



The *Great* Canadian
Catholic Hospital History Project

Documenting the legacy and contribution of the
Congregations of Religious Women in Canada,
their mission in health care, and the founding and operation of Catholic hospitals.



Projet de la *Grande* Histoire
des hôpitaux catholiques au Canada

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des
congrégations de religieuses au Canada,
leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

**Compassion Builds a House:
The Legacy of Caring
at Providence Centre, Toronto**

by
Diane Bisson, Ph.D.

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COMPASSION
BUILDS A HOUSE
THE LEGACY OF CARING AT PROVIDENCE CENTRE

Diane Bisson, Ph.D.



DEDICATION

To the Sisters of St. Joseph whose compassion built a strong foundation of service in response to the needs of the most vulnerable of society.

To all the women and men whose compassion continues to serve the needs of patients, residents and clients at Providence Centre.

To Marion Leslie whose compassion conceived the writing of this history as a gift to the Sisters of St. Joseph when sponsorship for Providence Centre was transferred from the Sisters to the Catholic Health Corporation of Ontario in 1998.

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Diane Bisson, Ph.D.

Director, Mission and Values, Providence Centre

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**"WE WILL CALL THE HOME FOR THE POOR THE
'HOUSE OF PROVIDENCE'
AND IN NAMING IT THUS THE PROVIDENCE OF
GOD WILL SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN IT."**

Bishop de Charbonnel

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, working closely with the Bishop of Toronto, Armand François de Charbonnel, opened the doors of the House of Providence in 1857. The Sisters of St. Joseph provided a place of welcome for all, particularly the most vulnerable of the society at the time. Providing hospitality to those most in need was critical because those who were poor or disadvantaged were often housed in jails, mixed in with criminals.²

The primary work of the House of Providence was to provide shelter and food for those who otherwise would not have those bare necessities of life. In its early years, its residents included children, particularly orphans, widows, elderly people and those who were poor. Over time, as the needs of the residents increased, an infirmary was created. Gradually, the House of Providence responded more to the needs of elderly people. When the House was moved to the present site in 1962, Providence Villa and Hospital, as it was then called, was built as primarily a Home for the Aged with some chronic care patients. Providence Centre now has more patients in need of hospital care than residents in the Home for the Aged.

For much of the history of the House of Providence, the House was primarily operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph, with small numbers of paid staff. Those who lived at the House worked as they were able, doing chores. Gradually, particularly after the move was made to Providence Villa and Hospital, the numbers of paid staff substantially increased and the numbers of Sisters decreased. This pattern has continued until the present when there are very few Sisters working at Providence Centre.

Through numerous challenges the Sisters experienced their deep dependence on God, trusting that God would provide for their need. The Sisters were innovative, dealing with challenges in many different ways. In the *Jubilee Volume* compiled for the fiftieth anniversary of the Archdiocese, Archbishop J.J. Lynch wrote: “Nothing short of an almost miraculous interposition of Providence could have enabled the good Sisters presiding over the institution, with the slender resources at their disposal, to shelter, feed and clothe so many poor.”³

The original building was located on Power Street in Toronto and eventually grew to four times its original size. After a century of caring, a new building was needed and, on January 28, 1962 the residents were moved to Providence Villa and Hospital at the present site of 3276 St. Clair Avenue East. On May 15, 1989 the Board of Directors approved a new name, Providence Centre, in order to reflect the diversity of services which were offered.

Providence Centre’s Mission is rooted firmly in the tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph, as revealed in the history of the House of Providence and its successors, Providence Villa and Hospital and Providence Centre. Remembering the history and the contribution of the Sisters can be encouragement for us at Providence Centre as we seek to live the Mission as faithfully as possible.

Providence Centre continues to care for those who are among the most vulnerable in society. The Mission, Values and Vision are critical components to Providence Centre’s identity. These statements allow us to evaluate continually our decisions and actions so that we may provide the best possible care to our patients, residents and clients.

PROVIDENCE CENTRE HAS AFFIRMED ITS MISSION IN ITS MISSION STATEMENT: *Providence Centre furthers the Catholic Church's mission of healing by providing care for adults who are elderly or facing disability, chronic or terminal illness. To this end, Providence Centre leads by excelling in care, education, advocacy, and research.*⁴

Providence Centre's six core Values describe the attitudes and behaviours which are necessary if we are to accomplish our Mission. These Values were derived from the health care Philosophy of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto.

Sanctity of Life • Every life is a sacred gift that has meaning and value.

Human Dignity • Everyone has intrinsic value and is worthy of respect.

Compassionate Service • The needs of every person are attended to with thoughtfulness, understanding and sensitivity.

Community • People of diverse backgrounds gather together with a shared purpose and support each other in hope and celebration.

Social Justice • Each person is treated in a fair and equitable manner, according to one's needs.

Social Responsibility • Accountability is demonstrated by the prudent use of the resources given to us in trust.⁵

FIDELITY TO OUR MISSION AND VALUES HELPS US TO MOVE TOWARDS OUR VISION:
Celebrating Life and Enriching Lives in a Community of Hope.⁶

Our Mission, Values and Vision emerge out of the legacy which has been left to us by the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Sisters of St. Joseph no longer sponsor Providence Centre as that responsibility was given to the Catholic Health Corporation of Ontario in 1998. Nevertheless, this organization seeks to remember the legacy of caring which the Sisters of St. Joseph have left to us, a contribution extending over 140 years. May this remembering be a source of encouragement for all of us as we seek to be faithful to the Mission entrusted to us at Providence Centre.

Belief in the Providence of God is a belief in God's deep compassion for human beings. In many ways, God's compassion is shown through human beings' compassion for one another.

Compassion comes from the Latin "to suffer with." When we are compassionate, we imagine what it is like to be in the position of the other person, we listen to what people are able to tell us about what it is like to be where they are, and we respond to them in the way that we would like others to respond to us. Part of the mystery of compassion is that we are often more able to be compassionate to others when we are most in touch with our own vulnerability. When we are compassionate, we are "welcoming" of another person into our lives and into our hearts.

At Providence Centre, we have recognized that Compassionate Service is a core Value for us. This Value comes out of a history of caring: not just the caring which the Sisters did, but the caring of the whole community for one another. The ways in which we show compassion to one another, patients, residents, clients, families, volunteers, staff and ourselves, is the extent to which we continue to build on the firm foundation. It is a foundation which first envisioned a haven of hospitality in which anyone in need would be welcome and would find the compassion which was not found elsewhere.

The extent to which we at Providence Centre put our values into action, including our Value of Compassionate Service, helps us to be faithful to our mission. Providence Centre's Mission Statement announces that we "further the Catholic Church's mission of healing." The House of Providence was founded through the sponsorship of a Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church and was operated by a Roman Catholic group of women, the Sisters of St. Joseph. Providence Centre continues to be sponsored by the Catholic Health Corporation of Ontario, ensuring fidelity to the Catholic identity.

Providence Centre's Catholic identity is maintained in many different ways which include action revealing our commitment to Catholic principles as found in the *Health Ethics Guide*. We have ethicists to help all at Providence Centre to make decisions which are grounded in solid ethical principles. We have the Ethics Committee and Research Ethics Board, both of which follow carefully the ethical teaching of the Church. We ensure that those who wish to participate in the sacramental life of the Church, including daily Eucharist, are able to do so. Pastoral care is integral to the services we offer.

The care which we extend to our patients, residents, and clients is holistic, based in the cherished beliefs about the human person as a unity of body, mind and spirit. That is a fundamental component to our Catholic identity as a facility.

Providence Centre is also "Catholic" in the sense of "universal." Just as the early vision of the House of Providence was that anyone would be welcome, regardless of race or religion, we continue to receive those who are most in need of our services. That hospitality is in continuity with the legacy left to us.

Part of the culture of Providence Centre which encourages us to offer hospitality, to extend compassion to those most in need, has been handed on to us by the founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto.

The Sisters of St. Joseph in France

Ever since the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded in Le Puy, France in 1648 the Sisters have sought to serve those who were most in need. Beginning with six women, most of whom could neither read nor write,

the Sisters made lace to support themselves and dressed in widows' clothing so that they could go out to the poorest of the city.

According to the earliest Constitutions, Father Jean Pierre Médaille, SJ directed the Sisters to devote themselves to hospital work, the direction of orphanages, the visitation of the "sick poor" and prisons, and the instruction of girls.⁷

The number of Sisters of St. Joseph grew, and they established community houses throughout France. A century and a half after the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph was established, during the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, the Sisters' convents were closed and their property taken by the revolutionaries. Many Sisters either unwillingly returned to their families or were put in prison. At least seven Sisters of St. Joseph were martyred because they refused to take the oath required by those leading the revolution.



Mother St. John Fontbonne
*Refounded the Congregation after
the French Revolution*

One Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, was among those put in prison. She was saved from the guillotine with the death of a key figure in the revolution shortly before the day she was to be executed. A few years later, in 1807, Mother St. John responded to the request of the archbishop of Lyons to re-establish a community of religious women according to the spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Soon requests came from other countries, asking the Sisters to come and work among the poor in those places. In 1836, at the request of

the Bishop of St. Louis, Mother St. John sent six Sisters to the United States. Among them was her niece, Sister Delphine Fontbonne, who, fifteen years later, was sent to Toronto to establish the first foundation of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada.

Arrival in Toronto

At the invitation of the Bishop of Toronto, Armand François Marie de Charbonnel, four Sisters of St. Joseph arrived at the Toronto wharf from Philadelphia on October 7, 1851. The eldest at 38 years of age and leader of the group was Sister Delphine Fontbonne. She had made vows 16 years before in France. The others, younger and with much less experience as Sisters of St. Joseph, were from different countries (Germany, Ireland and the United States.)⁸

The Sisters originally came to Toronto to run an orphanage which had been managed by Catholic lay women. They quickly found other urgent needs. Most relief needed to come from the churches and private charities as it was not until 1866 that orphanages, homes, hospitals and houses of refuge received provincial grants to help with expenses.⁹

Founding the House of Providence

The House of Providence was sponsored by Bishop de Charbonnel, the second Roman Catholic bishop of Toronto. Born in France in 1801, Armand François de Charbonnel was ordained in 1825. He began missionary work in Montreal in 1839 and was made Bishop of Toronto in 1850. He resigned as Bishop in 1860, returning to France to become a Capuchin friar. During his tenure, Bishop de Charbonnel “laid the foundation for financial stability in the diocese and created organizations

for his church's endeavours in charity, education, and spirituality."¹⁰ He died in France in 1891.

When Bishop de Charbonnel visited Pope Pius IX in 1854, the *Annals of the House of Providence* record that:

Bishop de Charbonnel sought permission to erect a house of charity to alleviate the poverty that reigned throughout his diocese. When his request was granted he paused to ask for a special blessing on this haven of love. After a moment's thought, the Holy Father told him he would ask God that the House of Providence be never destroyed by fire and that its work never fail for lack of funds.¹¹

Bishop de Charbonnel's vision for the House of Providence was outlined in his Pastoral Letter of 1855 in which he explained that the House of Providence was to benefit "the necessitous; emigrants, young and old, invalid and destitute." Its purpose was hospitality:

Might we not shelter for a few days poor emigrants, particularly destitute widows, mothers and daughters, refresh a little their mind, heart and body by all the cares of a truly Christian hospitality, giving them all possible information, directions about land, employment and work? Who has not seen these poor emigrants year after year on our boats, wharves and streets without heart-rending feelings at the sight of fellow [human beings] reduced to so pitiable a condition?¹²

As well as providing hospitality to those who were in need, the House of Providence was also to help people stay on the right moral path. The Bishop observed that poverty can be combined with other "immoralities" so, he believed, by helping the poor, the House of Providence could diminish idleness, lying and drinking too much.

The Bishop's vision was expansive regarding the kinds of people who would enjoy the hospitality of the House of Providence. He wrote:

*Besides giving a little comfort to poor emigrants in our House of Providence could we not therein attend to some special cases of sickness and gather up some more orphans... Could we not likewise save from destruction some young girls and reclaim others, shelter widows and help some aged or invalid persons?*¹³

The Bishop further explained that the members of his diocese should not be “astonished” that he would have such compassion towards emigrants because he was “an immigrant’s son whose parents and relatives received in the greatest distress the kindest hospitality in Germany and England.” This commitment to the poor is significant when it is considered in the context of the Bishop’s position in the French nobility.

The Bishop wrote also of his mother’s compassion towards immigrants as “she sold a part of her fine dress to support a starving octogenarian emigrant.” The Bishop gave a personal reason as well for founding the House of Providence, revealing that it was his “long desire to die in a House of this kind” and he expressed his wish to resign from being a bishop so that he could make the House of Providence “his resting place.”¹⁴

The House of Providence was opened to serve the needs of anyone, regardless of religion. A primary motivation for such hospitality was the understanding that what it meant to follow Jesus was to care for the needs of the poor for “At all times it has been one of the glories of the Holy Catholic Church to provide for all the wants of suffering humanity.”¹⁵

Within a month of issuing the pastoral letter, the Bishop was able to enlist the help of lay people in the diocese to help fulfil his vision and

to begin fundraising for the House of Providence, with evidence of a first meeting in July 1855.¹⁶

The building of the House of Providence began in 1855. There was a special blessing of the cornerstone on July 13, 1856.¹⁷ On August 11, 1857 as the building was nearing completion, a keg of gunpowder was placed under the foundation and ignited. There was considerable damage to the building. Although a reward was offered by the Mayor for information leading to the capture of the person or persons who did it, there is no indication in the *Annals* of the Sisters of St. Joseph that anyone was charged with the crime. To stop further incidents, the Bishop asked for two Sisters to sleep in the uncompleted building every night. No further trouble was experienced.¹⁸



House of Providence circa 1857

This is one of the earliest known pictures of the House of Providence.

In 1857, the House of Providence opened its doors. Although we do not have a date for the opening, we do find that the *Mirror* reports on October 9, 1857 that a Bazaar would be held “sometime this Fall to

procure the most necessary articles of furniture” for the House of Providence. The vision is given: “The House of Providence will be an asylum for sufferers of all kinds, without distinction of creed or nation; for the poor, the sick, the aged, the infirm; for widows and orphans; in a word for those whom Christ has said, “As long as you did it to one of these my least [brothers and sisters], you did it to me.”¹⁹

By December 11, a newspaper reported that the House of Providence “was on the point of being completed” and that the Bazaar would be held December 28, 29, 30, 1857.²⁰

According to the *Annals*, the first resident was Mary Birney, 22, whose husband had been lost at sea. Mrs. Birney stayed at the House, asking “to devote her life to work for the poor and nobly she carried out her resolution. She was offered remuneration for her services which she steadily refused.”²¹

Conclusions

The compassion of a Bishop, the laity and the Sisters built the House of Providence. During a time when there was great suffering among the people who were very poor, there was a deep desire to welcome those who were most in need of shelter and care. Compassion was shown through hospitality. Compassion has continued to be an important part of the work of the House named in honour of God’s own compassion for human beings, God’s care, God’s Providence as we continue to seek out ways to “further the Catholic Church’s mission of healing.”

Toronto Colonist
14th August 1857

New Advertisements.
ALL THIS DAY.

PROCLAMATION!



£100 Reward.

JOHN HUTCHISON, Esq., Mayor of the City of Toronto,
to all whom these presents may concern.

WHEREAS ON THE NIGHT OF TUESDAY,
the 11th instant, some evil disposed person or persons attempted to destroy the

HOUSE OF PROVIDENCE,

In this City, by placing a Jar or Crock of Gunpowder in the Building, and firing it off, by which means injury was done to the said building.

These are therefore to make known, that a Reward of

ONE HUNDRED POUNDS,

Will be paid to any party or parties who shall give such information as shall lead to the detection and conviction of the perpetrator or perpetrators of this nefarious and dastardly act.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused this Proclamation to be made public at Toronto, this 14th day of Aug., 1857.

JOHN HUTCHISON,
Mayor.
Toronto, Aug. 14, 1857.

A copy of the advertisement offering a reward for information leading to a conviction.
From the Toronto Colonist, August 14, 1857.

At Providence Centre our patients, residents and clients are, as we have indicated in our Mission statement, “adults who are elderly or facing disability, chronic or terminal illness.” The needs of many are complex and we continue to seek out ways to respond as best we can. Creativity is required and as our context changes, so does our response. Fidelity to the Mission is not measured by “how things stay the same” but by how well we are responding to the needs of the most vulnerable of society.

Like the Sisters of St. Joseph whose legacy has been entrusted to us, we continue to seek out ways in which all are welcome at Providence Centre. That desire to be hospitable can come at a high price for staff as we welcome people who have increasingly greater care needs. Yet, we try to the best of our ability to ensure that those who are not welcome at other facilities because of the kind of care which they require find a welcome at Providence Centre.

As care needs of patients, residents and clients increase, so does the need for hope. When people feel vulnerable, it can at times lead them to a sense of despair, as we find in both our history and our present. At Providence Centre, as we have stated in our Vision Statement, we seek to be a “Community of Hope” with our staff, patients, residents, clients, families and the larger community. The building of community is not an easy task; it requires that we be faithful to our Values, respecting one another and nurturing the gift that diversity is among us.

The “Dear Neighbour”

The phrase the “dear neighbour” is one which the founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Father Jean Pierre Médaille, SJ, used to describe the people with whom the Sisters were to work. In France, the Sisters were sent to the poorest parts of cities to serve the dear neighbour in humility,

simplicity and charity. They were encouraged to “practice all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy of which woman is capable and which will most benefit the souls of the dear neighbour.”²² That passion to care for the dear neighbour continued as the Sisters came to the New World.

The faces of the dear neighbour at the House of Providence could be found in children who lacked adequate homes or parental support, single parents, elderly people, poor people, and widows without any support. Many of the city’s Irish poor also found their way to the House of Providence because being an unskilled worker in Toronto at that time meant that employment was often difficult to find. All of these people were among the most vulnerable of society and so were welcome at the House of Providence, given food and lodging so that they could live with greater dignity.

Care of the dear neighbour had its challenges, not least of which was finding the space to care for people. We find that over the years the Sisters were innovative in this regard, embracing the challenges by moving people to other accommodations, building new wings, and providing “outdoor relief.”

Building Community

In the early years, there was little staff, so it was critical that everyone contributed what he or she could. Anyone who lived at the House of Providence and was able to work was given some task. We find, for example, a description in 1876: two Sisters were assisted in the nursery by a few women (looking after 25 babies); two women helped one Sister do all the baking because they could not afford to pay for help; eight to ten girls were seen washing ‘by steam’ with one Sister.²³ In the Annual Report for 1879 we are told that the men work at light gardening,

mending shoes and carpentry while the women labour in the kitchen, laundry and sewing rooms.

There must have been some challenges, however, in keeping people motivated to work. In 1869 one journalist describes the “Old Men’s Room” as forming “a more melancholy exhibition than the aged of the opposite sex...These poor pensioners rarely exert themselves to any occupation; a great blank seems to have fallen on them and paralysed their executive faculties.”²⁴

An examination of the early Registers from the House of Providence shows that the length of stay of residents varied from one night to many years, just as age and diagnosis varied. The occupation of most of the residents was listed as “indigent” or “orphan” with a few “labourers” and “seamstresses.” People were referred to the House of Providence by many different sources including the police, jail, hospital, and the community.²⁵ After a century of caring, by 1958, it was estimated that more than 27,900 persons had been residents of the House of Providence.²⁶

An Early “Family Album”

Sister Thecla Lehane, who kept the *Annals* of the House of Providence for a number of years, gives us a rare glimpse of the face of the dear neighbour in the 1880s. Sister Thecla entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1867. She taught for six years, was at the House of Providence for nineteen years and was Assistant to the Superior General for six before she died September 1, 1897.

The people that Sister Thecla wrote about would probably have followed the rules and regulations found in the 1879 Annual Report:

1. *The sick, infirm, incurable and destitute aged of both sexes are admitted to the House without distinction of creed.*
2. *Applicants must be recommended by a clergyman or Physician, or other respectable person known to the Sisters.*
3. *In case of sickness or great destitution persons will be admitted at once; the most destitute will be received in preference to those who can pay a small sum.*
4. *Inmates are not allowed to keep money in their possession, but should give it in charge to the Superioress, otherwise she will not be accountable for its loss.*
5. *No inmate to leave the Institution without permission.*
6. *Immediate expulsion for any inmates who bring in spirituous liquors or become intoxicated.*
7. *All cursing, swearing, or improper language strictly forbidden.*
8. *Smoking strictly prohibited except in appointed places.*
9. *The men are strictly forbidden to [communicate] with the women, or go near their departments.*
10. *All the inmates who are able to render assistance in any way are expected to do so, and when leaving are not to expect any remuneration for their services.*
11. *Silence to be observed in the dormitories.²⁷*

The day's schedule for a person living at the House of Providence in 1879 has also been laid out in the same report:

<i>A.M.</i>	<i>5:30</i>	<i>Rising and morning prayers for those who are able</i>
	<i>6:00</i>	<i>Assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass</i>
	<i>7:00</i>	<i>Breakfast</i>
	<i>8:00</i>	<i>Manual Labour</i>
	<i>11:30</i>	<i>Dinner</i>
<i>P.M.</i>	<i>1:30</i>	<i>Lecture for quarter of an hour. Work for those who are able</i>
	<i>5:30</i>	<i>Supper</i>
	<i>8:00</i>	<i>Night prayers</i>
	<i>9:00</i>	<i>All to be in bed</i>

Sister Thecla tells us about a few of the people who found shelter at the House of Providence:

January 15, 1880: Two inmates (a man and a woman) were brought from St. Catharines Gaol by order of Sheriff Woodriff. The man is a Protestant and paralysed. The woman is insane but not vicious. Neither of them were committed to Gaol for crime, merely for want of a home.

January 17, 1880: Sisters Liguori and Immaculata found Mrs. Malone in great destitution and very ill in a lane off Queen St. The Sisters came to tell the poor woman's condition and Mother desired to have her

brought here. Came same evening and lived only 13 days. Husband in Central prison.

April 19, 1880: David Brady admitted. He is now 97 years of age. It is said that he figured under Wellington in most of the Peninsula and was one of the bearers of the coffin of Bonaparte on the occasion of the funeral of that great Emperor... He has been in the House several times and never remained a long period. However this time he presents a poor appearance and seems to be losing strength. He is much bent and enfeebled, but he was once tall and stalwart, being over six feet.

March 14, 1883: Mrs. E. Cook, an old lady from St. Mary's Parish, was brought here in a dying state, by the Sisters. She had been living in a little house by herself and although having means enough to live comfortably she was most miserably situated and would not consent to come to the House of Providence. Yesterday the Sisters from St. Mary's Convent visited the old lady and found her in a dying state. The Priest was called in and administered the last Sacraments. Afterwards she was brought here. During the evening the Sisters noticed a change for the worse and they said prayers for the poor old lady. About ten o'clock it became evident that death was drawing near, the Sisters read prayers for the dying and put a blessed candle in the old woman's hand. She seemed conscious, but looked around anxiously and after some minutes raised her right hand with the left and blew out the candle with one puff of her breath and remarked, "Now children go to bed." This was an amusing incident notwithstanding the gravity of the scene. The inmates in the Ward were present. Mrs. Cook died at 1 a.m. Her relations are all Protestants.

May 25, 1883: Sent a patient to Lunatic Asylum today. She was brought here on Monday by the Assistant Immigrant Agent, until Dr. Clark would award admission to Asylum. Mrs. Emiline Sattler is a French

Governess who arrived from France nearly two years ago. States that her husband ill treated her so that she had to leave him and do for herself. Has two or three children, these in France also. I suppose the separation was too much for her and her mind is quite disturbed. She went to Dixie a couple of weeks ago to see if change of air would benefit her declining health, but she grew worse and imagined the lady who boarded her had poisoned her (Mrs. Sattler.) She is a Catholic but neglected her religious duties for years.

March 25, 1884: At 11 o'clock we were startled and alarmed to hear that one of the inmates, an Italian man, had cut his throat and died almost instantaneously. The unfortunate man was in the House just three months, he could not speak English. He was laid up with frozen feet. He showed mental aberration during the time, but no one anticipated his suicidal intentions, although (as we since learned he asked a few times for a razor) he seemed despondent. From what could be gathered from his broken English and incoherent expressions, it would appear as if the deceased had failed in business, lost everything and turned to drink. Evidently he had seen better days. He seemed truly penitent here and would kneel and pray fervently for a long time. On account of the circumstances, His Grace kindly allowed him Christian burial. Just as the dinner was ready that day Carlo Catanio (name of Italian) left the room. In a few minutes a noise was heard outside the door; one of the men looked out and saw the unfortunate man lying in a pool of blood and the razor beside him. He cut his throat from ear to ear. Father Hobin was summoned, but life seemed to be extinct, however the Priest gave him conditional absolution. Father Jeffcott tried several times to get deceased to make his confession, but he could not speak English well enough to be understood. Dr. Nevitt brought a Coroner and he considered it unnecessary to hold an Inquest.

Children

When the Sisters first came to Toronto, their original mandate was to look after an orphanage on Nelson Street (now Jarvis Street). In 1859, the children were moved from the orphanage to the House of Providence. In 1876, a Protestant gentleman, Mr. H. Speid, went abroad for five years. Prior to his departure, he toured a number of charitable institutions. He was most impressed with the “Children’s Department” of the House of Providence and offered the Sisters use of his estate for orphans while he was abroad.²⁸ Gratefully, the Sisters accepted the offer and on August 26, 1876 twenty-six infants and three Sisters moved from the House of Providence to Sunnyside (current site of St. Joseph’s Health Centre).

Five years later, Mr. Speid decided to sell the property and offered it to the Sisters at a very reasonable price. Because the Sisters could not afford to buy the property, the Bishop bought it for use by the House of Providence. The boys were moved there on October 12, 1885. The sod was turned for a new building to accommodate the orphan girls on April 27, 1890, the Feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph. One hundred and twenty girls were moved to Sunnyside on September 8, 1891.

It would seem that the generosity of Mr. Speid and the Providence of God worked together. A story is recorded in the *Annals*:

One day Mother Bernard Dinan took the children [from the House of Providence] to an outing to the lake front near High Park. For a resting place they sat on a grassy spot overlooking the lake. Mother Bernard thought how good would be that place for an orphanage and she buried a small statue of St. Joseph in the ground. Nuns had done such a thing before and have done it since. Results have been

encouraging. Some years after Mother Bernard had buried the statue, the owner of the property lent it with his residence to the Sisters for the orphanage. Still later he sold it to them for a reasonable sum. Thus was started the Sacred Heart Orphanage at Sunnyside.²⁹

Eventually Sacred Heart Orphanage was moved to Bathurst Street and St. Clair Avenue West (the girls in September 1924, the boys December 1924). Although boys continued to be cared for by the Sisters of St. Joseph, in 1947, at the request of Catholic Charities the girls were placed in a Carmelite orphanage.³⁰

Children under four years of age, however, remained at the House of Providence until St. Vincent's Home was built on Sackville St. on the grounds of the House of Providence.³¹ It was formally opened on May 28, 1908 with 85 infants.³² The Sisters of St. Joseph continued to care for infants until 1916 when the Misericordia Sisters of Montreal came to the city to care for infants and to establish a maternity hospital. The work with infants was entrusted to those Sisters.³³

"The Infirm"

An infirmary, or separate space for those who were more sick than the general population of the residents of the House of Providence, was one way in which care was given to the dear neighbour almost since the beginning. We find in a letter by Sister de Chantal McKay who was Administrator and Superior of the House of Providence from 1858-1869 and 1878-1885 to the Lieutenant-Governor a plea for money to support the care of the sick. She wrote that the House of Providence had an infirmary for 21 years and yet had no grant.³⁴ By 1885 some government funding was being received in the "Hospital Department"

in which there were three large wards for “incurables.”³⁵

In 1925 “incurable” patients from the House of Providence were transferred to St. Vincent’s Home (which previously had been used as a residence for infants and young children). Situated on the same property as the House of Providence but facing Sackville St., it became known as Our Lady of Mercy Hospital. A new wing was added in 1932. In 1939, a new hospital was built on Sunnyside Avenue beside St. Joseph’s Hospital, and the patients were transferred to this new Our Lady of Mercy Hospital.³⁶

The old building became known as “St. Teresa’s Unit” and was used to accommodate residents for the House of Providence. St. Teresa’s Unit was opened officially October 15, 1939, the Feast of St. Teresa.³⁷

Eventually, in September 1954 a “new” infirmary was set up with a large ward and 12 private and semi-private beds in St. Teresa’s Unit because there were several patients in each department at the House of Providence who required extended care. According to the *Annals*, “Forty bed-ridden and mentally worn out ladies were given the same care as was given in hospital with specialized geriatric supervision in the newly set-up Infirmary.”³⁸

All Are Welcome

Although the House of Providence was a haven of hospitality, seldom did there seem to be enough space to welcome everyone who was in need. Over the years, as the population of the city increased,³⁹ the capacity of the House of Providence quadrupled. The challenge to be sure that all were welcomed had to be addressed in other ways, so the Sisters offered what came to be known as “outdoor relief.” People who



Sister St. Osmund
providing "outdoor relief"
to those in need at the
House of Providence.

came to the door and were in need but could not be accommodated for an extended period were provided with meals and temporary lodging, and “destitute families” were given food and clothing.⁴⁰



Lunch line at the House of Providence

A quick glance at the history reveals that the House of Providence provided outdoor relief throughout the years. For example, in 1875, a time of severe economic depression, *The Globe* reports that there was “Great destitution from men being out of employment... great many applications to the House have to be refused, as much from want of room as other necessities.”⁴¹ The Registers of the House of Providence reveal that in 1875 bread and soup were distributed to 482 persons in addition to those already living at the House of Providence.⁴²

In the year ending September 30, 1881, 320 meals had been given to poor people, 2890 loaves of bread distributed, besides groceries and medicine to the sick poor and \$27.00 was spent, chiefly to pay for the lodging of poor people who could not be accommodated in the House.

In 1924 The Globe reported that between 80 and 90 meals were being served daily, “the good Sisters have turned none away.” The journalist wrote:

Plates of savoury stew, generous slices of bread and butter, and bowls of soup constitute the noon-day lunch, excepting Fast days when frequently fish replaces the meat. Bowls of soup and bread appease the hunger of the men entering the side door in the early evening, but many a man who has not found his way to the door at noon-time finds a plate of nourishing stew awaiting him at supper. The Sisters have been touched with the eagerness with which men entreat an opportunity to pay for these meals in working for the House of Providence. Odd jobs, such as scrubbing and floor mopping are performed by the visitors.⁴³

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a time of severe economic hardship for many people, the Sisters continued to provide outdoor relief. In the 1938 Annual Report of the House of Providence we read of the challenges experienced:

Outside Relief has always taxed the resources of the House of Providence and during recent years the work has assumed such proportions that the Sisters have reason to fear that, should the present poverty continue and the demands increase, they will be unable to carry the burden incurred. During past year 58,898 meals and lunches were served to the homeless unemployed, no distinction being made because of creed or nationality. At the request of these men and when there was not accommodation within the House, a warm but bedless basement room was left unlocked and proved a haven for many.⁴⁴

In this same report we learn that “Every day members of poor families

Residents and Sisters on
the Stairs of the House
of Providence



ask at the kitchen for a basket of food and in all the House provides about one hundred such baskets a week.”

In 1957 The Globe and Mail continued to report the ways in which the House of Providence extended its services to the community. Sandwiches and coffee, soup in the cold weather, were distributed twice daily every day of the year. From 25 to 30 neighbourhood families and children came daily for food boxes. Clothing donated to the home was also supplied in the same way to those in need.⁴⁵



Residents' dormitory in the garret of the House of Providence
Taken for the capital campaign to build the "new" House of Providence (Providence Villa and Hospital) late 1950s. Canada Pictures Limited

Throughout the history of the House of Providence often the House would take in people whom others would not. For example, in the early 1900s newspapers of the time reported that people suffering from consumption (tuberculosis) were being admitted to the House of Providence when no other institution would take them. *The Mail* of Sept 1902 reported a story about Mrs. Wilson:

The case of Mrs. Wilson is a particularly sad one. She is in destitute circumstances. Her husband, instead of contributing to her support,

has, it is alleged, been spending his money in drink and annoying her during her illness. After Mrs. Wilson had been removed to the House of Providence on Saturday afternoon, Constable Chapman visited the woman's house and arrested her husband on a warrant charging him with vagrancy.⁴⁶



Women's dormitory at the House of Providence, late 1950s. *Canada Pictures Limited*

Katherine Mason in *The Women's Century* wrote of her surprise when in 1919 she was trying to find a home for a “friendless old lady of seventy six, who had been earning a living as a daily domestic, mother’s help, etc. but whose age had compelled her to seek assistance.” Mason stated that she had approached the House of Providence with “much foreboding” because she was under the impression that it was solely a Catholic institution. Mason found, however, that there were no questions asked about the woman’s creed or nationality, only if she required charity.⁴⁷

This theme of all being welcomed is underlined by Sister Victorine Kennedy who worked at the House of Providence for many years. Sister Victorine describes a Sister in charge:

*She never refused anyone day or night. She always asked them if they had anything to eat and most times they said they had not had anything that day. We would get a call someone was coming down and to be sure to get them something to eat, a bath, clean clothes, a bed and some work to do in the morning.*⁴⁸

In 1962, Providence Villa and Hospital was opened on the present St. Clair Avenue East site. Providence Villa and Hospital continued in the tradition of the House of Providence, welcoming those who were in need. The needs of the residents continued to shift, however, as they had throughout the history of the House of Providence. The homeless people who had once come for “outdoor relief” were now served by the Brothers of the Good Shepherd in the same area where the House of Providence had been.

Over the years at Providence Villa and Hospital, the resident and patient population became progressively in need of more nursing care. In 1962, 20% (122) of the people served required chronic care and rehabilitation and 80% (510) needed to be in the Home for the Aged (known popularly as the Villa).

By 1967 we read in the Annual Report:

The 526 beds at Providence Villa are never empty. Our average waiting list has over 100 applications on it....The average age of our residents is 80 years and in keeping with the national average there are more women than men. There are people currently living at the Villa who have been residents of either the House of Providence or Providence Villa for over 40 years. Married couples make up part of our group and our 7 suites are always filled. In 1966 there were approximately 29 admissions per month. Life is an ongoing process at Providence Villa because of our concept of total care.

In 1981 55% of the beds were chronic care and rehabilitation and 45% Home for the Aged. In the Annual Report for 1985 we read that the Home for the Aged had 125 “Residential Care” beds and 167 “Extended Care, including 57 Special Care.” The Hospital had 344 beds including 42 for Rehabilitation, 17 Assessment and 17 Palliative Care. We find in the Annual Report for 1986 a recognition of a shift in the needs of the people who were being served by Providence Villa and Hospital, as increasingly services were being provided to people who were “not elderly.”



Sister Mary Albert and a nurse tend residents at the new Providence Villa and Hospital c. 1962. *Canada Pictures Limited*

In May 1989, the Board of Directors approved a name change. Providence Villa and Hospital became Providence Centre as a way of including in its name the community outreach programs sponsored by the institution. As well as clinics available to the broader community, the innovative Alzheimer Day Program which gradually moved to being a 24 hour program, 7 days a week, and the staff position of Director, Community Development, Providence Centre is continually seeking ways to respond to the needs of the community.

In 1998 funding was approved to build a new Home for the Aged for 288 residents, based on an innovative model of care. The “Resident Centered” model of care is a new paradigm in which resident needs govern operations in an environment which is as homelike as possible. Programming principles include resident centeredness, supportive relationships and responsive care. Multiskilled staff called “Resident Assistants” builds one on one relationships with individuals by helping with personal care, activation, recreation, light housekeeping and meals.

In 1998, Providence Centre was directed to increase its capacity by one third in order to incorporate additional rehabilitation and complex continuing care beds. (The increase in rehabilitation from 39 to 87 and in complex continuing care from 238 to 284).

Conclusion

The passion with which the Sisters of St. Joseph cared for the dear neighbour is clearly reflected in the history of the House of Providence and its successors, Providence Villa and Hospital and Providence Centre. The Sisters sought to respond to the needs of the people of their times, the needs of those who were most vulnerable. In the early years, the face of the dear neighbour was found in the orphans and widows, in servants who had lost positions, in homeless people, in destitute families, in prostitutes and single mothers. Over the years, the face of the dear neighbour gradually became more and more those who were elderly or in need of rehabilitation or complex continuing care. Today, at Providence Centre, the face of the dear neighbour is revealed in many different people with many different needs. The people for whom Providence Centre provides care are, as we have stated in our Mission Statement, “adults who are elderly or facing disability, chronic or terminal illness.”⁴⁹

Holistic care is important for us at Providence Centre. The Roman Catholic tradition has long understood that human beings are a unity of body, mind and spirit. In caring for the human person, we need to nourish all that we are, the physical body as well as our inner selves.

At Providence Centre we seek ways to respond to the needs of the whole person. We seek to put into action our Value of Sanctity of Life, a core Value which underlines our belief that the worth of a person is not diminished by frailty, disability or age. Our ability to continue to celebrate the gift of each person, in the midst of diminishment, which help people to continue to grow and learn are fundamental to help us to move towards our Vision, “Celebrating Life and Enriching Lives in a Community of Hope,” a time-honoured tradition of nourishing wholeness in human beings.

Celebrations to Nourish the Spirit

Integral to what it means to be a human person is our need for celebration, for “special” times. We find in the *Annals* of the House of Providence special celebrations of a religious nature such as Christmas and the Feast of St. Joseph. We also find stories of concerts and parties which nurture the spirit in other ways.

We find stories of dignitaries who came to visit the House of Providence. On September 13, 1883 Princess Louise, the daughter of Queen Victoria and spouse of the Governor General, visited. The *Annals* report that “The children and the old people who were able to walk were arranged on the front garden or lawn and when the distinguished guests drove up to the door, the children sang the national anthem ‘God Save the Queen.’” An extensive program had been arranged for the royal visitor.⁵⁰

Governor Generals seem to have been favourite visitors to the House of Providence. On December 6, 1897 Lord and Lady Aberdeen visited and “expressed their pleasure at seeing the excellent work done by the Institution.”⁵¹ On May 9, 1903, the Governor General and Lady Minto visited.⁵² Governor General Rolland Michener visited Providence Villa and Hospital on November 25, 1967.

Over the years the Knights of Columbus have also been active in providing entertainment for the residents of the House of Providence and Providence Villa and Hospital. In 1930 in *The Globe and Mail* we read of the “eleventh annual” entertainment which included a drive around the city, and a concert and supper at Exhibition Park.⁵³



Celebration of the Centenary of the House of Providence with the Residents on September 20, 1955

One of the major celebrations was held in honour of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the House of Providence. “Residents’ Day,” was held on September 20, 1955. We find in the *Annals* the hopes of the Sisters that this would be a day which “the residents would never forget.” “The very best quality [food] was purchased for every meal” and pictures were taken in all the dining rooms. In the afternoon ice cream and home made maple cream were served to all. A special show was held in the evening and more candy was served. As a special gift to the Residents, the kneeling benches in the Chapel were padded.⁵⁴

To mark the centenary with the Sisters on October 1, 1955 the House of Providence held “Sisters’ Day” with Mass, a buffet lunch, and centennial

banquet. About 220 Sisters visited the House that day as invitations had been sent to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto in Ontario houses.⁵⁵

Providence Villa and Hospital even had a visit from a television celebrity: Ed Sullivan came on April 22, 1965.⁵⁶



**Celebration of the House of Providence Centenary
with the Sisters of St. Joseph October 1, 1955**

In 1975 there was a “countryside excursion” for 300 residents. One hundred ten cars with elderly and physically challenged people were escorted by 20 motorcycle police from Metro Toronto and Ontario Provincial Police. It must have made quite a sight with police blocking off Highway 401 and an Ontario Provincial Police helicopter keeping tabs on the cars.⁵⁷

For several years there was also a residents’ holiday weekend at Invermara, the Sisters’ cottage on Lake Simcoe. Over 60 residents and volunteers attended the first one held September 23-25, 1977. One of the nurses at Providence Centre describes his experience of those weekends:

Together we all [staff and volunteers] worked as a team with several nuns making sure that all residents and patients would have a good

time. We prepare 3 meals a day and a snack in the afternoon. We are talking about 80-90 people here. Everyone has different roles, cook, dishwashers, waiters, cleaners, program co-ordinator, entertainer and nurses. We encourage residents and patients to help out like drying utensils and dishes, getting it ready for the next meal, arranging table cloths, napkins and cutlery.

In the evening we have gatherings with wine and different kind of goodies. We have entertainment, dancing going along with of course different patients and residents participation with the help of outside entertainers (guitarists). I'll never forget our barbecue everyone outside really enjoying themselves. We have our daily masses in the chapel, residents and patients doing the reading.⁵⁸

As the health of the residents declined over the years, the holidays were discontinued.⁵⁹

Prayer to Nourish the Soul

A space for prayer has always been an important component of the work of the Sisters. We are told that it was not long after the Sisters arrived in Toronto that one of the first floor rooms of the Orphanage which they had come to run had been changed to “a most inviting Chapel.”⁶⁰ It is clear also from the *Annals* of the House of Providence that even before the Chapel wing was built in 1882, a small chapel had been in use for prayer and liturgy. When the large House of Providence Chapel was built, it was dedicated to the Sacred Heart. When Providence Villa and Hospital was built, a large chapel was created, designed to seat 626. This Chapel was dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

One of the ways in which the human heart can be lifted to God is

through the beauty of stained glass windows. In the Roman Catholic tradition, such windows provided a way of teaching people who could not read about the faith. For Providence Centre the stained glass windows are a “reminder of the faith, traditions and values that inspired the original House of Providence. In addition to their religious, historic and artistic significance, these windows are an enduring symbol of our link with the Sisters of St. Joseph.”⁶¹

In the House of Providence 24 stained glass windows were created especially for the chapel by two manufacturers, N.T. Lyon Co. and The Robert McCausland Company, over the course of 13 years after the large House of Providence chapel was built.⁶² When Providence Villa and Hospital was built, many of the stained glass windows from the House of Providence were brought to the new building.

Stained glass windows from the House of Providence can be found in Providence Centre’s Library, originally a small side chapel for the Hospital patients. These windows were taken from the stained glass above the main altar in the House of Providence Chapel which had been worked into a circular design with four inner circular windows joined together.⁶³ Each of the five windows has a dominant symbol on it: the Lamb of God, Alpha and Omega, a Dove representing the Holy Spirit, the Lily of St. Joseph, and the Eucharistic Cup.

Other stained glass windows from the House of Providence were placed along the “C” corridor beside the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel. They were cut to fit the window space of the corridor wall. Each window is in vibrant colours and has a dominant figure on it. The windows include St. Joseph, the Assumption of Mary, Jesus Walking on the Stormy Sea, St. Patrick, Mary, the mother of James, and John the Baptist. Three of the windows have been moved to the new Home for the Aged, the Houses of Providence.

Other stained glass windows taken from the House of Providence were placed in the former Sisters' wing (present "K" wing). On October 31, 1994, through the generous donation of Reverend Dan Donovan in memory of his parents, six stained glass windows were moved from the "K" wing to the front lobby. The windows are in the same style as the ones found in the "C" corridor. Each window has a central figure which includes the Good Shepherd, the Annunciation scene with Mary and the Angel, Mary and the Infant Jesus, and the Child Jesus in the Temple. The unveiling of the windows in their new location was on November 20, 1994. The celebration included Mass and a reception.

When the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel was built in the new Providence Villa and Hospital, additional stained glass windows were created. These windows were designed by Russell Goodman and executed under his supervision at Luxfer Studio, Toronto. Each of the 28 windows is thirty feet high. According to an information brochure at the time, the windows:

portray the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary and the religious subjects pertinent to the works of Providence Villa and Hospital. Each window individually displays a complete spectrum from deep blues at the top to rich golds and reds at the bottom, and at the same time forms part of the spectrum formed by the ensemble of the fourteen windows on each side of the chapel - deep blues at the nave gradually changing to deeper golds and reds as we draw near the sanctuary - to symbolize the Love of the Blessed Sacrament.⁶⁴

Food to Nourish the Body

There is no doubt that there were considerable challenges in feeding the many people who lived at the House of Providence as well as those who sought "outdoor relief."

God's tender providential care was shown in at least one extraordinary way in the feeding of the people. We find the story of a team of horses which was pulling a load of flour from the mill to the St. Lawrence Market. As they went up Power Street, the horses stopped in front of the House of Providence and would not move. When the driver in desperation at the stubbornness of the horses threw up the reins, the horses turned in at the gate and drove around to the back door. There had been no flour to bake the daily bread and the Sisters and residents had been praying to St. Joseph for help. "The driver understood that someone in greater want than he needed the flour."⁶⁵

Sister Victorine Kennedy, who worked at the House of Providence for many years, also tells the story of generous donors:

Donations of all sorts, at any hour might be left at our receiving door. Sometimes a huge transport truck would drive up with a full load of fruit and vegetables - still good quality, but past their peak for consumer marketing. We certainly were grateful, yet often we didn't know the donor. I'd hustle the men out to help unload the transport. We'd store what we could for future use; arrange to preserve and can under steam pressure in jars what we could handle in that way. Our daily consumption in the fresh state took care of another portion. Then, if there was still too much left over, we'd place it on the front lawn and call some of the 30-40 families on our list who were constantly in need to come for it. They'd come in droves of kids and adults, swarming over the lawn with baskets and buckets, rejoicing and giving thanks in unison. Often we called in the Salvation Army to share in our good fortune.⁶⁶

Food was also obtained from the House of Providence farm. In 1897 by the will of Thomas O'Connor, a farm on Queen St. East was left to the Sisters of St. Joseph for the House of Providence.⁶⁷ The bequest included



God's tender providential care at work.

This scene was illustrated by Sister Seraphine to mark the Jubilee year for St. Joseph's Oratory in 1955.

42 acres and water lot in front as well as five houses on Chapel Street (now Bay Street.) Because of the rapid growth of the city this farm became very valuable and was sold in 1910 for \$150,000. A mortgage of \$40,000 was paid off leaving a balance of \$110,000. From this money, a farm on St Clair Avenue East was purchased for \$22,000. The Infants' Home on Sackville St. was built at a cost of \$60,000 and a south wing added to the House of Providence in 1912 for \$28,000 thus absorbing the remainder of the O'Connor bequest.⁶⁸

The farm on St. Clair Avenue East was known as the House of Providence Farm. According to the *House of Providence Annals*, the farm had originally been owned by Mr. Herron, after whom Herron Avenue has been named. It was under the direction of the Superior of the House of Providence and all the proceeds were used for the House.

The *Annals* state that the House of Providence farm was “really the life of the institution. It provided fruit, vegetables, meat, eggs, and milk...Before pensions were available to the Aged, products from the farm provided the main means of existence.”⁶⁹

Until the barn burned down November 6, 1955, the farm had a herd of 35 cattle including 20 milking cows which provided about half the total needs at the House of Providence. Three to four hundred laying hens provided 150 dozen eggs a week (the House required 240 dozen eggs a week to feed the residents.) Much of the land was devoted to vegetables including potatoes, carrots, parsnips and beets.⁷⁰

There was a Farm House which was used by the Sisters for holidays during the summer and an addition at the back was used to accommodate farm workers. A separate house was provided for the foreman and his family.

Conclusions

Always there was the challenge to care for the dear neighbour in ways that addressed the needs of the whole person. Food, prayer and celebration all helped to meet those needs. At times the needs were met in extraordinary ways. Most of the time, however, the needs were met in the ordinary day-to-day responses of people to each other.

The dear neighbour whom the Sisters served had different care needs than the patients, residents and clients who are cared for at Providence Centre today. The Sisters had their own struggles in meeting the needs of the residents of the House of Providence. Although we have different struggles, remembering the tradition may help us to be creative with the challenges to which we are invited.

The material development of the House of Providence, the extension of building accommodation, the increase of the number of inmates, and the miraculous manner in which difficulties were overcome, was owing in great part, after God's help, to the efficient personnel. The Sisters were all women of strong unfailing faith in Providence, on which they depended absolutely. In every emergency their confidence was invariably rewarded. Their hearts were filled with an all-embracing charity, animated by the love of God and the neighbour."

The Mission of Providence Centre as begun by the Sisters of St. Joseph is continued by the staff and volunteers at Providence Centre. The spirit of generosity is evident today as staff care for a very vulnerable population with dignity and compassion in the tradition of "Great Love." Volunteers support that work in a wide variety of ways. All that the staff and volunteers do to put the Values into action help Providence Centre to be faithful to the Mission begun by the Sisters of St. Joseph and help us to move towards our Vision of being a "Community of Hope."

In the early years, the House of Providence was staffed primarily by the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Sisters could not do all the work themselves, however, so many of the people who lived at the House of Providence were encouraged to do what they could. We find in the 1870 *Annual Report* that no money was being spent on salaries as the residents and Sisters did all the work. From the census of 1871 we learn that there were 18 Sisters of St. Joseph stationed at the House of Providence. In 1892, Archbishop Lynch writes that salaries to staff have been saved by the "industry" of the Sisters and residents.⁷² By 1920, however, with an average number of residents at 336, there were 10 paid employees and 30 Sisters on staff.⁷³ By 1949, there were 59 employees and 29 Sisters.⁷⁴ In 1962, when Providence Villa and Hospital was built, the paid staff was considerably increased.

Spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph

When the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded, they were encouraged to live their lives in a way that the congregation may bear the name “Congregation of the Great Love of God.” Their founder Father Médaille envisioned that “in everything and everywhere their lives may proclaim the love they profess.”⁷⁵ The spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph, according to their *Constitutions*, is shown in “humility, charity, simplicity, gentleness, peace and joy, and in dependence on the grace of God.”⁷⁶

When we look at the writings of their founder, Father Médaille, written in the seventeenth century, we find that the Sisters were encouraged to grow “in likeness” to Jesus as one who, as revealed in the Bible (Philippians 2), had great humility and emptied himself and became a servant. “Humility” is understood as knowing the truth about ourselves, being “grounded” in both our limitations and strengths, and using them for God’s greater glory. Humility helps us to experience our deep and utter dependence on God, in effect, God’s Providence.

The Sisters were to take on Jesus’ attitude in his zeal or passion for building God’s reign on earth. They were also encouraged to be like Mary, the mother of Jesus, in her openness to God’s grace and like Joseph, the guardian of Jesus, who had great love and compassion “toward every kind of neighbour.”⁷⁷ When we look at the Sisters of St. Joseph at the House of Providence, we see how this spirit was active in them.

Mother Delphine Fontbonne

As we reflect on the spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph, there is no doubt that Mother Delphine Fontbonne, one of the first Sisters to arrive in Toronto, had a great deal of “zeal” or “passion” for building the reign of

God. At the time of her death in 1856, Bishop De Charbonnel, wrote:

This excellent and worthy niece of the saintly Mother St. John Fontbonne, had in five years (really four years and four months) established in Toronto, a Noviciate, an Orphan Asylum and a House of Providence which affords to the poor every spiritual and temporal succour, as well as several houses in the diocese. Endowed with great wisdom and experience, this holy Superior enforced the Rule with sweetness and firmness. Her judgement was solid, her mind clear and penetrating, her prudence enlightened and far-seeing. She was laborious, energetic, active and provident.⁷⁸



Mother Delphine Fontbonne
Founded the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto in 1851. She founded the House of Providence in collaboration with Bishop de Charbonnel although she died before the House was opened.

The Sisters of St. Joseph were encouraged to love the “dear neighbour.” We find evidence of that in the life of Mother Delphine. At the age of 42 on February 7, 1856, a year before the House of Providence opened its doors, Mother Delphine died from typhus. Her death was thought to be caused by staying overnight with a sick woman when Mother Delphine herself was already fatigued from caring for the sick Sisters. We are told that the last day of her active life, two weeks before her death, was spent taking the sick woman and her baby to the Lunatic Asylum on Queen St. West.⁷⁹

When Mother Delphine was 24, she showed that she already had the quality of humility. She had been in the United States for only two years after coming from France and had been made superior of a small group

of Sisters of St. Joseph. She was finding that “it was impossible to discharge her duties” because the Sisters were not satisfied with her leadership style, as they thought that she was too strict.⁸⁰ Mother Delphine resigned from being the leader, but she must have learned a great deal from that experience for she was to take on many leadership roles in later years, including her time in Toronto.

Mother De Chantal McKay

The spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph is clearly evident in Mother De Chantal McKay. Mother De Chantal entered the community in 1855 and was a Sister of St. Joseph for 47 years. She was in charge of the House of Providence from 1858-1869 and from 1878-1885. She died on August 10, 1903 at the age of 77 when on the fourth day of her annual retreat she had a heart attack.⁸¹

It is clear from a letter written by Bishop Lynch, the Bishop of Toronto, that she and the other Sisters at the House of Providence had much zeal:

At my last visit to the House of Providence, whilst greatly admiring the order, neatness, prosperity, as well as the religiousness of the Establishment, I could not but feel a sincere regret at so many of the good Sisters, as well as yourself, who were in very delicate health, all



Mother De Chantal McKay

*of which was brought on by overexertion of the Sisters and their too long stay among the Sick.*⁸²

More Snapshots from the Family Album

In the early years of the House of Providence we find stories about young Sisters who died while tending the sick. For example, Sister Camilla O'Brien, 34, and Sister Mary Sophia O'Toole, 23, both died of consumption, as tuberculosis at the time was commonly called. There were also older Sisters who spent many years at the House of Providence and died there. Sister Paul McDonald who died on December 28, 1908 had spent over 25 years at the House of Providence tending to the sick and poor.⁸³ During her time there she was said to have "performed heroic acts of charity."⁸⁴

Sister M. Febronia Whalen, who died at House of Providence August 17, 1925, had been a Sister of St. Joseph for 50 years, 45 of which had been spent at the House of Providence. In the *Annals* of the Sisters of St. Joseph she is remembered as having a "deep strong spirit of faith which made her see in the poor and unfortunate the Person of Jesus Christ...Simple and unpretentious, she won the respect of all by her candour, uprightness and deep sense of honour,...To love God and to serve Him in the simplicity of her heart was her only aim."⁸⁵

August 12, 1930 we read of the death of Sister M. Dorothy Spencer at the House of Providence, where she "laboured many years for the poor." She was a Sister of St. Joseph for almost fifty years and, the annalist writes, she "possessed in a marked degree the characteristics of a true Sister of St. Joseph, - gentle, patient, hard-working, humble, obedient, charitable, and above all, simple and joyous."⁸⁶

On February 19, 1943 we read of the death of Sister Bernardine Lynch who had charge of the dispensary at the House of Providence for almost 30 years. "Her treatment of the sick and the homeless was marked by unflinching kindness and she was ever animated by faith which saw Christ Himself in the person of his poor."⁸⁷

On September 9, 1947 we read of the death of Sister Bertrand Marsh. Most of Sister Bertrand's fifty years as a Sister of St. Joseph were spent at the House of Providence:

*She loved her work with the poor and the aged, and in the pursuit of the same, while leading a truly hidden life, she revealed those qualities of mind and heart most necessary to the exercise of charity. Naturally kind and gentle, she gave herself generously in the interest of others, seeming wholly forgetful of self, while her fidelity to the least detail of duty coupled with real solicitude for her charges won their confidence and love. She continued on the way of unselfish service until her physical weakness made it no longer possible. The past few years of ill health meant the slow consuming of energy and strength, as if the fire of sacrifice were burning itself out.*⁸⁸

Sister Victorine Kennedy

Sister Victorine Kennedy came to the House of Providence in 1936 where she worked until 1944. She returned to the House of Providence in 1949 and stayed there until 1962 when she moved with the other Sisters and residents to Providence Villa and Hospital. She continued to "be involved in various capacities in the care of the sick and visiting of residents bringing comfort and support to all she met" until 1989 when she began to serve as a volunteer in Pastoral Care at Providence Centre.



**Sister Victorine with a resident
at Providence Centre**

*Sister Victorine began ministering at
the House of Providence in 1936.
Over 50 years of her life were spent at
Providence, until her death in 1994.*

She was still volunteering at Providence Centre until a few weeks before she died on November 19, 1994. Shortly before her death she was given special recognition at the Long Service Employee Recognition Awards. In Sister Victorine's obituary the following is recorded:

A week prior to Sister Victorine's death, she was honoured with a special award which was presented to her by Ms Marion Leslie, the President of Providence Centre. Marion described Sister Victorine's life as one of love for and service to, the poor. In the citation...Sister Victorine is portrayed in the following words: "Someone who inspires us all on a day to day basis through the generosity of her kindness and her dedication to the residents and patients at Providence Centre." The citation goes on to speak of Sister Victorine's service, courage, dedication and acceptance.

After Sister Victorine's death, a statue of Mary was placed in the alcove opposite the 4B Nursing station in remembrance of her. It was subsequently moved to the Houses of Providence.

In 1989 Sister Victorine wrote a short paper on her experience of working at the House of Providence. That paper demonstrates the qualities of a Sister of St. Joseph which Sister Victorine reflected.

Sister Victorine reveals her humility, her sense of being grounded in who she was with both her giftedness and limitations. She tells a story which happened shortly after she was assigned to the House of Providence in August 1936. She and Sister St. Bede were looking after about 125 men in the Basement, which after renovations at a later date, was known as Bosco Hall. She tells of being frightened of the men. One evening:

Sister St. Bede and I went down as we always did to see that the lights were out and everyone had gone up to bed. We came across a man who had been drinking and he was trying to get something out of his cupboard. Sister St. Bede started to talk to him and the conversation kept on and on. I kept wishing she would let him go as I was getting so upset. I couldn't believe that I had come to the Sisters of St. Joseph and that I would have to help look after a drunk man. We finally got him settled and I went upstairs to bed and had a good cry. The next day I got up and went back to try again. I thought things over as the days passed. I realized that I shouldn't have been so upset and I wasn't any better than the good Sisters who had been doing that work for many years before me. So I told myself I had better just get busy and do it. From that day on God seemed to give me the grace to do it although I didn't find it easy.⁸⁹

Sister Victorine, as she reflected on her experience of working in Bosco Hall (a section of the House of Providence) for many years, writes:

Many years in Bosco Hall taught me that some of our good old timers were really looking after me, instead of me looking after them. When there was some loud talking or arguing going on and I went out to the big sitting room to see what was wrong, I found that four or five of our good old timers would come out also. They would not say or do anything because I could seem to stop the argument if I appeared. They respected the presence of the Sisters. I know that if the old timers were needed they would have been there to help.⁹⁰

Co-workers



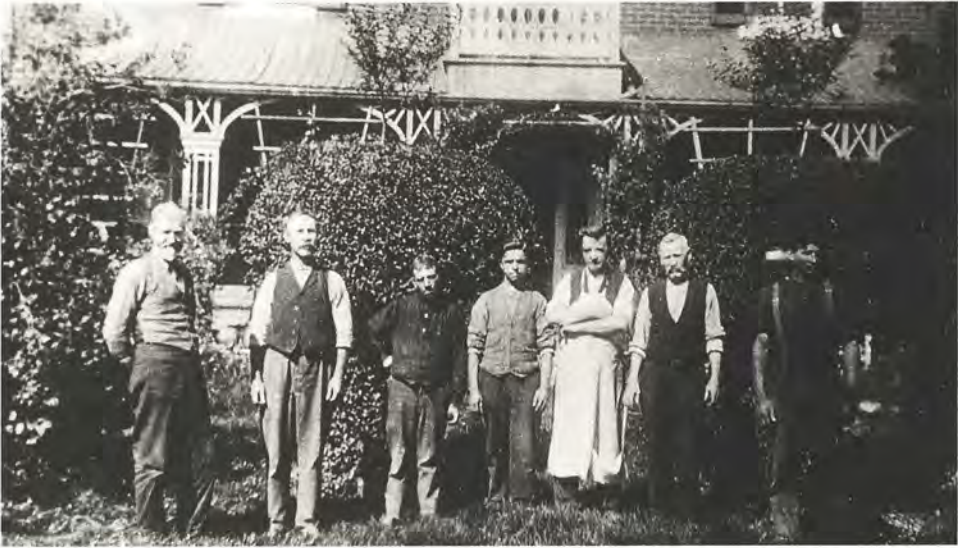
John Farrugia

There were many people who have worked with the Sisters and who continued their Mission. One co-worker who has been recognized in a particular way is John Farrugia who came to the House of Providence in 1928 and worked for the Sisters for 55 years. In 1983, the “J” wing of Providence Villa and Hospital was opened and named after him. In recognition of Mr. Farrugia’s faithful and devoted service, Providence Centre established the John M. Farrugia Award in 1994. Mr. Farrugia died at the age of 94 on July 1, 1998.

John Farrugia was a man who had a deep commitment to the work of the Sisters. He was an engineer who oversaw many of the Sisters’ building projects, including the building of Providence Villa and Hospital. Although he was offered better paying jobs elsewhere, he refused them so that he could continue to work with the Sisters.⁹¹ In an obituary in the Providence Centre bi-weekly publication *Centre Line* July 16, 1998 we read of his wisdom and integrity. As well, “Mr. Farrugia’s contribution of his skills and devoted service set a standard of excellence for all of us at Providence Centre.”⁹²



Nurse McGreggor and resident
photographed for
“Providence Villa is People” brochure



House of Providence Farmhouse 1915. Basil Majowski is in the middle.

Another man who worked in a different capacity was Basil Majowski who worked at the House of Providence farm. Born to a poor Ukrainian family in 1895, Basil emigrated to Canada at age 16. He became very ill while working in a factory and was sent to St. Michael's Hospital and then to the House of Providence. Sister Cyrilla Merrigan, the Superior at the House of Providence, sent him to school to learn English and then to work at the House of Providence farm in the summer.

In 1934 Basil was put in charge of the North Farm in Richmond Hill. In 1925, the Sisters of St. Joseph built a house on the North Farm that could be used by Sisters who had contracted tuberculosis. After some time, it began to be used as a holiday place for Sisters. Also known as Mount St. Joseph, the farm was sold to the Basilian Fathers in 1946 for use as a noviciate.

When the North Farm was sold, Basil was asked to go to Invermara, the Sisters' summer home, as caretaker and gardener. A gentle, quiet man

with a generous smile and heart, Basil died at Providence Centre on February 13, 1996 after celebrating his 100th birthday the previous July.

Volunteers

Volunteers have also been integral to the work of Providence. The House of Providence Guild was formed in 1953 to support the House of Providence and later Providence Villa and Hospital. In 1964, the Guild's name was changed to Providence Villa and Hospital Auxiliary. A great deal of work was done by the Auxiliary in organizing group activities and fundraising. Due to an inability to get adequate leadership for the executive, the Auxiliary was disbanded at its General Meeting on January 14, 1985 and Auxiliary members were invited to become Volunteers under Volunteer Services.⁹³

In 1977 the Guild was rejuvenated to take on direct care volunteer activities such as feeding and visiting. Around the same time a Junior Guild was formed and younger people were able to participate. From newsletters at that time, we can read about numerous activities organized for patients and residents and fundraising events. In the 1978-79 Annual Report for Volunteer Services, Lorraine Pollock, Director of Volunteer Services, indicated that anyone who volunteers at Providence Villa and Hospital automatically became a member of the Providence Guild (or Junior Guild, if they are 13-18 years of age.) Eventually, around 1990, the Guild was disbanded. Currently the Mission of Providence Centre is supported through the work of Volunteers under the aegis of Volunteer Resources. The Volunteers offer very important services to the patients and residents.

Administrators/ Executive Directors/ Chief Executive Officers

Mother M. Agnes Geary	1857-1858
Mother M. de Chantal McKay	1858-1869
Mother M. Antoinette McDonnell	1869-1878
Mother M. de Chantal McKay	1878-1885
Mother M. Louise Clancy	1885-1908
Mother M. Gertrude Frewer	1908-1914
Sister M. Dympna Stritch	1914-1920
Sister M. Othelia McGuire	1920-1923
Sister M. Cyrilla Merrigan	1923-1929
Sister M. Alphonsus McDonough	1929-1935
Sister M. Annette Carolan	1935-1941
Sister M. Norine Pollard	1941-1947
Sister M. St. Paul McCabe	1947-1953
Sister Rose Marie Moreau	1953-1960
Sister M. Louise Carey	1960-1962
Sister Vianney Fenn	1962-1968
Sister Raphael Kane	1968-1969
Sister Mary Frances Peck	1969-1972
Sister Mary Kathleen Moore	1973-1974
Sister Matilda Gibbon	1974-1976
Sister Liguori McCarthy	1976-1981
Sister Margaret McNamara (Acting)	1981-1982
Sister Roberta Freeman	1982-1993
Ms Marion Leslie	1993-2000

Conclusions

In the time since the erection of the House of Providence there have been very many people who have revealed God's great love for the poor and most vulnerable of society through the work which they carried out at the House of Providence, Providence Villa and Hospital and Providence Centre. Although these are only a few of the many who ministered at Providence, we find in their lives the Spirit of the Sisters as Father Médaille envisioned it. We find in their stories strong women and men of faith who had a deep love for those who were most vulnerable in society. We find in the midst of hardship a spirit of humility and generosity.

The growth experienced in recent years at Providence Centre with the building of the new Home for the Aged, the “Houses of Providence” and the expansion of the hospital with all its renovations, carries forward the tradition of ongoing flexibility to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable of society.

The Original House

Originally one quarter of the size it eventually became, the House of Providence was a haven of hospitality. New wings were added to respond to the needs of the ever increasing number of poor in Toronto and surrounding area. The original building was located at 65 Power Street in the King and Parliament area, south of St. Paul’s church, on the east side of Power Street.⁹⁴ In 1962, the old House of Providence was demolished along with a large part of the residential district that surrounded it to make way for the Richmond Street exit ramp from the Don Valley Parkway. Today nothing but an open lawn marks the site.⁹⁵

In *Toronto: Past and Present* the House of Providence is described as “One of the most noteworthy of Toronto edifices...an extensive range of buildings in the form of an irregular quadrangle on Power Street...(with) a corridor worthy of Versailles or Windsor... and, deservedly, a favourite with Toronto architects.”⁹⁶

William Dendy maintains that:

To give the building the dignity appropriate to its function and a fanciful air that would blunt the hard edge of charity Hay [the architect] chose a style loosely based on French architecture of the sixteenth century and influenced by the steep roofed forms of the Second Empire. With a broken roof line of gables, dormers and towers, ornamented by lacy wrought-iron cresting and gilded vanes, it was

designed to look more like a palatial country house in a noblemen's park than a refuge.

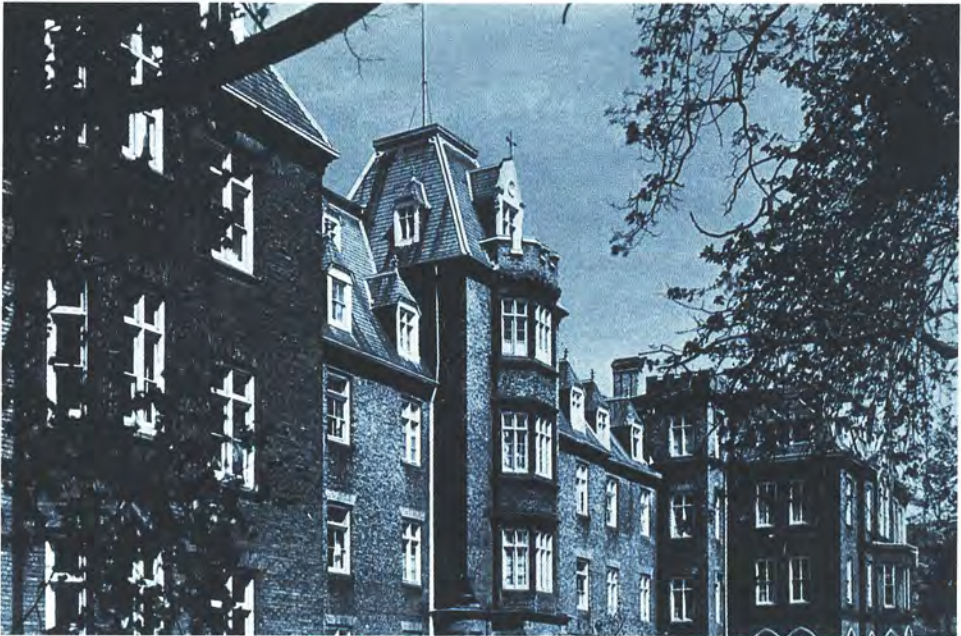
The building was H-shaped in plan, with wards and private rooms for each of the various uses on separate floors. On the second floor of the central block was the chapel, three storeys high, with an open-beamed roof and a sanctuary lit by Gothic windows. The west end of the chapel was open to the corridors of each of the three upper floors to provide galleries from which the residents could observe the service.⁹⁷

The original building can be seen through the words of a journalist who visited the institution in November 1869. With 360 residents, there were 17 Sisters who ran the Institution with the help of residents. The journalist described the entrance which “admits into a large vestibule, from which on the left a broad flight of stairs leads to the first corridor, on which are placed some of the private and work rooms.”⁹⁸ Next the journalist described the area in which children are cared for:

On the top flat are dormitories for the boys and girls each at different sides of the building; in the largest room there is accommodation for forty and though owing to the demand on their space, the beds are very closely set, the system of ventilation is so thorough, that the ill effects of the crowding that might otherwise arise, are completely obviated; the greatest cleanliness and neatness are observable and the beds are as comfortable as the most exacting mother need require for her favourite child.

Next to this area was a room which two Sisters share so that they are available if the children need help. The journalist then described the floor below where elderly residents live and the infirmary section for the sick. These dormitories had as many as thirty to forty in them but,

unlike the children, their beds were supplied with curtains. Sisters also were in the infirmary; they are described as “Being but women of like physical nature with their sisters of the world who have suffered considerably in health from the trying and arduous duties imposed upon them by the management of such a large Institution.”



House of Providence

The journalist then described “the old women’s room,” and the “old men’s room.” There was also a Boys’ school for 85 boys who lived at the House of Providence and a Girls’ school for 88, the majority of whom were under nine years. One Sister looked after each school. There was a nursery with 22 infants under the age of five. As the journalist described the bake house we are told that every day two barrels and a half of flour are made into bread there.

Expanding Hospitality

There were always more poor people who required hospitality than there was space to welcome them. The House of Providence was expanded, therefore, to four times its original size in its century on Power Street. We find in the *Annals* of the House of Providence for 1872:

Within fifteen years after its erection, the House of Providence had long become so overcrowded that many deserving poor and destitute had to be denied admittance. With heavy expenses and very small income there could be nothing laid by for building operations and yet the Sisters hesitated to ask for further help from the clergy and laity who had already been most generous in almsgiving. However, when the need of the Sisters was learned by the citizens, a public meeting was held and a subscription list was opened to supply building funds. Such was the generosity of all classes that on September 20, 1873, excavation for a new wing for the women was begun to the north of the original edifice...The medical profession did their part nobly...Not only doctors, but business men and all who had the interest of their City at heart rallied to the support of the House.⁹⁹

The large new wing was completed and blessed by the Archbishop. It cost \$35,000. In those days of struggle this was an overwhelming debt to assume, but, it was noted, “the charity of citizens of all creeds was truly remarkable whenever it was a question of aiding the House of Providence, and God’s almighty hand could always be relied upon for timely support.”¹⁰⁰

The next wing to be added was the Chapel wing. Blessed on January 6, 1882, this addition was on the east side of the building. It is described



Residents and Sisters
in Chapel in House
of Providence c.1959

in a newspaper article as two storeys high with the chapel on the upper floor and with the lower floor being used for “refectories, etc.”¹⁰¹ The Chapel is described in the *Congregational Annals* as a “spacious and magnificent structure which greatly improves the accommodation of the House of Providence.”¹⁰² Before this addition was built, there had been a chapel which became too small to accommodate all the residents.

Another wing was opened in 1896. *The Catholic Register* May 30, 1895 reports that the cornerstone of a new wing was laid by Archbishop Walsh at the annual picnic. Erected to the south of the building, it was to provide more comfortable accommodation for the elderly men.¹⁰³ This cornerstone was retained when Providence Villa and Hospital was built and can be found below the statue of Mary near the visitors’ parking lot at Providence Centre. A translation of the Latin reads: “This cornerstone of the addition to that wing for the care of the elderly commonly called the House of Providence which is to be erected here to the greater glory of God and for the consolation of the Poor. The Most Reverend and illustrious John Walsh Archbishop of Toronto blessed and set in place on the 24th of May in the year of our Lord 1895.”

St. Vincent’s Home was erected in 1908 and infants were cared for there until the Misericordia Sisters began a similar work in 1916. The residents of the House of Providence lived there until 1925 when it began to be used as a hospital. On the 24th of September, 1925 the building was blessed by Archbishop Neil McNeil and placed under the protection of Our Lady of Ransom, Mercy Hospital for Incurables. That evening three Sisters and six patients were sent from the House of Providence. In two years it was filled to capacity with 110 patients. In 1933 a new wing was added which increased the patient capacity to 165. With its increased activities it was run separately from the House of Providence. In 1939 the patients were transferred to the newly built Our Lady of Mercy Hospital next to St. Joseph’s Hospital (now St. Joseph’s Health Centre)

in the west end of the city, thus giving the patients a more restorative environment with a view of the lake.¹⁰⁴

When the patients were moved from Our Lady of Mercy Hospital at Sackville St. to Our Lady of Mercy Hospital at Sunnyside, that building again was used by the House of Providence. After being refurbished for the residents, it was named St. Teresa's Unit and was formally opened October 15, 1939, the feast of St. Teresa.¹⁰⁵

In 1911, a residence for Sisters was erected to the south of the main building and joined to it by a glassed passage way. Each Sister had a private room with running cold and hot water. A bright Community room had windows on two sides from which a veranda opened. The Sisters had their own kitchen where their meals were prepared independently of the residents.¹⁰⁶ When the Sisters moved to Providence Villa and Hospital they also had their own wing, presently known as the "K" wing. Over the years, until the Sisters moved out in 1990, there had been 176 Sisters in total who had lived at Providence Villa and Hospital. Twenty-three Sisters moved out of Providence Centre in 1990 to 35 Herron Avenue, the former monastery of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. They moved from Herron in 1996, mostly going to Morrow Park, the Mother House of the Sisters of St. Joseph, at 3377 Bayview Avenue. The land was then sold to developers and housing was built.

The Sisters' hospitality expanded to include those who were homeless but were not able to be cared for at the House of Providence because of lack of space. We are told in the *Annals of the House of Providence* that:

During the post war years of 1918 hundreds of transients found night lodging in the basement of the men's wing. During the days of the Great Depression, homeless men swarmed to the House of Providence

for night shelter. They were happy to sleep on the floor any where. Cots had been put up in increasing numbers in the attic, halls and corridors. Gradually the store rooms of the attic were turned into dormitories where accommodation for 150 men was provided. The Fire Department forbade the use of corridors as sleeping apartments.

In 1932, the basement of the House of Providence was excavated to create a new floor with nine foot ceilings. It provided dining rooms for men and women, storerooms, and Bosco Hall with its spacious sitting areas and bathrooms.¹⁰⁷

Moves

The experience of being a haven of hospitality and of expanding that hospitality can mean that those who live in the House experience the disruption of moves. When people are ill, moves can be extraordinarily difficult. We find in the House of Providence *Annals* that moves were difficult in the 1880s as well. There had been a fire which had caused the need for immediate moves. The women who had “incurable” diseases were moved from the third floor to the first floor of the north wing. On May 15, 1880 Sister Thecla writes:

Early this morning Sister Anna Maria commenced to remove her class of women out of the workroom and by noon it was vacated so that Sister Paul had possession of the room at once, much to the grief of her Incurable class, who could not bear the change. The women in the workroom cried bitterly, too. The whole place was in commotion. At first it was considered advisable not to disturb the little girls' classroom but on re-consideration the children were removed to the third floor to occupy the two front Sick Wards, so that all the invalids would be on the ground floor.¹⁰⁸

The moves were not accepted with peace and it seems to have taken until November before all was settled. Sister Thecla points out how much better it is to have the sick women on the first floor, close to an exit, in case of fire.¹⁰⁹

We have already seen the moves which were precipitated by the children going to Sunnyside, and eventually, those who were most sick to Our Lady of Mercy Hospital. All of those moves would have had ramifications throughout the building for all those who lived there.

A significant move, the “fastest move in history”, happened as the House of Providence residents moved on January 28, 1962 to the “new House of Providence,” that is, Providence Villa and Hospital.

It is interesting to note that talk about such a move began as early as 1914 for inspectors:

*It is always to be kept in mind that at no distant date this Institution should be moved to a country site. Such a change of action would be a great advantage to both the Sisters and to the inmates for whom they care with such charity and devotion.*¹¹⁰

Although it might have been good for the residents to move to a “country site,” it would be many years before circumstances would begin to cause the Sisters and their supporters to look much more critically at the need for a move. It took almost half a century before serious discussion was begun about building a new House of Providence.

In a letter dated June 15, 1949, to the General Superior from the Superior of the House of Providence, Sister St. Paul McCabe suggested that a new House of Providence be built on the north end of the House of Providence farm.¹¹¹



Providence Villa and Hospital view from the air 1987



According to a letter from Sister Mary Grace to the General Superior August 4, 1956, it had been brought to the attention of the Chapter of 1950 that the new House of Providence needed to be built on land which the Congregation owned. (The Archdiocese owned the land on which the old House of Providence was built.) The choice for the House of Providence farm may have been in part because it was land which had been designated for use by the House of Providence: it would have saved considerable expense not to buy additional land.¹¹²

In 1954, in preparation to celebrate the centenary of the House of Providence's founding in 1855, we find a survey report prepared by John Price Jones Company. The report described the House of Providence as "impossible, and beyond repair. It is antique, obsolete, over crowded, poorly distributed and a continuing fire hazard."¹¹³ Termites were also a problem. "Woodwork eaten by termites looks like dry sponges, stairways are pulling away from the wall and the roof has many leaks." Some ground floor window sashes were completely hollowed out, skirting boards were crumbling and even some of the main beams were laced with termite holes until they looked like sponges.¹¹⁴

In 1956, the General Chapter of the Sisters of St. Joseph gave permission to build a new House of Providence. It was not long before a campaign was launched. The annalist who described the donations to the campaign for the new House of Providence, wrote:

*It cannot be overlooked that the new building, much like the century old House of Providence has been assisted by the small donations, the nickels and dimes of the poor. These bore more than financial assistance, they carried the blessings of charity, the charity of the Widow's mite.*¹¹⁵

The turning of sod for the new building was held on Oct 25, 1959, the Feast of Christ the King. Those breaking the ground included the Most Reverend Francis V. Allen, Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto and Reverend Mother Maura, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Many Sisters of St. Joseph, residents from the House of Providence and interested friends were present. The Architects were Brennan and Whale and the general contractors were Anglin, Norcross Ltd.

In a letter sent to Rome in 1962, the plan to finance the new building was outlined. The Sisters of St. Joseph were able to contribute \$1,200,000 through the sale of property and "garden parties." The government contributed \$1,200,000. A public campaign was carried on in which money plus pledges amounted to \$6,000,000. It proved necessary to request to borrow \$2,000,000 to complete the project.¹¹⁶

Once Providence Villa and Hospital was built, the blessing was held on January 21, 1962 by Most Reverend Phillip F. Pocock, Coadjutor Archbishop of Toronto.

The move occurred on January 28, 1962. Paid for by an anonymous donor, a "Caravan of Kindness" moved over 500 people.

The first stage of "Operation Relocation" began at 9 in the morning as 25 ambulances rolled one by one up to the front door and 55 patients from the home's hospital were carefully loaded into them. Stage two began at noon after the remaining residents had an early lunch. Taxicabs lined Power and Sackville Streets taking on passengers from the front and back doors of the old home. Taxis, directed by police, took four passengers each and proceeded along a specified route to the new building. Residents waiting for taxis sat with shopping bags filled with personal belongings in their arms. Everyone had a coloured tag, green, yellow, pink

or grey, to correspond to the unit where they would be going in the new home. Stage two is said to have taken place in less than an hour. Sister Jane MacDonald, who helped with the move, wrote: “For me it was truly the ‘fastest move in my history.’”¹¹⁷ The Sister in charge at the Providence Villa and Hospital end was Sister Rose Marie Moreau, who ensured that everyone went to the right floor in the large building.

Providence Villa and Hospital had four to six beds in a ward instead of the accommodation in the House of Providence where sometimes 16 were in a room. There were also numerous elevators instead of stairs. One might think that everyone would be very pleased to move into the new building. According to Sister Aloysia Payne, though, some people had difficulties with the move:

*[One] lady wouldn't leave [the House of Providence.] She said she just couldn't but we gradually got her to come. Most of them didn't want to leave but the place was practically condemned—they said the only thing that held it up was the paint... When they got to Providence Villa they said the place was too cold. They meant it wasn't like the old place. Everything was white and clean and new, it wasn't like the other place where you scrubbed everything to get it clean. The problem was it looked more like a hospital to them, but they settled down.*¹¹⁸

On May 16, 2000 another momentous move occurred as 288 residents from the Home for the Aged (“the Villa”) were moved from 1B, 2B, 4B, 5B, and 5A to the new Houses of Providence. The move was orchestrated by the Commissioning Committee with leadership from Mary Diamond, a long time Resident Care Manager appointed as Relocation Facilitator, Therese Liston, Social Worker for the Houses of Providence, and Tom Clancy, Director of Housekeeping. Many staff,

volunteers and family members united to move the residents over a 12 hour period from one building to another. Everyone worked very hard that day, with all pitching in as best they could. Because the day was so well organized, minimal frustration ensued. The reactions of residents were mixed, of course, with some resisting the change, but one resident perhaps best captured the mood of the day as he compared the new building and the old with “heaven and purgatory.”

Conclusions

All have always been welcome. At the old House of Providence and when there was not enough space to provide the hospitality that was integral to the spirit of the House, then the Sisters worked to find ways to expand. Over the years the House had grown to four times its original size, extending its welcoming arms even wider. After a century of caring, the Sisters and those who supported their work looked for additional ways to welcome those who were most vulnerable in society. They built the “new House of Providence,” known as Providence Villa and Hospital and eventually Providence Centre. That desire to welcome those who are most vulnerable in society continues to be part of our Mission at Providence Centre and we are always looking for better ways to do that. In planning the new Home for the Aged, “Houses of Providence,” we sought out ways to make it as homelike as possible. Providence Centre’s hope is that the patients, residents, clients and their families will continue to experience Providence Centre as a “haven of hospitality” as did people in need from throughout our history.

[When Bishop de Charbonnel visited Pope Pius IX in 1854,] Bishop de Charbonnel sought permission to erect a house of charity to alleviate the poverty that reigned throughout his diocese. When his request was granted he paused to ask for a special blessing on this haven of love. After a moment's thought, the Holy Father told him he would ask God that the House of Providence be never destroyed by fire and that its work never fail for lack of funds.¹⁰⁰

At Providence Centre when we put our Values into action, we are faithful to our Mission. There are continual challenges to balance: as we weigh Compassionate Service with Social Responsibility, for example, how do we give the best compassionate care that we can within the limits of our resources?

Another question which is important to us and has been important for a long time is Providence Centre's relationship with the larger community. We both respond to the needs of the community and are dependant on the generosity of the community as well. Today at Providence Centre we continue to seek out ways in which we can be faithful to our Value of Community by working collaboratively with one another and in partnership with patients, residents, clients and their families and others.

Providence Centre is a multicultural facility. We seek to respect the various faith and cultural traditions of our staff, residents, patients, clients, volunteers, and families. At the same time, we are grounded in our Catholic identity, a particular faith tradition which provides a framework for our decisions and actions. It is out of that tradition that our name, Providence, emerges and that this reflection on our history occurs.

In the Annual Report of 1938 we read:

With the passing years, it is true, the accidentals of the Management of the House of Providence have necessarily changed, but the spirit of the House has ever been the same. Today just as in the past, its doors are open to all in need; its charity knows no limits of religious conviction — the need of care is the chief pass-port to its shelter and hospitality. Moreover, the history of the Institute for the eighty-two years of its existence justifies in a remarkable way its name the “House of Providence”. Of the years of difficulty in the beginning, there are many interesting accounts of help marvellously bestowed when the resources of the Sisters were exhausted. Yet, we do not need to go back so far to seek for providential happenings, for every day has its own record of almost inconceivable evidences of the care of an all-loving, all powerful God. Thus the House of Providence ... has ever stood for the Christian ideal of Trust in Divine Providence, has been indeed, an uninterrupted object-lesson in that same wonderful virtue.¹²⁰

The Sisters have long understood that their work was sustained by God’s tender providential care. It was not, in fact, “their” work after all, but God’s work. The Sisters encountered numerous challenges but because they knew it was God’s work, they could trust that God’s tender providential care would continue to sustain them. We find in the history of the House of Providence stories of “extraordinary” providential care by God, “miracles” of a sort. And yet, in the ordinary running of the House of Providence, day by day, there were ordinary “miracles” shown in the reality that people were fed and cared for, that fires did not destroy the House, that funds were raised from many sources, all revealing God’s tender providential care.

Besides limited government support, the Sisters had a number of other sources of income. Sisters were not paid for their labour but money was

required for food and other necessities. The Sisters were dependent on donations of the “benevolent of all denominations” for “the means of support for the inmates depend[ed] almost wholly on donations and contributions of the kind hearted.”¹²¹ The Providence of God was also revealed through the generosity of many who supported the work of the Sisters.

As well, God’s providential care was revealed in the generosity of the residents of the House of Providence. We are told, for example, how in 1870, with 345 residents and 21 Sisters:

*The Sisters and the Inmates do all the work. Looms are worked in the House and Wool collected from the Farms is made into Flannel, Stockings, etc. All the Clothing is made in the House, Shoes also. Baking, Washing, Mending, etc. All that are able, do some work, the old helping to take care of the young, and vice versa.*¹²²

Protected from Fire

When asked by Bishop Armand de Charbonnel for a special blessing, Pope Pius IX said he would ask God that the House of Providence “be never destroyed by fire and that its work never fail for lack of funds.”¹²³ Despite very hazardous conditions, God’s providential care sustained the House so that it was never consumed by fire.

There were, however, some close calls. Once the House of Providence was saved from going up in flames when a “mysterious visitor” notified a Sister late at night that a fire had started in the laundry. The Sister was able to put out the fire and thus save the building from destruction. The man had never been seen before and, given the reality that the House of Providence was a “fire trap,” the Sisters believed that St. Joseph had

visited them to warn them of the danger.¹²⁴

On February 24, 1880 fire was discovered in the roof. Sister Thecla writes:

It would appear as if the roof had been burning slowly for some time as many of the beams and rafters, etc. were totally destroyed and part of the roof also. Notice was sent at once to the Insurance Offices. Two men called next day and had the damages repaired, which cost about \$20.00. The danger from which we escaped on this occasion is attributed solely to the goodness of God, nothing short of a miracle. Many who saw the fire say surely it was miraculous that the whole building escaped being consumed. Prayers of thanksgiving were offered up by Sisters and inmates for the goodness and mercy of God for preserving us from Fire...In the attempt to extinguish the flames, Mother fell, and narrowly escaped being hurt. Here again the providence of God interposed and saved our Mother.¹²⁵

In 1882 on April 20, another fire began at 4 o'clock in the morning in an unoccupied room in the House of Providence. It was caused by cloths igniting after being used to oil the Chapel floor and was discovered by a resident. It was put out before much damage was done. Sister Thecla writes that "The Providence of God saved the place from serious injury."¹²⁶

On May 12, 1883 another fire broke out, this time at a neighbour's, Mr. Kieley, whose stables were close to the House of Providence's stables and out houses. According to Sister Thecla, "the wind was high and threatened the destruction of the entire premises." She tells of many people gathering in the Chapel to pray so that "...when the wind visibly changed, those present said, 'Surely this is a Miracle.'¹²⁷

We also read of two fires in the 1920s. One was quite small in the

“People’s Kitchen” on April 23, 1923. The Fire Department responded immediately and no serious damage was done.¹²⁸ A second fire, however, on October 9, 1929 was much more serious. The fire, in a carpenter shop in the basement of the building, was believed to have been started by oily rags. The bench and windows were in flames when it was discovered. Miss Grant, one of the night attendants, was walking along the hall about 11 o’clock when she smelled smoke. Looking out of the window to another building used as a laundry by the institution, she could see the reflection in the windows. The glare was so bright that she thought the fire was in the laundry. The Fire Department was called in. The loss was only about \$300.¹²⁹

Sister Victorine Kennedy also tells a story of being saved from fire. The date for the event is not given but it was sometime after she was appointed to the House of Providence in 1936:

I can also tell of some miracles I experienced [at the House of Providence.] One night as I was saying the Rosary down in Bosco Hall (as it was later called) I saw some of the men getting up and going out of the back stairs. We kept on saying the rosary and when I finished it I went out to see what was going on. I met some men coming out with baskets of clothing on fire. We put them out with water by the sinks as we had no fire hose at that time. We kept the soiled laundry under the stairs until the bathing was finished for the week then taken to the laundry. In the meantime it had been smouldering under the stairs for a couple of hours. It could have caused a bad fire at night since we would have been less aware. We managed to put it out without calling the firemen.¹³⁰

In an interview which Sister Imelda Cahill and Sister Mary Bernita Young had with John Farrugia in 1986 we find how very real the fear of



Residents attend Mass in Our
Lady of the Assumption Chapel
at Providence Villa and Hospital

*Photo source:
"Providence Villa is People"*



fire was at the House of Providence. Mr. Farrugia indicated in that interview that when a decision was made to build a new House of Providence the Fire Department was very happy. When Mr. Farrugia asked if it was because the Fire Department did not like the House of Providence, the fire fighter said “Oh, sure, we like you. But John, you’re the biggest risk around.”¹³¹

There was some major destruction by fire at the House of Providence farm. On November 14, 1920 the large barn was destroyed. We are told that “the season’s crop, the best in many years, 23 head of cattle, 3 colts and some pigs were all consumed. The horses and 50 hogs were saved. An east wind saved the house and poultry buildings. The fire seems to have started on the roof. The cause is unknown.”¹³² On November 6, 1955 the barn was burnt down and never rebuilt. Apparently, flames were visible seven miles away and 140 tons of hay and grain were destroyed. ¹³³

Never Failing for Lack of Funds

The second prayer of Pope Pius IX when he gave permission to erect a house of charity to be called the House of Providence was that this House’s “work never fail for lack of funds.”¹³⁴ It never “failed” but the struggle for adequate funding has long been part of the experience of the House of Providence. Although in time grants were received from both the provincial and city governments, we find that if the Sisters had had to rely solely on government support to run the House of Providence they would have had to fold the operation before they started. Instead, because of the generosity of so many in the community, the work was able to continue for over 140 years.

In 1859, only two years after the House of Providence was opened, the

Sisters of St. Joseph sent a petition to the Aldermen and Council of Toronto for financial aid of \$1000 each for the Orphans' Asylum and House of Providence. Because in 1858 aid had been given to the House of Industry (another house of refuge), Toronto Grammar School, the General Hospital, Magdalene Asylum and Female Protection Society, those at the House of Providence desired funding as well. The petition was rejected.¹³⁵

By 1865, however, the House of Providence was receiving some funding and required more. Mother de Chantal, on August 8, 1865, wrote a request to the Right Hon. Charles Stanley, Viscount Monk, Governor General of British North America in Council. With 104 adults (Thirteen were blind; thirty were "aged and infirm" widows; and nearly all the others had different diseases) and 304 orphans, Mother de Chantal wrote that "The whole fixed revenue of the institution is \$960 received from the Government. Although "the strictest economy is observed," the outlay exceeds \$9,000 per annum. Mother de Chantal wrote:

That your petitioners have no property, no income beyond that already stated but have to depend on the voluntary contributions of the charitable, which fluctuate according to the condition of the crops or of the financial affairs of the country.

That to procure this precarious aid, the Community in charge of the establishment are obliged to travel through remote parts of this western section generally in the depth of winter and are necessarily exposed to great hardship and expense.

That in the Hospital department your petitioners have had, from time to time, diseases of every description. During the past Spring there were two hundred cases of fever, but owing to the skill of the

medical attendant, and the unremitting care bestowed upon the patients, the fatality of the disease was confined to the members of the Community – three of our most efficient Sisters died of malignant fever...

...That your petitioners, therefore, in view of the great amount of destitution relieved and of suffering alleviated, and in consideration of the Sisters – fifteen in number in charge of the House giving their services gratuitously and for charity sake, humbly ask that your Excellency in Council be pleased to direct that the grant already conceded to the House of Providence may be increased to a sum commensurate with the requirements of the Institution for the relief of suffering humanity.¹³⁶

Mother de Chantal's concern was serious. *The Canadian Freeman* the same year indicated that the House of Providence orphan asylum received ten times the number of children as the Protestant asylum but the same amount of money. The House of Providence had twice the number of residents as the Toronto General Hospital but received one tenth of the amount. (\$960 as compared to \$11,000.)

According to the *Jubilee Volume*, in 1875 there was an increase in the government grant because of an amendment to the "Charity Aid Act." A clause was introduced which gave a certain sum towards the support of each person in the different charitable institutions, instead of giving "indiscriminately," as had been done before. "Instead of the pittance formerly granted, the House of Providence received the next year from the government the very liberal sum of \$3,298.54 and the Orphan Asylum \$1,593.88; making a total of \$4,892.42, as compared with the grant of \$1,500 of the previous year." Thus, a grant of seven cents a day was allowed for each resident of the House of Providence and two cents

a day for each child in the Orphan Asylum.¹³⁷

In 1888, we read, there continued to be concerns about funding. Mother Louise Clancy wrote to the Mayor of Toronto indicating that in 1881 they were receiving \$2,000 with 195 adults and 108 orphan girls. In 1888 with 325 adults and 145 orphan girls \$2,000 is no longer in proportion.¹³⁸ Apparently, the City did not fund according to numbers of residents.

Besides limited government support, the Sisters had other sources of income, mainly donations of the “benevolent of all denominations.” We are told that because the House of Providence’s door “is open to all classes and creeds, Protestants have at all times been very liberal in their contributions, and this has especially been the case on the occasion of the Sisters’ annual collecting tour through the city in the fall.”¹³⁹

“Collection tours” were forays into the country to request food and provisions from farmers. In a scrap book that one Sister at the time collected, there are numerous examples of advertisements placed in the papers thanking people for their donations, particularly of food. We are told in the *Jubilee Volume* (1892) that the Sisters collect flour, meat, butter, wool, and clothing from among the farmers in the winter season.¹⁴⁰

There are stories in the *Annals* about how at times these winter trips needed to be curtailed because of terrible weather conditions. The collections would be done by sled, except when there was little snow, and then wagons were used. Obviously, these collecting tours took the Sisters away from helping to run the House of Providence which caused further hardship.

We find in the Annual Report of 1879 that “Each year twelve Sisters brave the inclemency of our Canadian winter to perform this arduous

work of charity. They receive with gratitude the donations (either in money, provisions or clothing) given them by the liberality of a generous people, to supply the necessities of nearly 500 poor.”¹⁴¹

Collecting must have been very demanding work, as a glance at the month of January 1882 shows:

- *On January 7, 1882 Sisters Anna Maria [Coolahan] and Dolores left on the morning train for Orillia. On January 28, they returned with the collection unfinished because Sister Anna Maria had caught Bronchitis so Sister Dolores needed another companion. On February 7 Sisters Mary Rose [O'Mallay] and Claudia [Cokeley] went to finish Mara and Uxbridge.*
- *On January 7, 1882 Sisters de Chantal [McKay] and Aurelia [Cokely] left on the morning train for Barrie.*
- *On January 7, Sisters Paul [McDonald] and Thecla [Lehane] left on the evening train for Caledon. They returned January 21.*
- *On January 11, Sisters M. Rose and Assumption [Keenan] left on the evening train for Adjala. They returned February 2.*
- *On January 21, Sisters Claudia and de Sales [Ryan] left on the evening train to collect in Newmarket and returned February 4.*
- *On January 26, Sisters Euphrasia [McKendry] and Teresa [Brennan] left for Chicago to finish the collection they had started in September.*
- *On January 30, Sisters Paul and Thecla set out for Thornhill which only took one week to collect.*¹⁴²

In 1900, collection tours were discontinued in favour of an annual collection taken up by the Sisters in the churches.¹⁴³ For a few years both types of collections seem to have been going on because there is evidence of both in the *Jubilee Volume* (1892).¹⁴⁴

Spring Festival

The Queen's Birthday in May has long been a time for fundraising and fun at Providence. There have been a variety of names for this fundraising; it has been called a "Festival," a "Garden Party" and a "Picnic." Historically, however, the most popular name seems to have been a picnic. Currently, at Providence Centre we have the annual "Spring Festival," the last Saturday in May.

Fundraising on the Queen's birthday began with the "May Festival," the first recorded on May 25, 1863. It was held at the Music Hall to aid the House of Providence.¹⁴⁵ Within a couple of years, the spring concert was turned into a picnic and concerts were held in the winter to raise funds.

We find evidence of the first picnic in May 1866. *The Canadian Freeman* published news of a May 1866 meeting of ladies and gentlemen of all Toronto parishes to arrange details for House of Providence fundraising picnic.¹⁴⁶ A fundraising picnic was also held in August of that year.

There were times in the history of the House of Providence when the annual spring picnic was discontinued because of circumstances. In 1919, the annual picnic was discontinued because the House of Providence joined the "Civic Federation of Charities" from which it received necessary funds for support. In 1952, however, the tradition was revived to raise funds for the installation of a "complete fire alarm

system with detectors” required by the Toronto Fire Department. As the House of Providence sought to raise funds for a “New House of Providence” the picnics continued to be held until 1961. They were discontinued when the move was made to Providence Villa and Hospital. In 1977, as the deficit for the Villa soared, the Spring Festival was revived once again and has been held ever since to raise funds.

The picnic has been held at different locations, although the House of Providence grounds seems to have been the favoured one. In 1869 for example, the Annual “Festival” for House of Providence held on the Queen’s birthday was located on Government Grounds.¹⁴⁷ Government Grounds were closed in 1870, however, and a “picnic” was held on the House of Providence’s own premises. In 1882 and 1884 it was held at Sunnyside, where St. Joseph’s Health Centre is currently located.

Like Providence Centre’s own Spring Festival, there were years when it rained and years when the sun shone beautifully. In 1952, when the picnic was revived after 34 years, for example, it rained all day. The organizers were undaunted by the weather, however, and carried on:

Real ponies were provided, saddles and all, as a special attraction for children and when the rain clouds did not scatter, the riding was done in the laundry. On the whole the Sisters were satisfied with the financial returns and greatly encouraged by the abundance of good-will.¹⁴⁸

There were times when there were challenges because of people who came to the picnics. In 1880 the picnic was on a “fine day” in which attendance was “very great.”

Everything passed off very well until the close of the day when some

young men came to the Grounds quite intoxicated, and tried to raise a quarrel. No Policemen were present.

Although the Queen's Birthday became known as "House of Providence Day" and the picnic was well attended by Catholics and Protestants alike, there were times when other activities happening in the city detracted from its proceeds. We are told, for example, that in 1884 there were races at Woodbine on the same day as the picnic and so it was not as well attended as in other years.¹⁴⁹

Providence Centre Foundation

In 1987, the Providence Villa and Hospital Foundation was established to further the work of Providence Villa and Hospital. In 1991 its name was changed to Providence Centre Foundation. Its letters of incorporation indicate clearly that its primary object is to maintain and receive a fund and to apply those funds "for the benefit of or to improve the services provided by" Providence Centre. Raising funds and receiving the generous donations of numerous donors, the Foundation has been instrumental to enable Providence Centre to further its Mission, to provide the best service possible to its patients, residents and clients.

Conclusions

Faith in God's tender providential care does not mean that there will never be challenges to overcome. It does mean that while the Sisters had to work hard in order to meet the challenges, the necessary resources were given. There were many different challenges that had to be met and many different ways in which God's Providence provided for the needs.

The challenges which the Sisters experienced encouraged the building of community. The Sisters could not afford to be self-sufficient but instead were required to enlist the help of the broader community to sustain the work of the House. The generosity of response enabled the work to continue. God's tender providential care was revealed in the generosity of the community.

There were challenges in the very real danger of fire. At times God's tender providential care was revealed in extraordinary ways in which the House was saved from fire. People recognized God's action and named it as a "miracle." There were other times, however, in which the fidelity of someone to her work, like Miss Grant who discovered fire in the carpenter's room, also revealed God's tender providential care for the residents of the House.

There is no doubt that in a time of scarce resources such as the House of Providence experienced, there was a need to be faithful to the Value of Social Responsibility. The Sisters had to be accountable for the ways in which resources were used. God's tender providential care provided for the House's needs yet at the same time it was necessary to use the resources wisely.

A LEGACY OF CARING: THE FUTURE OF CARE

The Sisters of St. Joseph provided a house of hospitality in which all were welcome, particularly the most vulnerable. Through numerous challenges the Sisters experienced their deep dependence on God, trusting that God would always provide for their need. The experience of the Sisters can be encouragement for those who carry forward the Mission of Providence today.

As we look at the history of the House of Providence, Providence Villa and Hospital, and Providence Centre, we can see the legacy of caring which has been entrusted to us by the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Sisters' desire to care for the "dear neighbour" with dignity and compassion is a guide for us as we seek to care for the patients, residents and clients of Providence Centre in ways which reflect our Values of Sanctity of Life, Human Dignity, Compassionate Service, Community, Social Justice and Social Responsibility.

We see in the history of caring of the Sisters that the Sisters of St. Joseph tried to be as faithful as possible to their call to be a "Congregation of Great Love" as their founder, Father Médaille, had encouraged them. Their fidelity revealed God's love for those in their care.

The House of Providence was a haven of hospitality, a place in which the most vulnerable of society were welcomed. That original vision of Bishop de Charbonnel has endured as we at Providence Centre continue to welcome a vulnerable population, those who are most in need of care. We seek to care for people in ways which reflect our concern for the whole person.

The history of the House of Providence and its successors, Providence Villa and Hospital and Providence Centre, reveals God's tender providential care. The Sisters believed that God intervened in almost miraculous

ways, providing for the needs of the residents, protecting them from fire and ensuring that the work never fail for lack of funds. Always the work was much larger than the House itself, as the House of Providence depended greatly on the community's generosity to sustain them.

The rich legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph is for us, and for the future, inspiration as all at Providence Centre seek to be faithful to the Mission and Values. In 1998, the Sisters of St. Joseph entrusted the sponsorship of Providence Centre into the care of the Catholic Health Corporation of Ontario. As we move forward into the future we have numerous opportunities to continue to be faithful to that legacy left to us. We have opened a new Home for the Aged, "Houses of Providence," based on an innovative model of care in which we continually seek out ways to put the needs of residents first. We are expanding our hospital, increasing our opportunities to care for those in need.

There are so many ways in which the legacy of caring left by the Sisters of St. Joseph is carried forward into the future. Staff continues to seek out ways to provide the best care possible. Volunteers continue to respond, supporting the work of Providence Centre in a wide variety of ways. Donors continue to give what they can to support the work as the Foundation raises much needed funds. Patients, residents and families, continue to support each other, doing what is possible for them. Board members continue to seek to give direction to the Centre, basing decisions soundly in our Mission and Values. All of our roles at Providence Centre are crucial and all are committed to furthering the Mission through fidelity to the Values.

Because of the firm foundation of the legacy of caring left by the Sisters of St. Joseph and the strong community of all who support, live, and work at Providence Centre we can proclaim with boldness that Providence Centre's work is indeed "the future of care."

Endnotes

Introduction

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 PROVIDENCE CENTRE

3276 ST. CLAIR AVENUE EAST, SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO M1L 1W1