.*



*Mother Vincent.*

*A fourth woman, Mary Routanne, who had belonged for a time to Elizabeth Ann Seton's Emmitsburg community, took up the challenge as well. Arriving in Saint John in early September 1854, the four women immediately set up an orphanage in a small house on Waterloo Street north of the unfinished cathedral. They took in as many orphans as they could, and helped to place many more.*

*In the same house a month later -- on Oct. 21, 1854 -- Honoria Conway, Mary Routanne, Mary Madden and Annie McCabe took their vows and accepted the Rule of the Sisters of Charity of Saint John. Drawn up by the bishop, the Rule outlined the spirit that was to motivate them in their work.*

*They "were to be animated by a desire to give glory to God, to build up and sustain the Church of God and to assist their neighbours, instructing and inspiring them. It is the duty of the Sister to make the whole world love God and be fond of virtue."*



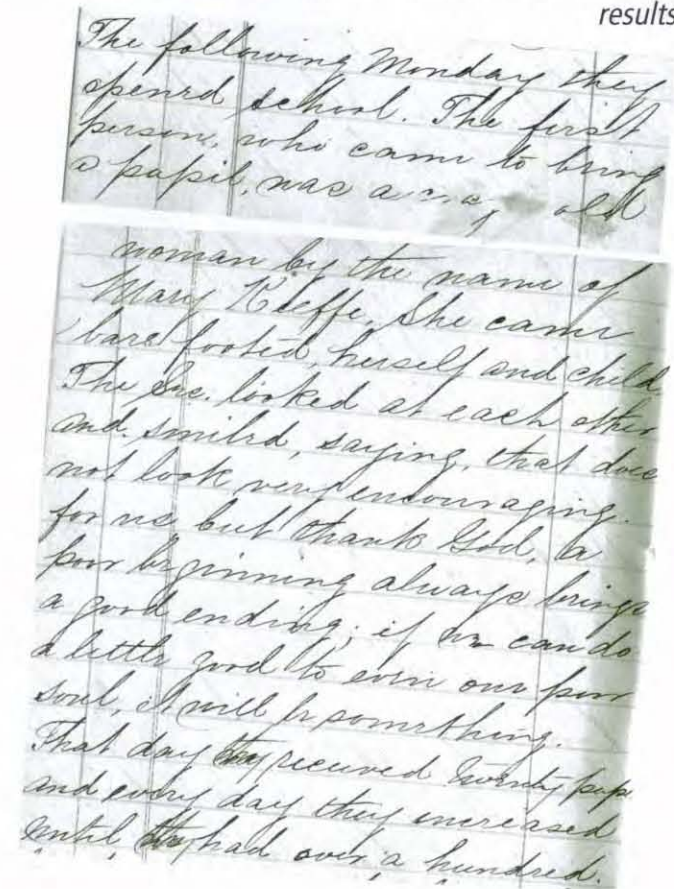
## A Bud Opening - The Story Begins

By 1855, the Sisters' reach extended throughout the city. Now with 10 members, they had some 300 children attending school, and were giving catechetical instruction to about 500 children. Two years later, buoyed by the successful establishment of the orphanage and schools, the Sisters sought to respond to needs outside the boundaries of Saint John.

In Portland, now Saint John's "North End," they opened St. Peter's School in 1857. Mary Keeffe's daughter was the first student. Says a chronicle from the school: "This first mission was begun under many trials and difficulties of all kinds, but the little band was happy to be chosen for arduous work and the very thought of that filled their hearts with joy and made them think their trials and hardships light." In two months, the student population had swelled to 250.

That same year, 1857, they turned a house into a convent-school for girls in St. Basile, the Acadians' largest economic center, in northern New Brunswick. A pastor who had always wanted a place to educate the girls of the Madawaska region had left the house in his will to the Bishop of Saint John. Since the Sisters of Charity were the bishop's only personnel, he asked them to take up the mission. Three English-speaking Sisters traveled by boat and coach into the December cold and the province's wilderness, to a place where the majority of people could neither read nor write, and spoke only French. Once there, they opened the school, which would later prepare girls for teaching other Acadian children at the primary level.

In their first five years, the Sisters of Charity of Saint John turned what had seemed like the impossible into the possible - answering the needs of everyone from the cholera orphans to the Acadians in the province's north and the barefoot Keeffe girl with her anxious mother. Each time they responded to the need, turning humble beginnings into rich results.



The following Monday they opened school. The first person, who came to bring a pupil, was a very old woman by the name of Mary Keeffe. She came barefooted, herself and child. The two looked at each other and smiled, saying, that does not look very encouraging for me, but thank God, to your beginning always brings a good ending; if we can do a little good to save our poor soul, it will be something. That day they received twenty pupils and every day they increased until they had over a hundred.



## HONORIA'S PANTRY

The following is an oral piece handed down: "One evening a young mother came to the door of the orphanage asking for just enough bread for herself and her children. Honoria heard her request and went to the pantry, thinking as she went 'if I give some away, will we have enough to feed our children tomorrow?' She returned carrying several loaves and gave them to the woman."

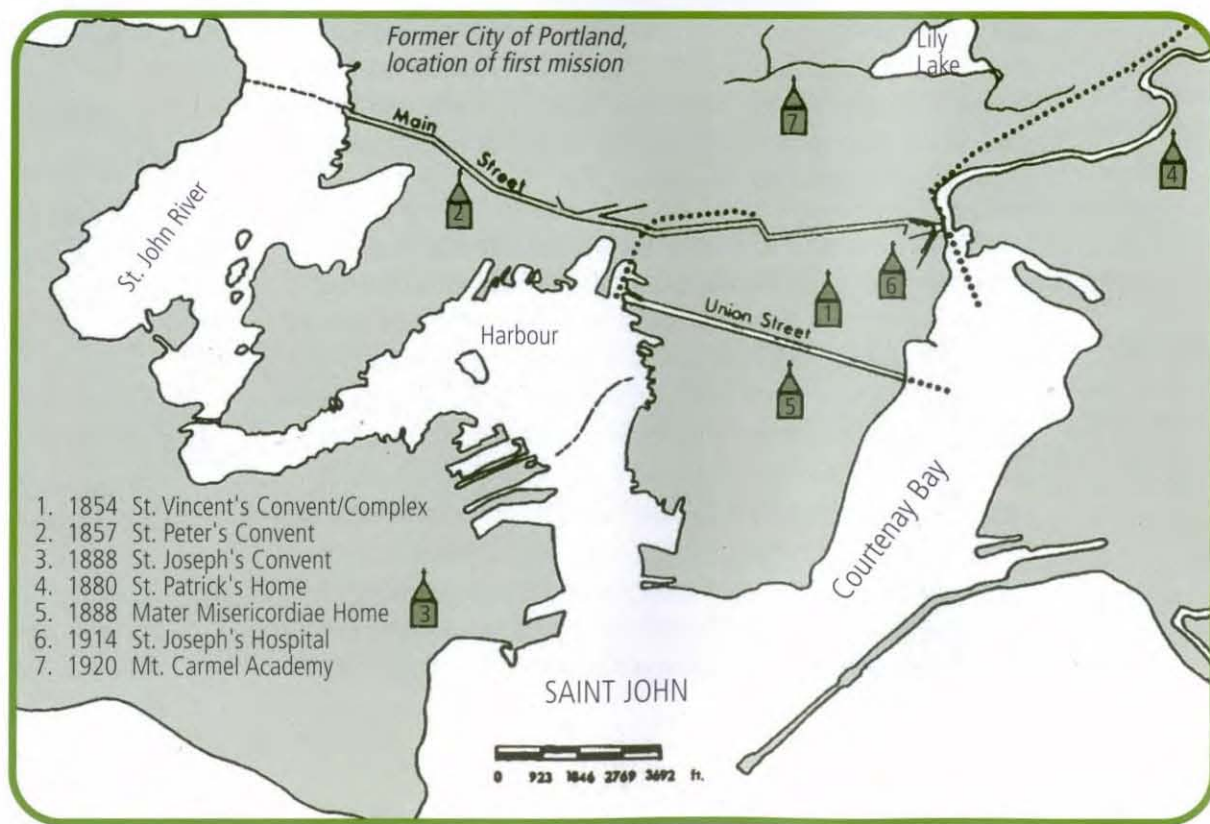
Shortly thereafter, Honoria went back to the pantry and discovered, to her surprise, that there remained the same number of loaves as before."

## CELEBRATIONS OF THE OPENING OF THE M. M. HOME

The M. M. Home had opened its doors in 1888 and continued to care for those in need with the same spirit the Sisters had exemplified from the beginning, namely: "That the Sisters in charge of the Home have never turned away a single applicant, whenever there was room, no matter how much the care was to be financially dealt with." This disinterested charity was appreciated by the many who came to them.

## CARE OF THE ORPHANS

Another group that the Sisters continued to care for with much love were the Orphans. On the arrival of the Sisters in Saint John, the orphaned girls were Sister Vincent's (Honoria Conway) first need to be met and thus, St. Vincent's Orphanage had its beginnings. In 1880, St. Patrick's Industrial School was opened at Silver Falls for the boys. Sister Vincent must have been overjoyed when this was accomplished.



*This map shows SCIC Foundations in Saint John to 1936. Note the location of the first mission outside the city at St. Peter's Convent, Portland.*



## *Branching Out - The Move West*

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*It was the summer of 1906 and Father Wilhelm Brueck OMI needed help quickly. His orphanage in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, was caring for many local French-speaking children. Recently, it had received 60 British orphans, some of the 125,000 who had been abandoned and sent to western Canada as the Industrial Revolution took hold in England.*

*Unfortunately, the Sisters who had been operating the seven-year-old orphanage spoke only French, creating a growing language divide between the caregivers and the British children. Father Brueck, of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, knew the situation was clearly going to deteriorate without some English-speaking Sisters.*

*In the previous five years, the town's population had nearly doubled as waves of English-speaking immigrants moved to Western Canada. From the East and from the United States, they were enticed by the 1897 Klondike gold rush, the recently completed Canadian Pacific Railway, jobs harvesting grain crops and the possibility of establishing farms on the vast, sparsely-populated prairie lands.*

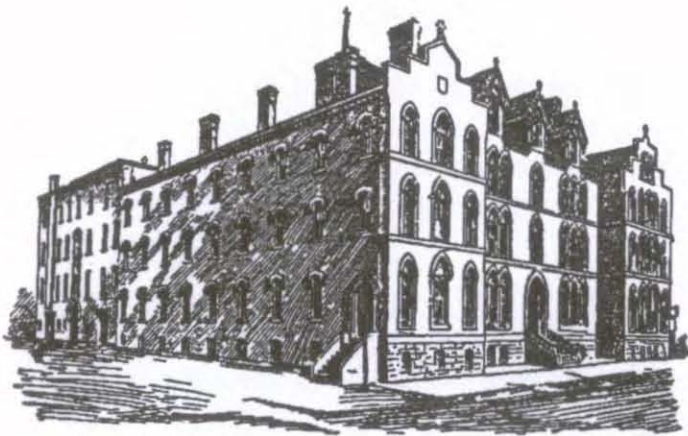
*So Father Brueck traveled that summer to Saint John, New Brunswick, the birthplace of the first English-speaking order of Sisters in Canada. There, he invited the Sisters of Charity to help him with the orphans in Saskatchewan.*

*For the Sisters, his appeal echoed the one that had called them into existence more than 50 years earlier. Responding to Fr. Brueck's plea would renew their missionary spirit, which had so energized the founders as they cared for Saint John's Irish orphans. It would also open the door to new territory, both in geography and in the scope of their work. In Prince Albert, the Sisters' mission to care for and educate orphans would eventually lead them into the field of health care.*



*Father William Brueck with orphans.*

## *Branching Out - The Move West*



*St. Vincent's Convent - Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity, erected in 1865 with additions in 1872 and 1876.*



*Mother M. Thomas O'Brien, who missioned the Sisters West.*

*By 1906, the Sisters of Charity of Saint John were operating schools, an orphanage and a nursing home in New Brunswick. Their numbers had grown to more than a hundred and many young women were entering the convent.*

*While their own numbers were growing, the demographics of the province were changing. In the late 19th century, many people moved to the "Boston States" in search of opportunity. Population growth in the Maritimes was stagnating while the West, now connected to the rest of Canada by the completion of the railway, was growing.*

*With the anticipation of continued stability in New Brunswick, the Sisters of Charity felt they could respond to the invitation in Western Canada - the first one that had come from outside their home province. In July, three Sisters set out for the western frontier, to the newly formed province of Saskatchewan.*



*A group of Sisters who went West.*



## Branching Out - The Move West



Taking a break at St. Patrick's Orphanage.

In Prince Albert, they shared the administration of St. Patrick's Orphanage, caring for and educating its 80 children. So impressed were the local people with life in the orphanage that two years later they made a second appeal to the Sisters. The city of Prince Albert, with a population of around 3,000, still had only a 16-bed hospital. At the turn of the century, the small hospital was seeing more typhoid cases, chest infections and accidents among lumbermen. The city doctors, anxious for a new facility, asked the Sisters if they would consider opening a new hospital.

After much consultation, the Sisters of Charity of Saint John accepted the call and began a new ministry. They purchased the land, oversaw construction and sent several Sisters away to be trained as nurses. On Christmas Day in 1910, the Holy Family Hospital opened its doors, with 32 beds and an operating room to serve the region.

### TRAGEDY

On Feb. 1, 1947 - One Sister and six young girls died when fire consumed St. Patrick's Orphanage. Only days before, a load of stoker coal had been delivered. During the night, flames crept up from the basement of the home of two Brothers, 14 Sisters, and 116 children.



First hospital - Holy Family, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, 1910.



St. Patrick's Orphanage, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.



Baptizing premature twins  
in Radway, Alberta.

## TO THE WILDERNESS

Occasionally, the Sisters of Charity who worked at the hospital would travel with Dr. King to the wilderness to visit the lumber camps and care for minor ailments. On the first occasion, the Sisters were nervous, wrote one of the acquaintances at the time. "The Sisters set off to camps with mixed emotions indeed. Fear of the cold, they padded their cloaks with newspapers to break the piercing wind, venturing into a lumber camp which was filled with strange men, but how good these strange men were to them."

## EMPTY BEDS - FULL BEDS

In the summer of 1911, the doctors of Holy Family Hospital in Prince Albert were without income. Everyone was healthy and there were no patients to bring in revenue. The Sisters of Charity, who worked at the hospital, felt they didn't have enough work because there were too many empty beds.

However, in the fall, typhoid fever hit the area, affecting the lay helpers and one Sister. In a few weeks, the hospital was crowded to its utmost capacity. Beds were placed in corridors. "Sighs and moaning were heard from floor to floor, and amid that 'heap of tortured humanity' the Sisters moved unceasingly, ever bright and cheerful, forgetful of their fatigue and weariness, tireless in their efforts to bring comfort to all, a little ray of sunshine and hope to many an agonizing soul," wrote an acquaintance of the Sisters in a letter dated from that time.

## FIRST PATIENT

The Holy Family Hospital in Prince Albert opened on Christmas Day in 1910. As they headed across the street for Christmas dinner at the orphanage, the Sisters saw a sleigh coming down the street, carrying Dr. R.L. King and the first patient - a man with a "quinsy" sore throat. The doctor prescribed ice, but there was none. So one of the Sisters packed snow into a pack for the man's throat, and quickly set a basin of water outside to turn to ice for the next packing. In the meantime, a youngster ran off with basin and ice, and the Sister had to continue with snow until a second try at ice succeeded. Within a few days, the hospital was filled to capacity.



## Branching Out - The Move West

Well established in Prince Albert, the Sisters of Charity now looked to see if they could fulfill needs in other parts of the province. They opened two more mission houses: in 1921, Rosary Hall, for women attending Normal School in Regina, and in 1924, a convent with room for girls to board in Holdfast. The year 1924 saw more big changes for the community. It was the year the Sisters of Charity moved into Alberta. In Edmonton, they assumed operation of a school, and in 1926 they opened a hospital in a small cabin in Radway living and working there until a 20-bed facility could be opened two years later.

The original Radway Hospital, 1926.



### PIONEER HOSPITAL

In 1926, the Sisters of Charity opened St. Joseph's Hospital in Radway, a small village of predominantly Ukrainian and Polish people. In a small cabin, they "pitched camp" and set up to serve the urgent needs of the community. Most of the space was used for patients, leaving one room for three Sisters to sleep, live and sometimes dine.

For surgeries, water drawn from the well was heated over a stone fireplace and bedding was washed and hung out to dry even when it was -35 degrees Celsius. Rates for a hospital bed were 50 cents to \$2 a day. In 18 months, they served 145 patients. In 1928, the Sisters opened a 20-bed hospital with proper facilities.

## *Branching Out - The Move West*



*Gardening skills were quickly developed.*

*Prior to 1929, the Sisters of Charity had not pushed their western frontier beyond the Rockies. Vancouver had seemed a world away -- until a Saint John native called on them for help. Coadjutor Archbishop William Duke of Vancouver wanted to establish Catholic education in British Columbia. He was assisting Archbishop Timothy Casey, another New Brunswicker who had been Bishop of Saint John for many years and who was now too frail to assume all the responsibilities of his Vancouver diocese. With both men there, the invitation to venture to Vancouver seemed a little easier. Six Sisters from the community soon made the long trip to British Columbia, and opened a school and a Mercy Home for unwed mothers.*

*It wasn't long before Archbishop Duke called on the Sisters again. In the early 1930s, access to health care in Vancouver was inadequate. Patients were waiting for treatment because of a lack of beds at the General Hospital. Archbishop Duke knew about the Sisters' successes in establishing hospitals elsewhere -- in Prince Albert, Saint John and Radway. He asked the Sisters to open a Catholic hospital in Vancouver. By 1939, the Sisters had purchased the land, overseen the construction and opened St. Vincent's Hospital on 33rd Avenue and Heather Street.*



*Even with much attention focused on Vancouver, the Sisters continued to respond to the need elsewhere in the West. In 1938, they opened St. Joseph's Convent and School in Winnipeg, the first mission house in Manitoba.*

*Winter transportation on the prairies, 1910.*



## *Branching Out - The Move West*



*Visiting the sick in Vancouver.*



*Annual check-up for school children, Vancouver.*

*Father Brueck's simple plea for help with the British orphans at the turn of the 20th century had proven a turning point for the Sisters of Charity of Saint John. Little did they know when they traveled to Saskatchewan in 1906 that their work would eventually extend to British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba, and a whole new field of ministry. As their migration followed the demographic development within Canada, so did their mission work respond to the pressing needs of a growing population. Saskatchewan, it turned out, was a gateway for the rest of Western Canada and an entry into health care.*

*Kindergarten class,  
Powell River, BC.*





## *Taking Root - Growth in the East*

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*While the Sisters of Charity were busy in the West opening schools, homes and hospitals, the same was happening back in Saint John.*

*The city's Roman Catholics knew about the hospital the Sisters had opened in the West, and they wanted one too. After all, the Order's founding city still had no Catholic health facility. Responding to a request from Bishop Edouard LeBlanc and the mounting pressure from residents, the Sisters took on the project.*

*In 1911 -- less than year after opening the Saskatchewan hospital -- the Sisters purchased a property for the hospital. Soon, they were converting existing buildings into administrative offices, hiring an architect and employing trades people to construct a \$100,000 brick building (or \$1.6-million by today's standards). The result was a hospital the local newspaper called "second-to-none east of Montreal."*

*On Nov.18, 1914, the 60-bed Saint John Infirmary admitted its first patient. The following year, the newly established School of Nursing enrolled its first students, who would become the backbone of the hospital staff. As demand for health care grew, so did the hospital. In 1924, the facility that would later become known as St. Joseph's Hospital expanded, nearly doubling its capacity.*



*The St. John Infirmary opened in 1914.*

## Taking Root - Growth in the East

### ADVANCED HEALTH CARE

When the St. John Infirmary (now called St. Joseph's Hospital) was built in 1914, it was considered advanced for its time. The operating room was constructed on the top floor, the furthest away from the street dust below. Its position also allowed surgeons to have northern light through vertical windows and skylights. It was several decades later before artificial lighting was installed in the operating room.

*The Sisters also kept pace with the province's social needs. They opened St. Vincent's Infants Home for unwed mothers in 1915.*

*The mothers arranged for their babies to be either boarded or left for adoption, in which case they were cared for at the home until they were old enough to go to the Catholic orphanage. At the same time, the Sisters continued to operate an older project, the first nursing home in Saint John. The Mater Misericordiae, which had opened in 1888, was a response to late 19th century social consciousness about elder care. Mary's Home in Moncton also served the needs of the elderly in the area for many years.*

*All the while the Sisters also maintained their important role in New Brunswick's evolving education system. From the beginning, they had recognized the importance of having proper academic qualifications. They strove to have their teaching Sisters licensed, and sent many to university to obtain basic degrees and even doctorates.*



*The first nursing home in Saint John, Mater Misericordiae, was opened in 1888.*



*Caring for babies at St. Vincent's Infants Home.*



## Taking Root - Growth in the East



*A Teacher Sister obtains her Degree in Education.*

*These eminently qualified women operated two high schools, and taught hundreds of elementary school children in Saint John, Fredericton, Moncton and Woodstock. They also ventured to rural areas of the province -- like the predominantly Irish Catholic community of Johnville in Carleton County -- often teaching in remote areas where no public school existed. In the mid-1920s, they moved into the First Nations community of Maliseet on the Tobique River, invited by the federal government to tend to the educational and medical needs of families there.*

*Education ministry with First Nations people, Tobique, NB.*

*The Sisters continued to operate high school academies for girls, having opened Mount Carmel Academy in Saint John in 1920 and Rosary Hall, a residence for young women studying at the Provincial Normal School in Fredericton, in 1926.*

*Where there was a need, the Sisters of Charity did their best to respond – in the fields of education, health care and social work. As their work was evolving and growing in the early 1900s, so did God provide the means for them to respond. Between 1905 and 1923, their numbers nearly doubled to 220.*

*But something else was also growing. As missions developed in both the East and the West, ethnic tensions were increasing at home.*



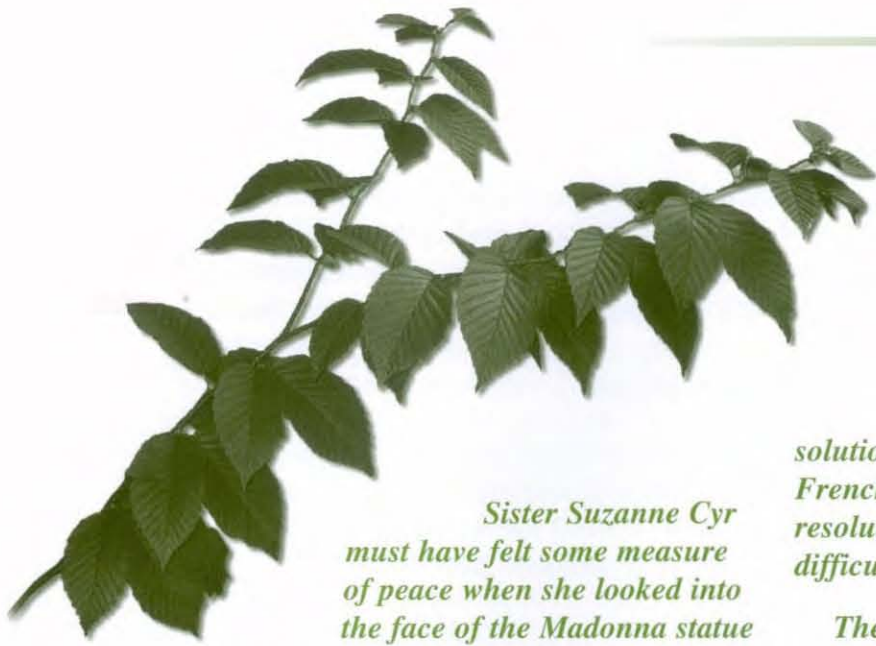


*“Whoever welcomes one such  
child for my sake welcomes me.”*

*Matthew 18:5*



## *A New Branch - The Acadian Story*



*Sister Suzanne Cyr must have felt some measure of peace when she looked into the face of the Madonna statue she was about to purchase in Montreal that August day in 1923.*

*It had been a year since she had sent a letter to Rome, making the case for a separation from the English-speaking Sisters of Charity. It had pained her, this dear friend to many of the English-speaking Sisters. But it had pained her more to see the heritage and culture of her Acadian people threatened.*

*From the beginning, French-speaking women who entered the Sisters of Charity had to pray and teach in English. As a result, many young Acadian girls chose to enter convents in Quebec or the United States. The*

*solution seemed easy enough: create an official French novitiate within the community. The final resolution, however, proved to be painfully difficult.*

*The 73-year-old woman must have reflected on this as she studied the face of the Virgin Mary, whom Acadians credit with the miracle of their survival from exile. This statue would eventually grace the future motherhouse in Saint-Joseph, and become the namesake of her new order of French-speaking Sisters: Les Religieuses de Notre-Dame du Sacré-Coeur. For Sister Cyr (known by the Acadian Sisters as Mère Marie-Anne), it had been a long struggle, one that began in 1914. Yet her people's struggle for religious and linguistic freedom had much earlier roots – in the settlement of North America. ■*



*Statue of Notre Dame du Sacré Coeur and child.*

## *A New Branch - The Acadian Story*

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*When France and Great Britain struggled over control of North America in the mid-1700s, Acadia became their battleground. In 1755, victorious Britain deported thousands of Acadians from the Maritimes, many of whom returned years later to find themselves forced into unsettled areas and largely ignored. With the odds stacked against them, there was little hope for the survival of the Acadians' culture in New Brunswick.*

*By the mid-1800s, Acadians made up as much as half of the Maritime population. Deeply committed to their heritage, they could not separate language from their identity as a people. The same did not apply to Irish immigrants, who made up the other portion of New Brunswick's Catholics and who had, by this time, assumed the leadership of the Catholic Church. Their commitment was to a new way of life far from the persecution and poverty of their own homeland.*

*With waves of potato famine Irish immigrants arriving in New Brunswick,*

*the situation only deteriorated. Now, the Irish outnumbered the Acadians and the Church, seeing their destitution, felt pressed to pastor them at the expense of the earlier Acadian settlers. Adding to this, the English-speaking Irish bishops had a difficult time understanding the significance of language in the hearts of the Acadian people.*

*Against this backdrop, the Sisters of Charity came into being. Already, tensions were high between the English and the French, and particularly between the Irish and the French, who were witnessing the slow demise of their culture.*

*Sister Cyr (Mère Marie-Anne) and many of the Acadian women in the Sisters of Charity sought to change that. For many years, the Sisters of Charity had focused mainly on the West and urban areas of New Brunswick. Their activity was restricted in Acadian areas, and the parishioners felt it. On two occasions, more than 100 parishioners in Memramcook had signed letters asking that the French-speaking students be given the same opportunity as English students.*

*In 1914, with the encouragement of Bishop Edouard LeBlanc -- the first Acadian bishop of Saint John -- the Acadian Sisters wrote to Mother Thomas, suggesting as a solution, two ecclesiastical provinces. Later they requested a separate branch of the community and permission to open a French novitiate -- both requests that Rome denied.*

*Mère Marie-Anne Cyr.*



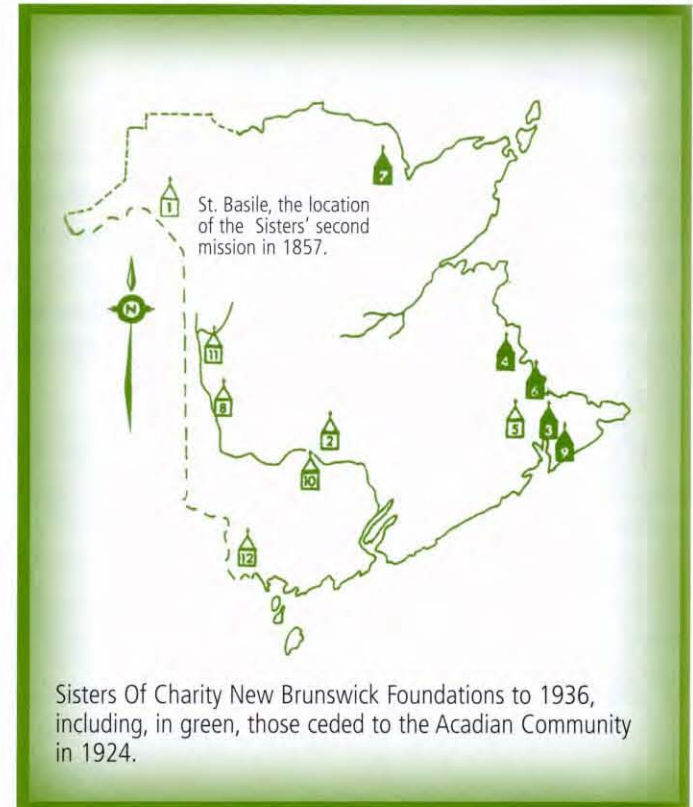


## A New Branch - The Acadian Story

Six years would pass, but the issue was resurrected in 1922 after Bishop Arthur Melanson in Campbellton founded the first Acadian religious community, *Les Filles de Marie de l'Assomption*. Worried that this would attract potential candidates from southeastern New Brunswick, Sister Cyr (Mère Marie-Anne) saw her dream of opening a French novitiate within the Sisters of Charity jeopardized, and so she approached her dear friend, the new Mother General, to plead her cause once more. Saddened and frustrated by the Acadian Sisters' proposal, Mother Alphonsus Carney denied the request and instead suggested they should just separate.

"This was in no way an engaging invitation, but a final declaration intended to place the French Sisters in the impossibility of continuing with their proceedings," wrote Sister Marie-Dorothée in her book, *A Stone in the Acadian Mosaic*. "But it may be that, in the impasse where she was, she was inviting them to consummate a project which she knew henceforth to be as inevitable as it was regrettable and incomprehensible."

Soon afterward, the Acadian Sisters wrote to Mother Alphonsus, agreeing with her suggestion, and asking her approval. The French-speaking Sisters wrote to Rome on Aug. 15 of that year – the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and a day which Acadians have adopted as their National Feast Day to celebrate their culture.



- 1 - 1857 St. Basile, convent (closed 1873)
- 2 - 1858 Fredericton, convent
- 3 - 1873 Memramcook, convent
- 4 - 1880 Buctouche, convent
- 5 - 1888 Moncton, convent, merged in 1904 with Home for the Aged
- 6 - 1888 Shediac, convent
- 7 - 1923 Petit Rocher, convent
- 8 - 1924 Johnville, convent
- 9 - 1924 St. Anselme, convent
- 10 - 1926 Fredericton, Rosary Hall
- 11 - 1928 Maliseet Indian Reserve
- 12 - 1930 St. Stephen, convent

## *A New Branch - The Acadian Story*

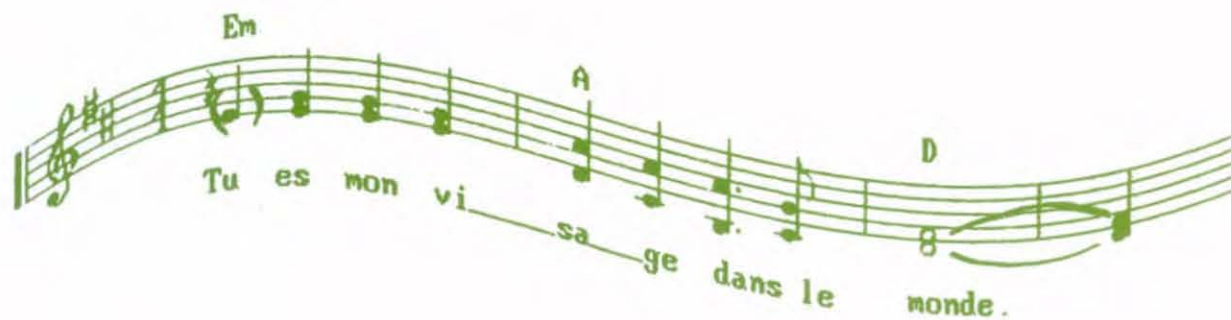
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Approval from Rome came on Feb. 8, 1924, six months after Sister Cyr (Mère Marie-Anne) visited Montreal to purchase the statue. The new Order, with 53 members, was officially founded on Feb. 17, and Sister Cyr was elected its first superior. Five houses were ceded to them from the Sisters of Charity – a good foundation on which to build a new community. Five years would pass, however, before the Sisters of Charity recovered their membership, and another 50 years for the healing to begin.

Wrote Sister Marie-Dorothée: “it was a local need that had separated them physically. In reality, all remained women consecrated to the Lord according to the modalities of the apostolate of Saint Vincent de Paul, of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, of Bishop Connolly and of Mother Vincent. The foundation by Mère Marie-Anne had just simply given rise to a new branch, still on the same trunk.”

*“The foundation by Mère Marie-Anne had just simply given rise to a new branch, still on the same trunk.”*

*–Sister Marie-Dorothée*







## *Flourishing - Stability and Expansion*

*It was "neat Rosary-time," the 15-minute drive from the Motherhouse on Saint John's Cliff Street to the retreat house for Sisters, built on the outskirts of the city in the 1950s.*

*As soon as the car dubbed the "Rosary Roadster" was in motion, one of the Sisters would start the round of prayer, which would finish by the time they reached Marycrest. For them, this practice of prayer was a way to remain connected to the founding spirit. The drive also reflected the Sisters of Charity's progress in the past 30 years.*

*While remaining committed to the principles of the community, they had kept pace with modern society and its changing needs. By the 1950s, many Sisters held driver's licences and PhD's, sat behind administrative desks and worked in hospital laboratories.*

*After the western expansion and the separation of the Acadian Sisters in the early 1900s, the Sisters of Charity had focused on the education of their own members. While some who entered the convent in the 1920s already held university degrees, many others who joined in the 1930s and 1940s pursued teaching and nursing degrees, and undertook doctoral work.*

*With their degrees, they became administrators of hospitals and principals of schools — positions traditionally held by men in the secular world. For many of these women, responding to God's call to enter religious life had also provided more opportunities for professional self-fulfillment than they would have found by choosing a different path.*

*Perhaps this was one reason for the community's unprecedented membership rise during this time. By 1948, there were more than 375 members staffing foundations in seven of Canada's 10 provinces.*

*Sisters' new headdress for driving.*





*St. Patrick's Academy,  
commercial class, Digby, NS.*



*During this period of growth and stability, from 1936 to 1965, the community continued to expand dramatically.*

*In Vancouver, the Sisters responded to a call from Archbishop Duke and opened St. Vincent's Hospital in 1939. They also opened two convents in the 1940s and taught at three schools. A kindergarten, along with the teaching of music and religion, formed the mission in Powell River in 1938.*

*Convents under the patronage of St. Joseph opened in the late 1930s and 1940s in Manitoba, British Columbia and Quebec. In Alberta, two new schools opened in Edmonton. The Sisters founded other schools in Wetaskiwin in 1942. A commercial school opened in Hanna in 1946. In the East, the Sisters opened schools in 1943 in Digby, Nova Scotia, and in English-speaking areas of Quebec – at Farrellton in 1945 and Venosta in 1946.*

*The 1950s saw the completion of several large-scale projects under the direction of Mother Joan Kane, nicknamed "The Builder." A new wing was added to St. Vincent's Hospital in Vancouver, a new nurses' residence was built at Holy Family Hospital in Prince Albert, the eight-storey St. Joseph's Hospital was completed in Saint John, and Marycrest -- a retreat house for the Sisters -- was built just outside the city.*

*Mother Kane also supervised renovations and improvements to existing foundations, including St. Vincent's Convent, and the relocation of high school classes from the convent to St. Vincent's High School. As one Saint John businessman said at the time: "Mother Joan brought the community into the 20th century."*



*Parish-funded schools  
were opened in Manitoba  
and British Columbia.*



*Class photo, Venosta, PQ.*



## *Flourishing - Stability and Expansion*

*The end of the Second World War, however, had affected both the number of new requests the Sisters of Charity received and their ability to fulfill them. Canadians had undergone years of social, political and economic upheaval, beginning with the Great Depression and were ready to finally enjoy prosperity. The housing market boomed and so did the number of babies born as veterans returned, married and had families. New Canadian communities developed — a phenomenon experienced in the United States and other nations.*

*Letters from desperate bishops and priests in Canada, the United States and even Jamaica sought the Sisters' help in dealing with the explosion of post-1945 suburbia and its need for schools and hospitals. The community had to decline many of the requests. Responding to an offer to build a hospital in Ontario in 1952, a Sister wrote: "We are understaffed in all our institutions and many of our Sisters are breaking down from doing too much."*

*From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the community reached a plateau of about 400 members — a number it would never surpass. After the mid-1960s, the rate of vocations slowed, perhaps because women were finding new work opportunities in the post-war world. Many clerical and service-sector jobs opened for women, and the baby boom fuelled the demand for traditional female positions, like teachers and nurses.*

*As a result, not enough new entrants answered the call to replace Sisters who retired because of age or health. This, combined with a greater government involvement in the policies of their institutions, meant that the Sisters needed to close schools, mercy homes and orphanages — foundations that had been the focus of the community since its beginning more than a century before.*

*In the late 1950s and 1960s, as the Sisters travelled in the "Rosary Roadster" to Marycrest — the retreat house and home for convalescent Sisters — they must have reflected on the future of their community and the changes it was undergoing. Little did they know, however, that they were in the midst of the calm before the true winds of change.*



*The new wing of St. Vincent's Hospital, Vancouver, BC was added in 1953.*



*Religion classes were taught in home basements.*



*PUBLICATION MINISTRY:  
From 1936 - 1978 the Raphaelite  
Magazine reached households near  
and far with stories and devotions  
that nurtured faith.*



*Picnic at Marycrest after 1960 retreat.*



*St. Vincent's Girls' School annual  
September outing at Marycrest.*



## *Wind in the Branches - Vatican II*

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**M**other Jean Keenan had a lot to contend with, overseeing the operation of hospitals, a mercy home and orphanages all across the country. Little did she know that she would soon be overseeing far greater and more radical changes within the congregation.

Elected Mother General of the Sisters of Charity in 1960, Mother Keenan would also become its helmswoman on a sea of changes. Two years into her tenure, Pope John XXIII, considered a transitional pope by many, opened the council of church leaders known as Vatican II.

It was a surprising and radical move, but Pope John recognized that the Catholic Church was living in a medieval model handed down over the course of 700 years. He hoped it could now make itself relevant in a contemporary world. Through Vatican II, Pope John opened the Church's windows and let in the fresh air of the Spirit. It was called a New Pentecost and the whole Catholic world would be forever changed.

Some signs of reawakening were obvious and immediate. Mass was no longer held in Latin and the priest no longer faced the altar with his back to the congregation. Lay people became more involved in the liturgy and parish ministries.

For the Sisters of Charity, this New Pentecost changed their whole way of being. It loosened the rigidity of their daily lives. It sparked changes in their spiritual attitude and it called them to re-examine the charism of their founders, bringing it to the present. The call of Vatican II also asked them to share their personnel with the poor in the Third World.

In a sense, Vatican II brought the Sisters full circle -- back to their roots, responding to needs, wherever they may be, with the spirit that had empowered their founders.



*Mother Jean Keenan, 1960.*

## *Wind in the Branches - Vatican II*

*Before Vatican II, life in the Sisters of Charity had become rigid and predictable. Convent life meant rising at five o'clock every morning for prayer, meditation, Mass and breakfast before heading off to jobs in schools, hospitals and orphanages.*

*Dressed in floor-length habits, the Sisters walked in pairs because they were forbidden to be alone in public. They ate their lunches apart from their fellow workers and, when the workday ended, they returned to the convent to eat supper in silence and to meditate. Only a half hour in the evening was allotted for free time to chat, sew or sing.*

*Outside the convent walls, personal relationships were restricted and family contact was limited. When they entered the order, the Sisters had even given up the names they had carried since baptism, to signify the new lives they were beginning.*

*So it was that religious life in the 1940s and 1950s had become increasingly monastic -- a closed and protective system trapped in the medieval mechanisms of the Church's past. Yet the Church continued to accept the system. So, for the most part, did society at large.*

*Novices at dinner, 1956.*





## *Wind in the Branches - Vatican II*



*New habit, 1967.*

*As the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, however, a quiet restlessness emerged within the community, much like the one quaking through the outside world. But as youthful baby boomers in the secular world began to protest, asserting their views and speaking of liberation, the Sisters of Charity continued to live according to the rules of their 1937 constitution. Never would they dare rattle for change.*

*That all changed when the winds of Vatican II blew into the midst of the 1960s' cultural revolution. None felt the breeze more than women in religious orders. The Council created both an intellectual and a liturgical excitement within the Sisters of Charity as they studied and discussed its published documents. Once constrained by the rules and restraints of the Order, the Sisters could now question, experiment and stir for changes from within.*

*Some of their first changes were external.*

*In 1966, the Sisters of Charity returned to their baptismal names. They experimented with their prayer routine, focusing more on scriptural prayer and individual meditation. They discarded their traditional floor-length habits in 1967 in favor of a modified polyester habit, and even these were replaced in 1969 by a simple suit or jumper.*

*The Order's organizational structure moved from a hierarchy to a community of Sisters led by a congregational leader. In 1983, they revised their constitution, replacing the generic rules and regulations of the 1937 version with one that more accurately reflected their own identity, their spirit and their mission to serve "the poor, the sick, the unlearned."*



*Winter recreation in Edmonton.*

## *Wind in the Branches - Vatican II*



*First adoption St. Peter Home, Saint John.*

*More importantly, Vatican II sparked deep internal changes within the Sisters of Charity.*

*At the council's urging, they reflected on the life of their foundress, Honoria Conway, and examined the life of St. Vincent de Paul. From his work with the poor in 17th-century France had sprung the order of the Sisters of Charity, "whose chapel is the parish church, whose cloister the streets of the city and wards of the hospitals."*

*Religious vows, which focused on the rules of poverty, obedience and chastity, were regarded with a deeper maturity. The Sisters now saw their vows as gifts to share rather than rules to set them apart from the lay community.*

*The Sisters of Charity now saw religious life as a gift for others -- not for themselves. As an apostolic congregation, they became more flexible in responding to the needs of the world around them.*

*As a result, the structured novitiate that had served the Sisters of Charity for many years no longer suited their needs. A formation process was shaped to prepare women to minister in today's Church. It gave them experience in community living, and allowed them to explore various ministries, theological studies and opportunities for discernment.*



*Religious instruction in Woodstock, NB.*



*Music ministry in Vancouver.*



## *Wind in the Branches - Vatican II*

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*Once considered a workforce for the Church, the Sisters now became valued in a different way in the bigger Church, finding new roles within the diocese, within parishes and on the streets.*

*In 1967, they set off on their first foreign mission to Peru, "A Mission called Hope." There, the Sisters established a school, medical clinics and pastoral ministries among the poor and marginalized in the shantytowns and in a rural community of this Third World country.*

*In Canada, they opened new missions in populated centres, and closed some of their older and more rural missions in places like Holdfast and Radway as populations shifted. They went to parishes in Fort Saskatchewan, in Lloydminster and Hope, BC, where Sisters worked within the communities.*



*First Nations ministry near Hope, BC.*



*Making sandwiches for the hungry, Edmonton AB.*



*Parish Ministry in Fredericton, NB.*

*The Sisters were not the only ones changing, of course. In the cultural revolution of the 1960s, new ideas about social institutions prompted the closures of orphanages, mercy homes and rosary halls.*

*As institutions closed, the Sisters looked for less formal ways to serve, expanding their ministries to include social justice, advocacy and support for immigrants and women's groups, the care of the environment, faith formation, literacy, pastoral care, and housing for the underprivileged as well as support for food banks, soup kitchens and crisis centers – all of which continue today.*

## *Wind in the Branches - Vatican II*

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*The era following Vatican II was not without its problems. The number of Sisters in the order slowly diminished over a 35-year period from its peak of nearly 400 in 1968 to just over 150 today.*

*For some Sisters, the changes brought about by the New Pentecost came too fast and went too far. Others experienced a freedom of conscience after Vatican II, and found the courage to respond in a direction other than religious life. At the same time, many aging Sisters retired and the number of novices slowly fell.*

*Among those who remained, Vatican II was a call to transformation. It fuelled excitement and created a new way*

*of being. It energized the renewal of the whole church. The foundations of the past were reconfigured to shape a healthier future. To find their place in this, the Sisters simply needed to ask: "What would our founders do?"*

*The answer, they found, would guide them into the years ahead. "The charity of Christ urges us, compels us."*

*The spirit of Vatican II was expressed in a more relaxed living atmosphere, demonstrated by these Sisters at dinner in the mid-1980's, Saint John.*



*Sisters celebrate at St. Vincents Hospital, Vancouver BC.*





## Wind in the Branches - Vatican II

### MISSIONS IN PERU:

*Mother Jean Keenan sat down one late summer day in 1966 to type a letter addressed to Peru. It was to a Canadian priest, who three years before had invited the Sisters to join him in his mission work there.*

*Earlier that summer, the Sisters of Charity had decided to undertake missionary work in Latin America. The decision was a response to the call of Vatican II*

*So when it came time to select a mission in Latin America, Mother Keenan looked no further than the first invitation the Sisters had received. Perhaps she was reassured because of its similarities to invitations 60 years earlier for the Sisters to go West: It came from Rev. J.C. Lavigne, an Oblate priest who was a New Brunswick native, and he was seeking an order of English-speaking Sisters.*

*"To any Congregation of Sisters that accepts the challenge to join us in Peru," he wrote, "we promise nothing but poverty and a glorious opportunity to do much work for Christ's poor."*

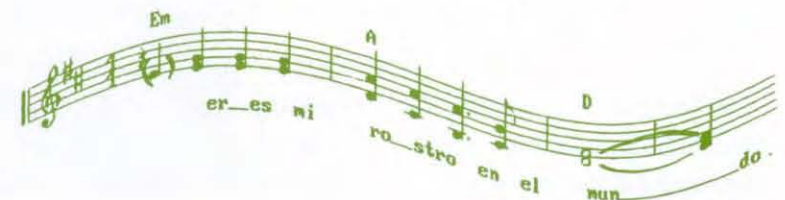
*The Sisters of Charity accepted the challenge. Though the language and customs of the country were unfamiliar, the common language became love, compassion and teamwork. Perhaps more than any other at the time, this mission approached the spirit of the founders, who a century before had lived among the people, feeling their suffering and empowering them through Christ's teachings.*

*So it was that Vatican II had sparked the Sisters to return to the spirit of their founders in a very concrete manner. Unexpectedly, the mission in Peru would also serve to speed the renewal of the community back home.*

*Shantytown outside of Lima, Peru.*



*Sister performing a baptism.*





## *Wind in the Branches - Vatican II*



*The Sisters' presence continues in this mountain village.*

*In 1967, six Sisters were sent to Peru. Three went to a school in Lima and three went to Chinchá Baja, a rural community, where they engaged in pastoral ministry and took over a small medical clinic.*

*From the beginning, the Sisters sought to teach not just the children, but the whole community, building skills the people would need to eventually run the schools and clinics themselves. Their goal was to empower the people.*

*In 1968, three more Sisters answered an invitation to go to Comas, one of the scores of unplanned and sprawling shantytowns that had sprung up on the outskirts of Lima. Now there were nine Sisters doing missionary work throughout the country. They had extended their work to other shantytowns of Lima, where they explored the possibility of vocations among the Peruvian women. They also ministered among the jungle people. In all, there were eight missions in the Latin American country.*

*When they first went to Peru, the Sisters had set aside the heavy black habits worn back home. Instead, they adopted light blue habits designed for the warm climate on the Peruvian coast. Even these*

*A few months after sending her letter, Mother Keenan went to Peru to investigate missions run there by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. She wanted to see first-hand the conditions the Sisters would be facing and the kind of work they would do. She came back encouraged.*

*proved impractical for women on the go and doing things that neither they nor the Canadian-based Sisters had previously done. Within a year, they were wearing practical street clothes, suitable for their circumstances, while the community in Canada was still experimenting with giving a fresh look to the traditional habit.*

*The mission in Peru helped to remove some of the monastic restraints that lingered from the pre-Vatican II era. In Peru, the Sisters worked with and beside the people, lived among them, and became immersed in their culture. As they returned to Canada after completing three-year terms, they brought with them a new sense of mission and creativity.*

*The late 1980s saw many of the Sisters leave Peru when a terrorist group known as Sendero Luminosa, translated as the Shining Path, moved toward civil war, killing foreigners along its way. But the Sisters of Charity had left a legacy — medical clinics and a school run by the local people, many of whom they had taught in their two decades there.*

*Today, two Sisters continue serving the people in remote areas in the mountains of Cajamarca.*



*Leaving the legacy: a local catechist carries on the work.*





St. Vincent



St. Louise de Marillac



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

## Wind in the Branches - Vatican II

### SISTERS OF CHARITY FEDERATION IN THE VINCENTIAN-SETONIAN TRADITION

Like a genealogist studying family trees, the Sisters of Charity discovered in the 1970's that they had cousins across North America. What they found came as somewhat of a surprise.

For much of their history, the Sisters of Charity I.C. believed their spirit was derived from the Franciscan influence of Bishop Thomas Louis Connolly. When they realized in the 1970's that their distinctive charism stemmed from a tree of charity with its roots in the rule of St. Vincent de Paul, their identity and sense of mission fell into place. Now, they began to explore their bond with other charity congregations of women religious across North America.

The spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, and St. Louise de Marillac reached the shores of North America through Elizabeth Ann Seton. She adapted the French rule for the first American Sisters of Charity, founded in 1809 in Emmitsburg, MD.

In 1947, six congregations, who traced their roots to Mother Seton had formed a federation working exclusively towards having their foundress canonized. Approached to join them at the time, the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception declined, not yet understanding their relationship with the American Sisters.

Through reflection and study in the 1970's, however, they soon made an important discovery. Their own foundress, Honoria Conway and Mary Routanne, who joined her in caring

for the orphans, had both previously belonged to Mother Seton's communities in New York and Emmitsburg, MD.

"Their ideals and perspectives were formed in the same mould," wrote a Sister in a 1977 paper for the Canadian Catholic Historical Association. "Although there was a severance of association when the founding members came to Saint John, there always remained a bond of affection. This was strengthened by the ideals of a common purpose carried out under similar circumstances."

In 1979, the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception applied for membership in the Federation, which now proudly claimed the first saint canonized in the United States, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, in 1975. Within the Federation the Sisters of Charity I.C. found a shared heritage, a bond of affection and support in the renewal of religious life generated by Vatican II.

Today, 14 congregations in the United States and Canada make up the Federation which works to promote the charism of charity among its members. In solidarity with the poor, the Federation uses its corporate energy to advocate against injustice locally and globally, and seeks to address the concerns of women and children worldwide. To this end, it funds a non-governmental organization position at the United Nations, bringing the ministry of justice to a global arena.

Through their united energies, the 14 congregations are able to accomplish together more than they could ever do alone.



An annual gathering of the Sisters of Charity Federation.



## *Wind in the Branches - Vatican II*

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### **ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP**

*In 1964, the Second Vatican Council document "Lumen Gentium" emphasized the universal call to active ministry and communal spirituality. The Sisters of Charity understood the charism of charity as a gift of the Spirit for the whole church.*

*With a renewed sense of mission and spirituality rooted in the spirit of their heritage, Sisters of Charity began to explore how they might extend the mission and spirit of the Congregation to include lay women and men. The seeds of the Associate relationship were sown.*

*In 1985, following years of study and preparation, the Sisters initiated a process in Saint John, Edmonton and Vancouver. Women and men, drawn to the spirit and tradition of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Honoria Conway and their love for the poor, began a journey together.*

*Association with the Sisters of Charity is a journey of mutuality wherein Sisters and Associates share the gift of a common call from God to serve the needs of the world wherever they are. Associates and Sisters come together for prayer, faith sharing, workshops, retreats, social gatherings and congregational events.*

*The Associate relationship continues to grow in Surrey, Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon and Saint John where clusters of Associates give expression to the charism of charity. Today, there are more than 75 Associates across Canada. They volunteer at inner-city centers, cut hair for the homeless, and volunteer at St. Vincent de Paul providing clothing and emergency food. They sit on social justice committees. They serve in parish ministries. They care for the sick and dying, and in a myriad of other ways, live the charism of charity wherever they are.*

*It is within their daily lives that Associates have the most impact, with a heightened consciousness of the Spirit present in all. To this, Elizabeth Ann Seton would say again, "Our poor little seed spreads its branches very well."*



*Sister and Associates at St. Vincent de Paul.*





## *In New Soil - The Story Continues*

*One thing is certain: The Sisters of Charity have been blessed to live in interesting times over the past century and a half. They were among Canada's first women on the forefront for social change and were among the country's first network of professional women. They responded to social needs across generations with compassion and courage.*

*Today, the number of Sisters of Charity may be diminishing but not their spirit. About 150 Sisters continue to minister through prayer and presence in diverse areas of society. Take for example, Sisters who, feeling the call to work hand-in-hand with the poor and exploited, exchanged their administrative positions for ministry on the streets. They now extend hope to many in Vancouver's East side. Another Sister brings her administrative gifts to co-directing an inner city pastoral ministry organization in Edmonton. In so doing, she collaborates with a variety of social groups, bringing forward the agenda of the poor. Working with and among the poor in direct service continues from coast to coast.*

*Recognizing the need to preserve the mission and vision of Catholic Health Care some Sisters have chosen to exercise leadership in provincial Catholic Health Care Associations across Canada. Sisters who were former educators and health care professionals, have become addiction counsellors after seeing the effects of addictions within families. Others have become support counsellors in non-profit AIDs organizations, spiritual counsellors in correctional settings, pastoral counsellors and counsellors in elementary schools.*



*Sisters attending NGO session at the United Nations, 1999.*

*"To every thing there is a season"*

*- Ecclesiastes 3:1*





## *In New Soil - The Story Continues*



*Public Advocacy  
for Childrens'  
issues.*



*Music is an important  
part of prayer and  
ministry.*

*East and West, many Sisters continue to bring their love for teaching into literacy centers for refugees and inner-city drop-in centers. In the North, Sisters have responded to the need for supportive roles in the diocese, the parishes and among First Nations people. The value of holistic health care through massage, Reiki and aromatherapy has drawn some Sisters to become practitioners in the field of wellness.*



*Professor of Theology  
at Newman College.*

## *In New Soil - The Story Continues*

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*The profession of journalism enables another Sister to cover aspects of theology, spirituality and areas of social and political inequality. Another Sister continues as a gifted professor of spirituality at a theological college. Some Sisters are connected to ecumenical and other coalitions that address social issues of today.*

*Behind the scenes, the Sisters of Charity are funding school breakfast programs, legal aid services, and homes for teen-age mothers and low-income seniors. Locally and globally, they are advocating for the rights of women and children, by writing letters to politicians, collaborating with social agencies and helping to fund a voice for justice and equality at the United Nations. Thus, the transformation process that began with Vatican II continues into a new century.*

*The founding spirit remains constant. The Sisters find themselves to be most authentic to that spirit when they are responding in new ways of being for mission. Today the Sisters of Charity continue as a faith-filled presence in a post- modern world.*

*Where God's Spirit will take them in the future, they are not certain, but they are certain of this: the Spirit of Charity will continue to unfold. ■*

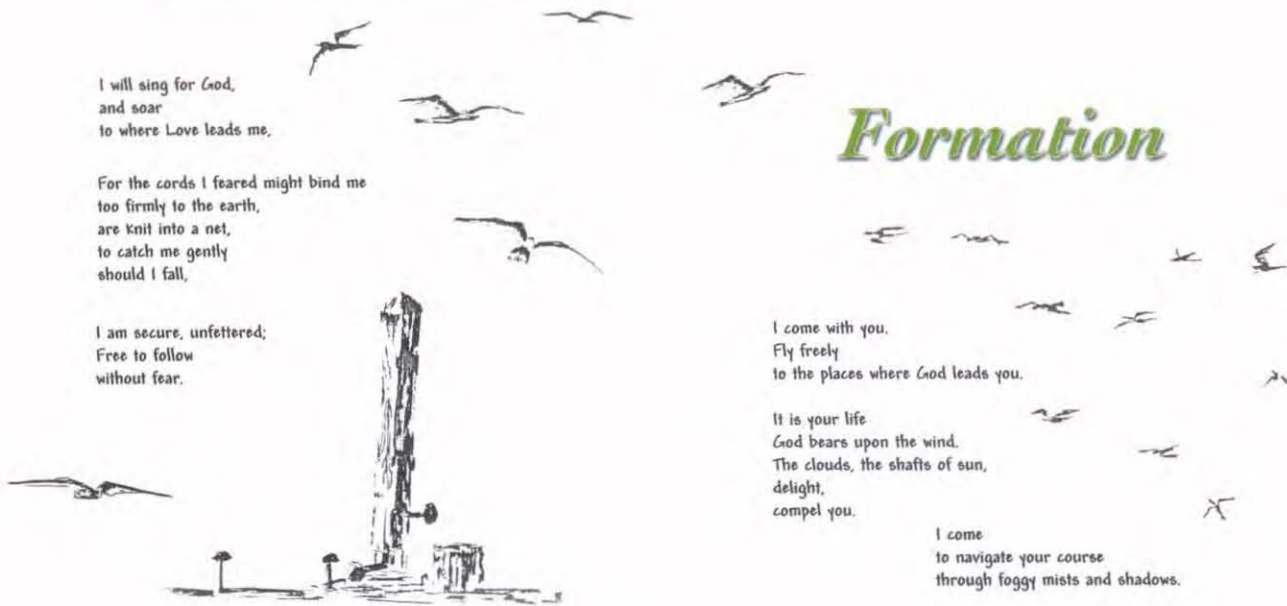


# Consecration

I will sing for God,  
and soar  
to where Love leads me,

For the cords I feared might bind me  
too firmly to the earth,  
are knit into a net,  
to catch me gently  
should I fall,

I am secure, unfettered;  
Free to follow  
without fear.



# Formation

I come with you,  
Fly freely  
to the places where God leads you.

It is your life  
God bears upon the wind.  
The clouds, the shafts of sun,  
delight,  
compel you.

I come  
to navigate your course  
through foggy mists and shadows.

You give form and movement  
to God's thought.  
And I am there  
to share your joy.

# Vocation

Tender shoot  
first tasting green of spring;  
Someone  
once cared enough for you  
to set you in the earth,  
Someone of faith  
who trusted  
that the spring  
would call you forth;  
Someone of faith  
who trusted you  
to recognize the beckoning  
and answer.



This house  
is made of music,  
A concerto  
full of harmonies:  
Discovered  
when the melodies and discords  
in each heart-song  
come together  
in a prayer.

# Community

Tangle of brambles  
cluttering the forest floor,

Winding, unwieldy  
around the paper birches:

A curse for wandering passers-by,

A blessing  
for the birches,  
who need such humble underbrush  
to keep  
from falling over  
in the wind.



# Government



**SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE  
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**  
150 Years 1854-2004