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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.

Major est Caritas 90 Years of Service to the Poor Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron in Canada. 1909-1999

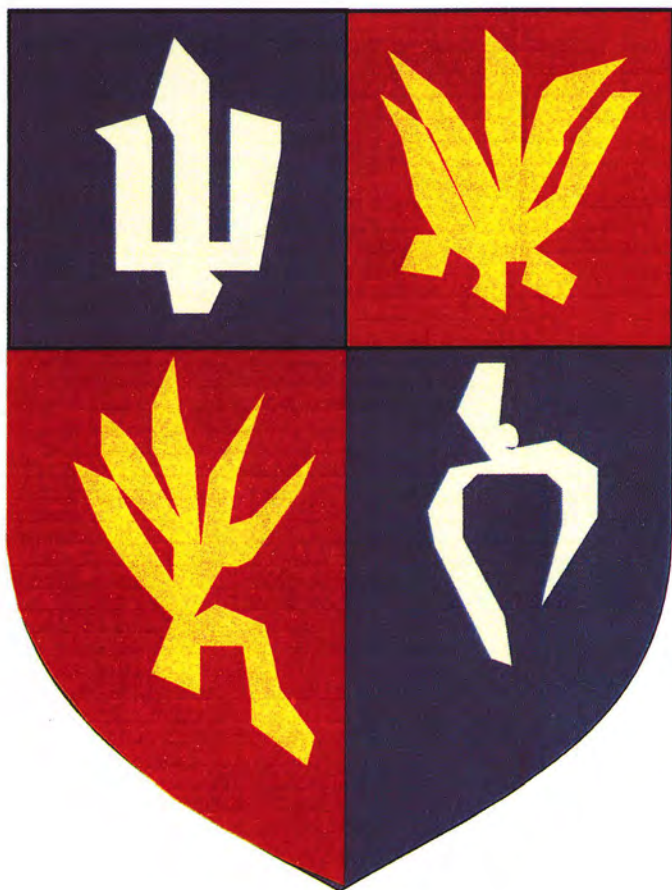
by
Jean Pariseau

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Notre Dame d'Évron

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MAJOR
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Sisters of Charity N.D. d'Évron
in Canada



**90 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE POOR:
SISTERS OF CHARITY NOTRE DAME D'ÉVRON
IN CANADA, 1909-1999**

Jean Pariseau

90 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE POOR:

SISTERS OF CHARITY NOTRE-DAME

D'ÉVRON

IN CANADA, 1909-1999

Edmonton, Alberta

2001

Canadian Cataloguing in Publishing Date:

Pariseau, Jean, 1924 –

90 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE POOR: THE SISTERS OF
CHARITY NOTRE-DAME D'ÉVRON IN CANADA
1909-1999

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ISBN 0-09684479-2-9

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Includes a Bibliography, illustrations and maps.

Summary:

- History of the Sisters Notre-Dame d'Évron in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1909-1999
- A French religious community in Canada
- Hospital Services, Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1909
- Teaching in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1909

Printed by: Delta Printing Ltd., Ottawa, Ontario

Legal deposit, National Library of Canada, 1st Trimester

2001. This is a translation by the author of: *90 Ans de service aux pauvres: les Soeurs de la Charité de Notre-Dame D'Évron au Canada, 1909-1999.*

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to the General Council, particularly to Sister Madeleine Bouttier, Superior General, and to Sister Marie-Hélène Olivereau, General Archivist, who graciously received us at the Mother House in Évron, at the very start of our research. Our visit was a great help in providing us with the atmosphere necessary to understand some of the basic underlying history.

To Eugène Trottier, a native of Saint-Denis D'Anjou, Mayenne who emigrated to Edmonton in 1952, our sincere thanks for having encouraged the Sisters of Évron in Canada to write their history.

Such a task, however, would have been impossible without the cooperation of the two Provincial Superiors, Sisters Marie-Thérèse Laberge (1990-1996) and Mary Ellen O'Neill (1996-). To Sister Claire Dargis, Archivist, and Sister Thérèse Verrier, computer expert, whose expertise was essential.

We also wish to thank Mr. W. (Bill) Constable of Ottawa, for the excellent maps he provided and Professor Guy Laperrière from the University of Sherbrooke who not only reviewed the manuscript but suggested excellent ways to improve it.

Our sincere thanks also to Annette J. Sayko who graciously typed this manuscript.

Finally our sincere gratitude to Mr. Benoit Belisle of Delta Printers in Ottawa for his excellent cooperation.

Jean Pariseau

Ottawa, March 1st 2001

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Preface

As General Superior of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron Congregation, the completion of this book fills me with much joy. The life stories of our sisters in Western Canada beginning in 1909 and up to the present time reveals an inspirational chapter in our congregational history.

I am filled with admiration and much gratitude for our pioneer sisters and for all those who continue the mission today. Throughout this century, faced with the concerns and struggles of daily life as well as with difficult decisions in the apostolates, they remained faithful to their religious commitment. In their society, which experienced rapid and immense changes, they were attentive and open to the needs around them.

Dear friend and reader, perhaps you already know these sisters; maybe you are familiar with or have experienced their deep passion and dedication in the service of God's kingdom. You may also be aware of their burning desire to keep abreast of the many developments in our society so that their response might be current and appropriate. Our history is quite old, beginning over 300 years ago in France, expanding to the United Kingdom and Canada early in the 20th century and for the past forty years in Africa.

In 1909 a few French Sisters left their homeland to respond to a need in Alberta. It did not take long for their presence and their commitment to become a beacon of light on the prairie landscape. Eventually young women who wished to respond to Christ's call requested to join

them. Their hearts were seized by the charism of Perrine Thulard, the foundress (1654-1735) – “to serve Jesus Christ, poor in the person of the poor”. The competence, creativity and spirit of service of these women were nourished by their deep faith and the limitless gift of themselves. It was and remains for them the unique way to live and to witness to the Gospel. In their own way, wherever they live, they try to fulfill their role of charity in the name of the Church for the world.

For the Congregation, writing the history of this group contributes to the mission of the local church and of Canadian society. Initially the Sisters requested Father Marie-Antoine Bugeaud, o.m.i. to undertake this project. In addition to a classical B.A. from the University of Ottawa, he obtained a B. Ed from the University of Alberta, and an M. Ed and Masters in Sociology and Psychology from the University of Seattle. He taught for 18 years in Northern Alberta and 3 years in Cameroun, Africa before undertaking the administration of the Oblate world-wide missions for 10 years. After a 5 year stint in Chili he returned to Edmonton as vice-postulator for the canonization causes of Bishop Vital Grandin and Brother Anthony Kowalczyk. In addition to his many activities Father Bugeaud was the editor of a bilingual periodical entitled *The Oblate Cross* which circulated in nineteen different countries.

As a student at St. John's juniorate in Edmonton Father Bugeaud came in contact with our sisters who at that time were in charge of the domestic services in that

institution. He had witnessed and experienced their dedication and in a spirit of gratitude he accepted to write the history of the Sisters in Canada. Having been invited to preach a retreat in Évron he took that opportunity to review some of the archival material which would be useful. He undertook this project with the proviso that he be assisted by his good friend and former classmate, Jean Pariseau, D ès L (Hist) from the University of Montpellier (France).

Born in Montreal he studied at St. John's College, Edmonton, before enrolling in the RCAF in 1943. He later served in the Canadian Army and recycled as a military historian at National Defence H.Q. in Ottawa. Upon retiring in 1989 he wholeheartedly accepted Father Antoine's proposal. Some of the research had been completed and an outline of the first two Chapters written when Father Bugeaud suddenly fell ill and in a few short days he entered into eternity, August 16th, 1996. Mr. Pariseau very generously accepted to continue the project and with his expertise as an historian he brought to fruition this dream of the Canadian Province.

I wish to express our very sincere thanks to Mr. Pariseau for the way in which he was able to grasp the essence of the Sisters mission be it in health care, the schools or in parish ministry. With a dynamic style he helped us to re-live a special part of the history of Western Canada.

The Sisters in Canada contributed as much as possible to the project; Sister Claire Dargis, provincial archivist, spent many hours retrieving and selecting historical documents. Each sister in her own way was

able to speak to the author about how a Sister of Charity commits today, as in the past, to living out Gospel values – “being a servant of Jesus Christ poor, in the person of the poor”.

This book tells the story of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron from the viewpoint of service to children and young people in schools, to First Nations people on a reserve and to the patients in their hospitals. They remained attuned to societal evolution and regularly updated their institutions. Always very much a part of the Congregation and ready to respond to the needs of the Church this group did not hesitate to send two of their members as missionaries to the Ivory Coast. These members have been in Africa now for more than a quarter of a century.

Today the apostolic activities of the Sisters are more diversified: as pastoral agents in parishes, as hospital pastoral care providers, in prison ministry, administration, and in rehabilitation programs for physically and mentally challenged individuals. Multiple and varied tasks no doubt, but activities where faith in Jesus Christ is expressed in the words of St. Vincent de Paul “the poor are our Masters”. Each individual person has a right to respect and dignity; they are God’s face in our world and truly our brothers and sisters.

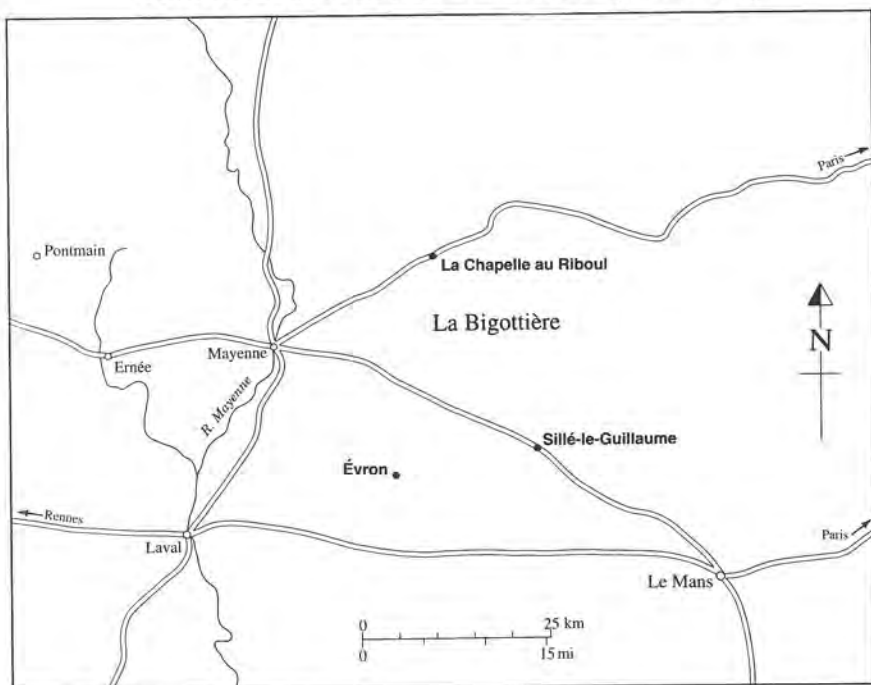
Whatever the service offered by the Sisters, as told in this book, it has always been their deep faith in God and in every human person which has been the motivating and driving force in their lives. It is also that faith which has made them sensitive and open to accept their responsibilities in the world and in the Church.

The history which you will discover, that of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron in Alberta and Saskatchewan, will offer you a lecture which is rich in events and which witnesses to the initiatives of these courageous and committed disciples.

This history concerns you, you who are interested in the story of your country, or in the place of women in your society and in the Church – and to you our youth who might hear a call to be involved in the building of our Church with and perhaps as a member of this Congregation whose members day after day were and remain risk takers and who accepted to live a simple life of service – a great adventure – loving God and others.

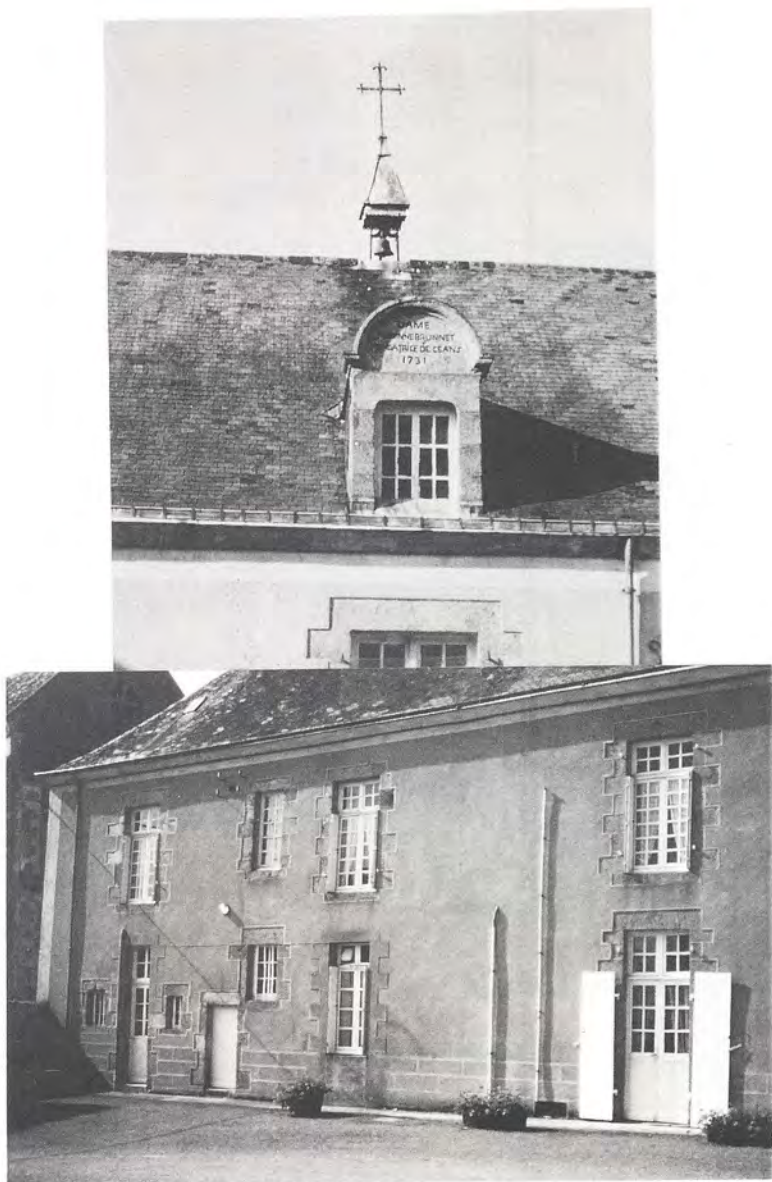
Sister Madeleine Bouttier
Superior General

THE REGION AROUND ÉVRON (FRANCE)





Madame Thulard
Foundress of the Congregation of the
Sisters of Charity N.D. d'Évron



Bell Tower and facade of 'La Chapelle-au-Riboul'



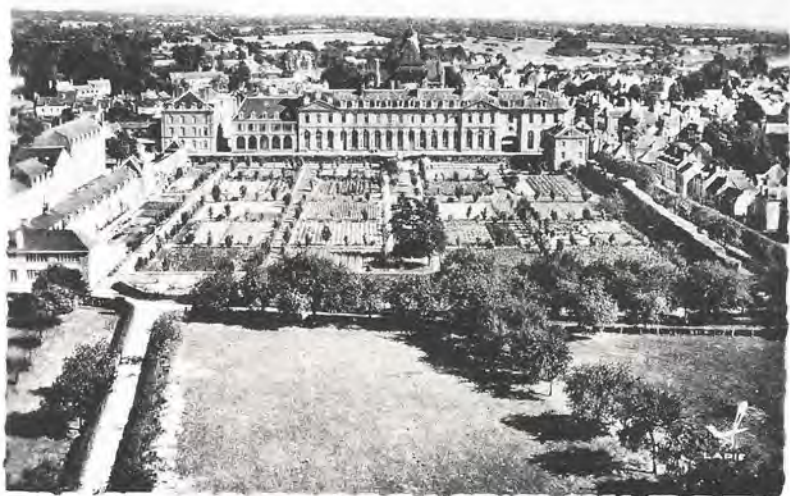
La Bigottière (farm house)



**Tapestry of the Sisters who were beatified in Rome,
May 1955**

**The latin text, as translated by Sister Marie Hélène
Olivereau, sce, Évron, reads as follows:**

*Having shed their blood at Laval, the blessed Marie
Lhuillier, Françoise Tréhet, Jeanne Véron, Françoise
Mézière, ascended quickly towards Christ, their Spouse.*



**The former Benedictine abbey of Évron (top photo)
became our Motherhouse (bottom photo)**

I

THE SISTERS OF CHARITY NOTRE-DAME D'ÉVRON IN EUROPE: IN RETROSPECT.

The aim of this overview is to initiate Canadian readers to the history of a French Religious congregation: the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron¹.

Following religious persecution during the French Revolution, beginning in 1793, and anti-congregational legislation from the end of the XIXth to the early XXth centuries, the sisters of this congregation (and others) were forced to cease all teaching and were even banished from their houses. They attempted to found missions in Belgium, but were forced to withdraw because of the devastation of World War I. Sisters were also missioned to England and Canada to establish works of charity.

Origins in 1682

Perrine Brunet was born in the hamlet of La Bigottière, a few kilometres northeast of Évron (Mayenne), on November 6, 1654. The youngest of four children, she was welcomed by her parents Jacques Brunet and Jeanne Bouvier who had her baptised a few hours after birth. Poor but profoundly christian this couple believed that the best heritage they could bestow upon their offspring was a good education. Seeing that Perrine showed a particular interest in learning they lost no time in sending her to take lessons from a neighbour lady who was eager to pass on to the precocious Perrine some of her knowledge.

In that era deciding on one's vocation required much thought and prayer, and the advice of one's confessor. Perrine sensed that she was called to become a nun. To her surprise, however, her parents were opposed to her wish and insisted, instead, that she accept a request of marriage to René Thulard, the local notary. Dutifully, Perrine submitted to her parents' wishes and at age 19 became Madame Thulard. She found inspiration in the book, *An Introduction to the Devout Life* by Francis of Sales. Such fervour inspired her spouse, and the couple lived in perfect harmony, practising mutual respect and enriching dialogue. They lived in the hamlet of Châteliers in Trans, and René, a devoted and loving husband, mentored Perrine so that she could understand business practices.

In 1664, the parish of La Chapelle-au-Riboul comprised 226 homes and was situated in a rocky and poor agricultural zone. The lower class of people could hardly make ends meet and were overtaxed to a point that a third of the inhabitants had recourse to charity. René Thulard, could not easily get rich in such a milieu, albeit sympathetic, without adding to his notarial duties that of merchant. Most notaries were in a similar position. So it was that the young couple lived a peaceful life awaiting the joys of parenthood. After six years of marriage, however, René Thulard died suddenly while on a business trip to Chartres. On this, his last earthly trip, he had prepared (and registered) his last will and testament in Le Mans. Perrine became a childless widow at the age of 26. Needless to say she was not the type of woman who would bemoan her fate and vegetate for the rest of her life.

Widowed and childless, Perrine returned to La Bigottière where she frequently prayed and meditated in a small oratory seeking to discover the will of God. More than ever she hoped

to realise her former wish of becoming a nun. Her sense of ardent charity did not allow her, however, to remain idle.

Remembering her own childhood days she assumed the role of educating the young girls in her neighbourhood. Avid to learn, the latter hastened to attend classes to such an extent that Perrine requested help from some of her friends. These enthusiastic and kind young women did not hesitate to attend to the sick after their classes. But Perrine, who still wished to enter a monastery, prayed fervently and sought the advice of her confessor who in turn, wished to consult Father Pierre Thulard, recently appointed parish priest at La Chapelle-au-Riboul. Without hesitation the latter told his sister-in-law that she would better serve the Church and society by continuing to "instruct and edify". He shared with her his dream of forming a small group whose mission would be "to remedy the illiteracy and lack of education as well as to bring a healing touch to broken and diseased bodies". Perrine accepted this new way of life and, with the help of Marie Château, her first companion, continued her dedication to young girls and to the sick.

Wishing to add more credibility to the project Father Thulard sent Perrine to the Ursulines' school in Le Mans, in order that she might learn "how to govern small schools". After that she went to Saint-Calais to receive instruction in "the art of governing the sick", under the direction of Mrs. Moreau, a competent nurse and excellent pharmacist. Two years later a happy and confident Perrine returned home and rejoined the four companions she had left; the rural school reopened and flourished.

Although modest the charitable institution soon received requests from neighbouring parishes. Father Thulard and his sister-in-law decided to offer similar services to surrounding parishes by founding at the Chapelle-au-Riboul "a program for

these celibate women who would help the poor in the countryside and wherever else they might be needed". And as a home was required to lodge these volunteers, Madame Thulard used the small inheritance from her husband to build a central house at La Chapelle-au-Riboul where she settled with her four first companions. United under one roof and inspired by the same ideal of charity, these young women felt the need for a common set of rules. Assisted by her parish priest Perrine Thulard wrote the first rules which these Daughters of Charity would follow. Despite her humility she accepted the charge of "Superior" of the group; however, the ecclesiastic superior, according to the norms of the diocese of Le Mans was a theologian appointed by the bishop.

The official act of foundation of the school at La Chapelle-au-Riboul did not occur until 1692. Indeed it was on September 5th of that year that Father Pierre Salin, former parish priest of La Chapelle-au-Riboul, executed the last will of Father Mathurin Peslier. The latter considered that "nothing was more important for the salvation of souls than that young people of both sexes be taught the mysteries and doctrine of our religion". He generously bequeathed an annuity of 50 pounds to the school at La Chapelle-au-Riboul.

Several benefactors, mostly retired priests, followed suit which contributed to the survival and expansion of the budding society. We shall next review how the society grew and developed through the services it offered and the number and quality of its members.

The Expansion of the Congregation up until the death of Perrine Thulard (1735)

The new society, which continued to receive recruits, was not a "cloistered" institution and followed closely the statutes of

the Sisters of Charity written by Saint Vincent de Paul and approved by the Archbishop of Paris in 1655. As teachers, the Sisters were expected to "act with affability and impartiality", and in the care of the poor and the ill, they were to serve with "attentiveness and joy".

Several obstacles arose when Madame Thulard indicated that she wished to found an institute based on charity and humility; the absence of resources, public apathy or mute antagonism, and even a divergence of opinion amongst her first companions. Despite all, the school for young girls grew as did the institute of charity for the poor and the sick. This was partly due to the number of priests who helped and encouraged her by placing their experience and resources at her disposal.

The rules written by Mother Thulard, and approved by ecclesiastical authority, were modified several times, mostly for practical and efficiency purposes. After being submitted to the Bishop of Le Mans, they were finally approved on February 12th, 1709.

The Society of La Chapelle-au-Riboul, as it was then called, wanted to be recognised by the State. A request was made to the Princess of Conty and she offered an impressive building situated in Sillé-le-Guillaume, a nearby town, which became the central administration². The Princess officially became patron of the Institute which took the name "Sisters of Charity of Sillé-le-Guillaume" and a royal charter was obtained from Louis XV in September 1721. The latter, registered in the Parliament of Paris on May 22nd, 1722, ensured a solid base for the Institution.

Father Pichereau, parish priest at La Chapelle-au-Riboul since 1717, was appointed to represent the Bishop of Le Mans and to assist Mother Thulard. Perrine was "beginning to feel

the weight of years, the weariness of the work and [...] the heavy moral responsibilities". Father Pichereau recommended that the sisters should never live isolated in a parish; they should be at least two. The Superior would always have the right to recall them to the Mother House or to associate them with another establishment.

In 1730, all the buildings at La Chapelle-au-Riboul were destroyed in a devastating fire. Two years later a new building emerged due to the generosity of the two General Vicars from Le Mans. It was there that Mother Thulard died on November 9th, 1735 at the age of 82.

By then, the Institute had founded some twenty-three schools for girls, including the one in Évron in 1720. According to Father Angot "no parish in lower Maine had been as favoured as [La Chapelle-au-Riboul] during the XVIIIth Century because of the presence of persons dedicated to the schooling of children"³.

The State of primary education in Sarthe and Mayenne

Under the *Ancien Régime* more than half the parishes in Sarthe had primary schools or colleges, most of which benefited from endowments. In other localities and poor villages the clergy, assisted by private teachers, established schools with excellent results.

Before the Revolution, 321 schools had been established in the 274 parishes in the diocese of Laval. In the diocese of Le Mans there existed no less than 176 boys' schools and 114 girls' schools. In Sarthe there were 290 schools, exclusive of private schools. According to Bishop Gonssans in 1784 more

than three-quarters of the total number of Sisters of Charity were established in his diocese of Le Mans.

**The Sisters of Charity
are dispersed during the Revolution (1789 – 1794)**

The spiritual family of Mother Thulard counted more than two hundred members when the French Revolution began in July 1789. From the time of Mother Thulard's death until the election of Mother Mailay, six General Superiors had successively governed the Congregation. Elected in 1784, Mother Mailay remained in charge until 1805. An energetic woman, she was capable of enduring great fatigue and profound sorrow. The Sisters, although scattered throughout the countryside, kept in touch with her and despite many hardships remained united with one another.

As it would be impossible to mention all the difficulties encountered by the Sisters of Charity of La Chapelle-au-Riboul, we shall only indicate the decrees approved by the Constituent Assembly that left their mark on the institute.

- August 26, 1789: Adoption of the Declaration of Rights (freedom, right to property, security and resistance to oppression);
- December 2, 1789: Despoliation of property and goods belonging to the Church of France;
- February 13, 1790: Abolition of all religious orders and congregations with vows of poverty, chastity and obedience;
- April 10, 1790: Nationalisation of the property and goods of clergy;

- November 27, 1790: All clergy occupying an official office must swear fidelity to the Constitution;
- April 17, 1791: Clergy who had not sworn fidelity were removed from official office.

Persecution against the Sisters of La Chapelle-au-Riboul had not yet begun. After all, they were not cloistered and had not pronounced vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Time, however, was quickly running out. On August 30th, 1791 the prosecutor of Martigné accused the teaching Sisters, because in his view they had spread the seeds of dissension by expressing opinions contrary to the direction of the Revolution; they had refused to pronounce the new civic oath and they attended masses celebrated by insubordinate priests. He therefore requested authorisation to evict the nuns from their homes and force them to leave the parishes within three days. Yet, on November 9th, in an address to the citizens of Mayenne, he recommended tolerance and respect of individual freedoms as laid down in the Constitution, adding “the services rendered by these hospitaler nuns militate in their favour”. There followed a curious turn of events when, upon receipt of a request from the parishes of La Chapelle-au-Riboul, Champeon and Hardanges, that the Sisters of Charity be allowed to remain in their homes and continue to look after the children and the sick, the same prosecutor turned it down⁴.

We could cite several other examples. The civil authorities, in essence, attempted to force the nuns to pronounce the new civic oath which they objected to except in a few rare instances. The Archbishop of Boisgelin of Aix requested Pius VI to accept the new French Civil Constitution. After a delay of three months the latter declared the civic oath “heretical and schismatic, and suspended each priest who had taken the oath

unless he retracted within forty days". The French Assembly replied by annexing the Comtat-Venaissin area and Avignon, in September 1791. Diplomatic relations between France and the Holy See ceased and were only restored in 1801⁵.

The sisters of La Chapelle-au-Riboul kept their habit until August 8th 1793. Although they were forbidden to wear it they remained faithful to their vocation and promises: to transmit the love of God to poor children and helpless and abandoned sick people. On August 8th, Commissioners from the district of Mayenne inventoried the effects of the House at La Chapelle-au-Riboul – an act that preceded expulsion. The inventory signed by Mother Mailay and her assistants bears the date of January 24th 1794. The nuns were promised a pension, which they never received; yet they were charged for the food they consumed.

Several Sisters were reduced to living in extreme misery, were mistreated and even imprisoned. Sister Peloquin was imprisoned at Évron on July 31st 1794 for a period of five months. On March 13th 1794, Sister Françoise Tréhet was beheaded along with twelve other persons at a guillotine set up in the village square of Ernée; they had all refused to pronounce the civic oath. A week later, Sister Jeanne Véron, sick with dropsy, was transported to the same guillotine on a stretcher and executed along with five others. Marie L'Huilier and Françoise Mézière suffered the same fate. The relics of these "Martyrs of 1794", interred at Saint-Pierre-des-Landes, were exhumed and reburied in a blessed cemetery in 1814⁶.

From a human point of view, the life works of Mother Thulard seemed to have come to nought: buildings had been confiscated and sold, education of children ended, personnel were dispersed and in hiding. But in the same way as "the blood of martyrs had laid the seed for new Christians" the suffering and death of Mother Thulard's followers bore marvellous

results. In the course of the XIXth Century their numbers will multiply eightfold.

The Sisters of Charity regroup at Évron

After the revolutionary upheaval, the prefect of Le Mans and the prefect of Mayenne were engaged in an administrative duel, the aim of which was to rebuild the Institute, each under his own property jurisdiction. Mother Mailay, counselled by Bishop de Pidoll of Le Mans, preferred to return to Mayenne where the civil authorities promised to give her the buildings and part of the grounds of the ancient Benedictine abbey in lieu of the former Mother House at La Chapelle-au-Riboul⁷.

With renewed energy and inspired by the foundress' charism, Mother Mailay settled in Évron on December 21, 1803. She regrouped her dispersed Sisters and the Institute was rebuilt. It would henceforth be called "Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron". The Congregation numbered 143 sisters, including 28 novices, 100 of whom were reunited in Évron. In 1908 Napoleon definitely conceded the former Benedictine abbey to the Congregation and approved the Institutes' statutes on November 13th, 1810. By then some seventy establishments had been reopened in Sarthe, Mayenne and Orne. The Sisters finally recovered their former Mother House at La Chapelle-au-Riboul on August 3rd, 1824.

On June 24th 1838, the Bishop of Le Mans, Jean-Baptiste Bouvier, approved the new Constitution and Rule of the Congregation. This was considered a new beginning by the sisters; 143 of them pronounced perpetual vows, while 229 opted for a quinquennial promise which would be a preparation for final vows. Two days later Mother Anne Françoise Julienne

Poussier was elected Superior General, a post she held for 18 years in the course of which she opened 78 new establishments.

On August 11th, 1843, His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI, in response to a request by Bishop Bouvier, declared the Institute "very laudable" without, however, approving its constitutions. In 1855 the establishment in Évron was transferred from the jurisdiction of the diocese of Le Mans to the newly created diocese of Laval.

During the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) Mother General Houdayer offered the use of the gardens of Évron to the government so that locally recruited militiamen (called Mobiles) could install their tents. A few weeks later the Mother House became a hospital filled with wounded soldiers, and others affected by typhus and smallpox; other houses offered similar services.

Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, officially recognised in 1765 by His Holiness Pope Clement XIII, was extended to the whole Church. A century before, Marguerite-Marie Alacoque (1648-1690) had received a revelation of this devotion in the course of four apparitions, the most important of which had occurred during the octave of Corpus Christi, in 1675.

On March 25th, 1874, Mother Aimée Morinière, Superior General, announced her decision to consecrate the congregation of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The announcement of this project, already approved by His Holiness Pope Pius IX, became the object of a celebration organised by the Bishop of Laval⁸.

A new storm is in the making

Following a take-over of power in the 1880's by Republicans whose inspiration came from Masonic doctrine, new ordeals were in the offing. A decisive battle was mounted against congregational schools. On November 28th 1882, the government forbade the teaching of religion in France.

In 1901 the congregation counted 1660 Sisters including novices and postulants, and owned 318 properties. The Sisters taught 30,000 students and cared for more than 3,000 patients in their hospitals.

On July 7th a new law stipulated that "teaching of all type and nature is forbidden by religious orders". As the schools were closed by the police the Sisters sought refuge in the Mother House at Évron. Mother Cousin, the Superior General, said to them: "I cannot invite you strongly enough to have confidence in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for I am firmly convinced that He will save us and that our dear family of Évron shall not perish"⁹.

Since apostolic work became impossible to carry out in France, Mother Cousin appealed to Bishop Heylen of Namur, Belgium, who accepted the congregation with pleasure and allowed it to settle at Sohier in 1903. This first house would serve as a rallying point for other groups to come.

The following year, at the request of a Benedictine monk who was originally from Sarthe, the Sisters of Évron received permission to settle in Filey, Yorkshire, England. In 1912 they opened a Boarding School at Romiley near Manchester. Thus, the followers of Mother Thulard, driven from France, contributed to the Church's mission to "go and teach all nations".



Mother Marie-Louise Rector
First Provincial Superior in Canada



**Trochu, 1909 – In the Coulee, l. to r. the infirmary,
the convent and the school.**



The Foundresses

**First row: Srs. L. Reboux, M-L. Recton, M-J. Rondo and
J. Boisseau**

**Second row: C. Février, M-T. Laigre, A. Buttier and
V. Bruhay.**

II

THE MOVE TO ALBERTA

The part played by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

The moral, spiritual and intellectual qualities of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron were well known by some of the Oblate missionaries who had left France in 1845 to spread the word of God among the people who inhabited the great Canadian north-west. Bishop Vital Grandin came from Mayenne, whereas his cousin Emile Grouard was a native of Brulon, in Sarthe. When Bishop Emile Legal succeeded Bishop Grandin in St. Albert, on June 3rd, 1902, he retained Father Hippolyte Leduc as his Vicar General. Born in Évron on April 30th, 1842, the latter had studied at Précigné and Mayenne before he was missioned to Canada in 1864. He had first hand knowledge of the teaching abilities and the quality care offered to the sick by the Sisters of Évron; he also was familiar with most of the area which would become Alberta in 1905. Bishop Legal requested Father Leduc to assist him in the administration of his immense diocese, and to supervise the construction of the new cathedral being built in St. Albert as well as the church of Saint Joachim in Edmonton. On November 30th, 1912¹ Bishop Legal decided to transfer his metropolitan seat to the provincial capital.

In 1903, a few French cavalry officers and aristocrats fled their homeland, affected as it was by the persecution against the Church and the religious orders, and probably by the famous Dreyfus affair. They settled on ranches southeast of Red Deer. A particular group settled on a tract of land called the Saint Ann

Ranch, and since the senior officer's name was Colonel Armand Trochu, they gave his name to the nearby hamlet.

Reverend Father Pierre Bazin, member of the Order Sainte-Marie de Tinchébray (psm) a congregation founded in Orne, north of Évron, was named the priest responsible for the residents of Trochu and area; eventually a church was built in Trochu².

When Father Leduc returned to Évron with Bishop Grandin in 1879, and again in 1893, he talked to the Sisters about the Oblate missions opening up in Western Canada, and of the need to have nuns who could teach and/or care for the sick.

On the advice of Father J.B. Lemius, promoter of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Cousin wrote a letter to Bishop Legal offering to send a group of her Sisters to Alberta. Wishing to know more about the situation at Trochu, she also wrote to Madame Philomène Butruille, wife of a rancher. Here is the reply sent by the lady who would welcome the nuns on their arrival a year later.

Trochu Valley, October 21st, 1908

My Reverend Mother,

I wish to express, first of all, my thanks for the trust you have placed in me. Alberta is a big country and there is a real need for boarding schools and hospitals. I very much want to see a group of sisters settle here; our Center is already fairly important and if a hospital were to be built it would have an extensive field of action as it is 50 miles away from a city. A principal condition that would be required of the nuns would be their knowledge of English: two out of four must speak English fluently, since French

people are rare and English is the language adopted by the cosmopolitan population that lives here.

Bishop Legal is the head of the Church in Alberta. We had the honour of his visit in September, at which time I told him of our wish to have a hospital. He replied that he reserves the right to decide, but would also abide by the wishes of the population. In other words he would send nuns provided that land, a building and operational funds were advanced. If none of the above conditions could be met he would consider a small hospital, beginning with three or four Sisters who would run it at their charge and be responsible for the finances. People are frequently sick or have accidents, and as the city is far away the services of a hospital would be in demand. [...]

As a French and Catholic colony we are responsible for the expenses of the local priest and for the support of the church. We could easily offer a piece of land and through a collection help put up a building. That is all we could do. To speak very frankly the country is poor – until the railway comes through and that may take another two years – our resources do not allow us to do more. [...]

Rest assured that you would be welcome here. There is much good to be done and all would bless your presence. Please accept, Reverend Mother, my respectful wishes.

(Signed) P. Butruille

P.S. We have two doctors here, one French-speaking, the other English; both are also pharmacists³.

At Évron, despite the uncertainty, a few sisters prepare for a departure that might take place in the summer of 1909.

The visit of Bishop Pascal, o.m.i., from Prince Albert "left excellent impressions and serious guaranties of hope for the future". Here is the much awaited reply of Bishop Legal:

St. Albert, Alberta, January 11th, 1909

Reverend and very dear Mother,

Thank you for recalling my memorable visit to your esteemed community and for your good wishes and the prayers offered to God in my favour. In return I sincerely hope that God will protect you, your group and your work and that he allows you to expand your field of action since it will widen your influence for good. I most sincerely wish to see this expansion extend to the Diocese of St. Albert, for everything I know about your institute makes me hope that it would lend us much support. Before answering your letter of November 29th, I obtained the opinion of the priest who serves Trochu Valley and consulted about the possibility of your community settling in that locality. The latter is not yet very big but its residents have high hopes that it will increase in importance. What appears to be needed and could be done at this time, I believe, is a small simply equipped hospital. A Catholic school could also be entrusted to the Sisters if some of them can teach in English as well as in French and have diplomas which are acceptable here. If you decide to settle in Trochu you will be cordially welcomed by myself and I sincerely hope that many others will follow this first establishment in the not too distant future.

I therefore consider your proposal accepted in principle; certain details such as the numbers of Sisters to be sent, the departure dates, etc. still have to be resolved. You

may have already received proposals from some Trochu residents; you could obtain the land for free. But it would be prudent on your part to have it legally transferred to your community. As a group you will have the right to own property through what is called an act of incorporation.

Therefore, rest assured, my very dear Mother, that your Sisters will be well received. It would be best for you to bring them personally and see for yourself the situation and the conditions of the country.

I recommend myself to the prayers of your pious community and bless you with affection, my Reverend and very dear Mother, Devotedly yours in our Lord and Mary Immaculate.

Émile J. Legal, Bishop
of St. Albert, o.m.i.⁴

Wishing to facilitate the installation of the group, Father Leduc bought from Colonel Trochu for the modest sum of two dollars, seven acres (2.83 hectares) adjacent to the church property in Trochu⁵.

An exploration trip

The positive reaction to this project pleased Mother Cousin and her General Council. She therefore decided to explore the situation in Alberta before proceeding with a definite decision.

Accompanied by Sister Claire Roimier, Novice Director, and by Canon A. Lemanceau, chaplain, Mother Cousin left Paris on February 24th, 1909. Sister Marie-Louise Recton who had

spent a couple of years in England to improve her knowledge of the English language joined the group in Liverpool. She would act as interpreter throughout the trip. On March 14th, Father Leduc warmly welcomed the group in Calgary and accompanied them by train to Strathcona, and thence to St. Albert where they would meet the Bishop. Father Leduc then escorted the visitors to several locations where he thought they might possibly wish to settle, including Trochu.

Immediately upon her return to France, Mother Cousin received a letter from Father Leduc.

Your founding house in Trochu will certainly be the beginning of an important series of foundations. Since your visit here new churches have been opened in the diocese of St. Albert. On the boundary of this diocese a new apostolic vicariate [Yukon] and a new regular diocese [Calgary] will shortly be erected. Do come back in a few years and you will be happy to see the deep roots your dear sisters will have established in our Canadian soil⁶.

The above remarks reveal how quickly the face of Western Canada was changing but also the accuracy of Father Leduc's predictions, as we shall see in the following narrative of the history of the Sisters of Évron.

The Seed

Upon her return to Évron, Mother Cousin and her General Council took the firm decision to send some Sisters to Canada. Their departure was scheduled for the end of July. Before Mother Cousin's letter had arrived on Bishop Legal's desk,

Father Leduc had written to her about an important event that might affect the decision to settle in Trochu. The Grand Trunk Railway Company that was laying a second line between Calgary and Edmonton had decided to by-pass Trochu. This decision might preclude the project of building a hospital there. Father Leduc suggested a dispensary and a small boarding school be constructed instead. He then added that once one of the Sisters received her teaching certificate she could be head of the Trochu Public School.

Mother Cousin and her Council, accepting Father Leduc's suggestion, decided to continue with the Trochu proposal. A group of eight nuns, apprehensive but placing their confidence in God, left Évron for America on July 29th as planned⁷. No one could have foreseen at that time that some twenty houses would be opening in Alberta and Saskatchewan, in the course of the next 90 years.

The Founders: a profile

On their arrival by train in Calgary, on August 14th, 1909, Father Ciron, psm, himself a native of Évron and parish priest of Carstairs, welcomed the Sisters. The 15th of August, Feast of the Assumption of Mary, the Sisters remained in Calgary. The next day Father Ciron drove them by car to Trochu where they arrived at 8 p.m.

The founding group consisted of: Sisters Marie-Louise Rector, Superior, Marie-Joseph Rondo, Marie-Joseph Laigre, Léontine Reboux, Marie-Victoire Bruhay, Joséphine Boisseau, Marie-Augustine Buttier and Cécile Février. Here is a profile of these heroic pioneers.

When one approached Sister Marie-Louise **Rector** one felt drawn to her by her charm and her quiet disposition. Above all

one sensed her supernatural spirit, which led to respect and even veneration. Named "Visitor for Canada" on September 19th, 1912, and Provincial Superior on January 25th, 1913, she remained in Trochu until she passed away on August 22nd, 1930.

Sister Marie-Joseph **Rondo**, employed all her talents in the service of her community and the parish. As first counselor and provincial secretary, she assumed more than her share of responsibilities: teaching, painting, music, sewing, laundry, housework, land clearing and gardening. She was chosen as the first Director of Novices. The Novitiate opened at Trochu on September 8th, 1914 and, Sister Rondo with her zeal and competence remained in charge for 42 years. She replaced Mother Marie-Louise as Provincial Superior from 1930 to 1954. Ceaselessly preoccupied with the spiritual, intellectual and material welfare of the Sisters, she was both firm and tender hearted. She died at the age of 90 on October 7th, 1968.

Of Breton origin, Sister Marie-Joseph **Laigre**, called Marie-Thérèse in order to avoid confusion with Sister Rondo, had been the "life of the party" during the crossing. Assigned to teach, she was sent to study English and obtain her teaching certificate at the University of Alberta, boarding with the Faithful Companions of Jesus, a religious order established in Edmonton. In 1930 she was named local Superior in Trochu, a position she held until 1938 when she was chosen to be 4th Assistant General and had to return to France.

Sister Léontine **Reboux**, distinguished, affable and well educated, was sacristan, portress and responsible for calling attention to community prayer times. She spent 50 years in Trochu, dying at the age of 82.

Sister Marie Victoire **Bruhay**, on arrival, was given the responsibility of the dispensary. Her stay at Trochu was of

short duration as she was chosen to open the Vegreville hospital the following year.

Sister Joséphine **Boisseau** was named nurse at the Trochu Coulee "hospital". Wishing to better serve potential clients she accepted to spend a few weeks at the Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary under the direction of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal (called Grey Nuns), in order to become acquainted with the English language. She became an excellent nursing instructor at the Vegreville School of Nursing and, later, served as Superior in that community. She died on September 26th, 1959.

Sister Cécile **Février**, also appointed to serve at the Trochu dispensary, accompanied Sister Joséphine to Calgary. With time she managed to speak sufficient english. The Mother General had suggested that the nuns "spend half of their recreation time speaking English".

Sister Marie Augustine **Buttier**, the youngest of the group, found it very difficult to leave her family. Despite this she was "neither the least merry nor the least generous" in her work as a cook which at the beginning, was difficult because of very limited supplies; the kitchen was rudimentary and situated at the rear of the house. Sister Buttier spent much energy at her work and died from tuberculosis on July 8th, 1929⁸.

Life in the Coulee

This is how the chronicles describes the arrival of the Sisters in Trochu:

The Sisters were received in the Coulee by members of the Butruille, Eckenfelder, de Chauny and de Reinach families as well as several other

persons gathered for the occasion. They were introduced into the former stopping-place which had been cleaned and made ready by kind and charitable hands. The ladies of the colony had thought of many details, and a crucifix placed in each room offered a special touch. They had cut these out of the French newspaper, *La Croix*, graciously framed them, attaching a blessed palm to each one. This gesture, as pious as it was delicate, found a way to the Sisters' hearts. The latter immediately sensed the kindness of these people who welcomed them⁹.

Early next day the sisters went about busily preparing their new home. A few days had gone by when several injured persons requested treatment at the dispensary. The Sisters tried to delay their admission since the premises were not really adequate to receive sick people, but they gave in following renewed requests by the latter and Dr. Milne who found that everything was perfect as long as he had "qualified nurses".

Two rooms were prepared in a hurry. Since carpenters were not available, Fathers Bazin, Anciaux and Ciron, p.s.m., did their best to fill in and managed to transform two granaries into a hospital. They also set up a chapel in one of the rooms of the living quarters.

Following requests from several families, the Sisters also took charge of teaching several children; boarders and day pupils were accepted as space allowed.

Thanks to Father Bazin's initiative a school was built: on the ground floor, two rooms, the larger one to be used as a classroom; on the upper floor, two dormitories for the boarders

and two small rooms to accommodate the Sisters who supervised.

This first school was later moved to the top of the hill in the enclosure where the Sisters had built Saint Mary's Hospital. In 1912 it was again moved, this time to the site of the actual school which had legally received the name *Pontmain School*¹⁰. Up until then the Sisters' services had been of a benevolent nature since none of them had the teaching diplomas required to function officially. Sister Marie-Gabrielle Guerrier arrived in September 1911, so along with Sister Marie-Thérèse Laigre, who had obtained the required qualifications, they shared the task of teaching.

Thus, in a new land, the Sisters found themselves once again with children which an iniquitous law had snatched from them in their own country. Despite all the attention and help they received from the priests and their sympathetic parishioners in these first years of exile, they were often forced to practice self-denial. They never did without the essentials in life but missed those thousand sweet nothings to which they had been used to in their Mother country.

*How sweet our new Bethlehem:
its poverty, and humility
gave to their hearts' happiness
in that cold and humid "Coulee"*¹¹.

Dr. Milne, local medical practitioner, was overjoyed at having such competent nurses. The Sisters, like everyone else for that matter, missed having running water, sewers and electricity, but accepted the extra work and lack of commodities in a spirit of abnegation. These basic installations in the Coulee were temporary. Mother Marie-Louise wasted no time in preparing plans and estimates for the future Saint Mary's

Hospital and Convent. Since the new railway line had not yet arrived at Trochu, problems caused by transporting building materials were solved as they arose. Father Leduc himself chose the site for the new building. It was to be constructed on the hill, near the future railway, not in the Coulee. On August 16th, 1910, he came to celebrate the first anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters in Trochu. Soon after he took a trip to France, which allowed him to see his elder sister at Évron. The latter, a Sister in the Order of the Holy Family and a missionary in Basutoland [Lesotho] for 43 years met her brother for the first time since his departure for Canada in 1864. Both went to Rome where His Holiness Pope Pius X received them¹².

On October 30th, 1910, it was Father Jean-Baptiste Lemius, o.m.i., apostle and former chaplain of Montmartre, who was given the honour of blessing the cornerstone of Saint Mary's Hospital and Convent. He had come to Montreal to participate in the Eucharistic congress held between September 6th and 16th¹³, and had insisted on visiting the Sister in Trochu before returning to France. He had, after all, accompanied Mother Cousin's party on its reconnaissance trip and had encouraged the Sisters to expatriate for the Glory of God. The Saint Mary's Hospital and convent were officially opened in 1911.

In the meantime a second group of Sisters had arrived in Trochu from France: Sisters Victorine Perlemoine, Baptistine Cottureau, Angèle Bouhours, Marie-Louise Martigné and Marie Doisneau¹⁴.

During the summer of 1912, Mother Marie Cousin, accompanied by Mother Marie Bourgouin, 1st Assistant, and Father Lemanceau, chaplain, returned to Canada to visit the sisters, not only in Trochu but also in Vegreville and Strathcona (South Edmonton). Towards the end of July, the blessing of

the bell – a gift from Father Bazin – took place. The bell was given the name Marie Anne Perrine Julienne [see appendix H].

Among the small group of Frenchmen, mostly ex-cavalry officers, who formed the nucleus of the future parish were the following: De Beaudrap, De Chauny, De Reinack, Butruille, Devilder, Figarolle, Papillard, Trochu, etc. When war was declared in 1914 most, if not all, were called up for service in France, and returned to their homeland. Their ranches were taken over by immigrants from Poland, Germany, Great Britain, Ukraine, Hungary, etc., each with his own culture and beliefs. Language barriers did not intimidate them in this largely anglophone province.

The Sisters inevitably learned and became fluent in the English language, at school as well as in the hospital. In the course of time they witnessed that the seed of faith planted in the coulee matured along with a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary¹⁵.

An abundant harvest is expected

The opening of a Noviciate in Trochu, on September 8th, 1914, facilitated the recruitment of Canadian postulants. Here is a recapitulation of the Sisters who, by then, had come from France:

Group	Departure Date	Number of Sisters
1 (founders)	July 29 th , 1909	8
2	July 13 th , 1910	5
3	December 1 st , 1910	4
4	December 13 th , 1910	2
5	September 13 th , 1911	6
6	May 24 th , 1912	2

7	October 3 rd , 1912	2
8	October 9 th , 1913	1
9	March 12 th , 1914	2
Total:		32

We must also add four Sisters of French origin who completed their Noviciate at Trochu.

The congregation had accepted to establish new communities in Canada. With help from the Oblate Missionaries and the priests of Sainte-Marie de Tinchebray, among whom several were natives of Mayenne, Orne and Sarthe, they had opened three Houses within three years. The seed had been firmly planted; all it needed was a good watering followed by the rays of God's sun. Here is a resume of the major events for the 1909 – 1917 period:

August 16 th , 1909	Foundation of Saint Mary's House, Trochu
October 4 th , 1910	Departure of 4 Sisters for Vegreville
April 3 rd , 1911	Saint Mary's Convent-Hospital is transferred from the coulee to the hill
September 1 st , 1911	Opening of Saint Mary's Hospital
Summer, 1912	Visit of Mother General Cousin
September 1 st , 1912	Opening of Pontmain School in Trochu
September 19 th , 1912	Sister Marie-Louise Recton named "Visitor" for Canada
December 9 th , 1912	Canonical erection (by indult) of the "Province of Canada"
January 25 th , 1913	Nomination of Sister Marie-Louise Recton as Provincial Superior

July 29 th , 1913	Death of Mother General Cousin in Évron, France
September 8 th , 1914	Opening of the Noviciate in Trochu, by Bishop Legal.
February 12 th , 1915	Canonical erection of the parish of Sainte-Anne-des-Prairies, at Trochu. The first church had been built in 1907.
June 29 th , 1917	Death of Sister Angèle Bouhours, the first French-born Sister of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron who died in Canada.

No new arrivals of nuns from France took place during the First World War. However, four Sisters did arrive between 1919 and 1947. Of the 36 French Sisters, the majority came from Mayenne [24], whereas 4 came from Sarthe, 3 from Ile-et-Vilaine, 3 from Charente, 2 from Orne, 2 from the lower Loire and 1 from Paris. Only six of them returned to France; the others are at rest in the congregation's cemeteries at Trochu or Edmonton.

It is the history of these valiant pioneers from France and their Canadian companions, dedicated to the education of children and the care of the sick, that we shall attempt to recount in the next chapters.

Establishment of the Canadian Province December 9th, 1912

After the approval of the Constitutions, in Rome, copies of the latter were sent to the Sisters in June 1911. A re-organization took place in the three existing houses in the Province: Trochu, Vegreville and Strathcona. In January 1912, local Councils were named consisting of a Superior and two

Counsellors; financial affairs were entrusted to a fourth Sister named the bursar.

In September 1912, the mandate of Sister Marie-Louise Recton, Superior of Saint Mary's Convent at Trochu, was extended for another three year period. She was also appointed "Visitor" of the Houses founded in Canada, until the election of a Provincial Superior who would carry the responsibility of the Province. All the Sisters in the Province heartily approved this decision and placed their trust in the one person they already loved as their Mother.

According to article 240 of the 1911 Constitution, the erection of a Province required approval by the Holy See. A province had to have at least three Houses and was required to establish its own Noviciate as soon as possible. Through an indult of December 9th, 1912, the Province of Canada was canonically erected and Sister Marie-Louise Recton, Provincial of this new province, was also authorized to be the Superior in Trochu¹⁶. This news which finally arrived in early February was welcomed with joy.

In March 1913, the Congregation in Canada was legally recognized in Alberta under the corporate name of "*LES SOEURS DE LA CHARITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME D'ÉVRON*". On the 25th of March with help from Father Leduc who had assisted this religious family since its inception, the Statutes were adopted¹⁷.

In 1914, consideration was given to founding a Noviciate in the Province of Canada, in order to respond to religious vocations. Already a few young girls, hesitant before the prospect of going to the noviciate in France, had decided to enter other congregations. On May 20th, 1914, Mother Marie Bourgouin, Superior General, requested and obtained

permission from Rome to open a noviciate in Trochu. Archbishop Legal of Edmonton – the see had moved from St. Albert on November 30th, 1912 – sent authorization to the Provincial Superior on June 25th, 1914, to open a noviciate. He added his sincere wish that many religious vocations would be forthcoming.

Copies of three related manuscript documents have been added as evidence, in Appendix A:

1. Letter from Mother M. Cousin, Superior General, Évron, dated January 25th, 1913.
2. An Act to incorporate *Les Soeurs de la Charité de Notre-Dame d'Évron*, passed March 25th, 1913.
3. Canonical erection of a Noviciate in Trochu, signed by Archbishop Émile Legal, June 25th, 1914.

¹ Baffie, *Aperçu*, p. 287-311. *La Congrégation*, op.cit, p. 322-337. Abbé Augustin Ceuneau, un compagnon de Mgr Grandin. *Le R.P. Alphonse-Hippolyte Leduc, o.m.i.* (1842-1918). Rennes, Imp La Nouvelliste de Bretagne, 1942. pp 66-71. Gaston Carrière. o.m.i., *Dictionnaire biographique des O.M.I. au Canada*, Tome II. University of Ottawa Press, 1977, p. 288-289.

² See Trochu and Tinchébray in *Place Names of Alberta*, Ottawa, KP, 1929, p. 125- 127.

Lcol Rousset, *histoire générale de la Guerre Franco-Allemande [1870-1871]*, Paris, Lib Tallandier, ca 1991, Tome I, p. 364 *ET SEQ.*, see Gen. Trochu's photo on page 375.

Also see "The Origins of Trochu" at Appendix F.

³ AG SCE Chroniques 1908, p 11-15, See *The Origins of Trochu* at Appendix F.

⁴ AG SCE, Chroniques, 1909, pp 38-41.

⁵ Baffie, *Aperçu*, p. 287-191. Letter, H. Leduc to Father Lemanceau, chaplain, May 29, 1909, APA.

⁶ A. Ceuneau, *Un compagnon de Mgr. Grandin*, p. 68-70.

⁷ Correspondence, AG SCE.

⁸ M,S "Les Soeurs de la Charité de Notre-Dome d'Évron, s.a, s.d., 19 p. AP SCE, Extracts from letters. AG SCE, Dossier Trochu.

⁹ "Arrivée des Soeurs d'Évron à Trochu" in Bulletin semestriels, No. 1, AG SCE.

See *The Origins of Trochu* in Appendix F.

¹⁰ This name calls to mind the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary to children in the village of Pontmain, in Mayenne, in 1871.

¹¹ Translation by the author, from AG SCE, Bulletin semestriel No. 1.

¹² A. Ceuneau, *Un compagnon de Mgr Grandin*, p. 73

¹³ During the Eucharistic Congress held in Notre-Dame Cathedral, in Montreal, Archbishop Bourne of Westminster, who had previously spent several hours conversing with Bishop Michael Fallon of London, Ontario, took the podium. He reminded the faithful how the French language had long been the sole language of expression for Catholicism, civilization and progress in Canada, but that another language – English – had replaced it in importance for ordinary fare. If therefore Canada, or better, America as a whole, was to be won over to the Catholic Church, it had to be done in the English language.

Henri Bourassa. Founder of *Le Devoir*, replied to the Archbishop. After having mentioned the rights of catholic workers and those of catholic education in the schools and colleges but also in universities, he claimed full rights for all francophones across Canada. He also briefly recalled the immense missionary effort provided by the Province of Quebec, not only in English Canada but also in the U.S. and in numerous countries of the world. “Finally”, said he, “do not extinguish this intense source of light that has lit up the continent for three hundred years. [...] We are but a handful, truly. But it is not at the school of Christ that I learned to count rights and moral force on the basis of numbers and riches [...] Let us climb to Calvary and there [...] learn the lesson of tolerance and true Christian charity [...]”. Quoted from *Hommage à Henri Bourassa*, Montreal, *Le Devoir*, October 25th, 1952, p. 97-114.

¹⁴ AG SCE, *Régistre des Nominations*

¹⁵ “Trochu Valley – Pays de Mission”. Sister Annette Labbé, “La dévotion à la Vierge Marie, Mère de Dieu”, Trochu, MS, post 1963, AG SCE [1987].

¹⁶ AP SCE, *Chronique*, Trochu, December 19th, 1912.

¹⁷ See Appendix A.



Trochu, 1915 – St. Mary's Hospital and Convent on the hill.



St. Anne of the Prairies Church - 1920



The Sisters' garden



A bit of recreation



**Children at the Pontmain School; Maria Lemay
is beside the Sister in the second row.**



Trochu – Pontmain School



Trochu – St. Mary's Hospital (1979)



Trochu - St. Mary's Nursing Home (1985)

III

EXPANSION IN ALBERTA

Trochu, 1915 – 1999

Historical events in the Province

The year 1930, for the Province of Canada, began in the shadow of the cross. The health of Mother Provincial was a source of concern and worry. After several months of intense suffering Mother Marie-Louise Rector died a few minutes before midnight at the end of the octave of the Assumption of our Lady¹.

Once again the citizens of Trochu showed their deep sympathy to the grief-stricken Sisters. The town-folk paid for the cost of the hearse and the parishioners offered the cross that was installed at the head of her grave.

Two months later the Sisters rejoiced upon learning that Sister Marie-Joseph Rondo had been named the new provincial. She was allowed, under indult, to remain Mistress of Novices

When classes opened in September 1931 the number of children enrolled had decreased from the previous year. This was obviously due to the Great Depression and the resulting departure of several families who, discouraged after successive crop failures, had decided to migrate to northern Alberta in the hope of a brighter future.

At the beginning of April 1932, in accordance with instructions received from Mother General, the Sisters celebrated a devout triduum in honour of the 250th anniversary of the founding of their Congregation. By month's end the Sisters had

another cause to rejoice: the consecration of a private cemetery on their property².

During the months of January and February 1934 a project planned for some time was finally realized; the enlargement of the convent chapel. The lack of appropriate space in the latter was especially felt during the annual retreats. Mother Marie-Joseph did most of the painting. Enlarged and renovated, the new chapel nevertheless kept the original charm given it by Mother Marie-Louise Rector. The Trochu parishioners who often participated in religious services in the chapel bought new pews by way of thanks.

The annual retreat in 1934, preached by Father Chauvin, psm, former parish priest of Trochu and long-time friend, was followed by the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Évron in Canada. Fathers Chauvin and Wilfred McNab, former pastors, as well as Father Joseph W. Burke, the present parish priest, delivered messages of profound admiration for the Sisters.

On August 21st, Father Henri Routhier, omi, a great apostle of youth, inaugurated the first in a series of retreats for young girls. These retreats were held in the convent.

During the summer of 1935 a small infirmary was set up near the chapel. Mother Marie-Joseph saw to every detail and made sure that these rooms would be comfortable and pleasing for the Sisters who would eventually use them. To allow for fresh air and sunshine a large gallery was also added to the western side of the convent.

This infirmary was used earlier than had been foreseen. In mid-July 1935 alarming news came from Bonnyville, Sister Marie Pervis has been diagnosed with cancer, while Sister Marie-

Eugénie Authenac's health had considerably declined to a point where she required attention and rest. Mother Marie-Joseph left Trochu immediately. She arranged for their transfer by car-ambulance and accompanied them as their nurse, from Bonnyville to Vegreville, and on to Trochu where they arrived on July 28th. The dear Sisters were immediately admitted to the infirmary where every comfort was afforded them. Shortly after, Sisters Marie-Thérèse Hélie and Marie-Rose Beaudry, both afflicted with an incurable illness joined them. Whenever possible they shared in the spiritual exercises of the community.

On February 21st, 1938, the members of the Canadian Province were saddened by the news that Sister Marie-Joseph Laigre, local Superior at Trochu for the past eight years, was being recalled to France. As Assistant General she would be of great help to the General Council in Évron. Her departure left the post of local Superior in Trochu vacant. Sister Eugénie Aucherie, Superior in Bonnyville, was appointed to fill this role.

In 1939, two retreats were held in Trochu, which allowed all the Sisters of the Province to participate in this time of spiritual renewal. That year also marked the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Trochu Noviciate – twenty-five years during which Mother Marie-Joseph offered the best of her knowledge and energy to form young Sisters in the service of God.

When war was declared on the first Friday of September 1939, all hearts and minds turned towards the Sisters in France, who no doubt would suffer from the invasion of their country. At the onset of the war no news came from Évron, which caused some anxiety. Then in August 1940, a message came from Sister Berthe Germont, Superior at the *Institut Saint-Julien* of Le Mans. Despite the German occupation of a building at the Mother House in Évron, despite a bombing that caused 19 casualties in the town, and despite the complete destruction of

the Sacred Heart Refuge, the members of the General Council and all the Sisters at the Mother House had been spared.

An expansion to the Trochu hospital started June 29th, 1948. The foundations were quickly laid due to the large number of workmen, but all external work ceased with the advent of cold weather. Finally, all was ready on July 19th, 1950, when Archbishop J.H. Macdonald of Edmonton officially blessed and dedicated the new building. His Excellency expressed his satisfaction and lauded the goodwill between Protestants and Catholics in Trochu who worked together to sustain this charitable organization. Jean Frère whom the founding Sisters had known as a boy gave the closing speech. He recalled the origins in the coulee before mentioning the competence of Sister Eugénie Aucherie, local Superior of Trochu, who had supervised the construction and organized the furnishings. He also recalled to memory Mother Marie-Louise Recton whose spirit was very much alive despite her death which had occurred 20 years previously.

In September the convent chapel was renovated to meet liturgical requirements. A new altar was installed, the size of the existing canopy was reduced, and walls and woodwork were painted.

A few changes are contemplated

At the General Chapter of 1952 it was decided to change the religious costume to comply with the directives of his Holiness Pius XII. The costume was to be simple, modernized and more adapted to everyday needs³. It was also decided to replace the "Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary" recited each day, with the Breviary "Book of Hours of Encalat"⁴.

Rome had also stated that no indult would be granted allowing a local Superior to remain in office after a fourth mandate. Sister Eugénie Aucherie, local Superior in Trochu since 1938, left her position on August 26th, 1952, to take up an equivalent post in Bonnyville; Sister Anna Keohane became local Superior in Trochu. The latter's stay however was short, due to ill health. The local Doctor advised immediate rest. On March 26th, 1954, Sister Anna was transferred to the Edmonton General Hospital and eventually underwent surgery for a brain tumor. Despite a partial paralysis which resulted, the operation was considered to have been successful. Sister Anna was given the option of returning home to Ireland as soon as she could travel, which she accepted.

In October 1954 Mother Marie-Joseph Rondo's eighth three-year mandate was completed. Sister Eugénie Aucherie of Bonnyville was appointed to fill this post. She returned to Trochu to serve concurrently as local and provincial Superior.

On May 9th, 1955, a telegram from Évron announced the imminent beatification among others of two French Sisters, Françoise Tréhet and Jeanne Véron, who had suffered martyrdom during the Revolution. Mother Provincial and a companion were invited to attend the ceremony in Rome. Shortly after, a letter followed inviting two Canadian Sisters to represent Canada. On June 7th, Mother Eugénie Aucherie, and Sisters Marie-Augustine Mottier, Albertine Bureau and Murielle Beaulieu left Trochu for Paris where they joined the rest of the Évron delegation en route for Rome.

The St. Joseph Residence

In early January 1959 Mother Eugénie Aucherie announced a new project that was received with joy. A new

chapel would be constructed to mark the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Évron in Canada.

This house of prayer while beautifully adorned retained a certain simplicity. The construction plans were reviewed, information trips made to Calgary and Edmonton, long sessions held with the architects and contractors, and materials chosen meticulously in order that a prayerful atmosphere would prevail. Excavation began after the spring thaw; huge powerful machines removed caraganas, lilac bushes and honeysuckle trees, not without some regrets.

The inauguration ceremony of the St. Joseph Residence took place on June 25th. In addition to the chapel, the building comprised an apartment for a visiting Bishop or a retreat director, as well as a conference room. The Stations of the Cross, the large crucifix, and the stained-glass windows arrived on July 15th. Bishop Anthony Jordan, omi, presided at the erection of the Stations of the Cross, on September 29th. At 10 o'clock the following day His Excellency, assisted by Fathers Gerald Doyle and Vincent Hartman, surrounded by a dozen colleagues who had previously served in the parish of Trochu, blessed the chapel and celebrated the first mass. Among the invited guests was the architect, Peter Rule, and his wife. Mr. Rule had offered a splendid sanctuary lamp which had arrived just in time for the blessing ceremony.

Sunday, May 1st, 1960, feast of St. Joseph the worker and patron saint of Canada, had been chosen for the blessing of the St. Joseph Residence. In order to truly celebrate the event the official opening coincided with the feast of St. John the Baptist, patron saint of French Canadians.

Sister Marie-Cécile Clermont was named local Superior in Trochu in 1960. Upon her nomination as Provincial Superior, in

1966, Sister Albertine Landry replaced her as local Superior. Sister Ruth Wirachowsky replaced the latter in 1970. From 1973 onward the function of local Superior no longer included the administration of the hospital which was entrusted firstly to Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, and in 1975 to Sister Helen Levasseur. From 1977 to 1979 the latter also served as local Superior. Since 1979 the position of administrator has been filled by a member of the laity.

The Pontmain School and Camp-Notre-Dame des Champs

The new Pontmain School was officially opened on the afternoon of September 30th, 1959. In the evening, a musical program in honour of the 50th anniversary of the Sisters' arrival at Trochu, was presented by the *Gais Troubadours*, a group of some thirty young students from *Collège Saint-Jean* in Edmonton, under the direction of Father Edmond Douziech, omi. Shortly after and taking advantage of the mild temperature, the carpenters added a gallery to the new infirmary, which joined the two wings on the south side of St-Mary's convent.

A camp-site was built to the west of the St. Joseph Residence, which gave the Sisters a place to rest and relax during the summer holidays. Father John Hesse, parish priest, inaugurated it in July 1963, and blessed the statue of *Mary Notre-Dame des Champs* [Our Lady of the Fields]. In good weather the community would often enjoy a picnic there and the evening would conclude with a prayer to honour Mary, protector and guardian of this site.

Notre-Dame Residence

A new building called Notre-Dame Residence, built to house the Provincialate and Noviciate, was officially opened and

blessed by Archbishop Anthony Jordan, omi, of Edmonton, on May 25th, 1967.

The year 1969, marked the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the first eight Sisters of Évron in Canada. Sister Odette Blin and her assistant Sister Berthe Germont, on their canonical visit to Canada, joined in the celebration on October 11th.

On August 8th, 1972, Sisters Aline Vachon and Marie Jenkins pronounced their perpetual vows in the presence of celebrant, Archbishop Jordan. Fathers Jean Papen, Ted Rozmahel (parish priest), Gérard Lassonde, omi, from Bonnyville, Joseph Goutier, omi, from Gurneyville, Alfred Houle, from Fort Kent and Gérard Van Vynckt, psm, from Tisdale, Saskatchewan, ccelebrated with the Bishop.

Before pronouncing her vows, each Sister lit a candle from the Pascal candle and placed it on the altar. The offerings were carried by Sister Aline and her father, and by Sister Marie and a friend from Bonnyville. When mass ended both Sisters signed the register at the altar, followed by the signature of Sister Odette Blin, Sister Marie-Cécile Clermont and the two provincial counsellors. A simple yet moving ceremony⁵.

Ever since his arrival in Trochu, in 1946, Dr. A.J. Stewart Hay had been a devoted medical practitioner. He was keenly interested in the education of children, encouraging them to discover and develop their natural talents and to seek their true vocation. He also helped those who found it difficult to learn and sought to improve their self esteem. This brought him notoriety in Trochu and the surrounding area. He worked hard to the very end and it was on Wednesday, May 30th, 1973, that he died peacefully in his sleep. The whole town mourned his death. Although not Catholic, his funeral was held in the Church

of Saint-Ann of the Prairies to accommodate the overflowing crowd of mourners.

On August 15th, 1973, Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, Administrator of St. Mary's Hospital, received the official authorization of the Government of Alberta to proceed with plans to renovate and expand the facility. This would mean the demolition of the original Saint Mary's Convent after 63 years of existence. The move, which started on July 3rd, was emotionally charged and called for a lot of letting go⁶. The elder sisters temporarily occupied the first floor of the St. Joseph Residence, and the rest of the community lived on the second floor of Notre-Dame Residence⁷.

As several pieces of furniture and numerous objects could not be used in the new building, it was decided to hold an auction at Saint Mary's convent on January 10th, 1975. Despite the intense cold there was a crowd all day long. Many came to attest their friendship, and to see for the last time the building they loved and to bring home a memento! On February 2nd the old convent doors swung open for a last visit. Over 150 persons signed their name in the Guest Book before going to the cafeteria where a lunch was served.

Two albums of photographs related the history of the Sisters from the time of their exploratory trip in 1909 to the present. Sister Eugénie Aucherie who had spent many years in Trochu since 1912, the only sister who was part of the heroic founding years, was on hand to answer the visitors' questions⁸. Many villagers recalled their school days and the care of thousands of sick and elderly provided by the Sisters, as well as the bonds of friendships built over the years.

St. Mary's Hospital 1978 –

The Sisters now entered into another phase of their history: they would continue to administer the new hospital as they had successfully done in the past and they would receive the necessary government funds to do so. The demolition of the convent was a painful experience for many people in the town but as is true in many situations one must pass through death to awaken to a new life⁹.

After the demolition of the first convent-hospital a new building was constructed on the same site, but it was attached to the wing built in 1949-50 and the latter underwent major renovations. This new, very impressive centre was officially opened under the name of St. Mary's Hospital. Emergency and medical treatment was offered along with long-term care, as well as diagnostic and therapeutic services.

A request to obtain the status of "accredited hospital" was forwarded to the Canadian Council of accreditation in 1978. The inspection being favourable, accreditation was awarded for two years. In 1981, following a second inspection, accreditation was awarded for three years, the maximum period allowed.

The year 1979 marked a turn in the hospital's history when the Sisters withdrew from administration, the latter being taken over by a layman, Mr. Peter Verhesen, who was replaced in September 1994 by Mr. Joe MacGillivray.

In time, the excellent reputation of St. Mary's Hospital became widespread across the region. One thing was missing; a nursing home. In the early 1980's, under the skillful direction of Peter Verhesen and the Governing Board a request was sent to the Department of Health for permission to build a 25-bed nursing home. After authorization was received, plans were

prepared to annex the new building to the north-east side of the hospital.

As a result of the expansion and following current practice the complex was named St. Mary's Health Care Centre. This would indicate that the Board administration and personnel seek to promote the health of the community by encouraging patients and residents alike to practice a wholistic and integrated lifestyle.

St. Mary's Health Care Centre

From its inception in 1909, St. Mary's Hospital had been governed by a council of local Sisters, similar to most hospitals operated and administered by religious communities. Gradually, in an attempt to favour an exchange of ideas with the public at large, the Sisters decided to invite people "committed" to the betterment of their community to take part in decisions that affected local health services.

The first group formed at Trochu, in 1946, consisted of seven persons, and was known as an Advisory Board. During the following 32 years many dedicated lay persons served the community of Trochu as members of this Board.

In 1978, the members of the then Advisory Board were appointed for fixed terms by the Sisters Corporation to become the Governing Board who were responsible for the governance of the Health Centre.

A novel way of collecting supplementary funds to help decorate St. Mary's Health Care Centre was concocted by a group of Trochu residents. In the Nursing Home two distinct sets of rooms, each with its own lounge, extended from a central information area, in addition to the recreation area, the kitchen and the dining room. The plan was based on the idea of keeping

a home-like atmosphere and to facilitate socialization. An auction sale of 48 water colours and oil paintings created by 26 local artists brought in the sum of \$8,620.00. These works of art, donated by the buyers, were used to decorate the hallways and common areas, thus creating a down-home feeling since many paintings represented scenes of the Trochu area.

The Nursing Home was officially opened on June 21st, 1985. Following an invocation by Reverend Al Richards, a retired minister of the United Church, and a short presentation by the students of Pontmain elementary school, Mr. Frank Hoppins, Master of Ceremonies, greeted everyone and introduced the guests of honour. Several congratulatory speeches followed; which all mentioned the important role of this facility as well as the spirit of dedication, loyalty and respect which was expected of the employees. The Golden Age group added a spiritual dimension singing "Bless this House". Father Les Drewicki, parish priest, blessed the commemorative plaque. The ceremony of unveiling involved Father Les and Sister Cécile Goyer, Provincial Superior. A surprise presentation was made by Peter Verhesen to Frank Hoppins, to honour his many years of service to the local hospital. The Hospital Auxiliary was also honoured; some of these ladies had been members for as many as thirty-five and even fifty years.

Mrs. Connie Osterman, M.L.A. for the Three Hills-Olds Constituency remarked on the climate of friendship and unity evident in the community despite the diversity of language and religion. She was impressed by the uniqueness of this edifice for the seniors in the village. She personally offered a plaque bearing the Coat of Arms of Alberta, before cutting the ribbon to officially open the facility. A lunch was served, and tours of the new building followed.

At the annual meeting of the Alberta Hospital Association in 1983, Sister Yvonne Laforge received the Ruth Crawford Award. At this announcement she was applauded by her many friends. The Alberta Hospital Housekeeping Association awarded this prize to Sister Yvonne for her exceptional service and contribution. This award won her recognition as an Honorary Life Member of the Housekeeping Association.

In 1985, Sister Agnes Knievel, a native of Trochu, was named local Superior. Shortly after, she received the honorary title "Nurse of the Month" from the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. The following year she celebrated her 50th anniversary as a registered nurse. The directors of the Alberta Central Region were happy to recognize her as a remarkable nurse inviting her and a few of her companions to a formal evening in her honour. Later a group of nursing friends invited her to a banquet in Edmonton at the time of the annual meeting.

Trochu Community, 1990-1999

Only very few Sisters remained in Trochu in 1990, and the convent was much too large so the Congregation purchased a bungalow-style house in a quiet part of town. The house could also accommodate other Sisters who came to visit or participate in occasional ceremonies. Such was the case when the town of Trochu received some fifty French people during the week of July 24th to 30th, 1995. They were joined by a few descendants of the founders of Saint Ann Ranch who had immigrated to the United States and who came to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founders' arrival. Sister Marie-Hélène Olivereau, archivist at the Mother House, came with the French contingent. Sister Marie-Thérèse Laberge, then Provincial Superior, and Claire Dargis, the Canadian archivist, welcomed her in Trochu, together with Father Antoine Bugeaud and Jean Pariseau. Father Bugeaud was the main celebrant at the open air mass. In both

official languages he eulogized the founders of Trochu, be they the ranchers or the Sisters of Charity of Notre-Dame d'Évron.

Most of the French families remained in Trochu when the men were recalled to the defence of their homeland in 1914. Today only a few descendants remain; some returned to France after the Armistice and others immigrated to the United States. The Frère Family keeps the flame of these French pioneers alive and has preserved the founders' history in a museum and teahouse in the coulee.

When the Trochu House was closed in 1999, Sister Agnes Knievel joined the community at the *Résidence Notre-Dame* in Edmonton.

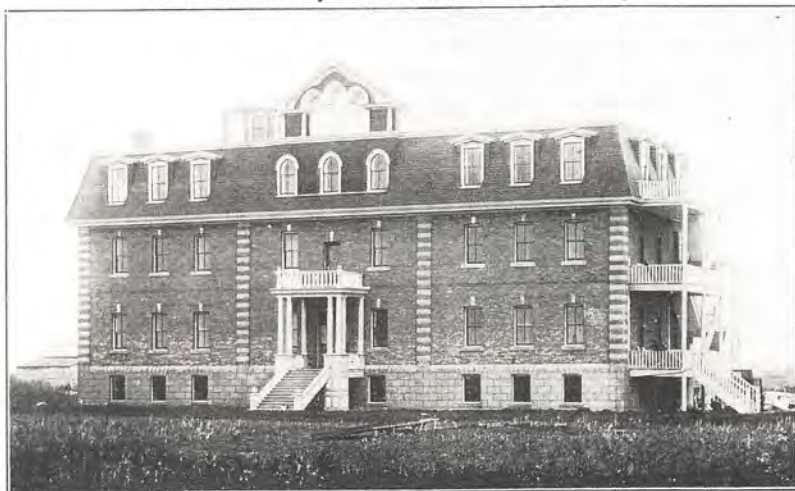
LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Marie-Louise RECTON	1909 – 1930
Sister Marie-Thérèse LAIGRE	1930 – 1938
Sister Eugénie AUCHERIE	1938 – 1953
Sister Anna KEOHANE	1953 – 1954
Sister Eugénie AUCHERIE	1954 – 1960
Sister Marie-Cécile CLERMONT	1960 – 1966
Sister Albertine LANDRY	1966 – 1970
Sister Ruth WIRACHOWSKY	1970 – 1972
Sister Anna LAFORGE	1973 – 1977
Sister Helen LEVASSEUR	1977 – 1983
Sister Dolores BEAUDOIN	1983 – 1985
Sister Agnès KNIEVEL	1985 – 1999

Végreville Presbytere, hôpital provisoire



1910 – The rectory turned into a convent and hospital



Vegreville, 1911 – St. Joseph's Hospital

I Guidelines for patients

1. *Patients can be admitted if they contact the superior after having obtained approval from a physician.*
2. *Room charges: Private rooms \$3.00, \$2.50, 2.00 according to specific room and each individual's means.*
Semi-private rooms: \$1.50
Ward beds: \$1.00
If treatment is required at night and is ordered there is a charge of \$2.00.
Use of the operating room: \$5.00
3. *For dressings, baths, medications as well as dressing supplies, wines and liquors, mineral water, library, there is an extra charge.*
4. *We prefer payment in advance. Private and semi-private room charges must be paid each week in advance.*
5. *Patients in ward beds are not to visit the patients in private rooms unless they obtain authorization from the sister supervisor.*
6. *Use of tobacco products is not permitted in the wards. If the doctor authorizes it smoking is allowed in the private rooms.*
7. *Lights must be out by 9 p.m.*
8. *The doctor will order a specified diet.*
9. *Isolation rooms in the hospital will cost \$2.00*

II For Visitors

1. *Visitors are allowed each day except Sunday morning:*
morning visiting is from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.
afternoon visiting is from 2 p.m. till 4 p.m.
evening visiting is from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.
2. *Other than in exceptional cases visits should last only a half hour.*
3. *Visitors are requested to only visit the patients they wish to see.*
The names are at each door. Visiting throughout the hospital is forbidden unless the visitor is accompanied by one of the sisters.
4. *Visitors are asked to give any items brought for the patients to the sister in charge; cake, fruit, wine, liquors, etc.*
5. *Out of town or casual visitors can visit only between the hours of 2 and 4 p.m.*



Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Nursing School



Vegreville - The 1947 flood



Upper: Two other views of the flood
Lower: St. Joseph's General Hospital, 1995

Vegreville: St. Joseph's Hospital, 1910-

The first group of Sisters to leave Trochu went to Vegreville on October 4th, 1910. The new community consisted of Sisters Marie-Victoire Bruhay, local Superior, and Marie-Joséphine Boisseau, as well as Sisters Marie-Louise Martigné and Marie Doisneau recently arrived from France.

Father J.B. Lemius, omi, the French chaplain who had blessed the foundation at Trochu, the previous year, asked also to bless the Vegreville foundation. Father Lemius, Mother Marie-Louise Rector and the founding Sisters travelled by train. Due to the meandering course of the railway, and the necessary transfers, the train only reached its destination after midnight, on the morning of October 6th. In short it took 40 hours to travel a distance of 125 miles (200 km).

Fathers Augustin Bernier and Jean Garnier met the group on their arrival in Vegreville and accompanied the Sisters to the convent of The Sisters of Providence of Saint-Brieux, a French community who was already established in the locality. The Sisters of Évron remained with these Sisters for a few days until their baggage arrived from Stettler. They finally moved into the rectory which was vacated by the priests and which would serve as a temporary hospital awaiting the construction of a new building.

The latter would measure 90 by 36 feet (27,5 X 11 meters) and would consist of a basement, the ground floor and two other floors, the upper one serving as a convent. So far \$5,000.00 had been raised to defray the cost which, according to Father Bernier, would amount to a total of \$15,000.00, including heating, baths and sewers. "I will have a lot of gratuitous work," he added, "and want everything to be just right so that you may be well established and known in the community. I promised that

it [the new hospital] will be as good as those in Edmonton [the General and the Misericordia] although not as big¹⁰.

Founded in 1895 by a group of French Canadians who had migrated to Kansas before coming to Western Canada, the town was named after Father Valentin Vegreville, omi, a native of Évron who had arrived in St. Boniface in 1852. A contemporary of Father Leduc, he had opened a mission at Cold Lake, in 1854, wishing to evangelize the Chipewyan Indians of that region. He died at St. Albert on July 9th, 1903¹¹.

In 1910 the town counted 1200; a third of the population was Catholic. The community was served by a protestant (Presbyterian) hospital – the Rolland M. Boswell Hospital. When the Sisters settled in the provisional Hospital, on October 17th, the ladies brought them all sorts of household supplies as a welcome gesture. Beds, mattresses, blankets and sheets, bandages, pharmaceutical objects and medical supplies, an operating table, etc., were ordered at once. Delivery, however, was sporadic¹². Clothes closets and screens were also needed, as were dishes and food, as well as the installation of a laundry room. As of November 12th, to the Sisters' delight, the Blessed Sacrament was kept in one of the hospital rooms. On Sundays, when they walked to the parish church the sisters had to wear heavy coats and overshoes¹³.

Four Sisters who had left Évron on December 1st arrived in Vegreville on Christmas Eve. Two others who had left on December 13th arrived ten days later. Some of the new arrivals were to found the Strathcona House at St. John's Junioriate (South Edmonton). Since the convent they were to occupy was not yet ready they stayed with the Vegreville community. Except for Sister Maria Foucher, the sisters who had recently arrived left for Strathcona on January 5th, 1911.

Archbishop Legal, accompanied by Father Leduc, visited the new community in Vegreville on December 28th. Three weeks later, a government agent arrived to inspect the makeshift installation. His visit had favourable results: from that day on, certain hospital services were paid for by the government¹⁴.

Mother General Cousin recommended the hiring of a male and female lay nurse. "The male is a French Canadian, wrote Sister Marie-Victoire Bruhay, the female is French – Mrs. Lecerf who seems very competent and who has much *savoir-vivre*; appears very active. She asked to join us for the rosary and to pray with us each evening whenever she can; I said, yes". Marie, her 16-year-old daughter, wants to enter the community¹⁵.

Beginning in February 1911, there was a sharp increase in the number of patients. Construction work, which had been stopped because of the cold weather, had started up again but a problem arose. The local Superior requested Father Leduc to pay the construction bills; he replied that she should pass on such a request to the Superior in Trochu who, in turn, replied that, "the matter is entirely in the hands of Father Leduc". In fact, it was only settled in July when a cheque was sent from Évron¹⁶.

The story of a perilous journey

It was winter, January 17th, 1913. For several weeks Mother Marie-Louise Recton's presence had been requested by the Sisters in Vegreville to settle an urgent and ticklish problem.

Travelling at this time of year was difficult. The railway lines were open but a train scheduled to head north of Trochu has been held up due to lack of water.

At this juncture, Father Bazin who had planned to go by a horse-drawn cutter to a mission east of the Red Deer River

suggested to Mother Rector that they could leave with him. On Saturday morning he would drive them to Erskine where they could take the train to Edmonton.

Turning down such a proposal would have delayed the urgently required trip. It was therefore accepted in spite of falling snow and strong winds. In order to ensure warmth the three travellers were wrapped in overcoats and blankets and soon were on their way. Despite the falling snow the team of horses kept up a good pace. By two o'clock in the afternoon they had covered 30 miles (48 km). A halt was called so the horses could take a much needed rest while the travellers warmed up. The latter received a warm welcome in the home of a Catholic family. The table was quickly set and a hearty meal eaten. By four o'clock the group was on its way despite a certain anxiety the driver would not admit to, but could hardly dissimulate.

Father Bazin was disappointed that the man of the house was absent as he had counted on him to know which road to take in order to cross the river at the best place. The 12-year-old son was sent to gather information from the nearest neighbour. This done, he hitched up the horses, ensured the warmth and safety of his passengers and proceeded on the way. The horses took some time getting used to walking on the ice and thick coat of snow. Several large blocks of ice, carried indiscriminately after earlier thaws and now joined together, formed hard bumps over which the horses moved slowly. The sleigh could easily have been smashed to pieces. Breaks in the ice allowed water to surface. To continue on the river meant being exposed to much danger. Finally after one of the horses stumbled the Sisters felt they should turn around; the driver, however, disagreed. He searched for a better route but to no avail. The horses were prevented from going forward because of fallen tree trunks and thousands of branches that barred the way. The horses were unhitched and

the sleigh left there. Leading the horses an attempt was made to climb the river bank. It was now 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

Courageously Father led the first horse while one of the Sisters tried to lead the other. Not making much headway Sister simply held the bridle and decided to remain in one place until Father, having tied his, came to the rescue. This manoeuvre was repeated time and again, with the hope of finding a way out. A vain hope it was! For having reached the summit, they would have to come down into the next valley and go through similar hardships to climb the next hill. Reaching the valley, covered in snow where the only visible tracks were those of wolves, alas another hill, higher than the first, had to be climbed. Surely, thought the travellers, the road is nearby, so they continued. The tangled branches buried in snow led to several falls. Occasionally a branch was seized with the hope of advancing, but it often broke and led to a tumble.

Sometimes the treacherous snow hid deep holes where one would sink to the knees. With a bit of extra effort the travellers reached the summit, only to discover that a new descent, a second valley and a third hill awaited them. What should they do? Should they attempt to continue or retrace their steps? It was at this point that Father, very near-sighted, lost his *pince-nez* (eye glasses). A fire lit in the hope of finding the latter, only produced smoke; the eyepiece could not be found.

The restless horses wanted to move on; it was important that they not wander into the thick trees. The travellers, who had agreed to climb the third hill, discovered that the icy slope was too steep and decided to turn back. It was 8 o'clock p.m., the moon was full and the cold so intense that it was not advisable to stop even for a short time.

Retracing one's steps was not easy, yet the travellers could not spend the night without shelter. Father was distressed, not so much for himself as for the Sisters. The latter, calm and confident were convinced that the Star of the Sea, would also be the Star of the River. After all it was January 17th, anniversary of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the starlit sky of Pontmain [in France] in 1871. Young children saw her message written by an invisible hand in the night sky "Pray dear children: God will answer your prayer".

As at that time the Blessed Virgin remained Mother of Hope, so the Sisters did not lose hope and help arrived in an unexpected way. At approximately 10:30 p.m., shouts and rifle shots were heard and Father answered. Shortly two men appeared at the top of the hill. Their outline could be clearly seen in the moonlight. Perhaps they wanted to point out that they were armed. They fired a few more shots in the air before establishing a conversation with the lost travellers.

Upon learning that they were looking for the road, the men offered to take them to a nearby house. Towards 11:30 p.m. they arrived at the house of a young French couple who was totally surprised to see these visitors at such a late hour. They were happy to meet the Sisters and Father Bazin whom they knew very well. A hot meal and a warm bed were not only welcomed by the visitors but helped them forget their tiring journey.

On Saturday morning the intended trip to the Erskine Station was out of question. Instead, the young men, equipped with axes and ropes accompanied Father who was only too happy to recuperate the cutter. His portable altar, as well as various other items, had remained intact overnight in the cutter.

Meanwhile, the Sisters helped with housekeeping duties; they apparently cooked a roast to perfection and that story became legendary. It was however an excellent cut of meat and the appetites of the men were not lacking. At about 4 p.m., Father and the Sisters, back in the sleigh, headed for another house about 6 miles (9 km) away, where Father was expected, but not the Sisters. One cannot describe the welcome they received in this French family; every one was happy, and despite the mishap, it was a joy and honour to receive these visitors.

Sunday morning the Sisters were driven in the family sleigh some 8 miles (13 km) away to attend mass in a local school. There, isolated in the middle of the prairie, along with the family with whom they had spent the night, they were joined by some thirty men who had ridden between 10 and 12 miles (16 to 19 km) to attend mass. The cold weather had prevented the women from coming.

The schoolhouse was ice-cold, and despite a well-stoked fire it remained cold all during mass. The elements however did not stop the men and the Sisters, from singing unaccompanied, the beautiful mass of Dumont. What memories of France it kindled!

The courage of these brave Catholics is to be admired, as they do not hesitate to face terrible weather in order to attend mass once a month when Father comes to celebrate the Eucharist. And what of the missionary who each week without regard to seasonal changes travels here and there to meet the religious needs of the many Catholics who settled in the vast expanse of Canada's north west.

After early mass, on Monday morning, the Sisters were driven to Erskine in 40 below windy weather. They arrived chilled to the bone and could hardly utter a thank you to Father

Bazin who had done so much to help them. A few hours later, they were received by the Sisters of the Strathcona community and then travelled on to Vegreville, which was the objective of this trip¹⁷.

Life in the Vegreville Hospital in 1911 – 1912

The regular medical practitioner, Dr. Couillard, a French Canadian, recently married and on his honeymoon, had been replaced by Dr. Field, an anglo-protestant. An additional lay nurse, Miss Watson, also an anglo-protestant, had been hired because the protestant doctors felt it was necessary that someone should speak fluent English for the sake of anglophone patients. Miss Watson left in September¹⁸.

Miss Marie Lecerf, daughter of nurse Lecerf, had arrived June 3rd, 1911. "She is very strong, appears to be serious and is a hard worker; one would believe she is 20 [years old] rather than 16". She was waiting for official word of her acceptance to the Noviciate in Évron; she left on October 19th. Bishop Albert Pascal, OMI, a native of the Department of Ardèche (France) and Bishop of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, had met the "founding Sisters" aboard the ship that brought them to Canada and decided to visit the Vegreville community. His most ardent wish, so he said, was to have Sisters of Charity of Notre-Dame d'Évron in his diocese. He foresaw them established in Tisdale and Zenon Park.

When a scarlet fever epidemic broke out in the Vegreville area many sick children were brought to the hospital and an improvised tent was set up to quarantine the ill. Sister Marie-Louise Martigné, also contracted the disease and was placed on the sick list until August 7th¹⁹. Following this experience during which it rained continuously, the decision was taken to build a small house behind the hospital to be used as an isolation unit.

On May 25th the Sisters joined with the Sisters of Providence of St. Brieux for their annual retreat which was preached by Father Voisin, psm, from Red Deer²⁰.

In July, following a practice already established by Father Bernier, the local Superior and another sister went to Edmonton to collect funds to help defray the construction costs of the hospital. "She returned with only a few donations but gained a postulant." Miss Blanche Couturier, recruited by Father Boniface, ofm, Superior of St. Anthony's College in North Edmonton, spent some time with the Sisters in Vegreville before leaving for the noviciate in Évron. Shortly thereafter Sister Eugénie Verron arrived from the Mother House to help out²¹.

The official opening of the Vegreville General Hospital, placed under the patronage of St. Joseph, took place on October 4th, 1911, in the presence of Archbishop Legal, the Lieutenant-Governor, Fathers Lacombe and Leduc, the Mayor, Dr. Goodwin, M.L.A. Holden, Father Bernier, parish priest, several other priests and a number of physicians. The ceremony began with the celebration of mass in the new chapel presided by the Archbishop, followed by a tour of the hospital. After lunch a "medical" meeting was held, and it was noted that the religious orders in Alberta were providing excellent health services. A tasty dinner served by a ladies group rounded off the ceremony²².

The construction of the hospital was nearly finished. But the town hall refused to connect the electricity unless a fee of \$5,000.00 – an amount considered inordinate – was paid beforehand. Mother General, when asked, agreed to pay the \$2,000.00 needed for the hospital to own its private power plant. Fathers Bernier and Garnier had spent much time overseeing the construction and settling the financial aspects so the Sisters were most grateful to them. On November 21st, 1911, the latter finally moved into their new building²³.

Beginning in January 1912, it became readily apparent to the Sisters that the Protestant medical practitioners were advising patients against seeking treatment at the "Catholic" hospital. This anti-catholicism was added to an anti-French position as they also refused to collaborate with Dr. Couillard. In March when Dr. Field wished to perform a particular type of operation [not described in the reference source] the local Superior refused. The doctor then asked why the hospital was called "General" whereupon the Superior replied that although the institution served everyone, no one could compel it to break the laws of God and the Church²⁴.

April 19th, 1912 turned out to be a sad day for the community. Sister Marie-Victoire Bruhay, the valiant Superior, was stricken with typhoid fever, as was Sister Valérie Jeuffault. A medical examination revealed that she suffered from myocarditis. Sister Marie Doisneau, was also afflicted with typhoid.

Sister Josephine Boisseau who reported this directly to the Mother General, added that Sister Marie-Thérèse Hélié had come from Strathcona to lend a hand. The Sisters of Providence of Saint-Brieux not only sent a former student to help with the laundry, but also a nursing-sister. In addition to the three sick nuns, there were 14 other patients, five of whom had typhoid²⁵. To everyone's disappointment the Superior had a relapse and Sister Marie-Thérèse Hélié who had come from Strathcona also contracted typhoid. Sister Maria Foucher, meanwhile, fell ill with pleurisy²⁶.

In mid-June, there was great joy when Mother Cousin, accompanied by an Assistant and chaplain Lemanceau on their way from Évron to Trochu, stopped to visit the Vegreville Sisters. The exultation was cut short, however, when the local Superior, even before her three-year period of office had been

completed, was replaced "due to her faulty administration" – that is an accumulation of debt due to non-payment of accounts by clients²⁷. Sister Marie Françoise Jouin was named to replace her and given office the same day by Sister Marie-Louise Rector. After inquiring from several hospitals, and in concert with Father Bernier, the new Superior wrote a set of rules for the General Hospital²⁸. All misunderstandings had to be dispelled and the deficiencies of the previous administration corrected. Fathers Bernier and Garnier discussed the new rules in detail with Dr. Couillard who found it difficult to accept the new Superior as Matron. The latter, on the other hand, worked hard to establish among her companions a religious spirit and regularity that had been neglected during the past months, as well as external order and good administrative practices. "Basically, the priests and Doctor were upset because they were no longer as in the past, in control at the hospital". When Father Bernier realized he could not change the rules he asked Archbishop Legal to intervene. The latter decided instead to send Father Leduc to the Vegreville hospital on a statutory visit.

Father Leduc arrived on December 27th. After talking at great length with the Superior, the priests and the doctor, he referred to the grievances as "foolish and petty – a tempest in a teapot". He advised the Superior to make concessions as a matter of form, but recommended that she insist on an adherence to the rules. The rules were slightly modified at Archbishop Legal's request. However, if Father Leduc's visit managed to bring peace to the community it did not altogether dissipate the strained relationship that existed between the Sisters, the priests and the doctor.

The foundation of a nursing school, 1915

Shortly after her appointment, Sister Marie-Françoise opened a nursing school, with two aims in mind: provide

professional help to the hospital staff and prepare the latter to provide services in the countryside where many families without adequate transportation could not obtain essential health services. When the Nursing School was officially recognized, the program was entrusted to Sister Joséphine Boisseau who shared her knowledge, talents and energy during forty years to prepare a number of professional nurses²⁹. As in most organizations of this type the School had modest beginnings. The first two students who had started classes on November 4th, 1915, received their diplomas in 1918.

In 1917 Father Leduc's health began to deteriorate. He therefore asked to be discharged of his appointment as Chancellor of the diocese, a responsibility that was assigned to Father Bernier, pastor of Vegreville. The parish was then confided to the Priests of Sainte-Marie de Tinchebray, the same congregation that had in 1909 welcomed the Sisters of Évron on their arrival in Trochu: Father Bazin was named parish priest and Father Renut, curate. This change carried with it the benefit of daily mass (or nearly) in the hospital chapel, a short spiritual talk each week and occasionally benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

1917: The Spanish influenza

The Spanish influenza that raged from mid-October 1917 to January 1918 left numerous victims. For weeks on end the Sisters ministered to the sick and the dying. The nurses and other employees were stricken one after the other. Some returned home from time to time to take care of their own family members who were affected by the disease. With all the goodwill in the world it was impossible to measure up to the task at hand. Volunteers came day after day to offer a few hours of their time, be it in the kitchen, the laundry or caring for the sick and dying – a gesture that was greatly appreciated.

Father Paul Lamort, psm, a colleague of Father Bazin, had only recently transferred the "Apostolic School" of missionaries from Trochu to Vegreville when he was smitten by the terrible "flu" and died very quickly. The body of this cherished priest and friend like that of the other epidemic victims, was buried without a funeral mass. The body was prepared at the hospital and transported directly to the cemetery. Only a few people escorted the casket since, by law, no more than twelve persons could assemble at one time, even for funerals.

The following day, Sister Marie-Louise Martigné who had tried to fight off the disease for a few days, had to be hospitalized as had another companion who had been ill for some time. On December 1st, 1917, running a temperature of 104° F (40° C) Sister Marie-Louise left her kitchen for the last time and eventually succumbed to the disease³⁰. The influenza epidemic slowly diminished and in early January the Sisters returned to their normal duties.

In 1922 the Priests of Sainte Marie de Tinchebray who had served the parish of Vegreville for the past five years wished to leave and requested that the diocese take on the parish once again³¹. Archbishop O'Leary appointed Father Dominic Rowland a diocesan priest of Irish descent to the parish.

Under the guidance of Sister Anna Keohane, 1930 – 1947

Sister Anna Keohane, of Irish descent, who had recently arrived from England, was named Superior in Vegreville in 1930. She gave a new vitality to the student nursing program and made improvements in hospital services. In 1933 a new wing was added to the original building, and another in 1937, in order to meet the needs of the increasing number of patients. Even though the School of Nursing was administered to the

satisfaction of everyone, among the powers to be, there was talk that the schools established in small centers would be suppressed. The townsfolk of Vegreville reacted and showed how much they wished to keep their School of Nursing. A committee, given the task of making representations to provincial authorities, obtained a two-year reprieve³².

In June 1938 the Protestant hospital was closed. The Sisters now must meet the health service needs of the town and surrounding area. Further improvements, particularly in the kitchen and laundry room were required in order to facilitate the work of the personnel. Sister Anna prepared plans and had them approved in Évron.

At winter's end, in 1943, there was an abundant snowfall followed by a heavy rain. A rapid thaw caused flooding more serious than the floods of 1914 and 1940. There was no stopping the usual quiet Vermilion River and within a few days the hospital was surrounded by water. Only the know-how and energy of a group of men kept the water at bay. As water rose over the bridge, several patients were brought into the hospital wing by small boats. Water began to enter in the Nurses' residence. In less than half-an-hour the water had risen a foot (30 cm) on the main floor. Sister Cécile Clermont who was giving a class saw the water rising and prudently had that part of the house evacuated. Nothing was damaged except the wall [and floors]. After several days of struggle, anxiety and fervent prayer, the danger ended. Some of the Sisters and staff took time off to tour the grounds in a small boat, which could pass over the hedge of caraganas behind the hospital.

To prevent or at least diminish the damage that might be caused by another flood – since no one could change the course of the meandering river – important renovations were carried out on the hospital property. The fir trees were all removed except

two; small cement walls were built to protect the basement windows; the level of the earth was raised and a new lawn sown; a cellar at one end of the building was filled in and replaced by a proper root cellar at the rear of the kitchen. The town paid for the construction of a wide cement sidewalk in front of the hospital, and upgraded the sewers.

After having taken to heart the good of the Vegreville community and the hospital for many years, Sister Anna Keohane was called to fill another important post. In 1947 her superiors asked her to take over the direction of Sainte-Thérèse Hospital in Tisdale, Saskatchewan, following Sister Marie-Françoise Jouin's death. When Sister Anna left Vegreville, after 17 years of devotion to duty, her inner strength was remembered and served as an example to all those who had known her.

Renovations and Anniversaries

In 1950, under the direction of the new Superior, Sister Anna O'Donovan {also from Ireland}, a new paediatric wing, a new operating room and a new chapel were constructed. On this occasion it was decided to rename the institution St. Joseph's General Hospital³³.

The 50th anniversary of the foundation of the hospital was celebrated in 1960 with the opening of a new nurses' residence. This long-awaited building would provide the student nurses with many conveniences which would help them to meet the demands of their noble vocation³⁴.

Soon after, planning was begun to build a new hospital that would include a new chapel and a residence for the sisters. A parcel of land owned by the Sisters was sold for one dollar to the municipality of Minburn-Eagle, to make possible the building of a 50 bed auxiliary hospital³⁵.

The blessing of the new St. Joseph's hospital took place February 11th, 1965. Sister Eugénie Aucherie, Provincial, and Sister Marie Cécile Clermont, local Superior in Trochu, arrived the previous evening. Archbishop A. Jordan, O.M.I., of Edmonton had promised to personally consecrate the altar stone, a gift of the architect. In a short homily His Excellency praised the Christian nurse: "She must distinguish herself by her zeal and her discretion; Charity must inspire her to care for the sick with much dedication and respect, and she must look upon them as suffering members of Christ". The small chapel, built between the nurses' residence and the hospital, was modern, yet simple and in good taste, and easily accessible. The Sisters appreciated and felt "very much at home" in their new residence³⁶.

On June 5th of the same year the 50th anniversary of the School of Nursing was celebrated with much joy and a spirit of unity. The day began with the celebration of Mass. Sister Helen Levasseur, local Superior, led a choir of student nurses, which offered beautiful renditions of psalms and hymns. The homily was given by Father Ed McCarthy, parish priest, who was inspired by the text: "A glass of water given to a poor individual is the same as giving it to Jesus Christ in person". He further described the value and beauty of a Nurse's role: she must develop nobility of soul in the exercise of her profession and pay homage to Christ in caring for patients.

In the course of the forenoon alumni members were welcomed in the School of Nursing by Sister Madeleine Beaulieu and the students; this was followed by a visit to the hospital and to the Sisters' residence. The Gold Guest Book was signed by each one with the date they received their diploma. At 4:30 p.m., the Ukrainian Catholic Ladies served a banquet for 150 people. The festivities ended with an evening of entertainment held in St. Martin's Hall. Sister Helen had invited, for this special occasion, a group of orphaned children aged 4 and 5, from Mundare, a

nearby village. They performed Ukrainian dancing with such charm, agility and unity that they were recalled for an encore. Songs, piano and violin recitals followed by the hymn "I'll walk with God" beautifully performed by the student nurses and much appreciated by the audience, ended this wonderful evening.

Changes in the 1970s

As previously mentioned the government was encouraging the closure of rural schools of nursing. From 1937 onward there were several attempts to end hospital based schools; finally in 1971 a decision was taken to close the Vegreville Nursing School after 55 years of operation and 468 graduates. Several reasons led to this closure: the difficulty in recruiting qualified instructors/supervisors; the problem of finding sufficient practical experience for the students and finally, the constraints imposed by the Department of Health who wished to centralize training in larger urban establishments³⁷. Following the end of the Registered Nurse' training program Sister Ursula Whitley headed a program to give practical training to prepare certified Nursing Aides; later, Sisters Dolores Beaudoin and Marie Jenkins supervised these students in the program until 1980 when it too was discontinued³⁸.

In 1974, the Sisters were again put to the test during the spring thaw. A radio announcement on April 17th informed the local residents that the Vermilion River was rising very quickly. A small sand bag dike was rapidly set up in front of the hospital, but it was too little too late. The hospital engineer managed to obtain a water pump that operated without stop for two days and nights; two men were continuously on watch. All of a sudden the dike gave way and there appeared a large lake where one could see the homes of the neighbors completely surrounded by water. Part of the barrier behind the hospital was demolished to allow the water to flow towards the river. Downtown, an

emergency shelter was organized to care for the sick and nurses took turns giving treatment and care. The Sisters, in the meantime, remained in their house, isolated as if they had been shipwrecked on an island. When the danger had passed the interior of the buildings had to be cleaned and refurbished. The patients were readmitted and the routine continued. This time, radical measures were taken to ensure that such a disaster would not occur again.

Since St. Joseph's Hospital had been founded the Administrator had always been a Sister. In 1978 a lay person was asked to assume this responsibility. Mr. Eugene Rudyk, a former employee of the Sisters at the Ste-Thérèse Hospital in Tisdale, Saskatchewan, accepted the position and moved with his family to Vegreville. His devotion, integrity and loyalty to the mission of compassion for the sick were quickly recognized by the townspeople. It is under his direction, in conjunction with his devoted collaborators, that St. Joseph's Hospital carries on its mission to the sick and the elderly³⁹.

Since the opening of the hospital in 1910, the local council of Sisters had acted as an Administrative Council. In the early 1950s the sisters realized the importance of requesting the help of citizens who would speak on behalf of the local people and give advice on the policies set forth by the Department of Health. In 1955, the Sisters appointed an Advisory Board. This group played an important role in obtaining a new modern hospital for Vegreville and intervened frequently with government officials on matters of finance and on the future of the Nursing School.

In 1960 the Administrative Council counted five members: three Sisters and two lay persons. Its mandate was to assist the administrator in questions relating to policy and government decisions. In 1981 the Advisory Board, named by the Corporation of the Sisters [of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron],

assumed the direction of the St. Joseph's General Hospital and was then referred to as the Board of Trustees.

The Diamond Jubilee celebration

From June 14th to 16th, 1985, St. Joseph's Hospital celebrated its 75th birthday. Numerous people came to celebrate this diamond jubilee and expressed their friendship, appreciation and gratitude to the Sisters. Several nurses returned to visit their *Alma Mater* from places as far away as Ontario, Oklahoma, California, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.

Sister Ruth Wirachowsky, speaking on behalf of the Sisters, thanked the Lord for this day filled with fond memories. She recalled the Sisters' commitment and dedication in the care of the sick and thanked the personnel for their generosity.

After the banquet Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, Director of Nursing at Bonnyville, addressed approximately 800 guests. With much eloquence and emotion she recounted the history of St. Joseph's Hospital, underlining the competence and devotion of the Sisters who had served there⁴⁰.

Recent initiatives

The closing of the Nursing School in 1971 had left the Sisters with an empty building. It was first rented to the Department of Public Health in Vegreville. When the latter left to set up elsewhere in town, the residence was again vacant; the Sisters moved to the upper level of the building in 1985.

The following year, after much soul-searching and consultation with a group of Vegreville laity, the Provincial Council decided to begin a program for unmarried mothers, to be

located in the empty portion of the former Nursing School. With the above committee's approval the *Caritas Centre* was founded. In 1991 due to the high cost of operation and the inability to obtain further financial help, the Centre was closed.

In 1990, a survey pointed out the need for a child care centre. The former Sisters' residence was renovated and a child care centre was established to accommodate up to fifty children. There was also provision made for administrative offices and support services⁴¹.

By 1992 only three Sisters remained in Vegreville; they were the last to occupy part of the former Nursing School building, before relocating to a home near the parish church.

On November 9th, 1995, the Sisters, members of the Board of Trustees, administration, nursing personnel, members of the clergy and pastoral care personnel, the Ladies Auxiliary and representatives of various clubs and organizations gathered in the hospital meeting room to celebrate the 85th anniversary of St. Joseph's Hospital. Reverend Gerry Wallace, pastor of the United Church representing the ministerial association of Vegreville, opened the event with a prayer. His heart-warming words created a fraternal climate for the evening. "In the course of its history the Hospital has been a place of healing, prayer, spiritual strength and support, tears and laughter, a place where Christ's love has been ever present".

At the dawn of the 21st Century the Sisters, in fidelity to the Gospel message, continue their mission in Vegreville. "Whatever you do to the smallest among my people, you do it to me (Matt 25:40)."

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Marie-Victoire BRUHAY	1910 – 1912
Sister Marie-Françoise JOUIN	1912 – 1925
Sister Marie-Thérèse HÉLIE	1925 – 1930
Sister Anna KEOHANE	1930 – 1947
Sister Annie O'DONOVAN	1947 – 1951
Sister Joséphine BOISSEAU	1951 – 1955
Sister Helen LEVASSEUR	1955 – 1965
Sister Albertine LANDRY	1965 – 1967
Sister Laura CHALUT	1967 – 1969
Sister Mary Ellen O'NEILL	1969 – 1973
Sister Ruth WIRACHOWSKY	1980 – 1983
Sister Aline VACHON	1983 – 1992
Sister Ruth WIRACHOWSKY	1993 –



**L. to R.: Srs. J. Vaillant, E. Legendre, A. Hareau,
V. Bruhay
2nd row: C. Veillard, B. Gautrin and M. Neuville**



Strathcona – The altar in the Sisters' chapel



Sister Hélène Fedoruk goes fishing while at Lac Ste Anne

Contract with the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron

Between these two parties:

*The Reverend Oblate Fathers of Marie Immaculate
and
The Reverend Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron*

The following has been agreed upon and approved:

Article I

The Reverend Oblate Fathers wishing to have religious sisters to perform the domestic services in their Juniorate in Strathcona, Province of Alberta, Canada agree:

- 1. to provide a separate residence to accommodate the Sisters and to make sufficient space available for the community to meet the religious obligations of their state.*
- 2. to provide spiritual guidance to the Sisters according to their Rule and Constitutions.*
- 3. to pay each Sister the sum of fifty dollars (\$50.00) annually to be paid each semester starting January 1st, 1911.*
- 4. to provide sustenance for the Sisters – namely, meals, bedding, table linens, heat, light, etc., and to also cover the cost of travel for their annual retreat within the limit of the St. Albert diocese.*

Article II

The Congregation of the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron agrees to provide at least five sisters to the Juniorate starting January 1, 1911.

- 1. the choir sisters will look after the altar linens and the laundry of the Institution as well as the housekeeping and will provide in these different areas all the service they can without infringing on their Rule and Constitution.*
- 2. the lay sisters, under the direction of the Superior will do the cooking, laundry and the yard work.*

Article III

*The present contract cannot be cancelled by either party unless notice is given at least six months in advance.
Executed in duplicate at Edmonton (Canada) the 31st day of December 1910.*

*H. Grandin
Ass. Vicar
Sr. M. Cousin
Superior General*

Strathcona, 1911 – 1966

Convent Saint John Juniorate/Collège St-Jean

After living in the red brick convent for 55 years, the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron left this work in 1966 due largely to a shortage of sisters. The building thereafter served as a centre for the group *Francophone-Jeunesse* of Alberta as well as a kindergarten for francophone children. Later it was temporarily occupied by Mr. Guy Lacombe and was then known as *Pavillon André Daridon* in honour of the first Superior of St. John's Juniorate⁴².

On a trip to France in September 1910, Father Hippolyte Leduc, omi, former bursar of the St. Albert diocese promised he would not return to Canada without bringing back at least five Sisters from Évron. The latter would neither be teachers or nurses – their customary roles – but would rather be at the service of the Oblate Priests and students at St. John's Juniorate established in Strathcona, on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River.

Mother Cousin, the Superior General, who responded to Father Leduc's appeal, agreed to send only four Sisters: Sisters Alphonsine Hareau (local Superior), Augustine Guesdon, Joséphine Vaillant and Agnès Foucher. Since the construction of the convent facing 91st Street was not yet finished, the Sisters who had left Évron on December 1st, 1910, first came to St. Albert before going by train to Vegreville where they spent the Christmas and New Year season with the Sisters who were in Vegreville since October 6th. Having returned to Edmonton on the eve of the Epiphany they lived in two different houses before settling in the convent built on the east side of the Juniorate, at 8406 – 91st Street⁴³.

Before relating in detail the type of service the Sisters would be required to perform, a few general observations would be useful. Founded in 1908 by Father André Daridon, a native of Brest, France, the Juniorate first opened at Pincher Creek, in Southern Alberta; the working language was English. Since this village was too far away from most of the population it was called upon to serve, it was decided to move it to Edmonton, capital of Alberta, in a house situated just south of Saint Joachim's church, on 111th Street.

Living in a rented house close to the convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, the Sisters were required to prepare meals for the Priests, Brothers and students. It was not an easy task. They would get up at 5:00 a.m. to pray and meditate. After breakfast they would wash the personal clothes of the Priests and students, mend and iron where necessary. At first the laundry was done at the "mission" – a term in use to indicate the Oblate Fathers' residence at St. Joachim, and occasionally in St. Albert – with the help of the *Filles de Jésus* Sisters who were already well established and equipped. These French Sisters from Kermaria, in Brittany, France, had arrived in Edmonton on October 22nd, 1902: at Father Daridon's request. One of them agreed to spend a few weeks teaching the newly arrived Sisters of Évron how to prepare food *à la canadienne*⁴⁴.

On March 15th, 1911, the Sisters moved to another rented house. Sister Agnes Foucher took over the kitchen duties which in the interim had been done by one of the oblate brothers⁴⁵. On May 23rd the Sisters of Évron received copies of their new constitutions which had been sent with the Oblates from Rome⁴⁶.

Finally, during the summer holiday, the personnel of the Juniorate moved to the newly finished red brick building facing Mill Creek in Strathcona's Bonnie Doon area. This institution similar to a college had as a main objective the formation of the

young men who were preparing to join the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate. The building was officially opened and blessed by Bishop Émile Legal, omi, of St. Albert, on December 27th, 1911 – the feast of St. John the Evangelist. The personnel were as follows: 5 priests, 2 brothers and 29 students. The courses offered were study of religious life, catechism, languages – French, English, Latin and Greek --, sciences and mathematics, artistic education – drama, singing, music – sports and personal discipline. After the arrival of Father Henri Routhier as Superior in 1931, the Juniorate became a French-speaking college⁴⁷.

Affiliated with the University of Ottawa in 1928, the Juniorate offered all the classical courses in French, from preparatory year to Rhetoric. It also offered in English the intermediate and high school courses prescribed by the Department of Education in Alberta.

When the Jesuit College in Edmonton closed in 1942, the Juniorate adopted the name *Collège Saint-Jean* and took on as secondary aim the “education of a lay elite in the field of liberal arts and sciences”. It followed the pattern set in the *petits seminaries* of the province of Quebec where the first aim was to educate future priests, but also doctors, lawyers, engineers, farmers, accountants and business men⁴⁸.

When two Sisters, one of whom was probably the Superior, went to St. Albert to visit Bishop Legal, Father Leduc gave them a parcel and asked them not to open it until they had returned to their new convent. It contained “a chalice and paten in vermeil or gold-covered copper”, a biography of Bishop Vital Grandin, omi, and a note signed by the donor, which said: “Property of the chapel and library of the Sisters of Évron at Strathcona’s Juniorate”. What a delicate gesture from this old missionary who as Vicar General of the St. Albert diocese had countless things to see to⁴⁹.

The Sisters took possession of their home on July 3rd, 1911, even though some of the work still had to be completed. One can easily imagine the difficulties that were presented, as they tried to settle in before the start of the new academic year. They did have access to their new chapel during the annual retreat held from August 25th to 29th ⁵⁰. One of the Juniorate priests celebrated the Eucharist each day in the convent chapel beginning September 14th. The latter was still poorly furnished but the Sisters were happy to have the Eucharistic presence.

Soon after the students' arrival on September 5th, 1911, they had the unexpected pleasure of a visit from the Apostolic Vicar of Athabasca, Bishop Émile Grouard, OMI⁵¹. A native of Brulon, in Sarthe (France), situated some 50 miles (80km) south of Évron, he had first hand knowledge of the community's excellent reputation. His own missions were already served by the Sisters of Providence from Montreal and one might conjecture that he was satisfied with the latter's work since he did not request help from the Sisters of Évron.

On October 3rd, two other Sisters joined the small group: sisters Marie-Thérèse Hélie and Cécile Veillard⁵². From December 6th onward, a routine was established; each day the Sisters carried out their prescribed daily spiritual exercises in addition to their regular duties in the kitchen and laundry. Throughout the year, the Superior, together with the head of the Juniorate (while awaiting the arrival of the bursar) had to plan for the food purchases. During the summer a huge vegetable garden tended to by the Brothers, produced tomatoes, lettuce, radishes, beans and cucumbers in abundance. In addition, fruit was bought by the case, and made into preserves. In the fall pumpkins and gourds were collected and the students helped pick and bag potatoes from a huge field.

The students were required to clean the areas they used most frequently: the dormitory, the study hall and the classrooms, etc. During the down time the sisters, in pairs, would clean the priests' rooms, their recreation hall, the parlour, the corridors, the refectory and their own convent. The sister in charge of the infirmary would also help in the routine work whenever her medical skills were not needed. Already, when the city of Strathcona was annexed to the City of Edmonton on January 31st, 1912⁵³, the Sisters' convent was considered as a beehive of quiet activity and a refreshing haven of peace" always open to visiting Sisters.

At the official opening ceremonies presided by Bishop Legal, the Sisters served 94 guests at lunch and 58 for dinner. Shortly thereafter, Father Daridon gave \$75.00 to Sister Superior in payment for work done by the Sisters during the preceding three-month period.

On February 19th, 1912, fire broke out in the kitchen. Two Sisters managed to flee unharmed by way of the windows, before the arrival of the fire truck⁵⁴. The following day the Sisters joined with the Oblate Fathers to celebrate the 50th anniversary of ordination for Father Leduc and another priest. After the feast, the cleaning of the kitchen and the repairs necessitated because of the fire became a priority. Sister Marie-Augustine Guesdon, the nursing Sister, glad to have been spared the need to tend burn victims, helped instead with the cleaning chores⁵⁵. Towards the end of April, the Superior and another Sister went to help the Vegreville community where two nursing Sisters were sick with typhoid and another from exhaustion. Sister Marie-Thérèse Hélie stayed there for some time until she too succumbed to the disease⁵⁶.

The arrival of Father Pierre Hétu, as bursar of the Juniorate, meant that Sister Superior would henceforth plan the

food purchases with him. During the summer break the community was complete once again, just in time for the annual retreat that was preached by Father Leduc⁵⁷.

Classes started again on September 4th. The teachers and student body represented 56 people; 40 were students; eleven of these were aged 20 or more. Sister Superior requested more help; while awaiting another Sister "most of the heavy washing was carried out at the mission"⁵⁸.

When the community learned on October 17th, that Sister Marie-Louis Rector, Superior at Trochu, had been named "Visitor" for Canada, meaning that she would be responsible to the General Council in Évron for the three Canadian houses, it brought "great consolation" to the local Superior. A little later, Sister Marie-Louise, accompanied by Sisters Marie-Françoise Jouin and Marie-Victoire Bruhay, visited the Strathcona community. The first two travelled on to Vegreville while the latter remained in Strathcona. Three additional Sisters who stayed at the convent took courses in English from a lay professor hired by the Juniorate and who would later become an ordained priest⁵⁹.

In 1913, shortly after Easter, Bishop Gabriel Breynat, OMI, Apostolic Vicar for Mackenzie, visited the Juniorate which gave rise to another celebration⁶⁰. One can readily understand the joy experienced by missionaries who met other religious personnel from France, after having spent several years ministering to various native communities in the Far North.

The community was sorely afflicted when the Superior, Sister Alphonsine Hareau, became seriously ill. Although the doctors hoped to save her, Brother Anthony Kowalczyk who heard about it asked Father Superior to spend the night before the Blessed Sacrament. Early next morning Sister Alphonsine

appeared much improved. The community has always attributed her healing to the prayers of Brother Anthony.

The long and terrible years of the First World War put an end to Trans-Atlantic correspondence between the Sisters, as well as the sending of reinforcements from France. Communication was restored after the Allied Victory on November 11th, 1918.

In 1926, Sister Joséphine Vaillant replaced Sister Alphonsine Hareau as local Superior. After being in this position until 1952 and, later, from 1958 to 1962, Sister Joséphine practically identified her life with that of the Juniorate. All those who knew her acknowledged her great contribution in giving the community its character of reserve, devotion to duty, thoughtfulness and discretion⁶¹.

Several Sisters, especially those who served at the Juniorate's convent between 1911 and 1947, had the pleasure of knowing Brother Anthony Kowalczyk. It was near this holy man of Polish origin, who jargonized the French language and greeted everyone with an *Ave*, this one-armed brother who humbly carried out the most modest - indeed repugnant tasks, that the Sisters worked at their own sanctification during these 36 years. This was true also for the Oblate Fathers and Brothers, as well as the students. One of these, Antoine Bugeaud, who was ordained priest as an Oblate missionary on June 25th, 1950, served the congregation with 'brio' and was eventually posted to the Oblate Grandin province in Alberta. As vice-postulator he pursued the beatification cause of Bishop Vital Grandin and Brother Anthony Kowalczyk, from 1990 until his premature death in Edmonton, on August 16th, 1996⁶².

Father Paul-Émile Breton, omi, former editor of the weekly Edmonton newspaper *La Survivance*, wrote the

following story in Brother Anthony's biography. We have chosen to repeat it here in order to help the reader better understand the saintly Brother's self-abnegation.

During a spiritual conference he was giving to the Sisters who worked at the Juniorate Father Superior discussed various aspects of the virtue of humility.

"Do you wish to see with your own eyes the perfect model of a humble religious person? Wait!" He then sounded the buzzer in a code that identified that the Superior needed Brother Anthony, who was at work. After a minute or two Brother Anthony appeared, dressed in his work clothes and holding his hat. Before the latter could say a word the Superior addressed him sharply, "What do you want now, Brother Anthony?" "I thought you had rang" the brother replied. "Go back to work; is this how you waste your time!" With a profound inclination of his head, Brother Anthony offered his apologies and withdrew as he had come gentle and serene...a lamb.

And Father Breton adds:

At Saint John's College the Sisters in charge of domestic services witnessed the Brother at work during several years. They paid tribute to his great virtue. All, without exception, ascertain that the humble Brother edified others through his sacrifices, piety, his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Blessed Sacrament, his profound faith, his humility and the glow of an intense interior life. They considered Brother Anthony as a true saint⁶³.

As a result of several changes that had occurred since 1943, the work required from the Sisters became excessive. They worked nearly continuously, without rest, during the school year and also during the summer break period when supplementary programs were offered. They were so taken up by their work that they could hardly be attentive during the annual retreat in Trochu. The Provincial Superior notified the Oblates that the Sisters would withdraw. They were replaced by lay personnel.

In 1966 the former Juniorate – officially *Collège Saint-Jean* since 1942 – ceased its affiliation with the University of Ottawa, and became the *Faculté Saint-Jean* incorporated into the University of Alberta⁶⁴.

On July 1st, 1966, Sisters Hélène Fedoruk, Joséphine Vaillant, Henriette Authenac, Jeannette Bureau and Gisèle Beaulieu left Edmonton and returned to Trochu.

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Alphonsine HAREAU	1910 – 1917
Sister Esther LEGENDRE	1917 – 1923
Sister Baptistine COTTEREAU	1923 – 1926
Sister Joséphine VAILLANT	1926 – 1952
Sister Henriette AUTHENAC	1952 – 1958
Sister Joséphine VAILLANT	1958 – 1962
Sister Hélène FEDORUK	1962 – 1966



**Le Goff, 1916 – Wagon trip from Lloydminster to Le Goff.
L to R: Srs. E. Aucherie, M-T. Hélie and B. Couturier
Photo taken by Sr. A. Foucher**



St. Raphael Mission OMI, Deschatelets Archives, Ottawa

Provisional Agreement

*Concerning the establishment of a community of the
Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron at the
St. Raphael Mission in Cold Lake.*

*Very Reverend Father Henri Grandin, provincial of the
Oblate Priests and Reverend Mother Marie Louise
Recton, provincial of the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame
d'Évron agree and write the following document:*

*Rev. Mother Recton will send four sisters as soon as
possible to the St. Raphael Mission of Cold Lake and
these sisters will assume the direction of the following
works:*

- 1. The direction of the day school for native children
on the Reserve as authorized by the Department of
Indian Affairs.*
- 2. Care of the Church sacristy.*
- 3. Preparation of food for the priests and brothers of
the Mission; they will take their meals in a dining
room set aside for their use in the Sisters house.*
- 4. Care of the clothing of the personnel in the Oblate
Community and from time to time some
housekeeping.*

*In return the Reverend Oblate Fathers will assume the
following:*

- 1. Expenses pertaining to accommodation,
furnishings, heat, light, food, etc. will be charged
to the Mission.*

2. *Each sister will receive from the Mission an annual salary of \$50.00 which is payable once each semester; this to cover their personal expenses, clothing, etc.*
3. *Each year, half of their numbers may attend the annual retreat which will be held in one of their communities in the Edmonton Archdiocese. Their travel costs will be covered by the mission. As well the mission will this year cover the cost of installation and travel for the first four sisters sent to the Mission by the Provincial.*
4. *To cover all these costs the Director of the Cold Lake Mission shall attempt to obtain a government subsidy as remuneration for the teachers in the school and as long as this agreement, presently as a trial, remains in force that is until December 31, 1917.*

At that time if the Government has, as it is to be hoped entrusted to the Sisters a hospital for the natives on the Reserve or if they transfer the day school to a residential school subsidized by the Department of Indian Affairs with a sufficient grant in order for the Sisters to be financially independent, the present agreement will be replaced by a new one which will allow the Sisters to be self sufficient as are those of other Congregations in the Province of Alberta who operate similar institutions. It is understood that the Sisters will receive as much spiritual guidance as the Priests of the Mission are able to provide. For their religious life the Superior has the freedom and authority to govern the community according to the Rule and Constitutions of the Institute.

*Executed at St. Mary's Convent in Trochu, Alberta, the
18th day of the month of May 1916.*

*Signed: H. Grandin
Provincial Secretary
Provincial OMI*

*Sr. Marie Louise Rector
Provincial*

*Witnessed: Sr. Marie Joseph Rondo
Provincial Secretary*



**Bonnyville, 1918 – (Top) The former church and rectory converted into a hospital and convent.
(Lower) Sister Eugénie Aucherie**



St. Louis Hospital, 1919



Bonnyville Health Centre, 1986



Bonnyville – Sisters' Home



Our Lady of Victory camp, Gull Lake, Alberta



Youth for Christ – St. Louis Camp, Bonnyville



**Sister Monique Beaudoin teaches catechism
in an outlying country church**

Le Goff, St. Raphael Mission, 1916-1919

Mother Marie Bourgouin, Superior General since 1914, assented to a request from the Oblate Missionaries authorizing the opening of a mission among the Chipewyan Indians at Beaver River Reserve, north east of Bonnyville, Alberta. Here is a copy of the letter she wrote on this occasion:

It is with joy that I approve the first mission of the Congregation amongst the Indians of Canada. It is an unpretentious post but we prefer it to others that may be more prominent. As far as I am concerned I am very satisfied that the Good Lord allowed me to add to the establishments of our dear religious family⁶⁵.

A Provisional Agreement was signed between Father Henri Grandin, General Vicar of the diocese of St. Albert, and Sister Marie-Louise Rector at Trochu, on May 18th, 1916⁶⁶. The Mission had been named after Father Laurent LeGoff, omi, a missionary in the Canadian West since 1866 and an eminent linguist in the Chipewyan tongue.

The first four Sisters designated for this post were Sisters Marie-Thérèse Hélie, Superior; Eugénie Aucherie, teacher; Blanche Couturier, nurse, and Agnès Foucher, cook. On May 29th the Sisters assisted at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in Trochu, where Father Paul Lamort, psm, exhorted them to "go in peace to become witnesses of Christ". Later, accompanied by Sister Rector, Provincial Superior, they left by train for Edmonton. From Edmonton, they went to St. Albert to visit Bishop Legal and ask for his blessing, before heading for Lloydminster where they arrived on May 31st, at 4:00 a.m. Here they were met by two Sisters of the Assumption of The Blessed Virgin (Nicolet), accompanied by Father J.M. Dupé, omi, a

native of Frégéac, Loire-Atlantique (France), missionary at the mission of Our Lady of the Rosary at Onion Lake, on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border⁶⁷.

Spring was late with heavy rains and a cold winds. Around 10 o'clock the caravan of four horse-drawn wagons set out on the rough road heading north of Lloydminster. After crossing the North Saskatchewan River by ferry, followed by another short halt, the group finally arrived at the convent of the Sisters of the Assumption. The latter did everything possible to make the visitors feel at home. After a good night's rest, they celebrated the feast of the Ascension with their hosts and left the next day, June 2nd. Brother Adolphe Vanel, omi, who had come from LeGoff to meet them, along with a few Chipewyans, including the Chief and his wife, accompanied them for the remainder of the trip.

At about three o'clock the party stopped briefly at the former mission site where two oblate missionaries, Fathers Félix Fafard and Félix Marchand had been killed by Cree Indians during the North-West Rebellion of 1885⁶⁸.

The convoy stopped near Frog Lake, at 5:00 p.m., where the chief placed a house at the travellers' disposition. The Brother and the Chipewyans occupied the ground floor while the Sisters settled on the upper floor. After an early start the next day, and a short stop for lunch, the group arrived at their destination at around 2:00 p.m. where they were received by Father Louis Dauphin, a native of Landinvy, in Mayenne (France). As no approximate time of arrival had been set he had convened the Chipewyan to meet at the church at 4:00 p.m. After Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, he introduced the Sisters to those present who all seemed happy to greet them and shake hands. The next day the missionary officially greeted the Sisters and

instructed the members of his flock on the attitude of respect they were expected to show to the newcomers.

Three weeks later some fifty pupils – boys and girls – gathered at the school. These Indian children are very bright; they see everything, are intuitive about many things and draw conclusions with incredible accuracy. They spoke only Chipewyan on our arrival; a few months later they understood some English and even a few sentences in French⁶⁹.

At first the natives often visited the Sisters for insignificant ills. In serious cases, however, the Sisters would visit the sick at home. This is where they discovered the extreme poverty of the Indians who lived in shabby shelters, scattered here and there in the bush. These huts, without furniture, often revealed a pile of blankets in a corner and a few pieces of bread or other food on a mat or wrapped up in a blanket. The Sisters had to kneel beside the patient in order to treat him/her⁷⁰.

The agent of the (federal) Department of Indian Affairs sent a copy of a document to the Sisters entitled *Memorandum of Instructions for Matrons of Hospitals on Indian Reserves*. Each visit, each prescription had to be inscribed in a notebook, *in situ*, and reported monthly to the local Indian agent⁷¹.

The good Oblate brother provided the Sisters with fresh vegetables from the garden, eggs, chickens and milk from the mission's cow. Occasionally they would have a share of a cut of moose or other type of meat offered to the missionary. Beginning January 1st, 1918, the teachers' annual salary of \$50.00 was raised to \$75.00.

In 1917, Sister Eugénie Aucherie became ill with typhoid fever. The following year the four Sisters contracted Spanish influenza. Immediately, help was sent from Vegreville.

Throughout the years of the First World War the government paid little interest to the natives. Due to lack of supplies, most of them returned to their traditional custom of hunting and fishing, which meant a nomadic life. Since their children accompanied them, the school program was scuttled, which ended the Sisters' mission at Le Goff. In any case the diocesan authorities had plans to mission them elsewhere⁷².

After having attended the annual retreat at Trochu, in August 1919, the Sisters remained there while awaiting a new posting. The St. Raphael Mission was closed on October 1st, because the government did not keep its promise to build a boarding school; use of the small provisional school could not go on indefinitely. On October 15th, 1925, the General Council decided to consider the mission permanently closed⁷³.

LOCAL SUPERIOR

Sister Marie-Thérèse HELIE

1916-1919

Bonnyville

The village school, 1919-1937
St. Louis Hospital, 1919-1986
Bonnyville Health Centre 1986-

The origins of Bonnyville go back to the spring of 1907, when Father Adéodat Thérien, OMI, accompanied by three settlers, Albert Dargis, Wilfrid Ouimet and Philorum Ouellette, arrived in a horse-drawn sleigh at Moose Lake. He had served as a missionary at Lac-la-Biche and Onion Lake, among other places, before founding St-Paul-des-Métis, in 1896, where he was now the resident priest⁷⁴. In 1908, Bishop Legal of St. Albert appointed Father François Bonny, a secular priest, as parish priest of the St. Louis Mission near Moose Lake; he gave his name to the budding hamlet, before leaving in 1910. After that Father Le Goff and other missionaries served the mission for a few years. In 1916, Father Joseph E. Lapointe, a native of St. Janvier parish in Quebec, was named parish priest and stayed until 1945.

He immediately took it upon himself to search for ways to provide for care of the sick and education for the children. In 1918 under his initiative, Bonnyville welcomed its first medical practitioner, Dr. Sévérin Sabourin. In 1919 he was successful in obtaining the services of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron. The foundation of the St. Louis Hospital and the village school followed⁷⁵.

Father Lapointe repeatedly requested help from the Superior when, finally, on October 15th, 1919, four sisters from Trochu arrived in Bonnyville: Sisters Marie-Thérèse Hélie, Superior, Maria Foucher, Henriette Authenac and Agnès

Foucher. These valiant pioneers were followed shortly by Sisters Eugénie Aucherie, Marcelle Édon and Victorine Perlemoine⁷⁶.

Temporary convent and hospital

The Sisters settled temporarily in the former church/rectory that was placed at their disposition by the parish. The ground floor served as an 8-bed hospital whereas the upper level was converted into a dormitory for boarders and classes for some fifty students. (boarders and day students) The Sisters' accommodation was in the attic.

At first the Sisters lived in complete poverty, which they accepted joyfully. Fortunately, Father Lapointe had left two beds, a few blankets and some of his dishes for the sisters. This would have been acceptable for a few days but unfortunately the Sisters' luggage was held up for a full month. At mealtime the sugar bowl, cups, serving bowls, were all used as soup bowls. The saucepan served as the soup tureen. When Sister Agnès decided to bake bread she had to improvise the bread tins. At night, two Sisters slept together in a large bed, one on a small cot, while the fourth Sister used a large feather tick on the floor. As the available blankets were insufficient in this cold, drafty house, coats and woollen articles of clothing were all put to good use.

The first chapel was set up in the parish priest's former office; a worktable was used for the altar and a small box covered with a white veil served as the Tabernacle. Without proper beds and bedding it was impossible to organize even the beginning of a hospital – a fact that many townspeople could not understand. Seven potential patients regretfully had to be turned away, but it was impossible to do otherwise. The children also impatiently awaited the opening of the school.

December arrived with its biting cold, so severe, that the upper part of the house had to be abandoned. The Sisters settled in the kitchen and in the former sacristy; as no door separated these two areas, in order to keep the kitchen warm the Sisters used a large piece of material that had been left by Father Lapointe.

Beginning in 1920, boarders were accepted at the convent and two children came as day students. The small refectory that served as a classroom was soon too small. Another room was arranged to serve exclusively as a classroom. Benches were moved each morning from the chapel to serve as seats and later a few boxes were added. The number of school children continued to increase and some had to be turned away due to lack of space.

In the chronicles of the Bonnyville community there is mention of an occasion when the Sisters had done some sewing for one of the ladies who, in payment, gave them a jar of cream and a lovely white hen and eighteen eggs. The clucking hen sat on fourteen of the eggs but to the dismay of the sisters, only hatched three little chicks.

In July 1925, Sister Marie-Thérèse Hélie's health deteriorated to the point that she could no longer remain as Superior. After spending some time in Vegreville she finally was transported to the infirmary at Trochu⁷⁷.

The village school, 1919-1937

The Bonnyville residents wanted the Sisters to take charge of the village school. This is how events occurred: The Alberta Department of Education approved the school and Sister Eugénie Aucherie was named Director; two other Sisters joined her shortly thereafter⁷⁸. Due to the lack of unanimity among the taxpayers, they had to wait until September 16th, 1925 before

another building could be used as the village school. A former hotel, temporary rearranged with two badly lit classrooms was fitted with desks. Right from the start the classrooms were too small to accommodate the number of students, especially the younger ones; there were only 24 desks for 37 students⁷⁹.

On December 26th, at a School Board meeting, the members approved the proposal that Sister Eugénie provide two qualified teachers by 1926, in order to be eligible for departmental grants⁸⁰. This proposal was renewed in the New Year. In the Sisters' chronicles we find the following entry: "School opening: the Inspector is displeased that one of the two Sisters is not qualified; yet, during Mother Marie-Louise Rector's annual visit, she heard only praise regarding the Sisters' good spirit, simplicity and endurance"⁸¹.

The number of boarders increased substantially so by September 1926; the village school was overcrowded. Instead of some 60 students for the two classes the number had risen to about 90⁸².

In September 1927, a new building designated to serve as a school was rented, but because of a shortage of teachers the lower grade classes had to be cancelled. This caused serious concern and much anger from the people. However, on November 21st decisive action brought satisfaction; Sister Eugénie Aucherie, in addition to her duties as Superior, took on the lower grade classes. There were 42 children enrolled in grades 1, 2 and 3. This arrangement lasted until 1929 when the construction of the new hospital was completed⁸³.

The former church building was again used as a school; this time with five classes. Everything went well for the following years. But as early as 1937 it could easily be seen that the Sisters of Évron could not carry on their teaching mission for

much longer. The local School District was preparing to build a large school with some ten classes, which would require many qualified teachers. As it happened, the illness of one Sister and the departure of another reduced to two the number of teachers. The Sisters of Évron therefore had to abandon this field of work and ceded their place to the Sisters of The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. The sisters of Évron received solace from their former students and their families. This was only appropriate as they had dedicated their lives, despite very difficult circumstances, for a period of 17 years⁸⁴.

The St. Louis Hospital, 1919-1986

After the parish church had been given over to the Sisters of Évron in October 1919, a parish committee supervised the construction of a new church that was blessed on August 23rd, 1923.

In 1927 another committee, chaired by Dr. Sabourin, collected funds for the construction of a new hospital, larger and better equipped. Despite poor economic conditions which affected most of the district residents, the required sum was collected and the Sisters moved into the new building on October 16th, 1929. Various services were provided: surgery, medicine, maternity, paediatrics, etc. A raffle, organized by the parishioners provided the sum of \$3,140.00 to help buy an X-ray machine.

On August 10th, 1931, Archbishop Henry J. O'Leary, who had succeeded Archbishop Legal in 1920, presided at the official opening and blessing of the new hospital. Later, a charitable organization, encouraged by the Sisters, Ladies Auxiliary of St. Louis Hospital, contributed furnishings for the patient rooms and also provided various other services⁸⁵.

Dr. Sabourin, loved and respected by all, died suddenly on April 29th, 1944, in the hospital where he had worked so hard. Such an unexpected event was very upsetting for all those who had known him⁸⁶.

Under the wise administration of several Sisters, namely Marie-Cécile Clermont, Laura Chalut and Florence Verrier, and with the cooperation and support of lay persons, St. Louis Hospital continued to provide medical care in the region. The number of patients increased to a point where consideration was given to increasing the size of the hospital. On November 25th, 1953, provincial authorities agreed to allow 28 additional beds. Construction of an annex began on May 8th, 1954 and was finished on April 15th, 1955. Bishop Philippe Lussier, ccsr, bishop of St. Paul, presided at the inauguration ceremony on September 20th. This modern, enlarged facility was the result of 36 years of hard work by the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron.

During the 1970-80's, the Sisters gradually relinquished the administrative function of the hospital. In 1976, Mr. Simon Dallaire, an employee of twelve years, became the first lay administrator of St. Louis Hospital. He was replaced in 1994 by Mr. Clément Johnson, and from August 1997 onward by Mr. Alex Smyl.

In 1973, the paediatrics services were transferred to the third floor of the hospital, which had until then, been occupied by the Sisters. The latter had purchased a home near the hospital which allowed the sisters to leave the work site at the end of their shift⁸⁷.

Mention must be made of the contribution made, by the various St. Louis Hospital Boards over the years. Initially an Advisory Board was named by the Sisters of Charity, and a first

meeting was held May 13th, 1954. These community minded citizens had the good function of the hospital at heart⁸⁸.

A Board, consisting of Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron, governed St. Louis Hospital and in 1972 two lay persons were added; a third was added in 1975. Two years later, a representative from the Town Council and another from the Municipal Council of Bonnyville were added to the Hospital Board. On January 15th, 1979, a new Board of Management having authority to plan health services in Bonnyville, was constituted. Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, Provincial Superior, confirmed the nomination of its nine members. Since the Advisory Board originally appointed in 1954 had lost its *raison d'être*, it was disbanded⁸⁹.

After several years of study, research and deliberation, the Board of Management established a negotiating committee composed of four members, two from the St. Louis Hospital and two from the Duclos Hospital; its task was to discuss the possible fusion of the two hospitals. An agreement was reached in August 1978. After government approval in January 1981 work was begun on construction of an ultra-modern hospital⁹⁰. From that moment on the Board of Management would henceforth be composed of six members named by the Sisters of Évron and five by the district. Two of the members named by the Sisters were to be members of the Duclos Society. Approval for the Board of Management was ratified by an order-in-council of the Alberta Legislature.

On October 18th, 1979, members of the St. Louis Hospital and citizens of Bonnyville celebrated the 60th anniversary of foundation. During the banquet held at the Agriplex, Dr. Jean-Paul Bugeaud, president of the St. Louis Hospital's medical staff, recalled the immense contribution made by the Sisters of Évron⁹¹. Sister Eugénie Aucherie, the first

Administrator and only survivor of the first six Sisters, as well as Paul Sabourin, eldest son of the hospital's first medical practitioner, were among the invited guests⁹².

The Bonnyville Health Centre, 1986 –

On May 12th 1986, Bishop Raymond Roy, of the St. Paul diocese, presided at the blessing of the chapel and the new building that had replaced both the St. Louis and Duclos Hospitals, now called Bonnyville Health Centre. The atmosphere of friendship and professional care offered by the staff is more important than the beauty of the building; this is precisely what the Sisters had strived for. They reaffirmed their own Christian vision of health care in order to give meaning to the ever-increasing needs in the health care field⁹³.

The official opening of the Centre took place on June 11th. Sister Cécile Goyer, Provincial Superior, welcomed the invited guests and other people present⁹⁴. Shortly thereafter St. Louis Hospital was demolished, and a page of history disappeared.... On January 31st, 1988, during a special ceremony, the Board of Management paid homage to certain persons who had dedicated many years to the care of others. Here we mention only one of these special persons, Sister Eugénie Aucherie, aged 98, who because of her age, could not attend. The great charity, compassion and leadership she had displayed during her 20 years' stay in Bonnyville, were virtues that testified to the fact that she had always given the best of herself⁹⁵.

In the early 1990s the Alberta government decided to balance its budget in all its departments. Massive cuts in personnel and supplies were initiated and all staff members had to adapt to change in light of governmental policies. Health care services were adversely affected; nurses and support personnel

were laid off and hospital administrators were forced to reduce operational dollars⁹⁶.

The Department of Health decided in late 1993 to establish 19 regional boards in Alberta to govern the health care system. The funds to manage health services flows from the government to the regional boards who in turn distribute monies to the health facilities and programs.

Denominational care facilities were successful through the Catholic Health Association and Affiliates to convince government officials that the status of these facilities must be guaranteed. Agreements were signed at different levels of authorities and those facilities who wish to preserve a christian approach in the service and care offered can maintain their mission and value system. A point of contention remains today as the availability of sufficient financial resources is not always accessible. However in these facilities dedicated board members, physicians, administration staff and volunteers all continue to believe that the gospel invites us to witness to the healing presence of Jesus in our world.

The ever changing scene in the health care sector during the 1990s was very disturbing to those who shouldered the responsibility of assuring quality care to the sick, the elderly and other vulnerable people in our local communities.

The Bonnyville Health Centre Board of Directors in concert with the medical staff began to question how our patients would fare when referrals to an urban centre could not be realized as it was becoming more evident that waiting lists continued to grow in the city. The reality that patients and their families faced was expensive travel and accommodation fees as well as much fatigue and anxiety due to long waiting time. The Board, the medical staff and administration with a co-operative and

collaborative approach were successful in recruiting several specialists who would travel to Bonnyville on a regular basis to provide consultation, diagnostic and surgical services to the people of Bonnyville and area who required these services. This innovation in the provision of health and medical service has been highly lauded by authorities in health care and it continues to grow as needs are manifested.

In 1996 the Alberta Cancer Board chose Bonnyville as the site of the Community Cancer Centre, an outreach program of the Cancer Clinic in Edmonton. This has been a welcome service to people requiring certain cancer treatment, who would otherwise have to travel to Edmonton.

Bonnyville is also the site of the regional laboratory service which is a tremendous asset to the specialists and local physicians.

In autumn 1997 the Bonnyville Board of Directors took the initiative to establish a Health Care Foundation which would be governed by a separate board. This organization would be involved in raising funds to supply needed equipment and programs which would enhance the health services being offered in Bonnyville. A committee composed of staff, administration and interested community volunteers organized the first fund raising event in April 1998 and each year henceforth at least two major events will be held. Community support is overwhelming which is indicative that the citizens of Bonnyville wish to maintain and enhance the health related programs they now enjoy.

What awaits us tomorrow? No one knows. But today, like yesterday and for 300 years the Sisters of Évron humbly wish to remain faithful to their mission: a sign of God's love for all His people.

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Marie-Thérèse HÉLIE	1919 – 1925
Sister Eugénie AUCHERIE	1925 – 1930
Sister Marie-Thérèse HÉLIE	1930 – 1936
Sister Eugénie AUCHERIE	1936 – 1938
Sister Maria FOUCHER	1938 – 1940
Sister Anna CLERMONT	1940 – 1943
Sister Marie-Victoire BRUHAY	1943 – 1949
Sister Marguerite Marie MAIGNAN	1949 – 1952
Sister Eugénie AUCHERIE	1952 – 1954
Sister Marie-Cécile CLERMONT	1954 – 1960
Sister Laura CHALUT	1960 – 1967
Sister Florence VERRIER	1967 – 1973
Sister Marie-Thérèse LABERGE	1973 – 1983
Sister Florence VERRIER	1983 – 1985
Sister Mary Ellen O'NEILL	1985 –

Catechism Missions in Alberta

Ever since their arrival in Trochu, the Sisters of Évron always helped the missionaries by giving catechism classes for children who had no access to Catholic schools; sometimes these children were from Trochu. The Sisters would go to a parish (or community), either at the school or in a home, where they would teach the basics of religion with the aim of preparing the children to receive first communion and confirmation.

At the beginning of the summer holidays in 1953 two Sisters assisted with a summer camp at Gull Lake, west of Lacombe, approximately 80 miles (130 km) north-west of Trochu. This camp, under the supervision of a diocesan priest, was called Our Lady of Victory Camp. Assisted by a few older girls, the sisters taught approximately 150 children from the area. Here is an extract of the Sisters' chronicle on their first catechism mission in Alberta:

We had brought pictures cut out from religious calendars; these would not only decorate the bare room where we would hold classes but help the children to understand some of the material we would teach about. A map of Palestine caught the attention of some children. The Sister who had prepared it with great care had not noticed that the boat she had placed in the Dead Sea should really have been in the Sea of Galilee [.....] With the parish priest we had left Trochu at about 2:30 p.m. by car. To our great joy we took a half-hour break at Red Deer, for a short visit with the Sisters of Wisdom.

We arrived at Gull Lake around 6:00 p.m. The setting was ideal: a big lake more than a mile wide (1 ½ km) and believed to be some 20 miles (32 km) long, with a clean sandy beach which was easily accessible.

On the camp ground there was a large hall 75 by 25 feet, used as a chapel and refectory, with a kitchen in the far corner. Three cabins used by the boys are adjacent to one another. A parent is designated as supervisor of each cabin. A separate cabin branded "convent" is reserved for the Sisters; it is surely the home of Dame Poverty but we don't mind. There are two rooms, one with a wooden table, the other with a folding bed and a bunk-bed. Finally, there are three cabins with bunk-beds reserved for the girls.

Soon after our arrival priests from neighbouring parishes arrive with their respective groups; some children are accompanied by their parents who repeat, "dear Sisters, how happy we are to see you!"

By 7:00 p.m., the cook who had arrived at 4:00 p.m., had managed to put a bit of order in her kitchen and had assembled the pots and pans. Each child brought a napkin, a plate, utensils and a cup. They seemed to have hearty appetites; we too should have been hungry as our last meal was long gone. But the novelty of the scenery coupled with fatigue took away our appetite.

After supper the priest in charge told the children to line up and wash their dishes in a large basin. A few boys who thought this procedure a bit too slow went straight to the water pump. An old sheet we had brought along came in handy for drying the dishes, as no one had seen to this detail as well as a few others. After the clean-up the senior girls organized some games. Meanwhile the parents of one of our Trochu boarders who lived nearby drove us to their home to pick up extra sheets and blankets.

Upon our return at 9:00 p.m., it was time to ring the bell for evening prayer. This first communal prayer was magnificent and rekindled our spirit for the days to come. The senior girls helped put the 64 children to bed. The night was quite cool. The cook had not brought bedding with her so we gave her a blanket that we could certainly have used ourselves. But the night passed and we were up at 4:45 a.m. in order to pray before mass. We missed our "Book of the Hours" which would have helped us to be in unison with the community. Instead we tried to remember the words of the "Little Office of the Blessed Virgin" but we had difficulty remembering the latin words. It was a consolation just the same. Morning prayer was said with the children followed by a dialogued mass at 7:00 a.m.

Breakfast followed, and a short briefing with the personnel informed everyone about the day's activities. The schedule was followed very well and the response to the sound of the bell reminded us of community life. The children were divided in two age groups: 7 to 11 years and 11 to 14 years. Two-hour classes were held in the morning and afternoon; an hour of swimming under supervision occurred in the afternoon. Study time, short written exams, reading and recitation of the rosary occupied the rest of the time. After evening recreation, the director would review the three chapters studied that day, followed by a short talk and evening prayer. From 10 p.m. on, silence was the rule, at least on the program; occasionally the boys had to be reminded.

Days were organized pretty much the same. On the first day some of the girls went with Father to a small

village 5 miles away to buy a piece of cloth that he wished to hang behind the altar. Father requested a sheet to be used as an altar cloth but most people used grey flannelette sheets so they had nothing white to offer. Fortunately our letters to Trochu were answered and we received an altar cloth and many other things we had requested, much to Father's delight. We did not have the Blessed Sacrament, but daily mass and communion gave us the necessary courage to continue our work for the glory of God.

Although this type of work was new to us, the director had confidence in our know-how. He gave us full responsibility, even at meal-time when we served the children with a few helpers. Apart from the noise, the children were polite and respectful towards us. At the outset one of the older boys offered to serve the water as he thought the Sisters shouldn't have to do this.

We have not yet spoken about singing. At Gull Lake we sing everywhere. Each day we practised hymns accompanied by a 13-year-old boy with his harmonica. He also accompanied at mass on Sunday. Occasionally we are accompanied by another type of melody, less harmonious but just as fervent. The gulls seem to have a strong community spirit; pressed tightly against each other, hundreds of them send their raucous calls to the Creator, sometimes drowning out the children's loud and clear *Aves*.

The Gull Lake mission was followed by a week of catechism at Trochu. There were fewer children since they received instructions all year long. Three years later, the chronicles leave us another account of the Trochu Sisters' summer work:

Our three teaching sisters from Trochu went again, as in the past, to Our Lady of Victory Camp at Gull Lake for the summer catechism classes. Reverend Father Allan Reynolds, pastor of Trochu, drove us by car and he took us on a side trip to Sylvan Lake (west of Red Deer). The scenery is splendid.

Fathers Patrick Rooney of Lacombe and V. Forsyth of Olds, had already arrived. A few ladies will help us supervise the 72 children. Father Reynolds finds everything well organized. We are edified by the way he helps to serve at meal time. He wears his scout uniform, which gives him the aspect of a Camp Master. He also presides at morning and evening prayer.

The priests were delighted to see the Way of the Cross that was offered by our Edmonton Sisters. Each day we make the Way of the Cross with the children and they really love this time.

Father rented a large tent from the RCAF Squadron Leader at Penhold who supervised its installation. One of the Sisters teaches catechism there. At 5:00 p.m., a corner of the tent is transformed into a confessional. Do not get the idea (added the writer mischievously) that I stay there to preside at the celebration.

We dearly love our children who seem filled with goodwill. A young girl asked me the subject of the next lesson so she could study in advance. A 15 year-old boy who had very little catechism till now and who rarely had the chance to go to church, gets up early every morning and makes the Way of the Cross before

attending mass. There is much competition between the boys to serve mass and learn the proper responses. The days are very full and tiring but we sense the need of these children to hear about God and our faith; we wish we could do more. One has no idea of the lack of religious knowledge that exists among these children⁹⁷.

The catechism mission at Our Lady of Victory Camp, in 1958, was again the object of a chronicle:

The number of children who came to receive religious instruction at Gull Lake, this year, was a record210 in total. We had 85 for our two-week mission. Sister Laurentia (Beaudoin) had 21 for first communion. Everyone was happy to find a new cabin four times the size of the others and painted white and blue. Electricity and running water were installed in the main hall. Such progress shows the interest and dedication of the people who sponsor the camp.

Two boys, 13 and 15, were to receive their first communion in their parish church on the following Sunday, as well as their two older sisters who had attended the preceding course. The other children were younger than usual, 13 years old at most, which is explained by the fact that catechism classes are held each year. We have been assigned the last two weeks in July instead of the first two as in the past, which means new groups, which has its advantage for both parties. We were happy to see them so docile, courteous, respectful and attached to the sisters. [...]

The work is more and more organized and well distributed under the direction of Mrs. Sutton. Thus,

every day our communal prayer is said, the four hours of instruction are well spaced. There is daily Mass, the meals, the rosary recited under the trees, games, singing, a wiener roast and baseball. After supper when it is cooler the latter is particularly appreciated by the children; early on the children discovered that our two young sisters excelled at this sport.

Mrs. Sutton is very gifted and is loved by the children; she seems to have a special talent to bring out their maximum co-operation all the while leaving each one free to express himself and to use his initiative. She is discreet and humble, qualities she has communicated to the ladies requisitioned to help with the cooking; all are charming, simple and very devoted.

On Sunday evening, a simple procession through the woods was organized to the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes which two boys had set up in the branches of the nicest tree and at an ideal place for people to gather. They had asked the Sisters to look at it to see if it was appropriate⁹⁸.

In 1959, a chronicle was sent from the St. Raphael Mission, or more precisely from Elizabeth Colony, some 22 km from the Mission.

This year the catechism [mission] began on July 8th and ended on the 17th. A hall was used in turn as a classroom, an oratory, a refectory and a dormitory. We were four teachers; a lady with her young daughter taught in the Cree language, and two of us – Sisters Laurentia Beaudoin and Agnes Yuhas – in English, to prepare [the children] for their first communion and confirmation.

The children here, mostly Métis, are pleasant and agreeable. They get along well just like a large family. They learn well and, surprisingly, remember all that we teach them.

The classes started at 9:30 a.m. and finished at 3:30 p.m., and included recreation periods as in school. On Wednesday and Friday, Father Victor Le Calvez came to offer mass in one of the classrooms, since the church building is still under construction. All the children and their parents attended the High Mass, and sang from their hearts. They have nice voices and sing very well. [...]

We hope that despite the short time spent here teaching catechism that these poor children will use their knowledge to good advantage in the future⁹⁹.

Finally, here is the last report from Gull Lake in 1960.

Sister Rose (Liliane Baril) wrote: my initiation to Our Lady of Victory Camp was a new experience. I looked after "special cases" – 14 all told. Each case was different. A 13 year-old girl had not been baptized, others had not made their first communion and others had received little or no religious instruction.

Daily Mass was offered at 8:00 a.m. This meant moving the benches that were used for meals for seating during mass. On the first morning we recited prayers as a group. The next day Father Hartman explained the different parts of the mass which was a great help to the children.

This year we received more children but also more help: a female supervisor for the girls and a male supervisor for the boys, a graduate nurse, a lady and three young catechists. This allowed us to have seven classes and to group the children more appropriately. We had 77 children for confirmation and 17 for first communion. Also 20 children had come from Trochu and its missions for first communion and 8 adults for confirmation¹⁰⁰.

¹ Chronique, Trochu.

² See Appendix G.

³ See Appendix B.

⁴ The name refers to a french monastery; henceforth the office would be said using the french language rather than latin. *Livres d'Heures latin-français*, Dourgne (Tarn), Ed. De l'Abbaye d'Encalat, 1952.

⁵ Chronique, Couvent Ste. Marie.

⁶ Chronique de la Residence Notre Dame.

⁷ Pages Familiales # 77, June 1975.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Letter from Fr. Bernier to Sister Marie-Louise Recton, August 25, 1910. AG SCE, Chronique de Vegreville, 2 Sep, 3 and 6 October, 1910. *Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire*. p. 6 and 7.

¹¹ *Place Names of Alberta*, Ottawa KP, 1928, p. 128-9. G. Carrière, omi, *Dictionnaire biographique des O.M.I. in Canada*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa, vol III, 1979, p. 261-2.

¹² Chronique. 22 and 30 October, 1910.

¹³ *Ibid.* 12, 21, 29 Nov., 8 Dec., 1910.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 18, 27 Dec. 1910, 3, 10, 16, 25 and 31 Jan. 1911.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 31 Jan., 7 Feb., 5 and 11 Oct 1911.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 26 Feb. and 7 Jul. 1911.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 11 and 30 Mar, 11 and 27 Apr, 12 Sep. 1911.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.* 18 and 26 May, 1911.

²¹ *Ibid.* 7 and 26 July, 1911.

²² *Ibid.* 28 and 31 Aug, 8 Oct. 1911.

- 23 Chronique, 5 Oct. 1911, Ceauneau, *Un Compagnon de Mgr. Grandin*, p. 70-71.
- 24 Chronique, 18 October, 5 and 28 November 1911.
- 25 *Ibid*, 17 Feb., 10 and 30 Mar., 12 Apr. 1912.
- 26 *Ibid*, 10 and 20 Mar, 12 April, 20 May 1912.
- 27 *Ibid*, 26 June 1912.
- 28 A photocopy may be found with the photographs shown earlier .
- 29 "Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire", p. 18.
- 30 Chronique de Vegreville.
- 31 *Ibid*. Originally from New Brunswick, he was named Archbishop of Edmonton on September 7th 1920.
- 32 Chronique de Vegreville.
- 33 *Ibid*.
- 34 Chronique de Trochu, September 1959.
- 35 Recollection of Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill.
- 36 Chronique de Trochu, February 1965.
- 37 Chronique de Vegreville.
- 38 Notes from St. Ruth Wirachowsky.
- 39 *Ibid*.
- 40 Chronique de Vegreville.
- 41 Notes from Sr. Ruth Wirachowsky.
- 42 France Levasseur-Ouimet, *Regards, paroles et gestes*, Edmonton, Faculté Saint-Jean, 1997, p. 94.
- 43 Letter, Sr. Hareau to Mother Cousin, 22 Dec. 1910 and 12 Jan, 1911, AG ACE, Strathcona File. Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire, AP SCE, p. 8.
- 44 Chroniques des Soeurs, 19 and 31 Jan, 8 and 22 Feb. 1911. AG SCE, Strathcona file. See also A. Trottier and J. Fournier, *Les Filles de Jésus en Amérique*, Charlesbourg, QC, 1986, p. 190.
- 45 Chronique, 3, 19, 31 Mar., 12, 22 Apr., 1911.
- 46 *IBID*. 26 May, 1911.
- 47 *Saint-Jean : Une Institution qui s'adapte*; Edmonton, Faculté Saint-Jean, 1983, p 17-19.
- 48 *Ibid*, p. 22-25.
- 49 Father Leduc was a native of Évron.
- 50 Chronique, 13 and 21 Jun., 7 and 23 Jul., 28 Aug. 1911.
- 51 Chronique, 5 Sept. 1911.
- 52 Chronique, 28 Sept. and 3 Oct. 1911.
- 53 J.G. MacGregor, *Edmonton, A History*, Edmonton, Hurtig, 1967, p. 190.
- 54 Chronique, 19 Feb., 1912.
- 55 Chronique, 4 and 10 Mar., 1912.

- ⁵⁶ Chronique, 13 May, 1912.
- ⁵⁷ Chronique, 22 and 26 May, 2 June, 28 July, 11 Aug., 1912.
- ⁵⁸ Chronique, 22 Aug., 2 and 8 Sept., 1912
- ⁵⁹ Chronique, 12 and 21 Oct., 1 Nov., 3 Dec., 1912. Sister Marie-Victoire Bruhay was still at the Juniorate in 1938-1943 when the author was a student there.
- ⁶⁰ Chronique, 2 Apr. 1913. He would later become famous as "The Flying Bishop".
- ⁶¹ Sous l'égide de Notre-Dame, no. 7, June 1960, p. 156.
- ⁶² Antoine Bugeaud was a long-time friend and classmate of the author.
- ⁶³ P.E. Breton, omi., *Forgeron de Dieu, Frère Antoine Kowalczyk, omi, 1866-1947*, Edmonton, Ed. Hermitage, 1953, p. 161 and 205.
- ⁶⁴ *Saint-Jean, Une institution qui s'adapte*, op.cit, p. 37.
- ⁶⁵ Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire, p. 11, Régistre des Nominations, p. 2.
- ⁶⁶ See photocopy of said document on the preceding pages.
- ⁶⁷ The difficult beginnings at the Onion Lake Mission are described in A. Migneault, *Les Soeurs de l'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge dans l'Ouest canadien*, 1891-1991, Nicolet, SASV, 1991, p. 19-33.
- ⁶⁸ See Jules LeChevallier, omi, *Batoche, Les Missionnaires du Nord-Ouest pendant les troubles de 1885*, Montreal, Presses Dominicaines, 1941, and Stuart Hughes, *The Frog Lake "Massacre"*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, Carleton Library, no. 97, 1976, 364 p.
- ⁶⁹ Souvenirs du 50e, p.14
- ⁷⁰ D.C. Scott, Memorandum, etc., copy in AG SCE.
- ⁷¹ "La semence a grandi" in *Aperçu historique donné à l'occasion du Cinquantenaire*, p. 11-14. "Mission indienne LeGoff, connue aussi sous le nom de Mission indienne du Lac Froid, MS 6 p.
- ⁷² AG SCE, Letter, Bishop Legal to Sister Recton, n.d.
- ⁷³ Régistre des Nominations, p. 2 and 3.
- ⁷⁴ Gaston Carrière, omi., *Dictionnaire biographique des O.M.I. au Canada*, vol III, p. 224.
- ⁷⁵ H. Bourgoin and R. Girdard, éd., *Echoes of the Past, History of Bonnyville and District, Bonnyville*, Comité du Livre, ca 1984, p. 523-526. In 1917, at the Rev. John E. Duclos' initiative, a small hospital had been built about three miles west of the hamlet under the auspices of the Missionary Ladies Society of the Presbyterian Church of Canada.
- ⁷⁶ Archives, Convent St-Louis.
- ⁷⁷ Chronique de Couvent Saint-Louis, Bonnyville.
- ⁷⁸ *Echoes of the Past*, p. 547.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 549.

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- ⁸⁰ Chronique du Couvent Saint-Louis, Bonnyville.
⁸¹ *Echoes of the Past*, p. 549.
⁸² Chronique du Couvent Saint-Louis, Bonnyville.
⁸³ *Echoes of the Past*, p. 545-552
⁸⁴ AP SCE, 60 years of Service to Bonnyville District, 1979.
⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
⁸⁶ Archives, Sisters of Évron, Bonnyville.
⁸⁷ Archives, Sisters of Évron, Bonnyville.
⁸⁸ *Echoes of the Past*, p. 561.
⁸⁹ *Ibid.*
⁹⁰ *Ibid.*
⁹¹ *Bonnyville Nouvelles*, 23 Oct. 1979. Dr. J.P. Bugeaud was the younger brother of Father Marie-Antoine Bugeaud.
⁹² *Alta*, # 10, vol. XVIII, Nov.-Dec. 1979.
⁹³ Archives of the Sisters of Bonnyville.
⁹⁴ *Ibid.*
⁹⁵ *Ibid.*
⁹⁶ *Le Franco*, 15 Feb. 1990.
⁹⁷ *Petites Nouvelles de chez nous*, Oct. 1956, p. 9-10.
⁹⁸ *Sous l'égide de Notre-Dame*, 1958, No. 1, p.8.
⁹⁹ *Au Canada: Catéchismes*, 1959, p.108.
¹⁰⁰ "Camp de catéchisme en Alberta" in *Pages familiales*, # 16, Apr. 1961 (Srs. Rose Baril, Monique Beaulieu and Alice Labbé), p. 118-119.



Tisdale, 1925 – The temporary hospital



Sister Marie-Françoise Jouin



TISDALE. — Hospital Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus.
St. Therese Hospital, Tisdale, 1925



**The renovated hospital celebrates its
 25th anniversary**



Tisdale Nursing team in 1940: (Front) Srs. Eugénie Verron, Hélène Chevrollier, Marie-Françoise Jouin, Louise Février and Anna Clermont.

(Back) Nurses Ada Moses, Evelyne Botherel, Gertrude Carpenter, Margaret Sutherland, Donatienne Hudon, Haddie Cassin, Kobetta Foster, Anne Mahussier, Yvonne Creath, Ann Lutz and Annette Casavant

**Tisdale July 12th, 1998 – Sisters who attended the opening
of Place Ste Thérèse celebration**



**L. to R.: U. Whitley, M-T. Laberge, L. Boivin, T. Verrier, F.
Clusiaux, A. Knievel, M.E. O'Neill, L. Chalut, H. Beaudoin**



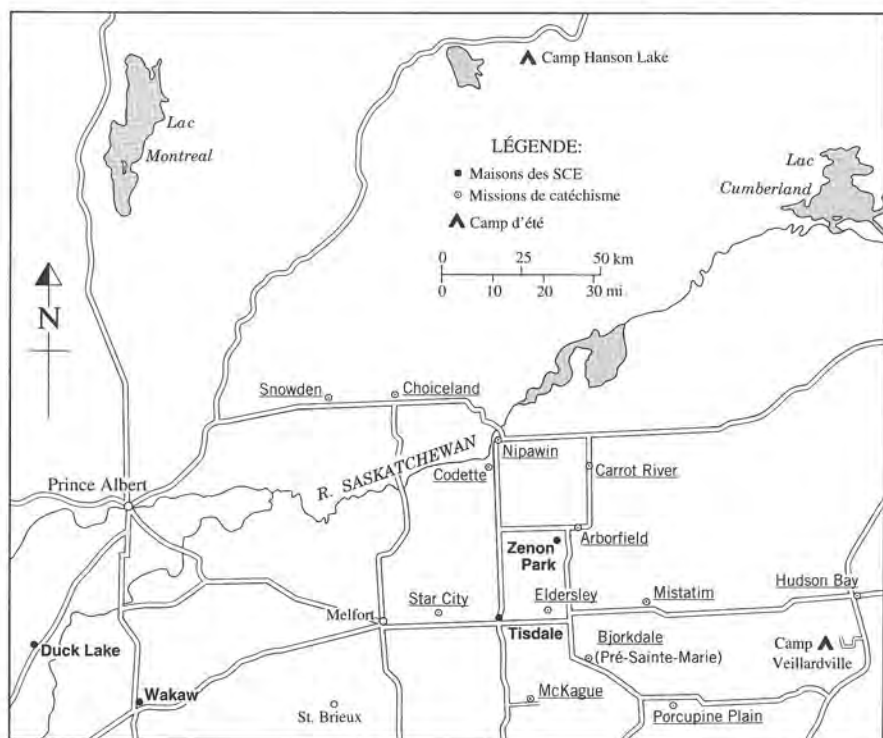
**Commemorative plaque affixed at the
Ste Thérèse grotto on the site of the
former St. Therese Hospital**



1938-39

Zenon Park, 1936 (Top) Sacred Heart Convent and boarding school; 1939, with its 1948 annex. (Lower) School children supervised by Srs. Eugénie Verron, M-Marguerite Maignan and Albertine Bureau, 1938-1939.

CATHECHISM MISSIONS IN EAST CENTRAL SASKATCHEWAN [w. Constable]



IV

EXPANSION INTO SASKATCHEWAN

Tisdale, Saskatchewan, 1925 – 1976

St. Therese of the Child Jesus Hospital

During a visit to the community of Vegreville in 1911, Bishop Albert Pascal, omi, had expressed his desire to have some Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron work in the diocese of Prince Albert. He had met the group that had come on the exploration trip in 1909, on board the ship from France. When the diocese of Calgary was established on November 30th, 1912, and Bishop John Thomas McNally was named, the priests of Sainte-Marie de Tinchebrary who had helped the Sisters of Évron settle in Trochu had to relocate to the Archdiocese of Edmonton, and later to the diocese of Prince Albert¹. When Bishop Pascal died in 1920 he was replaced by Bishop Henri Jean-Marie Prud'homme. He also repeatedly requested that the Sisters come to his diocese; the request was denied many times, "due to the lack of personnel". The Bishop even went to Évron to plead his cause².

Finally, after this last invitation, the Sisters of Évron decided to open an establishment in Tisdale, the first in Saskatchewan. Situated some 125 miles (200 km) northeast of Saskatoon, this village had a population of 1200 people, some of whom spoke French. Father Henri Voisin, psm, was parish priest of the Immaculate Conception parish in Tisdale. As Father L. Leconte and his companions had done, he had also left the Archdiocese of Edmonton because Archbishop O'Leary preferred having Anglophone religious communities. Fathers Voisin and Leconte were willing to relinquish the rectory if this

would facilitate the Sisters' installation which had become quite urgent³.

On February 5th, in a letter to the Mother General, Sister Marie-Louise Recton relates an extract of a message received from the Vicar General of Prince Albert:

The Priests of Ste. Marie de Tincbebray who have recently joined our diocese, to our great joy and satisfaction, have mentioned the possibility of your coming to Tisdale. This news brought great joy to our Bishop. Today, in his name, I invite you to visit Prince Albert and Tisdale. The people of the surrounding area have manifested on several occasions their ardent wish to have Sisters take over the direction of the hospital which they hope to have soon. The Prince Albert diocese is ready to receive you and Tisdale awaits you⁴.

What a warm invitation! The Priests of Sainte-Marie de Tincbebray were well known to the Sisters of Évron, especially the founding group with whom they had collaborated when they arrived in Trochu. In 1925, the Provincial Council approved the founding of a hospital in Tisdale. Sisters Marie-Françoise Jouin, Superior, and Marie Neuville arrived in Tisdale by train on October 6th. They were followed on the 15th, by Sisters Maria Foucher and Berthe Gautrin⁵. While carpenters worked on the provisional hospital, the Sisters settled in their new home.

"We have already tried our hand at everything", wrote the chronicler, "but our masterpiece is the house banking". Everyone who has spent a Canadian winter in a small wooden house knows that this refers to the procedure by which the

skirting board is "banked" with additional boards, earth and snow in order to stop the wind and help keep the house warm.

As soon as the provisional hospital was ready patients arrived. The townsfolk welcomed the Sisters and were extremely benevolent towards them. However, adds the chronicler.

The enemy of all good unleashed an anti-Catholic campaign through the person of an apostate who spread all kinds of calumnies against the Sisters. Sick people dared not show up at the hospital. It took much diplomacy on the part of the doctors to persuade them that the aim of these false tales was to discredit the Sisters' good influence. The crisis could not last. Gradually, goodwill was re-established and the numerous sick people lauded the care given to them by the Sisters⁶.

This incident was but one of many in the anti-Catholic and anti-French campaign mounted by the Ku Klux Klan (K.K.K.) – a group of extremists inspired by their U.S. counterparts who claimed "linguistic unity [English, evidently] of the Canadian people". The persecution lasted from 1925 to 1934, that is from the end of James Gardner's Liberal regime until the defeat of Conservative Premier J.T.M. Anderson. A more favourable attitude toward the teaching of French and catechism in Saskatchewan schools would return only in the early 1960's⁷.

At the end of June 1926 construction of the new hospital ceased, because the estimated costs to complete the building far exceeded the planned budget. Construction began again the

following year; this would allow sufficient time to review plans and revise the budget.

Work started anew in June 1927. The orientation of the building took into account the need for patients to have access to the sun in each room, at one time or another during the course of the day. The hospital faced the town without being aligned with the street.

Bishop Prud'homme came to Tisdale in June 1927 to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation. The sisters took advantage of this visit to invite him to bless their house. On the 14th, vigil of the feast of the Sacred Heart, all the personnel including a few patients and friends were grouped near the main entrance to welcome His Excellency, "So these are the good Sisters who give poison to the patients without the Bishop's authorization!"⁸ said the jovial Bishop. He was obviously alluding to the K.K.K. calumnies mentioned earlier. The ceremony was simple yet pious. The mitred Bishop copiously sprinkled holy water in each room. However, the Superior's room was given a special benediction; "when the devil is driven out of a community he takes refuge in the Superior's room; we must therefore not allow this to take place." Finally, in December 1927, the new St. Therese of the Child Jesus Hospital opened.

The new hospital had 40 beds, but as we shall see, it would have to be enlarged in ten years time. During the summer of 1929, several sick and/or wounded persons employed on the railway were cared for. On a particular night in July, 14 wounded were treated. The shortage of beds did not deter the foreman who insisted that they all be accommodated. He was anxious to report the accident to the Railway authorities so to help him out, somehow the group was taken in.

The hospital Sisters found it difficult to recruit qualified nurses. In 1934, Sister Marie-Françoise Jouin took the necessary measures to establish a program to train the personnel. She invited the doctors, each according to his own speciality, to share their knowledge and know-how; some in the classroom, others at the bedside. The young women who had given satisfactory service for a period of three years received a diploma signed by the doctors and the nursing supervisors. Since this program had not been officially recognized as a "school" the Sisters did not wish to attract too much attention and risk incurring official sanction. Thus, when the diplomas were handed out the Sisters held a small ceremony without sending out formal invitations⁹.

In the fall of 1936 the roof of the first hospital needed repairs. Since this building was used to house the female personnel, the Sisters decided to enhance it by adding a dormitory and a recreation room that could also be used to hold the doctors' monthly meetings. A radio was also installed to the great satisfaction of the young ladies who would spend their free time there.

As the 1927 hospital also needed to be enlarged, authorization was requested, and granted by the General Council. On the advice of the Grey Nuns of Saskatoon, A.J.K. Verbeke was hired as the architect. The final plans with approximate costs were approved by the Provincial Superior, and submitted to Évron. Special permission had to be obtained from Rome before borrowing some of the required funds¹⁰.

The 1925 house had to be relocated to allow the work to proceed. Construction was carried out rapidly and completed in March 1939. The new hospital was the most important building in the area and the proud townsfolk requested that its

official opening be carried out in style. Three hundred and seventy-five people came from 22 surrounding localities to attend the ceremony held on May 12th, 1939. Of interest, most of the promoters were former advocates of the K.K.K. anti-Catholic group who had spread the calumnies about the Sisters' work¹¹.

The community was very upset on December 7th, 1945, when Sister Marie-Françoise Jouin suffered a severe heart attack. Dismayed, the Sisters immediately started a novena in honour of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Sister Marie-Françoise's condition improved but the anxiety persisted. As her general health was poor, she expected to die. A second attack alarmed the Sisters anew; in addition to a weak heart it was found that Sister Marie-Françoise suffered from cancer. She was therefore transferred to a Saskatoon hospital under the vigilant care of Sister Berthe Plouffe. After a few weeks, she was brought back to Tisdale feeling slightly better and undertook light duties. Her health failed gradually and she died peacefully on the night of May 23rd, 1947¹². According to Bishop Prud'homme of Prince Albert the funeral of Sister Marie-Françoise Jouin "had the aspect of a triumph, for she was a born leader, who was an inspiration to others; a religious person who was passionately united to God"¹³.

Sister Anna Keohane followed Sister Marie-Françoise as Superior for a period of six years. A few improvements took place in 1949: a modern cafeteria was installed in the basement and a new laundry and boiler room added.

In April 1949 the Nurses' Residence – the very first house of the Sisters of Évron in Tisdale – was sold to a Catholic parishioner¹⁴. The following year a new Nurses' Residence with all the modern comforts was built: living-room, library, reception room, etc. The Sisters also chose to move

into the building, thus liberating the hospital's third floor which would henceforth be used for paediatrics and could accommodate up to twelve patients. Work was begun at the end of September and finished in 1950.

On October 28th, in the presence of many well-wishers the official opening of the Nurses' Residence was held and coincided with the hospital's 25th anniversary. Mr. Randall, chairman of the Hospital Board, announced that Sister Anna Keohane had received her diploma in Hospital Administration, which meant that the hospital itself was henceforth classed at the "A" level. All those present were impressed by the beauty of this new and modern building. The nurses moved in on November 1st and the Sisters followed a couple of days later.

On November 30th, 1958 Sister Albertine Landry replaced Sister Marguerite Maignan who had been Superior for the last five years. The latter returned to Zenon Park in order to be of assistance to Sister Angelina Plouffe, the school principal. The new Superior was well known, having been a nurse at Tisdale for ten years; she was received with enthusiasm and assured of everyone's cooperation.

On July 12th, 1959, the Sisters were informed of Sister Anna Keohane's death, which had occurred on the 7th, in Lisdoonvarna, Ireland, the dear country where she had been born and where she had hoped to die. She worked for 20 years in Canada, six of which in Tisdale, and she had left pleasant and profound memories. She would be another angel to intercede in heaven. Together with her predecessor, Sister Marie-Françoise Jouin they would watch over their former companions.

Even with the expansion of the hospital in 1950, seven years later there was talk of adding a new wing. Plans were

drawn up for an additional 75 beds¹⁵. This new project meant numerous visits from inspectors, contractors and the architect. Eventually government authorization to build was received. A short ceremony was held on the hospital lawn, the afternoon of August 29th, 1959. The mayor of Tisdale turned the sod and a wooden cross handed over by Sister Albertine Landry was mounted. Father Gerard Van Vynckt, parish priest, blessed the construction site and the cross. The cross, a meter high, would remain in place until the end of the construction¹⁶.

In mid January 1961 ten young women enrolled in a course for Nurses Aides, sponsored by the Canadian Vocational Training School. The program, under the direction of a registered nurse was of seven months duration. If the candidate did not possess the required skills to become a competent nursing assistant or if she proved negligent in her responsibilities, she forfeited her diploma. The Tisdale hospital was one of three hospitals in Saskatchewan chosen to provide this program. That same year St Therese Hospital received accreditation status for the 25th consecutive year; it was the only one of 21 hospitals in northeastern Saskatchewan to achieve this standing.

On February 21st, 1961, His Excellency Laurent Morin, Bishop of Prince Albert, at the blessing of the new addition, said "I thank you in the name of the Church for your apostolate to the sick; you are God's messengers. Like a priest, the consecrated religious has a ministry to fulfill; she can do much good spiritually to the suffering members of Christ as she cares for their corporal needs."¹⁷

The new wing was officially opened on May 10th, 1961. The Honourable Erb, Minister of Health, represented the Honourable T.C. Douglas, Premier of Saskatchewan. The Chairman of the Hospital Board acted as emcee, while the

Mayor of Tisdale welcomed all those present. Floral bouquets and gifts from various companies involved in the construction were displayed in different areas of the new building. Delegated by Bishop Morin, Father Van Vynckt, using the prayers from the ritual, asked God's blessing on the Hospital, the personnel and on the mission of caring. This was followed by several speeches thanking the Sisters and lay personnel for their labour of love and care of the sick for the past 36 years.

On August 31st, 1961, another celebration was held: the graduation ceremony of the first group of nursing assistants from the Canadian Vocational Training program. Three of these graduates would henceforth be employed by the hospital. Several guests attended including the Chairman of the Hospital Board and the physicians; everyone congratulated the graduates who would now continue caring for patients. The eldest of the class graciously thanked the superior, Sister Albertine Landry.

Towards the end of January 1962, renovations to the chapel were undertaken – a task that lasted until April. It was not until June 20th that the altar and communion rail, more in keeping with liturgical reform, would be installed. The unused items and pieces of furniture were sent to Porcupine Plain, a mission of the Priests of Tincchey, where the Sisters taught catechism during the summer holidays.

Other Sister Administrators served in the ensuing years: Sister Florence Verrier, Sister Helen Levasseur and Sister Laura Chalut.

In January 1973, Mr. Michael Woytiuk assumed the position of hospital administrator – an innovation that had been prepared for some time. He replaced Sister Laura Chalut who left Tisdale to become Provincial Bursar at Trochu.

In June all the Sisters from Tisdale joined the sisters in Bonnyville for a week's vacation. Father Jules Laberge of Lac La Biche had placed his summer cottage at the disposition of the Sisters – a first experience of its kind. After many long days and nights spent in the care of the sick or teaching children, a period of rest and relaxation, enjoying nature was very much appreciated.

Two years later, foreseeing that they would be leaving Tisdale because the hospital would soon be sold to the government, the Sisters took a six-day holiday in the United States where they assisted at a presentation of the Passion play in the Black Hills of South Dakota – an unforgettable experience!

Before leaving Tisdale the Sisters decided to give the statue of St Therese, which was near the entrance to the hospital, to the parish of Wakaw. Father G. W. Timmermans, parish priest in Wakaw, came with two helpers to take the statue to its new home. Henceforth this statue would be admired in front of the church of Wakaw which was dedicated to St Therese.

Recruiting nurses was becoming more difficult; most of them preferred working in urban hospitals. In addition, the Sisters who were registered nurses as well as those working in the service areas were aging. This situation led to the eventual transfer of the hospital to the provincial government. With the approval of the Generalate, the Provincial Council notified the appropriate authorities. Even before the formalities had been totally completed the Sisters withdrew and left Tisdale on May 8th, 1976¹⁸.

On June 23rd, 1976, 21 Sisters who had worked in St Therese caring for the sick since its foundation in 1925, were honoured by the community of Tisdale in recognition of their services. During the ceremonial meal, Mr. Alex Bryson, Chairman of the provisional Board of Directors paid tribute to the Sisters: "we salute the selfless devotion of the Sisters." "They served a total of 464 years at Tisdale, Mayor Jack Ives added, and most of the time they were barely paid what it cost them to live.¹⁹" In addition to caring for the sick, the Sisters taught many girls basic nursing skills; they also taught catechism to town children and during the summer holidays to children in rural areas. But, added, Mr. Bryson, "the memory left by the Sisters is in the hearts of the people." At the end of the meal Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, Provincial Superior, thanked the people of Tisdale and district for their loyal support during the Sisters' 50 years of service at Sainte-Thérèse hospital²⁰.

On July 12th, 1998, another page in the history of Tisdale was written when the area residents gathered on the banks of the Dog Hide River to celebrate the Eucharist as the founders had done a hundred years before. Mass was celebrated by Bishop Blaise Morand of Prince Albert; Father Luc Gaudet, the parish priest, ccelebrated. Several Sisters travelled from Alberta to attend the ceremonies. The previous evening they were guests at a banquet organized by the ladies of the Catholic Women's League who were also celebrating their 50th anniversary of foundation.

Sunday afternoon a park named *Place Sainte-Thérèse* was inaugurated on the former site of the hospital; a grotto with a statue of the "Little Flower", had been built in recognition of the 50 years of service by the Sisters. This ceremony was attended by former staff members and allowed for time to renew acquaintances. Among the guests was Dr.

Clifford Amundson, and his wife who had come from Nepean, near Ottawa, to partake in the festivities. He had served in Tisdale as a medical doctor for 27 years. After the ceremony the participants took time to meet former friends and review the many souvenir photo albums²¹.

Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill thanked all participants and closed her address with these words:

"We salute you, citizens of Tisdale, who have always inspired us and continue to do so. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for what you have done for us. Thank you for your cordial hospitality today. When we left Tisdale 22 years ago, we told you that we would carry you in our hearts and in our prayers, and today we renew that promise.

May God bless each of you, your families and your beautiful prairie landscape. As we move toward a new millennium may the same spirit which gave courage to our pioneers and founders continue to help us journey toward the day when together we shall celebrate Love eternally²²."

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Marie-Françoise JOUIN	1925 – 1947
Sister Anne KEOHANE	1947 – 1953
Sister Marguerite-Marie MAIGNAN	1953 – 1958
Sister Albertine LANDRY	1958 – 1964
Sister Florence VERRIER	1964 – 1967
Sister Helen LEVASSEUR	1967 – 1969
Sister Laura CHALUT	1969 – 1970
Sister Agnès KNIEVEL	1970 – 1976

Zenon Park – Sacred Heart Convent

1935 – 1978

The Village of Zenon Park, located 150 miles (240 km) Northeast of Saskatoon, was colonized in 1910 by Franco-American families who had worked in the New England spinning-mills before they had been recruited by Father Philippe-Antoine Bérubé. There were also several families who came from Penetanguishane, Ontario, because of conflicts that originated with Regulation XVII, which forbade the use of French language in provincially operated schools²³. In 1929, a C.N.R. line linked Zenon Park to the Saskatchewan railway system²⁴.

The townsfolk ardently desired that the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron would come to Zenon Park. As early as 1928 there were requests that they open a school and accommodation for boarders. Unfortunately lack of personnel prevented the Provincial Council from opening an establishment in this francophone community²⁵.

Father Armand Arès, responsible for this parish, renewed the request from time to time; finally, in 1935, the Provincial Council of the Sisters of Évron agreed to open a convent and boarding school in the village located only 25 miles (40 km) north east of Tisdale. It was thought that such a community might well be a place where religious vocations could flourish. Three Sisters left Trochu on August 24th; arriving four days later, accompanied by Sister Marie-Françoise Jouin of Tisdale, who was happy to have new neighbours. The group was

comprised of Sisters Marguerite-Marie Maignan, Superior, Eugénie Verron and Albertine Bureau²⁶

A house had been rented by Sister Marie-Françoise Jouin; she knew several townspeople who had been in the Tisdale hospital, either as patients or as visitors²⁷. Settling into this temporary home was quite easy as the proprietor had left a stove, some furniture, dishes and other household articles for use by the Sisters. She had recently had a water reservoir installed in the cellar, with a pump in the kitchen. Drinking water was at a premium and could only be obtained outside the village. For a reasonable price water was brought to the Sisters on a weekly basis. Right from the start, the local population was very generous, offering fresh vegetables, cream, meat, chickens, etc. A neighbour even offered to bake bread and provide the milk supply²⁸.

Excavation work for the new convent and boarding school began on the first Friday of June 1936; Raymond Courteau had donated the land and the work was done by the local people. By mid-October the building was ready for occupancy and it was with regret that the Sisters left the bungalow they had occupied for a little over a year²⁹.

For the first time on June 27th, the Sisters assisted at the Eucharist in their small chapel – an unforgettable date³⁰. Despite the proximity of the Parish Church they were allowed to have the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel. Mother Marie-Louis Montague accepted to be the sponsor giving it the name of Sacred Heart Convent³¹.

A charming description of the village of Zenon Park at the time (1936), was left to us by the chronicler:

No danger of getting lost as there are only two streets. There are three stores, a post office, the Sisters' temporary residence across the street, a hotel or restaurant that does not look like one or the other, although it serves both purposes; the school with its immense yard; then, at the top of the village, to the north, a nice rectory.

A little further on stands the church and on the opposite side the Sacred Heart convent. I have not mentioned the railway station, because it is not found on one street or the other; it is situated outside the village near the last homes. The population of Zenon Park, entirely Francophone Catholics reside mostly on nearby farms. We are surprised to see so many people at Mass on Sundays: the vast and spacious church is filled. The children have no special places and are with their parents, except for some twenty altar boys who sit in the sanctuary. One of us supervises them from the Sacristy while the other Sisters are in the choir loft with the choir which is composed of a number of young people³².

The parish is a French speaking jewel set in the midst of a cosmopolitan population dominated by an anglo-protestant element. At the end of the first school year, there were 115 students, divided into three classes; a lay teacher had been hired for the first grade.

Shortly after the Sisters settled in Zenon Park, each Sunday after High Mass, or on Saturdays during the winter, two of them went to Arborfield, a neighbouring anglophone village, to teach catechism to the children. Here is a short account of this apostolate written by Sister Angelina Plouffe.

The Sisters had also been asked to teach catechism on Sundays to the children who attended local schools which were staffed by lay teachers. During the summer, after High Mass, two of them would go by car to Arborfield, a mission served by the Zenon Park pastor, where they would teach catechism. On Saturdays in the winter months they travelled by 'caboose' – which looked like a Bohemian caravan [but on sleighs] pulled by horses and heated by means of a small stove³³.

Decoration of the altar at the [parish] church, the washing and upkeep of the altar linens; as well as accompanying hymns on the organ were also entrusted to the Sisters³⁴.

After ten years, the boarders had become so numerous that the convent had to be expanded. This was done in 1947-48 and 60 children could then be accommodated³⁵. Life at school and in a convent changes little over the years. Good is achieved without fanfare. How wonderful it is to be entrusted with the spiritual well being of the children! They are so receptive, especially if they are helped by good christian families. It is in good soil that seeds germinate and bear fruit³⁶.

Throughout the year different events and celebrations were planned, thus breaking the monotony. These consisted of music festivals, the feast of St. Catherine with its traditional toffee and the Christmas concert, well rehearsed and much appreciated. There is also the solemn feast of the Sacred Heart, patron saint of our Convent, and the graduation ceremony for the grade XII students³⁷.

Sister Marguerite-Marie Maignan was the first Superior of the Zenon Park convent. Very maternal towards the boarders she had a special place in her heart for orphans and

handicapped students. It was a great sacrifice for all when she accepted to become administrator of the St. Louis Hospital in Bonnyville. Sister Antoinette Rocher succeeded her in November 1949. The new Superior put her heart in this mission which she loved, and she was loved in return. It was also a sacrifice for her, in 1958, when she was called to the Provincial House to take charge of the Noviciate. She, in turn, was succeeded by Sister Angelina Plouffe, well known in the area, and who remained the principal of the school.

During the 1950s, Bishop Leo Blais of Prince Albert attempted to recruit qualified teaching Brothers who would teach high school to the boys, leaving the Sisters in charge of the younger boys and the girls³⁸.

On August 5th, 1954, three Brothers of the Sacred Heart arrived at Zenon Park from Granby, Quebec. Since only 13 boys had registered in high school whereas 65 were in grades 3 to 8, the Brothers took on the latter group rather than the high school group and continued this until 1959. Between 1959 and 1961 the Brothers now numbering five continued to teach the boys from grades 3 to 8, and also taught mixed classes (boys and girls) from grades 9 to 11.

In January 1956, Sister Eugénie Aucherie, Provincial Superior, accompanied by Sister Marcelle Edon, made her canonical visit to Tisdale and Zenon Park. The snow was so deep that the Sisters returned to Tisdale from Zenon Park in a 'Bombardier' – a particular brand of snow mobile. "Cold and frost, fog and snow, praise the Lord!" added the chronicler³⁹.

During the month of June 1960 the Catholic population of Veillardville and the surrounding missions wished to surprise the Sisters and mark 25 years of their presence at Zenon Park. Veillardville is a hamlet located 65 miles (100 km) from Zenon.

It bears the name of Veillard, a family that had come from Savoy (southeast France) in 1915 to settle in this part of Saskatchewan. On a beautiful Sunday afternoon, at 2:00 p.m., several cars arrived in front of the convent. The Sisters were informed of the planned visit when Mrs. Veillard invited them to come into the yard. A big cake, decorated with a '25' brought by the visitors awaited them on a small table.

Speeches thanking the Sisters for educating the children, teaching them catechism and the satisfaction of having given three girls to the service of God – two of them in the Institute of Évron – were read in French and English. A young girl then offered Sister Superior of bouquet of roses in which 25 one dollar bills folded in a fan-like fashion had been dissimulated. The rest of the afternoon was spent in recalling the arrival of the Sisters and visiting the town. Many had not yet seen the beautiful church of Zenon Park. Towards 5:00 p.m. everyone left for home, leaving the Sisters overwhelmed with the sentiments and appreciation expressed in this surprise visit.

On August 14th of the same year the village of Zenon Park commemorated the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the parish. Celebrations began on Saturday evening with the crowning of the queen of the harvest; ten other contestants, titled "princesses", each wore an emblem of one of Canada's ten provinces. On Sunday morning a solemn High Mass was presided over by Bishop Laurent Morin of Prince Albert; he also gave a homily for the occasion. After mass, everyone walked to the cemetery where prayers were said for the deceased pioneers. His Excellency again addressed the faithful before blessing a magnificent monument erected to honour the deceased.

After the banquet a parade of floats took place with a band leading; a parishioner mounted on a black horse led the

march. This magnificent historical procession was comprised of numerous floats decorated by various groups. On the first float rode the queen of the harvest surrounded by her princesses. The following ones represented Dollard des Ormeaux, national hero; the pioneers, her majesty the French Language; the teaching sisters of the village who were depicted by three little girls dressed in nuns habits. Next was a float, reminder of La Vérendrye, a famous French Canadian explorer, then a float from the hospital prepared by the Sisters of Notre-Dame d'Auvergne. There followed floats entitled: 'homage to our dedicated pastor', and finally the last three; our homeland, our folk songs and stories, St. John the Baptist, our patron saint. The sisters had done a tremendous amount of work decorating their float but they somehow found time to help others who were finding it difficult to complete theirs. The chronicler added, "we have the reputation, justified or not, to be good at everything and to also help others out of their predicaments."

There followed visits to the parochial institutions, namely the church, the convent, the college, the hospital and the home for retired people. The day ended with an evening of fun. A play was put on which told the history of Zenon Park; it was followed by folk songs and dances. Towards midnight everyone went home, tired but happy. The day was memorable and even the weather was ideal. In recognition of 25 years of service to education the parishioners offered a statue of 'Our Lady of Schools' to the Sisters of Évron.

In 1961, due to a shortage of personnel, the Brothers of the Sacred Heart had to abandon the mission in Zenon Park. When they left the parish in 1962 the Sisters took on all the classes.

Sister Angelina Plouffe left Zenon Park in 1966 after having dedicated her services for 29 years. She was

succeeded as Superior by Sister Claire Dargis who continued to teach⁴⁰.

With the advent of enlarged school divisions and the closing of small country schools, there was no reason to retain boarding schools. The one in Zenon Park closed on September 1st, 1973 and most of the Sisters of Évron were transferred elsewhere⁴¹. As the number of Sisters decreased, the ones remaining could not ensure the upkeep of the building. The Provincial Council therefore sold the convent/boarding school to the parochial cultural centre. Two sisters remained: one taught at the village school and the other assumed parochial tasks. They were considered part of the Tisdale community of Sisters.

Sister Claire Dargis remained in Zenon Park and taught until 1976. For the next two years she helped at the Marean Lake summer camp, assisted the parish council, the A.C.F.C. and the Cultural Centre. In October 1978, she was called to a new post in Edmonton. The presence and apostolic mission of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron at Zenon Park, had lasted 42 years⁴².

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Marguerite-Marie MAIGNAN	1935 – 1949
Sister Antoinette ROCHER	1949 – 1958
Sister Angéline PLOUFEE	1958 – 1966
Sister Claire DARGIS	1966 – 1970
Sister Maria LEMAY	1970 – 1973

Catechism Classes in Saskatchewan

In opposition to the anti-catholic and anti-french campaign launched by the Anderson Government, the Priests of Sainte-Marie de Tinchebray of the diocese of Prince Albert asked the Sisters of Évron to help them evangelize the area around Tisdale where no regular parishes existed. Catechism was to be taught to students in preparation for their first communion and their confirmation⁴³. These classes, held annually beginning in 1934, involved the following hamlets and villages: Eldersley, Star City, Snowden, Codette, McKague and Pré-Sainte-Marie, Porcupine Plain, Carrot River, Choiceland, Melfort, Nipawin, Hudson Bay and Veillardville.

Sisters Eugénie Verron and Albertine Bureau sent a report of their three weeks activities to the Mother House. Here are a few extracts.

On July 5th, following the example of the disciples of Jesus, we left, two at a time, to evangelize: Sisters Berthe Gautrin and Albertine Bureau to the mission of McKague served by Father [E.J.] Desmond, and the following week for Snowden: Sister Superior (Marie-Françoise Jouin) and I went in the opposite direction to Eldersley, a mission where Father Henri Voisin had worked and, since his death, was served by Father J.A. Rivard; the following week we went to Pré Sainte-Marie.

At Eldersley forty children, bright and eager to hear about God, attended the religious instructions; among them a sixteen-year old boy who has not yet received first communion. You should see, Reverend Mother, how keen he is to study and learn his catechism! The grace of God is visible in

this soul. Each morning for the five days we are here, he walks more than four miles (six km) on the railroad track, in order to be quiet when learning his prayers and to study more attentively [...]

There are also several girls, candid souls, who are drawn to us; true, they are still young but if our presence awakens in their hearts the thought of a vocation, may the Good Lord nourish it and call them to follow Him. Oh what good could be done if there were more of us in this apostolic field. Poor children, several know very little, not even the 'Our Father'.

The mission of Eldersley is about 12 miles (20 km) from Tisdale. At night we return to the convent, and in the morning we go back to our work asking the Good Lord to inspire us with the words that will enlighten these young souls, so that He will be better known and consequently better loved. When we arrive we can see the young faces light up. We begin the catechism lessons or teach them hymns, as some children don't get there right away. Ten of the children live as far away as 10 miles (16 km) and Father Rivard has to pick them up by car each day, and take them home at night. When all are present the children are divided into three groups: Father takes charge of the advanced group who have made their first communion; Sister Superior, assisted by a lay teacher takes a similar group while I look after the beginners. How I love these poor little ones and how I would like to teach them many things! But there is so little time and we must stick to the essentials.

The knowledge they have about religion is very limited but since they have shown such goodwill, I hope that our Lord was happy to come into their hearts on Saturday, July 7th, the date of their first communion [...]

After the ceremony, Sister Superior, wanting the children to remember this beautiful day, distributed small pins of Mary in her Immaculate Conception, presents that had been sent by Mother Provincial for those who would receive their first communion. The others received small holy pictures. All went away happy and their parents repeated how grateful they were for what we had done.

Our first week of catechism behind us, we took a day of rest with the community and spent time in prayer.

Monday, July 9th, the second mission; Sisters Berthe Gautrin and Albertine Bureau left at 8:00 a.m. for the distant mission of Snowden, an eight hour drive; we would not see them again until the following Monday.

At about 4:00 p.m., Sister Superior and I leave for Pré-Sainte-Marie, one of Father Rivard's missions, situated about 30 miles (50 km) southeast of Tisdale. The roads are bad, nearly impassable all the way, since it has rained abundantly lately.

Pré-Sainte-Marie consists of a church, a school, the teacher's house and a store. The church, large and pretty from the outside, has a steeple, similar to our countryside churches in France. But as soon as

we enter, our hearts shrink; it looks like a barn. The altar is extremely poor – a few boards covered with a white cloth. We are filled with thoughts of love and thanksgiving for our dear Lord who does not hesitate to come into this very modest abode to bring joy and consolation to His children. Dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua, the church can hold from 150 to 200 people. The benches are crudely made from tree trunks which still have some bark showing. The windows are clear and have several broken panes. The birds are masters of the building. Mass is celebrated only once a month; the blessed Sacrament is not kept in the Tabernacle.

To the right of the church is a meadow of modest size, which gave the locality its name [pré]. Nearby is a cemetery where the parishioners pray and remember their dead. A beautiful cross erected on the site is to be officially blessed on Confirmation day. The grave sites are well kept, although some have no flowers, not a weed can be seen; all have white crosses made by relatives or friends. The soil is sandy and the alleys are well kept with very fine white sand, which adds beauty to this peaceful and solitary corner. To the left of the church is a small grove where people meet in summertime to exchange greetings and news under the shade of trees that seem to have defied hurricanes.

Ten minutes away, again on the left, we find the school, barely big enough to hold between 35 and 40 children who are taught by a Catholic male teacher. On the school ground is also the teacherage which has been assigned to us for the

week; on his departure the teacher has not yet been replaced. Some 20 paces further is a store run by a Frenchman, father of six small children. Here you find basic items, which avoids having to drive to Tisdale. At Pré-Sainte-Marie there is neither a telephone line nor a railway; it is a small corner in the woods, very favourable for solitude and meditation. The entire population is spread throughout the countryside.

Having left Tisdale at 4:00 p.m. we arrived at Pré-Sainte-Marie at 6:00 p.m. We got out at the Mahussier store where we were well received and enjoyed a small lunch. Father then helped us settle in the teacherage which would be our convent for the week [...]

Just as at Eldersley, the children were happy to see the Sisters. Many had never met a sister before. They started arriving at 7:30 a.m. in large numbers. By 9:00 a.m., 52 children of various mother tongues; French, English, German and Polish were present. We wrote their names on a list, adding if they had made their first communion or had been confirmed, and if they had studied catechism in French or English. We then split them in two groups: Sister Superior took the English-speaking group and I the French-speaking one; nearly half are mixed blood. What work! Some do not know their prayers, not even the sign of the cross; others are more advanced and some are really knowledgeable. But as we were only two, it was a slow process and the first day was very hard. In the evening Father who had driven all over the countryside came back with ten more children.

After inquiring about our work and being told of our difficulties he gave up going to look for more. Sixty-two! That was enough to keep all three of us busy. We divided the children as we had done in Eldersley, but there was a hitch: the language. The prayers were taught in French and English and, to save time, catechism was taught in English – a language understood by all.

The majority of the children lacked a basic knowledge of religion so few were admitted to their first communion; despite this, everyone seemed happy and the mothers promised to supervise the learning of catechism [...] As at Eldersley, small gifts were given and thankful parents invited us to return next year. We joyfully set out for Tisdale, happy to be back in our community and to take a bit of physical and spiritual rest. [...]

This week, beginning the 15th [of August] we shall take care of the Tisdale children. I know them well, as after my summer trips, I would teach them catechism on Saturday, and on Sunday after mass.

His Excellency Bishop Prud'homme arrived on Wednesday evening, July 18th. On Thursday afternoon Sister Berthe [Gautrin] and I returned to Eldersley in order to refresh the memory of those [children] who are to be confirmed on Friday at 10:30 a.m. All are present. We also practice new and well known hymns to be sung at the High Mass; we then return to Tisdale.

July 20th – At 6:30 a.m. His Excellency gives us Holy Communion. After our thanksgiving and breakfast we leave for Eldersley with Father Rivard who will celebrate mass at 9:00 a.m. He picked flowers in the gardens and brought them to decorate the altar. During mass, music and singing are carried out to the best of our abilities and everyone seems satisfied. Then the men, who own cars, at the invitation of their priest, go to meet the Bishop who is less than a mile away, while the ladies and children standing in two lines – one on each side of the road – await his arrival.

At the church entrance, seven or eight yards from the road, trees had been planted, their tops brought together and held by white, blue and red bands of paper, thereby forming an archway.

At 10:30 a.m., His Excellency arrived, accompanied by a seminarist as secretary, and driven by Father Desmond. As the Bishop descends he is received by Father Rivard; he then walks along the improvised arcade, blessing people along the way; the children follow, boys on one side and girls on the other. While the parishioners take their seats, the Bishop vests in the sacristy and Sister Berthe plays a piece of music on a harmonium that would have sounded better had all the notes responded to the touch.

Finally the Bishop is seated on the throne – a simple armchair. In his welcoming address Father Rivard draws his attention to the joy reflected on all faces, but also touched with sorrow as Father Voisin their pastor was absent from the celebration

because he had died last month. The Bishop began by explaining the gifts of science and intelligence: "Taste and see! If you relish the gifts of God you will receive the sacraments often and will make sacrifices to be faithful to your Christian duties. Why is it that there are so many saints, so many people intimately united to God? It is because they received the gift of intelligence, which is more than faith; they taste God, they see Him in everything they do and are nourished by Him."

July 21st – First Communion and Confirmation at Pré-Sainte-Marie.

We leave [Tisdale] at 6:30 a.m. As the rain begins we realize we have forgotten to take our galoshes along – something we shall very much regret later. Indeed the storm increases, with lightning and thunder, and soon the rain comes down in torrents. [...] The road conditions are terrible, the car slides from one side of the road to the other. But surely our angels are watching over us. At 8:30 we are only halfway. We meet the teacher from Pré-Sainte-Marie on his way to pick up the Bishop. Father Rivard inquires about the road conditions. "It has rained a lot and the roads are bad" replies the teacher who asks in return if he should take the risk of going for the Bishop. "Do your best, says Father, bring the Bishop even if it is in the afternoon." We continue on, unsure if we will reach our destination. Occasionally Father asks if he should continue or return to Tisdale, but the thought of the children and parishioners who have been fasting gives him courage and helps him to forget his fatigue. At about 10 miles (15 km) from

our destination we arrive at a dangerous spot which our driver manages to overcome. But about 5 miles further the car gets stuck in the mud on a newly repaired road and it is impossible to get out. It is 9:00 a.m., raining cats and dogs, and we remain stuck in this awkward position. A few hundred yards away a man waves to us but it is raining so hard that he seeks shelter. Finally the rain stops and the man arrives: Sister Berthe and I get out of the car. Where are our galoshes? Very necessary apparel for this weather. It is very difficult to walk for half an hour in knee-high grass, but we find nice strawberries along the road – a nice delicacy provided by the Lord of the harvest. Meanwhile, the car is unstuck; the driver slowly manages to cross the difficult area and catches up with us; it is 10:30. The going is slow. At a kilometre short of the mission, we meet a cavalcade of eight robust fellows mounted astride horses adorned with ribbons who have come to meet His Excellency. Deception! Who do they see? An exceedingly tired driver and two poor little Sisters, soaking wet and quite dishevelled looking. Father advises the riders to stay there until 1:00 p.m., as the Bishop is surely on his way.

Finally, we arrive at the church. In spite of the bad weather there is quite a crowd; Eight little girls dressed in white and carrying baskets of flowers, are waiting to throw petals along the path on which the Bishop will walk. Another deception, the Bishop is not there and disappointment is evident especially from the little girls. Sister Berthe and I get out of the car, happy to be uninjured despite the roughness of the trip, which is usually of two hours

duration but which took us four and a half hours to complete. The rain has stopped. As Father discusses revised plans with the parishioners we enter the church to prepare for mass on a well-decorated altar.

Soon the church is filled and the Father hears confessions. Most of the people have fasted since midnight. The children receive communion before mass so that they can eat breakfast. It is past 11:30 a.m. when mass begins. The short sunny interval did not last and rain began falling again with such force that we could hardly hear the singing and the music. Mass ended at 12:15 and the parishioners were urged to remain on site until 1:00 p.m. to await the Bishop's arrival. But as the priest was still speaking, the cavalcade returned without His Excellency. The meal prepared for this special occasion was most welcome and we ate with ravenous appetites; breakfast was long gone and the bouncing around on the trip had accelerated its digestion.

14:30 hrs. — No news! We therefore decided to return to Tisdale. After a 10 kilometre (6 miles) drive on a terrible road we came across a gathering of mounted horsemen and cars that blocked our way. We first thought that it was an accident, but later perceived that it might be Bishop Prud'homme in trouble. Indeed, he had been stuck in the mud ever since 3:00 p.m. Our arrival was a relief and he requested to change cars, believing that our driver was better than his.

Our courage returned and with the Bishop in Father's car we returned to Pré-Sainte-Marie. Alas! Instead of the cavalcade that had been organized for his reception, His Excellency now had as an escort two poor little Sisters slightly embarrassed to be so honoured.

5:00 p.m. — our arrival caught everyone by surprise. The cavalcade was again regrouped, but this time to go after those parishioners who had already left, in the hope of letting them know that the confirmation ceremony would be held on Sunday, July 22nd.

The Bishop's driver, accompanied by the seminarist, arrived at 7:30 p.m. Mr. Mahussier, store owner, was taken aback for he had nothing very convenient to offer His Excellency. Supper was prepared while Father Rivard drove off to pick up bedding fit for a prince of the Church and to find a place where Sister Berthe and I could sleep. On his return he asked us to make up the Bishop's bed in the teacherage.

As we had not prepared food for ourselves, we were invited to share the Bishop's supper. It would surely be the only time that we would have such an honour. After the meal we kissed his ring and retired to a farmhouse — a ten minute walk from the church — belonging to a good French Canadian couple, Mr and Mrs. Fournier, who insisted they were honoured to receive us. Our room — that of the employees — had already been prepared; we were most comfortable and our hosts very welcoming. [...]

After breakfast the next morning we went to say our morning prayer in the church. Despite the incessant rain the parishioners return in large numbers. At 10:30 a.m., His Excellency arrived at the church and the eight little girls lined up under the church porch to throw flowers as he advanced to the altar. Meanwhile Sister Berthe, at the harmonium, played a beautiful piece of music. The singing and music for High Mass was very well executed.

After the gospel Bishop Prud'homme congratulated the parishioners for their act of faith, turning out in large numbers yesterday and today in such inclement weather. "I am moved to tears", said he, as he thanked them for their affection and loyalty. He then added that he would change the name of Pré-Sainte-Marie to that of Our Lady of the Rain, as this was his fourth visit and it had rained each time. [...] The theme of his sermon was prayer; here are a few of his thoughts: "O God may your merciful ears be open wide to hear the prayer of your children. When you pray you don't ask God to change His plan – that would be insulting – you simply ask Him to help you realize His will today and to do what He wishes. Our prayer renders God vulnerable and gives us strength. After mass and a short lesson of catechism he proceeded with the confirmation. As ten children could not be present the Bishop promised he would return on the third Sunday of September to confirm the absent children and to show his affection to these courageous parishioners.

We [the Sisters] headed for the store where Mr. and Mrs. Fournier would help serve dinner to His Excellency; a second dinner would be prepared for the Mahussier family, and a third for us. At the end of our meal two men arrived with five small roosters they had killed. The Bishop stayed for supper since it would have been foolhardy to return to Tisdale. At 4:00 p.m. we went to the church where we said our prayers and sang hymns. At six o'clock the rain had stopped. We then decided to go to the Fournier house where Mrs. Fournier had also done some killing in her yard; indeed we could see the chicken in the pot as we entered the kitchen.

These good people did everything they could to receive us well: the supper became a small family reunion and after a bit of recreation everyone retired to rest for the night and forget their worries and their fatigue.

July 23rd – Beautiful sunshine. We were up early and, after having thanked our benefactors, we went to church to pray our office and attend Bishop Prud'homme's mass at eight o'clock. Twenty-five people received communion; the Bishop was very impressed to see so many at Mass. Even if these people are poor, materially speaking, they possess a great treasure, faith. [...] This parish has mass only once a month so it would seem as if God rewarded their perseverance during the terrible rain, allowing them to have mass on three consecutive days. After breakfast the Bishop paid a courtesy call to the school children and we left for Tisdale at ten o'clock. As Father was worried about the poor

condition of the road he sent a few horsemen ahead, as well as a truck, in case we got stuck again.

In company of our guardian angels we began the trip: the driver, His Excellency and the secretary are in the front seat and we two, with the Bishop's large suitcase, in the back seat. During the first ten kilometres (6 miles) we travelled in almost complete silence. The road was awful but in spite of bumps and jolts all went well. The tongues started to loosen up when we arrived at the spot where we had met His Excellency, everyone relating his personal impressions.

As the driver was tired and the car radiator was heating up, a short halt was called. When we started up again water and mud flew all over and stuck to the wheel chains. [...] We stopped once again at a house by the side of the road, and were received by a French family from the Beauce area. They were happy to greet the Bishop. Meanwhile Father [driver] asked the son in the family to remove and clean the chains and to wipe off the car windows which were very muddy.

We were off again, without the chains; but the car tended to swerve continually on the clay road. At last around 1:30 p.m. our troubles were over; we were at the Tisdale hospital safe and sound. After dinner Sister Superior suggested that we take a rest, which we accepted whole-heartedly. After two good hours of sleep we had completely recovered.

July 24th – First Communion and Confirmation ceremonies at Tisdale. Bishop Prud'homme finds the right words of consolation for the parishioners whose beloved pastor, Father Voisin, had recently died⁴⁴.

Sister Albertine Bureau also wrote a long letter to Mother Superior, describing in detail the week of catechism she and Sister Berthe Gautrin had experienced at McKague, a hamlet located some 25 miles (40 km) south of Tisdale, and at Tisdale the following week. She ended the report with the description of the catechists' participation at St. Ann's pilgrimage on July 26th, at Saint-Brieux⁴⁵.

Sister Antoinette Rocher, Superior at Zenon Park, wrote the following about a mission held at Melfort, in 1956.

Our Sisters have just returned from Melfort accompanied by the Bishop, delighted about their week's [work]; the more than 80 children were delightful; the Sisters noticed that the presence of a Catholic priest in the area has had excellent results. Last year the children were undisciplined; this year they were very docile. The mothers did not have to force them to attend the [catechism] classes, as the children were anxious – so we were told – for the Sisters to come. Sister Claire [Dargis] distributed folders to some girls who asked about the life of the Sisters.

I also gave some little gifts – sixty or so framed pictures, rosary beads or statuettes ... but for 80 or more this was not enough. As we had to please everyone the Sisters divested themselves of all they had with them⁴⁶.

During the summer of 1958, Sister Louise Ladouceur, originally from St. Malo, Manitoba, considered herself the chosen one, to teach catechism to the children of Pré-Sainte-Marie, Hudson Bay and Choiceland; the latter two villages are 120 km (75 miles) from Tisdale – the first one to the east, the other to the north. She considered herself ‘spoiled’ to have been assigned to the children who would make their first communion in each of these missions.

At Pré-Sainte-Marie the whole class prayed for religious vocations and, adds the chronicler: “It was a young girl who alerted the group: if the Sisters stop, who will teach us catechism?” As it turned out a young man from Choiceland, son of a convert Lutheran mother, was ordained priest in 1960⁴⁷

The year 1959 marked the 25th anniversary of the Sisters’ Catechism missions in Saskatchewan. Only God knows all the good that ensued. In addition to the religious instruction given to the children by the Sisters, the priests made the most of these missions to regularize marriages, baptize children and a few adults and reconcile several non practicing Catholics with the Church. In certain hamlets small wooden churches replaced provisional chapels, despite the fact that the shortage of priests did not allow these communities to have the services of a full time pastor. At Tisdale, that year, 85 children took part in the mission; 25 made their first communion and 60 were prepared for confirmation which took place on August 10th. At Pré-Sainte-Marie, 63 children assiduously attended catechism classes; 9 made their first communion and 4 were confirmed on August 11th⁴⁸.

After 1968, due to the lack of reinforcements, the Sisters of Évron were forced to abandon their catechism trips in

Saskatchewan. From 1970 onward, parish missions gradually were replaced by summer camps in the east central area of Saskatchewan. From then on, St. Jean Bosco camp located in the Narrow Hills Provincial Park, some 160 km (100 Miles) northwest of Zenon Park, gave youngsters a chance to enjoy each other and to better know and love God, the Creator of these beautiful surroundings. Gatherings at Camp *Rex Mundi*, Marean Lake, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of Tisdale, centered on religious instruction first, but in a context where the young children could spend their energies and admire nature at the same time. The Sisters of Évron served in these two camps at different times and in various ways, similar to the ones at Gull Lake and Cold Lake in Alberta.

What an excellent undertaking, these catechism missions in Alberta and Saskatchewan, turned out to be! Each year, a dozen Sisters dedicated themselves to teaching basic elements of the catholic religion to some 350 children. Over a 34-year period more than 10 thousand students benefited from such teaching which supplemented the ordinary school curriculum.

In addition to the catechism classes given by the Priests of Tinchelbray missions of Saskatchewan, the Sisters of Évron taught catechism one day a week in rural communities close to towns where they resided, such as Trochu, Bonnyville, Vegreville, Zenon Park, Tisdale and Wakaw. At Trochu, in particular, children from country schools where religion was not taught spent a week at the Sisters' convent during the summer holidays, preparing for their first communion and confirmation.

For a few years some Bonnyville students attended Our Lady of Victory camp at Gull Lake. After having learned the

techniques of instruction that were practiced there, they founded a program called Youth for Christ at Saint Louis camp, near Moose Lake, Bonnyville. Under the direction of Father R. Bissonnette the program flourished and many young people from the area profited from this experience.

Sister Gloria Butler, who had taken part in the Gull Lake summer camps, joined the Saint Louis camp team as animator and nurse. Catechism courses on the sacraments, prayer, the mass, etc. were given there.

In 1994, Sister Thérèse Verrier also joined this team of animators. From one year to the next the team members were renewed due to the many young people who benefited from such an experience and who offered their services⁴⁹.

¹ A.G. Morice, omi, *Histoire de l'Église catholique dans l'Ouest Canadien*, 4th ed., Vol IV Winnipeg, 1928, p. 142.

² Chronique de Vegreville, p. 4, Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire, p. 19.

³ AGSCE Letter, Sister Recton to Mother General, arr. Jan 29th, 1925.

⁴ *Ibid*, Feb. 5th 1929.

⁵ Registre des nominations, p. 2.

⁶ Chronique de Tisdale, p. 214-215.

⁷ R. Lapointe & L. Tessier, *Histoire des Franco-Canadiens de la Saskatchewan*, Regina, La Société historique de la Saskatchewan, 1986, p. 227-232.

⁸ Registre des Nominations. P. 3; Chronique de Tisdale, p. 215-216.

⁹ Chronique de Tisdale.

¹⁰ Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire, p. 19.

¹¹ Chronique de Tisdale. P. 216. Nouvelles de Chez Nous, # 9, 1961.

¹² Registre des Nominations, p. 6.

¹³ Chronique de Tisdale, p. 216.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ Chronique de Tisdale.

¹⁶ *Tisdale Recorder*, Sept. 1959.

¹⁷ Chronique de Tisdale.

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- ¹⁸ Chronique de Tisdale
¹⁹ *Tisdale Recorder*, 30 June 1976.
²⁰ *Ibid.*
²¹ *Tisdale Recorder*, 15 July, 1998.
²² Pages familiales, # 38, Oct. 1998, P. 16-17.
²³ Author's visit to Zenon Park in August 1958.
²⁴ R. Lapointe and L. Tessier, *Histoire des Franco-Canadiens de la Saskatchewan* p. 131.
²⁵ Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire, 1959, p. 23-24.
²⁶ Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire, p. 21; Registre des Nominations, p. 3.
²⁷ Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire, p. 23-24.
²⁸ Bulletin semestriel, Oct. 1936, p. 29.
²⁹ *Livre Historique de Zenon Park*, p. 300.
³⁰ Souvenirs du Cinquantenaire, p. 24.
³¹ Chronique du Couvent de Trochu.
³² Bulletin semestriel # 8, Oct. 1936, p. 31.
³³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.
³⁴ *Livre Historique de Zenon Park*, P. 299.
³⁵ 50 ans au Canada, p. 25.
³⁶ *Ibid.*
³⁷ *Ibid.*
³⁸ Letter, Bishop Blais to Mother General Guet, 6 Mar, 1954.
³⁹ "A travers les neiges" in Petites Nouvelles, Feb./Mar. 1956, p. 9-11.
⁴⁰ *Livre Historique de Zenon Park*, p. 301.
⁴¹ Registre des Nominations. p. 5.
⁴² *Livre historique de Zenon Park*, p. 301.
⁴³ R. Lapointe and L. Tessier, *Histoire des Franco-Canadiens de la Saskatchewan*, p. 227-231.
⁴⁴ Bulletin semestriel No. 25, Apr. 1935, p. 36.
⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
⁴⁶ Petites Nouvelles de Chez-Nous. Oct. 1956, p. 9-10.
⁴⁷ Sous l'église de Notre-Dame, 1958. p. 8.
⁴⁸ Au Canada: Catéchismes, 1959, p. 108.
⁴⁹ Souvenirs, Sister Thérèse Verrier

MAJOR EST CARITAS



SOEURS DE LACHARITE DE NOTRE DAME d'EVRON

MISSION

*Appelées par le Christ à
construire un monde de justice
de justice et d'accueil, nous:
les Sœurs de la Charité
de Notre Dame d'Evron,
vivons par un
engagement authentique
opposant au prochain l'amour et
la compassion de Jésus.*

VALEURS FONDAMENTALES

HOSPITALITÉ

*Crée une ambiance de confiance, d'accueil et
de sollicitude.*

MISSION

*Nous mettrons à nous impliquer et à soutenir les
personnes en quête de justice.*

SOLIDARITÉ

*Crée des liens d'amitié, de soutien et de
compassion dans une même communauté.*

PRIERE

*Confirme notre foi et nous permet de prendre
de nouveaux risques pour le Royaume de Dieu.*



Mission Statement, 1992 Candle with the Sisters' Coat of Arms



First missioning ceremony, held at St. Albert, October 11th 1993: L to R.: Peter Verhesen, Trochu, Sr. Ruth Wirachowsky, Marcel Ducharme, Bonnyville, Sr. Mary Ellen O'Neill, Robert Robert, Vegreville, Sr. Marie Thérèse Laberge, Provincial Superior



Edmonton, St Anne Convent, 1981
Srs. G. Gagnon and A. Rocher with Bridget and Teresa Hesse



At Christmas time 1981
The Sisters and girls celebrate together



Residence Notre-Dame after its connection to St. Anne Convent



(Middle) Several anniversaries are celebrated on June 20th 1987: L. to R.: C. Goyer (25th), M. Bienvenu (60th), E. Aucherie (80th), M. Lemay (60th), and H. Levasseur (50th).

(Lower) First group of Sisters to occupy the new residence Notre-Dame. L. to R.: Front row - B. Bigelow, E. Aucherie, C. Bureau, (back row) A. Clermont, E. Sabo, L. Th  roux, A. Landry and U. Whitley



Edmonton - Castledowns I, 1975-1976



**Edmonton – Provincial Headquarters
and Formation Center 1976-1999**

V

A NEW ORIENTATION

Vatican II and its repercussions

by Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill

During the 1950's and early 1960's religious orders in Western Canada were mainly involved in the traditional roles of teaching and health care services in rural as well as urban centres. However, any astute observer could see that subtle changes were happening and that government was moving into these areas which had been, until then, mostly the exclusive domain of charitable organizations. A flourishing post-war economy brought much prosperity to the west; enormous deposits of coal, natural gas, oil and other natural reserves transformed an essentially agricultural society into one which became highly industrialized.

Governments at all levels profited from this prosperity and they began to move toward the provision of services which were social in nature; this of course added to their political success. When the federal government introduced a medicare plan enormous change took place in the health care field. What had once been a charitable service quickly became an industry where innovative technology and treatment protocols opened the door to interested stakeholders who began to invest large amounts of capital.

All these rapid changes caused religious communities to explore new and challenging apostolates. The presence of religious in the so called traditional apostolates began to be questioned within the ranks; and it was evident that individual forms of ministry would emerge. The difference between

religious commitment in the traditional charitable works and the involvement of the laity in the same domaine was not clear; religious congregations progressively moved out of education and health care institutions and apostolates.

There was also at the time a certain uneasiness within the Church; religious were not above questioning traditional customs of their congregations and of the Church. In October of 1958, Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was elected Pope and was called to lead the church as Pope John XXIII. Chosen by the Cardinals, ostensibly to serve in an interim role, this man of God shocked the world when he announced only three months after his election that he intended to convene the second Vatican Council. This humble Cardinal who would soon become known as 'Good Pope John' called for a renewal within the Church. Using the Italian word *aggiornamento* the Pope challenged us to "open wide the windows to let the Holy Spirit enter". He reminded Christians that the Church was called to fulfil its true identity to be the Church of the poor and that we must be committed to justice in the world at both a political and societal level.

This call to renewal echoed in the hearts of many religious and laity who were committed to creating a better world where the dignity of each human person would be respected. The Council requested that religious orders update their constitutions, renew their internal organization and rediscover their charism – their particular gift to the Church and to the world. During the 1960's and 1970's the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron, along with many other congregations, entered into an era of renewal, adapting and trying various interpretations of their Rule of Life. The Sisters undertook theological studies and reflection as well as a thorough examination of their life style. They attempted to

read the signs of the time and to redefine their true place in the Church and in the world. Rediscovering their roots as well as their founding charism and looking at what Perrine Thulard did for the people she served in the 17th century stimulated the Sisters to adapt their life style and to discuss how they could live out this charism in the 20th century.

Many challenges of the second Vatican Council echoed in the hearts of the Sisters in the Canadian Province and they became actively involved in the various changes. Liturgical renewal invited them to better understand and deepen the Word of God and to reflect on the importance of the Eucharist in their lives. The Sisters wished to learn and comprehend more about theology and scripture. After their working day was finished it was not unusual for the Sisters to travel long distances to attend conferences or study sessions so they could better understand and actualize the conciliatory documents. The use of the vernacular in liturgical celebrations brought about creative ways of praying and helped people grasp more fully how God is present and active in our world. Discussion groups were organized to study and share on scripture and council documents. At parish level the Sisters joined their lay brothers and sisters and together they tried to discover and apply the message of God's word in their everyday life. The second Vatican Council was often referred to as an ecumenical event which called all Christians of diverse cultures to overcome obstacles, and through dialogue and sharing to create a true Christian community – the people of God.

Institutions continued to undergo many changes as the years passed. As Governments took more financial responsibility in the fields of health and education the Sisters no longer were completely responsible to maintain and staff

the facilities. Sisters were salaried and like their professional colleagues received benefits and paid into the pension plan. Gradually the sisters moved out of their traditional roles; new individual apostolates emerged such as parish ministry, adult education and other non-institutional work among the vulnerable and marginalized.

The call to renew their constitutions challenged religious to a radical change in their way of living. They left their large institutions to live in small communities either in apartments or ordinary homes. Sharing in community and taking on the ordinary domestic tasks made them more aware of how women struggled daily to balance their professional and family responsibilities.

The Sisters learned a new and richer vocabulary and became familiar with words like dialogue, subsidiary, collegiality, authority, option for the poor, liberation, inclusive language, personal responsibility. A new and positive understanding, as well as a theological approach to their vowed life was, for most of the Sisters, a truly refreshing and liberating experience. They became more autonomous in their daily activities and in their individual ministries. Several Sisters learned to drive cars and each small community was allowed to purchase a car. The introduction of personal budgets allowed the Sisters to make decisions regarding the purchase of clothing and personal articles which until this time were made or furnished by the community. What was undoubtedly normal behaviour in the life of most lay adults became a challenge for a group of women regimented in a uniform way of life and who had to assume more responsibility. The Sisters had to discover and own their unique personality as well as their gifts and learn to develop them in their ministry. The religious costume and a very

stable community life had created an attitude of conformity that was, for some, very reassuring, but which for others was stifling and dehumanizing. The evolution of pluralism in Canadian society brought forth questions that required much discernment and understanding attitudes especially in areas that had always been accepted as the only way.

Progress and innovations in communications and technology exposed the Sisters to an influx of world issues and concerns which until this era were not usually introduced into the communities. Newspapers, radios and television brought the world to their homes. They could no longer be centred on their personal pre-occupations while ignoring the cry from a world starved for peace and justice. Each one in her heart heard the question: "What can I as a consecrated religious woman bring to a despairing world"? The call for renewal and a commitment in the world challenged them to realize the importance of personal conversion and the necessity to follow and imitate Christ. The Sisters felt the need to give time to prayer and contemplation so that they could be more present to people in a Christ-like way. Some of them chose to participate in personal directed retreats and weekend reflection workshops rather than follow the customary annual retreats.

During the stormy 1960s the stability of a traditional way of life was shaken. For some, the monastic-like life provided a certain comfort, despite the fact that at its origins the congregation was not cloistered; this radical change encouraged more personal freedom and commitment. Others began to question their consecration in religious life and their professional work. During this decade there was an impressive exodus of Sisters from the congregation, mostly among the younger members. For several reasons, which we

do not need to question these women chose to live their commitment as lay persons. As a result the average age of those who remained increased.

As well the number of young women who chose to join the order diminished. Important modifications in the initial and ongoing formation program occurred: new experiences were introduced to inter-novice programs; a number of small formation communities were established. Professed Sisters requested a sabbatical leave in order to study and deepen their understanding of theology, Christology, Scripture and religious life in general.

During the 1970's to 1980's most of the Sisters from the Canadian Province enrolled in renewal and theology courses which helped them widen their horizons and better understand diverse opinions. In most cases they studied with contemporary laity and realized that they did not have a monopoly on the meaning of mission or evangelization in the world. Like Sisters of other congregations, the Sisters of Évron continued their reflection on the meaning and relevance of their lives in a society and in the Church where, until the present, they had spent their energies, indeed their lives in the works of mercy. The post-Vatican Church seemed to say that more and more the Sisters should relinquish or at least share their former responsibilities in favour of the laity. As a matter of fact the Sisters, in the Vatican II vocabulary, were classed as lay persons.

After the closure of their boarding schools, the Sisters continued to teach in public schools as well as in separate (confessional) schools; while adhering to the established teaching program they continued to be generously committed to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. In their work in

the education of children the Sisters had a predilection for the physically or mentally challenged as well as for the vulnerable and marginalized. Through the years several former teaching Sisters turned to pastoral work in parishes as their apostolate.

In the health related field the Government allowed the presence of denominational based institutions and these facilities were allowed the authority and power to determine where resources would be used so that they would serve the greatest number of vulnerable persons. The hiring of lay persons for administration and management positions had been established for several years. Whether they belong to one denomination or another they are convinced that a Christian presence in the provision of health care is important and that this presence makes a difference in the quality of services offered.

In the early 1990's, wishing to pursue the healing mission of Jesus in all three of its health care institutions, the Sisters of Évron established an educational program called *Mission Values and Vision* which was given to those involved in providing care in these facilities. This project has helped strengthen and render more effective the commitment of those who collaborate with the Sisters in health care.

The *Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron Health Care Corporation* was established in 1992. Three lay members, each representing one of the three establishments, at Trochu, Vegreville and Bonnyville, became permanent members of this Corporation. The group has a certain authority 'with reserve' but membership is flexible enough to allow for the time when lay representatives could be delegated, to administer the Corporation. The members of this Corporation and the Directors of the three health centres

meet twice a year to reflect on the spiritual values inherent to health care and on ways of working with the Boards and personnel to ensure a Christian presence in this apostolic mission.

The discussion at General Chapters regarding lay associates dates back to 1986. A group of interested laity were invited by a group of Sisters to reflect on the spirituality and charism of the Congregation to discern whether they felt a call to become associate members. A charter is presently being developed for the associates and it would appear that several members of the group who have been journeying wish to become associate members. Requests to organize other groups have been received and this challenges the Sisters to remain open to the Spirit who perhaps is inviting us to new community models where the charism of Perrine Thulard would flourish and grow in the Canadian Province¹.

Edmonton St. Anne's Convent, 1961-1988

In the early 1960's, Sister Eugénie Aucherie, Provincial Superior, wishing to widen the field of activity of the Sisters of Évron in Canada, approached Archbishop Anthony Jordan, omi, of Edmonton. Two young Sisters under her direction were available for teaching positions. The Archbishop promised to speak to the Superintendent of the Separate School Board of Edmonton. The School Board later informed the Provincial Superior that the two Sisters could teach at St. Thomas Aquinas School (in the Bonnie Doon area) beginning in September 1961².

At first, Sisters Henriette Beaudoin and Rosanne Favreau, the perspective teachers, belonged to the College

Saint-Jean's convent community. On September 5th they reported for the opening of classes. Their first encounter with the staff was very favourable; indeed the Sisters were very comfortable with the lay teachers whom they found welcoming and kind. Some 420 students were enrolled; the classes were taught in English. Sister Henriette's home class was grade 1 but she also taught some grade 3 classes; Sister Rosanne taught Grade 5.

The purchase of a house located almost opposite the convent of the Sisters [of Strathcona] was made; Sisters Henriette Beaudoin, Rosanne Favreau and Marguerite Plouffe moved in on February 20th, 1962. The new community remained under the direction of Sister Eugénie Aucherie. Archbishop Jordan offered to bless the house on March 4th, the date he was to bless the new church, Saint Thomas, which had been built on the north-east corner of the Collège Saint-Jean property. He would also celebrate the first mass in the Sisters' chapel on the same day, if possible, or as soon as the altar was set up. The Sisters of Saint-Jean's convent provided many of the missing items which were needed, a much appreciated sisterly gesture.

Delivery of the chapel furniture was announced for the week of February 25th. Joy and enthusiasm marked the Sisters' preparation: Mother Provincial was there early, on March 3rd, accompanied by Sister Marie-Cécile Clermont, Superior in Trochu, Sister Antoinette Rocher, Novice Director, and two other Sisters from Trochu. The new house was like a beehive buzzing with activity: beds were delivered and Sister Henriette proudly announced that the entire delegation could sleep at St. Anne's. But the beds, still in the unheated garage, had to be unpacked, transported to the house and set up; the younger Sisters took on this task while

Mother Provincial and Sister Superior looked after the chapel. Even the carpenters joined in, hanging the crucifix, placing the Tabernacle, and finishing the installation of the doors. Everything was simple, yet in good taste; that evening the Sisters gathered in the chapel to say Matines, their first official prayer in common. Across the street parishioners of Saint Thomas parish worked late at night to prepare their new church for the opening ceremony.

On March 4th, at 10:30 a.m. Mother Provincial greeted Archbishop Jordan who had come to meet the Sisters in the parlour of the Saint Anne's convent. Sister Helen Levasseur, the Superior in Vegreville, along with two companions, and as well, Sister Hélène Fedoruk and three Sisters from the college convent were present for the celebration. His Excellency proceeded with the blessing of the altar, the liturgical ornaments and different parts of the house. After the reading of the gospel Bishop Jordan addressed the Sisters with these words:

Mother Provincial and dear sisters: It is a great joy for me to bless your convent today and I sincerely hope that your community will continue to expand in Edmonton and throughout the Archdiocese. The Lord will soon be present here in your midst and it is before the sacred presence in the tabernacle that you can draw strength and courage to carry out the responsibilities of your religious commitment. Our vocation calls us to be saints regardless of the duties we are asked to perform. The important thing is that we become holy and that we remain faithful to God at each moment. That is how

we witness our love; the love we have for God is proven by the love we manifest to our neighbour. We could not have chosen a better day to officially bless and open this convent: we have just listened to the letter of St. Paul who speaks about all the different ways to be charitable. Common life is not possible without this great virtue. It isn't always easy to be nice to each other; Jesus is our example, He accepts to be present in our house, He took on human flesh and He invites us to self-abnegation and to the total gift of ourselves as well as to charity which is necessary in community life.

Be conscious of Christ's presence in our midst. Try to be like Jesus, loving our sisters as He loves them. May His presence help us to make holy our most simple actions. Be alive and attentive to His presence and often repeat the prayer that the priest says when the Host is exposed for adoration: Lord Jesus Christ, you gave your Church an admirable sacrament as the abiding memorial of your passion. Teach us so to worship the sacred mystery of your Body and Blood, that its redeeming power may sanctify us always. Amen.

After Mass in the convent two parishioners from Saint Thomas were on hand to accompany the Bishop and the Sisters across the street to the church. His Excellency proceeded with the blessing of the new church and congratulated the parish priest and his parishioners for having

built this House of the Lord. During the past three years the Oblate Fathers had invited the parishioners, and Father Denis Hébert, parish priest and former student, to celebrate liturgies in the College Saint-Jean Chapel. Monsignor Romeo Ketchen, parish priest of the Immaculate Conception parish, gave the homily, adding that the new parish had been especially created to serve the French Canadian community of Edmonton-South.

Back at Saint Anne's, Mother Provincial presided over the festive meal – a true family reunion of 17 Sisters, including a few from the college convent. She evoked the memory of Mother General and her council in France, who were present in spirit if not physically, and of Mother Marie-Joseph Rondo, the former Provincial who could not attend due to ill health. Before dispersing the Sisters offered wishes for the prosperity of this new foundation which will respond to real needs and be in keeping with the charism of their foundress Perrine Thulard: Serve God in the person of the poor³.

A second house, immediately to the south, was bought in the summer of 1962 and was joined to the first one. The Sisters, who were pursuing studies whether at Collège Saint-Jean, at the University of Alberta or in other institutions, would henceforth live here.

On May 27th, 1962, the Sisters were invited to attend a parent/teacher meeting in order to discuss initiating French classes. Sister Henriette Beaudoin was invited to teach French in Grade 3, beginning the following September. Dr. Roger Motut, professor of Romance languages (including French) at the University of Alberta, underlined the importance that young Francophone students speak their mother tongue, even before they were taught grammar⁴.

In the past young Sisters were sent to Zenon Park, Saskatchewan, to finish their high-school studies, since this was the only school in the Canadian Province where Sisters of Évron taught the required courses. In Alberta an inter-community program for religious formation was under way. The Saint Anne convent was designated as the ideal place in which to house the young Sisters who would study at Providence Centre, the University of Alberta or at Collège Saint-Jean. When Sister Henriette Beaudoin was missioned to the Le Goff mission as local Superior (after it had reopened), Sister Angelina Plouffe who had taught at Zenon Park for 28 years was well suited to assist the younger Sisters in their religious and professional studies. She was therefore named local Superior of the Sainte-Anne convent in August 1966. In early 1967 minor changes in the chapel were made so that the priest could celebrate the Eucharist facing the participants.

At St. Thomas school the various activities continue to be very interesting. Sister Rejeanne Beaulieu, one of the teachers, went to Ottawa to attend a training session on the *Jeunesse en Marche* movement, formerly known as *Jeunesse étudiante catholique* (J.E.C.)⁵.

Sister Albertine Landry was named local Superior of the community on February 1st, 1973. In addition to her local responsibilities she worked one day per week with a Pro-life group, and another day helping the poor at the Marian Centre – two organizations which tried to respond to current needs in society.

That same month Sister Lina Beauchesne joined the Saint-Anne community. She worked as a dietary technician at the Norwood Nursing Home, which meant that she

travelled each morning and evening for $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour by bus. She would later be promoted to the position of Director of Food Services at the C.N.I.B.⁶.

In September 1973 Sister Cécile Goyer, provincial councillor, was named Coordinator of religious studies for 1700 students at the Griesbach Military base in north Edmonton. She worked with 80 teachers and was required to establish a program that would satisfy both Catholics and Protestants⁷.

At this time there was much emphasis on ongoing religious formation and renewal. Sister Thérèse Verrier opted to study for a year at the *Institut d'Angers*, in France, leaving Saint Anne Convent in August 1976. Sister Constance Rocher, who had come from France to stay with her sister Antoinette, returned to France with Sister Thérèse. She was happy to return home filled with memorable experiences of her stay in Canada.

In April 1978 the Provincial Council announced a new project for the Saint-Anne community: the convent was chosen as a home for young girls in need of accommodation while continuing their studies, but where they could also participate to some extent in community life. The Provincial Council took this decision in answer to Archbishop Joseph McNeil's concern that young girls at University, who often were on their own, were sometimes exposed to danger caused by use of drugs and alcohol. Certain changes were required to accommodate the new boarders, but each sister had to prepare her own heart for this new and at times demanding mission of hospitality.

Sister Cécile Goyer, having expressed her desire not to be re-named to the Provincial Council in 1978, accepted to head the Saint-Anne convent⁸. This allowed her to realize a personal project she had thought about for some time: while remaining local Superior and formation director she would work with the poor at Sacred-Heart parish, help prepare youth for baptism, and visit some schools. Every year at Christmas the Sisters of Saint Anne Convent would go to Sacred Heart parish where, along with other volunteers, they would serve dinner to the local poor. This charitable action was due to the initiative of a man who, each year, organized the provision of a meal to people who were alone at Christmas and who could not afford this luxury; there were many. A call went out for volunteer help including musicians and singers; and in the same article the press mentioned the serious illness of the promoter. God called him home in 1979 and that year he celebrated Christmas in heaven⁹.

In early 1983, Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, Provincial Superior, spoke to the Sisters regarding a new orientation for Saint Anne convent. On April 25th, the Provincial Council's decision announced: the convent would no longer serve as a residence for young students but would henceforth be used as a formation house. Sister Cécile Goyer's nine-year mandate had come to an end and Sister Marie Jenkins was appointed as formation director. She arrived in Edmonton on September 16th, 1983, along with Sister Louise Ladouceur.

Soon after her arrival Sister Marie agreed to work three days a week with the poor at the Sacred-Heart parish, as Sister Cécile had done before her. Each person requiring help, was welcomed individually and in a personal interview the needs of the person and family members were considered. Some of the cases were very sad and there was evidence of

deep human suffering. Sisters from surrounding communities helped by their prayers and with food they donated.

Later in the year Sisters Simone Lapointe and Lina Beauchesne joined the Saint Anne convent community. Sister Marie Jenkins, after a year of reflection and prayer decided to return to the lay state. Her responsibility was assumed by Sister Ursula Whitley who was also superior of the Residence Notre Dame. This responsibility was too great so, Sister Réjeanne Beaulieu of Vegreville was named superior in 1986¹⁰. The following year the Saint Anne convent was renovated and annexed to Résidence Notre-Dame. The remaining Sisters joined other communities in Edmonton; the Saint Anne convent officially ceased to exist¹¹.

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Henriette BEAUDOIN	1963 - 1966
Sister Angéline PLOUFFE	1966 - 1973
Sister Albertine LANDRY	1973 - 1976
Sister Antoinette ROCHER	1976 - 1978
Sister Cécile GOYER	1978 - 1984
Sister Ursula WHITLEY	1984 - 1986
Sister Réjeanne BEAULIEU	1986 - 1988

Castledowns I, 1975 – 1976

Noviciate

As several young girls requested to join the Sisters of Évron, Sister Marie Cécile Clermont, Provincial Superior, deemed it necessary to establish a formation house that would permit them to experience community life while benefiting from studies and spiritual guidance that could be offered in a more central city than Trochu.

The General Council, therefore, authorized the transfer of the Noviciate from Trochu to Edmonton, and a house located at 14615 – 115th Street, in the Castledowns area of north Edmonton was bought. As it was fairly close to Newman College on St. Albert Trail, it would facilitate travel for those who took university and religious studies, on the one hand, and also offer the possibility of inter-noviciate sessions.

On August 1st, 1975 two girls who were about to begin noviciate training, Gloria Butler and Heather Walker, joined Sister Cécile Goyer, formation director, and together they moved into the house. Before moving the furniture and personal effects they gave the whole house a thorough cleaning.

On August 13th the trio registered at Newman College, in Christology and Psychology courses. Four days later the Sisters from Saint-Anne, Résidence Notre-Dame, Trochu, Bonnyville and Vegreville joined them for a house-warming party. Several useful gifts were welcomed and much appreciated.

The last week of August was spent in a retreat, at Stillpoint, that marked the beginning of noviciate training. In addition to their regular courses at Newman, Heather and Gloria studied the history of the congregation given by Sister Antoinette Rocher; her presentations always comprised the social, political, economic and ecclesiastical aspects of the period under study. During etiquette lessons given by Sister Ursula Whitley, the novices discussed ways to improve their *savoir vivre*. Numerous meetings with novices and formation directors of other Congregations were held.

Sister Cécile who was their spiritual companion and guide during this initial period of formation in religious life, would recognize and lend support to positive actions, so that progressively God's will and the evangelical values would occupy a greater part of the novices' hearts and minds. The *Exercises of St. Ignatius* were used to foster discernment and to help the novices recognize the action and call of God in their lives.

Sister Odette Blin, Superior General, and two assistants, Sisters Andrée Levrault and Jeanne Lesourd visited the Noviciate for a few days in September 1975. Both Heather and Gloria were officially received as novices at a provincial meeting, and were given the Constitution of the order and the first Rule drawn up by Perrine Thulard¹². After a prayer of thanksgiving and offering, composed by Heather and Gloria, who each in turn took a lead part, everyone enjoyed a happy evening together.

In February 1976, Heather Walker returned to her family. On May 8th, the Noviciate and the Provincial House occupied new quarters in a duplex at 9544/46 - 142nd Street,

Edmonton. The Castledowns house was closed and sold in 1977.

LOCAL SUPERIOR

Sister Cécile GOYER 1975 – 1976

Notre-Dame Residence, 1975 –

The renovations in St. Mary's Hospital, Trochu, and the desire to have a convenient home for the aged and retired sisters brought about the decision of the Provincial Council to construct the Notre-Dame Residence on the plot of land south of the St. Anne's Convent. The land was situated across the street from Faculté Saint-Jean, formerly Collège Saint-Jean, on 91st Street. This street was renamed Marie-Anne Gaboury in 1988, in honour of the first white woman who settled in western Canada (1807)¹³.

In May 1975 nine Sisters moved into the new and comfortable home, under the direction of Sister Ursula Whitley. Most of them were retired but still active and alert. Sister Catherine Bureau, cook, along with Sisters Louise Thérout and Anna Clermont met regularly with a group of St. Thomas parishioners known as the 'Golden Age Group'. Sister Béatrice Bigelow joined a prayer group. Sisters Elizabeth Sabo and Marie-Anne Hartman helped with the housekeeping. Sister Eugénie Aucherie was archivist, chronicler and secretary. Sister Marie-Francis Lyons, whose hands were deformed due to rheumatoid arthritis, walked without her cane and persisted in the hope of visiting Ireland, some day.

Gradually the strength of one or the other declined so that the need to add an infirmary appeared evident. The Provincial Council decided to renovate the two houses – Notre-Dame Residence and St. Anne's Convent – into a single better-adapted building. A single community was constituted. The location is excellent as the St. Thomas church was across the street and most Sisters could readily walk. A shopping mall and dental clinic are easily accessible. The neighbourhood is very appropriate. Several religious communities live nearby and French is spoken almost everywhere! The Sisters therefore feel quite at home in such a milieu¹⁴.

In the early 1980's a few Sisters could still assume various duties in the house: housekeeping, dietary and gardening. In addition, they helped each other, and that was the main idea behind this communal project – the ones in good health looking after those who had ill health.

In 1986, lay staff was hired to take care of some of the sisters requiring special care. A Sister continued to supervise the house. A patient lift was bought and was very useful for those who were bed-ridden or handicapped. This project allowed the Sisters to remain with companions they had known for several years. The staff ensured that the ill remained autonomous as long as possible. Other members of the community participated, each according to her capacity, in the social and cultural life of the parish. Some attended Bible studies and even assumed leadership roles during the meetings. Others visited the residents at St. Thomas Manor – a building next to the Notre-Dame Residence. Still others took part in various study sessions or conferences in order to stay abreast of Church teaching on a variety of subjects. In

the community room a VCR attached to the television, allowed the Sisters to look at video cassettes, either as recreation or to pursue long-term formation.

For a while the parish priest came to the Residence once a month to offer the sacraments and give a conference to the confined Sisters and the community. The objective of keeping the retired and aging sisters as independent as possible appeared to be successful. To maintain people at their maximum level of social, physical and psychological functioning contributes to their quality of life.

June 20th, 1987 will always be remembered as a wonderful celebration – the very first oak jubilee in the congregation – Sister Eugénie Aucherie's 80 years of religious life. The venerable nonagenarian was radiant and wanted to celebrate with the other jubilarians; silver jubilee – Sister Cécile Goyer, Provincial Superior; golden jubilee – Sister Helen Levasseur; and diamond jubilee – Sisters Mathilde Bienvenue and Marie Lemay. The presence of Sister Madeleine Bouttier, Superior General, and Sister Anne-Marie Denoual, Assistant General, both from Évron, enhanced the celebration. Sisters Maria Séguin and Rosanne Favreau, Canadian missionaries in Ivory Coast, Africa, were also happy to be present¹⁵.

"I have proclaimed your faithfulness in the Great Assembly" (Psalm 40). This was the theme chosen by the liturgy committee for the eucharistic celebration presided over by Father Raymond Guimond and celebrated in the chapel of the Daughters of Jesus Convent. Faithfulness of the Lord who takes us by the hand to lead us to the Source of life. Reflecting on the gospel according to St. John, the celebrant explored how God's faithfulness calls forth our

faithfulness which all through our life should grow stronger if we wish to respond more fully each day to the Lord's call; that is the *raison d'être* of religious life.

The offertory procession took on a special form; using the priority list as set forth by the last Chapter each of the jubilarians offered something which for her spoke to one of the priorities. Sister Cécile Goyer chose youth, symbolized by a record called "The Prayer of Youth"; Sister Eugénie Aucherie brought her rosary, which spoke of the prayer of the older person; Sister Maria Lemay chose poverty and brought up an empty bowl to indicate her willingness to receive God's gifts; Sister Helen Levasseur chose a cross which reveals Christ's great love which is the cement that holds an apostolic community together; Sister Mathilda Bienvenue carried a lighted candle which reminded us that each of us must work for justice in a world that we want to be more loving and fraternal.

The closing hymn was lively and meaningful – "the Magnificat" translates totally the lasting faithfulness of God toward the meek and humble.

After mass the jubilarians and guests went to the gymnasium [below the chapel] for a banquet and reception¹⁶. Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, in charge of the recreational part of the festivities, invited Father Guimond to play the piano. This was followed by songs and monologues, and Sister Maria Lemay offered a musical rendition for her jubilarian companions. Sister Anne-Marie Denoual projected and commented an edited set of slides of the "most beautiful scenes in Canada". A surprise-booklet, containing a photograph of each jubilarian and delicate verses composed by Sister Ursula Whitley describing their particular traits, was

offered to each one. A delightful evening that merited the following comment: "An oak jubilee and the silver jubilee of our Provincial warranted a super celebration, and we all enjoyed it"¹⁷.

Return of the exiles

How good it is, how pleasant for [Sisters] to live in unity.

Ps. 133

In June 1988 it was necessary to accommodate the sisters elsewhere for a while in order to allow the workers the necessary freedom for the renovation and expansion of the Notre-Dame Residence and to join it to St. Anne's Convent.

The Sisters who needed more physical care were taken in at the Grey Nuns' infirmary with the proverbial sisterly hospitality practised by the Daughters of Mother d'Youville. The others were sent to Trochu, Vegreville, Vermilion and the Provincial House. Their expected homecoming by November had to be delayed as the building was not finished. Sisters Ann Yuhas, Simone Lapointe and Rejeanne Beaulieu who had remained on site, spent long months enduring the dust and noise in order to help empty the rooms and so ease the carpenters' workload.

As the opening date approached the Sisters from Edmonton and Bonnyville helped in the clean-up and the last preparations. When the Sisters who had sought refuge with the Grey Nuns returned January 9th most of them no longer had rooms on the ground floor. Indeed, they would henceforth be lodged on the second floor where new health care services had been readied: the nurses' office, a small refectory, a living room, a whirlpool bath, etc. Everything

had been foreseen, so that each one would receive the care she needed. On the 13th of January the Trochu group was happy to return. It would take some time, however, before everyone found her way around since doorways had changed as well as stair wells and even the elevator was different, not to speak of a solarium – a vast hall, beaming with light, that the architect had pretentiously called an *atrium*. We could even get to St. Anne without taking the elevator – “for busy people like us what a gift”, said one of the sisters.

The other Sisters returned in due course of time, and the community was at last reunited on January 26th 1989; each settled in, filled with gratitude for the changes brought about for their comfort. Once a day the sick Sisters who could do so joined the others in the refectory – a prolongation of the attractive solarium that was much admired by visitors¹⁸.

On February 19th, the Sisters of the Province gathered in the solarium for the blessing of the Residence by Father Clément Gauthier, the new parish priest¹⁹. Four days later, over 200 relatives and friends came to greet the Sisters at an open-house reception. Upon arriving at 2 p.m., they went to the solarium where they signed a Guest Book. Several religious communities were represented, each bringing with them good wishes, flowers and presents, thus contributing to a spirit of sisterly love so appreciated in Edmonton.

Each week, five Sisters from the Residence would visit the neighbouring Sisters of the Assumption where they followed a Bible study. “This year we are studying the Apocalypse”, wrote one of the Sisters, “it is hard-going but Sister Anne-Marie Mireault, sasv, our guide knows how to keep explanations at our level and at the level of the lay

of peace

people who attend. The course is captivating, and helps us better understand what St. John [the Evangelist] attempted to reveal to the Christians of his time." Questions asked, and answered, during the coffee break, reveal some of the current religious problems affecting our society²⁰.

In 1990, Sister Violette Lévesque, f.j., expressed her wish to Sister Simone Lapointe to regroup all the Sisters of the surrounding communities who worked in the kitchen. The proposal, submitted to the Provincial Superior, was agreed to. A first meeting, representing five congregations, was held at *Maison Saint-Joseph* convent of the Daughters of Jesus; the following month the meeting was held in the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. After having read poetic excerpts of the works of Françoise Gaudet-Smet, a speaker from Québec who specialized in home-cooking and home-made clothing, Sister Violette moved that the association be called "les Dames en Tablier", which was unanimously accepted by the group. Sister Marie-Rose Plamandon, f.j., was named Secretary and Sister Jeannine Handfield, csc, treasurer. As funds were required, a bake sale would be held at the next meeting, scheduled for the Daughters of Jesus residence. On that day there was a provincial meeting – an opportune time for a bake sale.

In 1992 the group consisted of 16 members from six different congregations which now also included the Sisters of Wisdom and the Sisters of Our Lady of the Cross. When the president left for the missions, Sister Simone Lapointe, sce, assumed the leadership. As she was preparing for a year of renewal in Montreal, she would also have to be replaced. Sister Violette thought it a good idea to invite the Provincial and Local Superiors to the next meeting. These meetings helped the participants to better know each other by

exchanging ideas, which, in turn, resulted in mutual understanding and concrete helping actions²¹.

One spring day, the principal of the French school Maurice Lavallée, located fairly close to the Notre-Dame Residence, wishing to give the students an occasion to meet the various religious communities in the parish, asked the Superiors if they would allow the children to visit each week. The request was immediately approved.

The following week three boys showed up: two of them worked with the sick sisters, reading to them and taking them out for a stroll; the third boy worked in the kitchen and dining room. At the end of their experience, the students gave a rose to each sick Sister and a carnation to each of the other Sisters. What a happy experience, this was for both the students and elders.

A Ninetieth Birthday

The community of Notre-Dame Residence and all the Sisters of the Province, wished to mark another year which was added to Sister Antoinette Rocher's life. She was the only French Sister left in the Canadian Province and was, as well, the eldest in the Province.

Sister Antoinette had spent only a year in France after pronouncing her vows. She then spent twenty years in England before coming to Canada which became her second home. Here, in her vivid and witty style, is an account of the celebration of her 90th birthday.

I wanted everything to be done with simplicity. It is not when one grows old that he or she should make a fuss! But the Sisters did not listen to me and they celebrated my birthday with pomp, even in Lent, and it was good, very good!

Mass was celebrated by our venerable chaplain Bishop E. Doyle; the Edmonton Sisters joined in with those of the Residence. They also joined in the banquet that followed. When Sister Simone Lapointe, our cook, prepares a feast for her sisters, it is always first class. Can you imagine, for instance, excellent rum *babas* and French bread called *flutes*, bought by Sister Marie Thérèse Laberge at the best bakery in town? What a treat!

And talk about the flowers! They were everywhere brought by Sisters from the various communities and by the Residence employees; even Sonia, our young housekeeper had brought a bouquet of roses and daisies. I received cards and a heavily laden envelope in keeping with the tradition of the Residence.

Happily, at the table of honour, the Bishop also had his birthday card and carnations, since he had celebrated his 81st anniversary the day before. We thus shared the honours. How wonderful it is to feel the Sisters' affection and love.

I had thought we would spend the evening in community, but Sister Helen Levasseur, our Superior, had another program in mind. Sister Catherine Bureau had thought of inviting the Sisters from the neighbourhood, so it turned out to be an open-door affair. From 4 to 6 p.m. the house was full. Sisters of the Holy Cross, Sisters of the Assumption, Daughters of Jesus and Sisters of Notre-Dame de la Croix. A wonderful occasion to fraternize with these dear neighbours who are so friendly when we go to their convents. All were happy with this wonderful meeting; laughter and noise filled our large residence as the many friends were happy to see one another and chat²².

The transformation of one of the rooms into a miniature museum was nearly completed by April 1993. Sisters Ann Yuhas and Dolorès Beaudoin worked hard to prepare artifacts related to life in the Province since the arrival of the first sisters in August 1909. The very first item one sees as he or she enters is a scale model of the Coulee with its buildings and the first home of the sisters. Certain aspects of the Sisters' way of life in Trochu, Vegreville, Bonnyville, Edmonton and in Saskatchewan are also shown²³.

On several occasions in the past few years the Sisters of the Residence accommodated Sisters from other Edmonton congregations in their infirmary. This fraternal gesture of welcome and solidarity was meant as a sign of God's love and goodness towards all.

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Ursula WHITLEY	1975 – 1981
Sister Laura CHALUT	1981 – 1984
Sister Ursula WHITLEY	1984 - 1987
Sister Anna YUHAS	1987 – 1993
Sister Helen LEVASSEUR	1993 – 1996
Sister Laura CHALUT	1996 – 1998
Sister Aline VACHON	1998 –

Provincial and Formation House 1976 – 1999

The need for the Provincial Superior to live in an urban centre closer to most of the congregation's establishments had been felt for a long time. She would therefore leave the Trochu quarters for use by the Sisters who worked in the Trochu hospital, and establish the Provincial House in Edmonton.

To facilitate Sister Cecile Goyer's work as first councillor and formation director, a duplex building was chosen: on the one side would be the Provincial Headquarters and the other the Formation Center. The possibility of going from one house to the other would allow the members of the Council to effectively work together on a regular basis while still remaining in contact with the novices under their direction. A few renovations were required: a small oratory, a few offices and a library.

In May 1976, the Provincial Council officially left Trochu and moved into the new building situated at 9544 –

142nd Street, in Edmonton. The new community consisted of Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, Provincial Superior, and her two councillors Sisters Ann Yuhas and Cecile Goyer; Sister Florence Clusiaux served as cook and Gloria Butler, novice. An open house was held June 20th, at which time, Father Francis Villeneuve celebrated the Eucharist.

As soon as they were settled, in addition to their official functions, most of the Sisters at the Provincial House were involved in some type of pastoral ministry, including service to the poor, the sick and the lonely. Each year, at Christmas, they visited the Sacred Heart parish to help serve meals to the poor of the city.

On March 18th and 19th, 1977, the Sisters of the Province met to listen to Father J.M.R. Tillard, o.p., a theologian from Ottawa give a session on religious life.

Sisters Mary Ellen O'Neill and Ann Yuhas travelled to the monthly hospital board meetings. On March 30, 1978, a lawyer representing St. Mary's Hospital in Trochu requested that the Act of Incorporation of the hospital be approved. This submission was made to a sitting committee of members of the legislative assembly. Sister Mary Ellen attended the session and was required to answer some questions regarding the congregation. It was a very impressive ceremony and Sister Mary Ellen felt honoured to sit in the legislative assembly.

At that time several Provincial Superiors of the Edmonton region wondered about the possibility of jointly building a facility for retired and ill Sisters that would serve the needs of several different congregations. A committee, chaired by Sister Mary Ellen, was formed. The number of

Sisters was decreasing while recruitment was at a stand still. After three years of research, talks and discussions the committee faced the fact that, as useful as the proposal may have been, it was not viable. In 1986 the Provincial Council chose to renovate existing accommodations at St. Anne's Convent and the Notre-Dame Residence.

On February 8th, 1982, during her last mandate, Sister Mary Ellen participated as usual in the annual meeting of the Western Canadian Religious Conference, held in Saskatoon. The theme of the meeting was the "contemplative dimension in the promotion of social justice". Mary Ellen was elected president of the organization.

From 1984 till 1990 Sister Cécile Goyer served as Provincial Superior. Her interest in initial and ongoing formation as well as the apostolic mission of each sister characterized her mandates. It was during this time that the Provincial Council decided to renovate and improve the residence for the senior and ill sisters so that their care and comfort would be assured at home as much as was possible.

In August 1990, Sister Marie Thérèse Laberge was named Provincial Superior of Canada. During her mandate, she would attempt to explore new approaches such as reflection groups, an enlarged council, ongoing study in cooperation with lay people in order to establish a system whereby the hospitals begun by the Congregation in Alberta could continue into the future under a different ownership group.

From 1996 onward, the duplex on 142nd Street which was no longer considered the Provincial House, continued being used for visiting Sisters and as a place for the

Provincial archives and library. It was finally closed and sold in March 1999.

¹ The charter was in fact presented to the lay members on March 1st, 1998.

² Registre des Nominations.

³ Chronique du Couvent Sainte-Anne.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Registre des Nominations.

⁶ The Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Archives de la Maison Sainte-Anne.

⁷ Archives provinciales, SCE.

⁸ Chronique de la Maison Provinciale.

⁹ Chronique du Couvent Sainte-Anne.

¹⁰ Archives du Couvent Sainte-Anne.

¹¹ Registre des Nominations.

¹² *Règlement pour les Soeurs de la Charité de la Société de Sillé-le-Guillaume*, Bar-le-Duc, France, imp. St. Paul, 1964.

¹³ *Dictionnaire de l'Amérique française*, Ottawa, PUL, 1988, p. 158-159.

¹⁴ Several provincial houses are nearby, namely those of the Sisters of the Holy Cross (St. Laurent, QC), the Daughters of Jesus (Trois-Rivieres, QC), the Sisters of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Nicolet, QC), The Sisters of Our Lady of the Cross (Prince Albert, Sk), in addition the Faculté Saint-Jean was inaugurated on May 4th 1979. The following year, the parishioners of St. Thomas celebrated Christmas in a new church built immediately behind (to the east of) the St. Joseph Convent owned by the Daughters of Jesus; the church was officially inaugurated on January 21st 1981. A modern building called *Cité francophone* and grouping together of several businesses, including a bookstore and restaurant, was opened on October 30th, 1997.

¹⁵ Pages Familiales # 120, Nov. p. 1039.

¹⁶ The mass and banquet were held at *Maison Saint Joseph*, Residence of the Daughters of Jesus.

¹⁷ Pages Familiales # 120, Nov. 1987.

¹⁸ Pages Familiales # 6, 1989, p. 154-155.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Pages Familiales, # 17, 1992.

²¹ *Ibid*

²² Pages Familiales # 24, 1994.

²³ Chronique de la Résidence Notre-Dame.



Le Goff II, 1959



**(Top) Mother General Georgette Guet, accompanied
by Provincial Superior Sr. E. Aucherie visits Srs.
Thérèse Villeneuve and Laurentia Beaudoin.
(Lower) Christmas 1957.**

Vermilion, 1981



Sr. Cécile Clermont prepares the altar for Mass.



Vermilion, 1986 – During her Canonical visit Sr. Madeleine Bouttier, Sup. Gen. accompanied by Sr. Renée Boué, are received by Srs. U. Whitley and A. Labbé.



Duck Lake, 1966
(Top) Parish church [OMI] Deschâtelets
Archives, Ottawa]
(Lower) Sr. Henriette Authenac prepares
the liturgical vestments.



**Delburne, 1969, Sr. Florence Verrier
teaches catechism in a small country
church.**



St. Theresa Parish Church in Wakaw, 1973



**The statue of St Therese with the commemorative plaque
erected at the site of the former St. Therese Hospital,
Tisdale , 1998**



St Paul, Alberta, 1978
Wrought iron gate erected in honor of the
founders.



**(Top) Sr. Henriette Beaudoin, teacher – St. Paul
(Lower) Sr. Maria Séguin with residents of the
Nursing Home in St. Paul, Alberta.**

VI

THE RESUMPTION OF A MISSION AND NEW FOUNDATIONS

The St. Raphael Mission, LeGoff II, 1957 – 1971

It was at repeated requests of the Oblate Fathers and Bishop Philippe Lussier, as well as the Chief of the Indian Reserve No. 149 of Cold Lake, that the General Council agreed to reopen this mission¹. Sister Eugénie Verron, Superior, accompanied by Sisters Thérèse Villeneuve and Laurentia Beaudoin, left Trochu for the LeGoff Mission on August 30th, 1957. Sister Thérèse would be in charge of 41 students in grades 1 and 2, Sister Laurentia would have 32 in grades 3 and 4, and Sister Eugénie would look after the house and prepare meals².

Sister Eugénie Aucherie, Provincial Superior, accompanied Mother General, Georgette Guet, during her canonical visit to LeGoff on November 21st 1957; here is how she described the mission:

It was a 45 km (28 mile) trip from Bonnyville. The landscape along the highway showed that large fields had been harvested. As we entered the reserve we noticed the contrast, as there was no cultivated land and no buildings to store grain. The homes were scattered over the prairie. Upon arrival at the mission on the right side was the rectory and at a little distance the white wooden church. In front of us were two new and modern looking

buildings, which had been built by the federal government. These buildings housed the classrooms and accommodation for the Sisters and the principal.

Sister Eugénie Verron, Superior of this small community, was happy to receive us and show us the house and the classrooms; these are roomy and bright, with new furnishings, good heating and well lit. The basement has a vast recreation room where the children eat their noon lunch that they bring from home. The government provides them with biscuits and a cup of reconstituted powdered milk; milking cows is unheard of here³.

The following day, Sunday, the church was filled; Mass of the Angels was sung to perfection, and so were a few hymns in Cree or Chipewyan. The longer the ceremony, the happier are the Indians. School began on Monday; the teachers were required to teach in English although the children spoke only Cree or Chipewyan at home.

On Saturday, which is a free day, one or two Sisters accompanied the qualified government nurse responsible for health care on the reserve. Invited to visit the sick who live in shacks, or occasionally tents, they were confronted with an everyday reality; nearly all the natives live under abject conditions which do not seem to adversely affect the family spirit that was strongly encouraged by the Oblate missionaries⁴.

We cannot complete this history without mentioning the excellent description of the Christmas (1957) celebration

left to us by the chronicler, in all likelihood, Sister Eugénie Verron:

As soon as December rolls around the children get into the spirit of Christmas; they bring small coniferous trees with a view to enjoying them before leaving on holidays. All of them, big or small, insist on doing something; decorate the blackboards, the windows, the doors.... They sketch spontaneously with no need of a model and we have observed among the older students beautiful drawings which reveal their artistic talents.

Included in the preparation for Christmas is practicing for the concert which will be on December 20th. Class work is done very rapidly much to the teachers' disappointment.... the 20th of December had been designated as the day for the official opening of the new classrooms. The children had brought their best clothes with them as they all wanted to be on the stage. After the noon meal and the washing up, everyday clothes give way to party dresses and clean dressy trousers.

The celebration begins before 2 p.m. with the raising of the flag. Beside the missionaries there are representatives of government, the Chief, the inspector of Indian schools in Alberta, and two inspectors from non-Indian schools.

Mr. Knapp, emcee, invites Mrs. Bernadette Levasseur, the principal, to cut the blue ribbon stretched across the stairway leading to the school basement; he then congratulates her and thanks her warmly for her dedication to the Indian children.

The concert that followed the ceremony is purported to have been a real success. The thirty little students sang "Happy Christmas to you! Happy Christmas everybody" in thirty different tones, before finishing on the same note. The more the guests laughed the more the singers became self-assured and sang louder. It was the last song of the program but not the least joyful.

Then came the distribution of presents; toys for the younger children, useful objects and clothing for the older ones. The evening ended with tea served by the Indian women.

At Christmas the midnight mass was very nice. From 11 p.m. onward hymns were sung accompanied by a young Indian. As the church is too small many men stood along the side aisles. Everyone sings with fervour, and many receive communion. Our Lord must love the Indians in a very special way because like the poor shepherds in Bethlehem they have a lot of faith. At the second mass Christmas hymns, which we recognized, were sung in English, Chipewyan and Cree. How we enjoyed these beautiful carols⁵.

On September 2nd, 1958, the Indian children happily return to start a new school year. One hundred of them share the four classrooms. The Sisters will be teaching 56 children, all told. The parents are unhappy because the government refuses to add a fifth classroom, they decide to keep the children home for a few days. The following day, the classes are nearly empty. The Indians are determined this time not to give in to the government. As always, Catholic missions on Indian reserves have a hard time getting what is required from the government.

Even on Indian reserves unusual weddings occur. On the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Father Le Calvez, omi, the mission priest, joined together in holy matrimony a 75 year-old man and a 26 year-old lady. Although it stirred up a few objections on the part of the girl's family, the sacrament was carried out with much seriousness and there was a lot of simplicity in the apparel of the wedding party.

The Sisters have no drinking water. Good news! Workers have been hired by the government to bring water from a creek to the two schools. The project however will not be completed until July 30th, 1959. A few years later the creek dried up and the problem would have to be solved differently.

A Metis colony located a few miles from the LeGoff mission is served by Father Le Calvez. Only two weeks a year can be devoted to the teaching of catechism, and the Sisters willingly give up some of their summer holidays to this cause. In 1961, the lessons are scheduled to begin on July 3rd, but the abundance of rain has rendered the roads impassable. The lessons are given at the school, as construction of the new church is not finished. One of the Sisters is assigned to prepare

the children for their first communion: out of 14 only 5 or 6 seem ready. The other Sister has 27 students 'for the summer catechism classes'. It is difficult for the children to apply themselves to learning and Father Le Calvez is not there to maintain discipline. Besides, at Frog Lake, a neighboring village, the Metis are involved in the annual sun dance [...]

In September the Indians have still not won their case to have a 5th class where various trades training could be carried out. They renew their threat to keep the children at home. On the other hand, the government built a brand new community center, which provided some short term employment...

The 18th of June 1962 is a federal election day. The Sisters, wishing to express their solidarity with the Indian cause, have their names inscribed on the Reserve electoral list.

Construction of the new church is finished in the summer of 1962 and Bishop Philippe Lussier, cssr, of St. Paul, is invited to bless the new place of worship in the presence of some 50 priests and sisters who have been invited. As Father Le Calvez expects the mission sisters to prepare everything that is necessary, Sisters Georgette Gagnon and Annette Labbé call on their companions in Bonnyville to give them a hand. When the ceremony begins at 4 p.m. all is ready. Between 500 and 600 people are present. In his homily the Bishop expresses a wish to see some Indians ordained priests one day in this very church.

When the classes reopen in September 1962, 136 children show up, 27 of them in grade 1. Despite the government agent's promise to open a 5th class if there are

more than 120 students, the Department of Indian Affairs steadfastly refuses.

Each Indian on the Reserve now receives an annual cheque of \$410.00, as the result of an oil discovery. Some of them build new houses and buy furniture, others buy a car. On a certain Sunday there was but a single horse-drawn vehicle at the church door, while some thirty cars were parked in the churchyard.

The year 1963 did not turn out too well. The number of school children diminished, as many parents, attracted by the promise of improving their situation elsewhere, have quit the Reserve. In early 1964, the Indians again keep the children home, as the Department of Indian Affairs has not provided the mission with drinking water. The teachers again must face empty desks.

In May a kindergarten class is set up in the school basement with some twenty children. This project aims to prepare the younger ones before they start grade 1.

In September 1968, only 95 children show up. Those in grade 7 and 8 will be sent to public schools. Two Sisters will reside at the Mission⁶.

The following year, Sisters Louise Ladouceur, Thérèse Handfield and Monique Beaudoin arrive at the Mission on September 2nd and open the school to 108 students.

In April 1971, Sister Odette Blin, Superior General, accompanied by Sister Jeanne Lesourd, Assistant General, arrive for the canonical visit. A cloud of sadness hangs over the visit, as the Provincial Council has decided to close the

Mission due to shortage of personnel. Sister Louise bids a sad farewell to her two companions who have decided to return to secular life⁷. The Indians, disconcerted when they learn of the Sisters projected departure, come to visit them in their residence. Departure is set for July 7th, 1971. Father Joseph Goutier, omi, the new missionary at LeGoff, bids them adieu and thanks them in the name of the Oblate missionaries for the group of Sisters of Évron who served the mission since 1957. His last wish is that one day the Good Lord will bring the Sisters back to the Chipewyan people⁸.

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Eugénie VERRON	1957 – 1958
Sister Georgette GAGNON	1958 – 1961
Sister Annette LABBÉ	1961 – 1964
Sister Marie-Louise SAMPSON	1964 – 1966
Sister Henriette BEAUDOIN	1966 – 1969
Sister Louise LADOUCEUR	1969 – 1971

Vermilion, Alberta, 1965 – 1997

Vermilion's origins go back to 1808 when the Hudson Bay and the North-West companies each built a fur-trading post there⁹. Ranches in the area were opened around 1900 and the first church was built by missionaries in 1908, three years after the arrival of the Canadian Northern Pacific railway. In 1909 Bishop Legal named Father Henri Goutier, son of a French family who had immigrated to Canada, the priest of the new Holy Name of Jesus parish. Father Goutier remained in Vermilion until 1925 finally returning to France in 1934 during the depression. A new church was built and blessed by Bishop J.H. MacDonald, Archbishop of Edmonton, on April 12th, 1953¹⁰.

On December 28th, 1961, at a general meeting of the parishioners, 86% were in favour of creating a catholic district that would offer classes for elementary and junior high students (grades 1 to 9) as well as to high school students, (grades 10 to 12). After being granted authorization by the Minister of Education of Alberta the school board proceeded with the construction of a modern school. Dedicated to St. Jerome, the school was blessed by Bishop A. Jordan, omi, on April 28th, 1963, in the presence of Minister A.O. Aalborg. That year 226 students registered. The following year, the school had to be enlarged as the students numbered 367 and the teachers increased from 10 to 17¹¹.

At about this time the Provincial Council of the Sisters of Évron at Trochu was thinking of sending some of their Sisters to Hinton, near the mountains of Jasper, where several French Canadian families, most of whom had moved from Quebec, were requesting French-speaking teachers. Meanwhile Father Charles Keenan, parish priest of Vermilion,

also wished to have the Sisters as teachers for his school. Aware of the Sisters of Évron's success elsewhere, he sent a request for the latter to Archbishop Jordan, on April 8th, 1965. The Provincial Council agreed to the Archbishop's request on May 3rd, 1965¹².

On August 28th, 1965, the four Sisters who arrived in Vermilion were greeted by Father Charles Keenan: Sister Helen Levasseur, Superior, Monique Beaudoin and Rosanne Favreau, teachers; and Louise Thérout, cook. The priest's wish that Sister Helen, a qualified nurse, might be hired at the local hospital did not materialize until April 15th, 1966. She was later replaced by Sister Marthe Poulin who left in 1971¹³. Since then no nursing sisters have worked in the Vermilion hospital.

The St. Jerome School principal, Mr. Anthony Reghelini, was a devout Catholic who believed in a well rounded education for students. In addition to the regular curriculum he encouraged public speaking with a view to improving oral expression. As well he promoted drama and various competitive sports. A "house" system for the school gave the students a sense of responsibility. Teachers and students were expected to adhere to the principle that "a tree is judged by its fruit".

The Sisters made friends with many people in the community - laity, parents and students - and very often visited families. Among their friends were the Anglican pastor and his wife. On the 60th anniversary of the Anglican Church in Western Canada the Anglican community asked Sisters Monique and Rosanne to decorate the hall where the celebration would take place; this earned them reserved seats at the table of honour and a pleasant evening of sharing.

In 1967, the centennial of Canadian confederation, Montreal with its Expo 67 received visitors from all over the world, including a delegation of students and eight teachers from St. Jerome High School; Sisters Monique and Rosanne were part of the group; everyone found it a very enriching experience¹⁴.

Sister Albertine Bureau, who was missioned to Vermilion in 1971, was the last teaching sister in St. Jerome; she left for Notre-Dame Residence, Edmonton, on August 23rd, 1977¹⁵.

During the earlier years of the Vermilion community the mission revolved around the two main works of the Congregation, teaching and nursing, but there was also an ongoing mission of service in the parish and the local community. After the withdrawal of the Sisters from the traditional apostolates, through the years, a number of them were missioned to Vermilion where they continued to reach out and serve in a way that manifested their love of the poor and their attentive presence to anyone in need. Their home was a welcome haven and the listening ear of one or the other of the Sisters helped those who confided in them to depart with renewed courage and peace.

For many years the various priests who served the parish benefited from their numerous talents: preparation of meals, care of the Sacristy, help with sacramental preparation, cleaning, laundry and mending, and at all times that reassuring presence and the knowledge that a religious community prayed for the needs of the parishioners. On many occasions these pastors publicly expressed their sincere and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the Sisters.

At the invitation of the Sisters, several parishioners joined them for community prayer, and frequently the Sisters hosted study and reflection groups in their home. Neighbours from a variety of denominations were comfortable and at ease with the Sisters and depended upon their abiding presence and love. These same people were quick to respond to any need the Sisters expressed, and gave freely of their time to help out.

In the early 1980's the townspeople of Vermilion sponsored two Vietnamese families (boat people) and welcomed them to the community. The Sisters who were living there at the time gave much time, energy and support to these immigrants so that they could become independent and fulfilled in their adopted land.

The Sisters also contributed greatly to the Catholic Women's League in the parish. They participated in many projects with these dedicated women: visiting shut-ins, helping to ensure that the sick in the hospital and nursing home participated in the weekly Eucharistic celebration, bringing communion to those who were unable to travel, helping with lunch served after funerals in the parish, working for the food bank, helping organize bazaars and other fund raising events, prayer days and ongoing support of the parish needs.

Sister Adèle Hewko among others, rendered remarkable social services to retired people, be they at home or in an institution. She also visited the sick and participated in a meals-on-wheels program. The Kinette Club organized a reception in her honour on December 7th, 1983, and Mrs. Donna Stinn, the club president, gave Sister Adèle a plaque as a memento of their gratitude.

Celebration of perpetual vows of Gloria Butler

Born in Vermilion, Sister Gloria Butler chose her parish, Holy Name of Jesus, to pronounce her perpetual vows on September 21st, 1985. She wanted the occasion to be a Church celebration. Having been a student at St. Jerome's school for three years she was invited to visit the classrooms and explain the meaning of the celebration to the students and to stimulate interest in religious life.

Sister Andrée Levrault, Superior General, came from France to receive Gloria's vows. Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, also a native of Vermilion, acted as commentator. During the homily Father Ron Rolheiser, omi, stressed the fact that the three vows originate in the sacrament of baptism.

We have come here tonight to celebrate with the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron, and especially with Sister Gloria. This is a unique occasion in the history of this parish; a celebration in which Gloria will say a definitive **Yes** to God. There are probably three categories of people here tonight: those who are curious and want to witness what this ceremony entails, those who came to celebrate with Gloria; friends who admire her courage, her generosity and who want to reassure her of their affection and prayers. There are also some who perhaps see in this commitment great waste, since, with her gifts and talents, Gloria could be so useful to society; they see this as being non-profitable for the world of today, yet, we vow our life

to God for the Kingdom. We cooperate with
God for the salvation of all.

Following the intercessory prayers the rite of perpetual vows occurred; the priest invited members of the assembly to renew their baptismal vows and by so doing to rekindle their faith in God-Trinity. All the Sisters then renewed their vows, Sister Gloria approached the altar with Sister Andrée and Sister Cécile, the Provincial Superior. The priest then questioned Gloria: "What do you request?" After her reply, the priest invited her to share some highlights of her spiritual journey. She recalled how she had lived in the congregation for ten years, the two first ones having been dedicated mostly to discernment and prayer with the help of marvellous companions and excellent guides. She had pronounced her first [temporary] vows on September 24th, 1977, adding:

Since then, I was assigned to three different missions: nursing at Vegreville and Trochu, and now at the Formation House where I continue to minister to patients at the Edmonton General Hospital. Everyone here has marked my life in one way or another, through their encouragement, their questions or reflections, their friendship and fraternal love. I give thanks to God on this day for all the help and friendship that I so often experienced.

Sister Andrée accepted Gloria's request and invited all the Sisters present to do the same, asking that she receive courage, charity and simplicity. They then sang "May the blessing of the Lord be upon you, we bless you in the name of the Lord". After having invoked the Holy Spirit the priest asked Gloria to

kneel while the assembly sang the *Veni Creator*, an emotionally filled moment. Sister Gloria then pronounced her vows, after which Sister Andrée presented her with the cross, symbol of her membership in the Congregation. Sisters Andrée and Cécile, as well as Gloria's parents, then signed the Register of Profession while the assembly sang "Take Lord, all my liberty".

The assembly then went to the reception area and shared a delicious lunch prepared by family members and friends. There was a wonderful climate in the gathering and a real celebration of joy; everyone congratulated Gloria and her family. A young girl added: "the ceremony, the homily and this celebration really touched me." A few young Sisters and novices who had come from Edmonton added: "this is [an example of] the Sisters of Évron's simplicity". Indeed, the celebration had deep meaning and the participation of many lay friends helped to make it a truly fraternal event¹⁶.

On July 13th, 1990 Sister Yvonne Laforge died as a result of a car accident. Following this unfortunate incident, Sister Albertine Bureau, who had returned to Vermilion in 1988, found herself very much alone. Neighbours and friends gathered to give her comfort and help in her trial. Shortly, Sister Annette Labbé joined her as a companion. From then on the community was reduced to two retired Sisters, and it became one of 'presence' – an expression of religious apostolic life in keeping with the spirituality of incarnation of the Sisters of Évron¹⁷.

The 25th Anniversary of presence in Vermilion

On December 2nd, 1990, the Vermilion parish celebrated the 25th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters. In spite of an awful snowstorm 23 Sisters came from different parts of the province to join the parishioners.

On one of the walls of the hall, participants could see the Sisters' coat of arms surrounded by photographs of each Sister who had served in the parish. Other illustrations, mostly press clippings, described their activities and showed their commitment to the people of Vermilion. In all, 22 Sisters had given a total of 90 years of service¹⁸.

The Sisters leave Vermilion

The Vermilion community was reduced to two since 1991: Sisters Ursula Whitley and Annette Labbé. The condition of their health and increasing age as well as the driving distance to other communities, often in bad weather, had become a heavy burden. The Provincial Council decided to withdraw the Sisters and,regretfully, in the spring of 1997 the house was closed and the property sold.

On May 11th, after mass at Holy Name parish, Father Ed Escobar and his parishioners said goodbye to the Sisters. Betty Ganton, a long time friend, who had also taught with most of the Sisters at the St. Jerome's School, praised and thanked the Sisters for what they had accomplished in Vermilion over the past 32 years. A delicious well decorated cake was then shared. As a going away gift each of them received a beautiful stereo cassette/CD player. Photo sessions and good-byes followed.

Liberated from the worries of maintaining the community in Vermilion Sisters Ursula and Annette continue their mission as part of the Notre-Dame Residence community in Edmonton¹⁹.

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Helen LEVASSEUR	1965 – 1967
Sister Anna LAFORGE	1967 – 1969
Sister Georgette GAGNON	1969 – 1978
Sister Marie-Cécile CLERMONT	1978 – 1990
Sister Annette LABBÉ	1990 – 1992
Sister Ursula WHITLEY	1992 – 1997

Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, St. John's Convent, 1966-1974

A rich Englishman, Douglas Stobart, opened a trading post at Duck Lake and in 1876, awaiting the construction of a chapel, Mr. Stobart graciously placed at the missionary's disposal a large clean house that would serve as a temporary chapel; it was there that midnight mass was celebrated that year. The Duck Lake School was named the Stobart School in his honour. In 1877 Father Alexis André, OMI, founded the Sacred Heart mission for the Indians and Metis at the Duck Lake Colony²⁰.

"The ways of God are not ours": this truth was again realized for the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron, in Canada. A letter from Sister Angelina Plouffe of Zenon Park, dated April 6th, 1966, spoke of the departure of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary who had been at Duck Lake for a long time; she requested that a few Sisters be sent to replace the latter. Sister Eugénie Aucherie, Provincial Superior, replied briefly: "Nothing can be done at the moment for Duck Lake".

This small town, about an hour's drive north of Saskatoon, was the home of several French Canadian families who had given several priests and nuns to the Church. This fact

undoubtedly contributed to Sister Angelina's eloquent second letter addressed to both Trochu and Évron.

Indeed, a reply from Mother General, Georgette Guet, received on April 17th, invited the Provincial Superior to inquire about the Duck Lake vacancy "before other Sisters settle there..." It was therefore in faith and obedience that a visit was set for the 21st, following a telephone call to the parish priest, Father Roland Gaudet.

A first information gathering visit by Sister Eugénie Aucherie, Provincial Superior, and Sister Marie Cécile Clermont, local Superior at Trochu, left a very favourable impression on the two visitors. A positive report sent to Évron, with a request to open a small convent at Duck Lake, was accepted by Mother General, first by a telegram sent on May 2nd, followed by a letter.

Bishop Laurent Morin of Prince Albert, absent during the Sisters' visit to Duck Lake, replied to Sister Eugénie's request to come to that parish:

The departure of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary from Duck Lake, was a great disappointment to us. Your benevolent letter shows that the Holy Spirit watches over the diocese and the parish of Duck Lake in particular. It is therefore with joy that I greet the arrival of your Sisters at Duck Lake where they shall be very welcome ...²¹

The beginnings of the Duck Lake convent were modest and the community comprised four Sisters: Catherine Bureau, Superior, Henriette Authenac, councillor, Cécile Goyer and

Emilia Labossière, teachers. Since the Sisters' arrival had been set for Monday, August 29th, feast of the beheading of St. John the Baptist, the convent was named in his honour²².

Construction of the Sisters' new residence began June 2nd, 1970. Because the new building was to be situated on the site of the old house it was necessary to move it a bit further away. Work progressed well and the Sisters moved in on September 24th. Three days later Mass was celebrated in the new chapel.

The official opening and blessing of the house took place on December 21st in the presence of the Provincial Superior, her Council, a few other Sisters from Alberta and Saskatchewan and some 200 guests. Ladies of the Parish served tea and goodies, which left the Sisters free to show the visitors around. "The hospitality of the local people who were happy to see us in their midst, felt good", said one of the Sisters.

In 1971 Sister Thérèse Verrier came from Tisdale to join the community. She carried out various tasks; caring for children in homes so that parents could work, carrying out pastoral duties to assist Father Doucet, parish priest and missionary at the Beardy Indian Reserve. She also was secretary of the Rosthern School Division for a time.

In 1974 the community consisted of only three Sisters: one of them requested secularization, another was elderly and not well, while the third, having found work in Edmonton, left Duck Lake to join the Saint Anne community on March 9th. For a while the house was administered by the Provincial bursar, later it was closed and eventually sold by a decision of the Provincial Council²³.

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Catherine BUREAU 1966 – 1971

Sister Emilia LABOSSIÈRE 1971 – 1974

Delburne [Trochu], 1969-1971

Father Denis Hébert, parish priest of Trochu, requested the help of teaching Sisters for St. Michael's parish in Delburne, a hamlet situated some 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of Trochu, where some rivalry existed among the various denominations. After deliberation the Province Council decided to send two Sisters to teach at the Delburne public school, provided that the school board accept them as full time members of the teaching staff. To certain individuals who expressed their surprise when they saw the names of two nuns on the list of the new teachers, an official of the school board replied: "I am very happy to have the Sisters; if I could have thirteen I would hire all of them immediately."

On the evening prior to the first day of school Sisters Laurentia Beaudoin and Rosanne Favreau, appointed to the new positions, attended a meeting of all teaching personnel. The Sisters were a bit concerned as they did not know what the attitude of the teachers who were protestants would be; it was a good meeting and the Sisters felt at ease because they were accepted without apparent discrimination. They next had to face the students and their families; some were annoyed at first, which is understandable. There were 510 students, mostly protestant, and certain parents did not easily accept the presence of the

prudently avoided the subject of religion in the classroom. They certainly appreciated the harmony and co-operation among teachers, as well as the courtesy and enthusiasm of the students. In addition to the regular school curriculum, domestic science was taught in a fully equipped area where girls and boys learned many useful skills and crafts. Each Monday evening the Sisters assisted catholic women who gave catechism classes to the children; catholic families were happy to place their homes at the disposal of the volunteer teachers who generously provided religious instruction to the Delburne children²⁴.

At Christmas, the various Churches held an oecumenical celebration. In the Nativity scene, prepared by the Catholics, there was a real donkey and a little baby, and, added Sister Rosanne mischievously, "it was a little girl! But Jesus would forgive us."

In January 1970, Sister Rosanne and a non-catholic teacher initiated a youth group. Non-catholic students envied their friends who could hold serious discussions during religion classes. The groups merged after a joint agreement was reached between the United Church Minister and Father Ted Rozmahel, the new parish priest, in Trochu²⁵. The Sisters travelled morning and night by car, a round trip of 80 kilometres (50 miles). Whenever they were detained for meetings or because of bad weather they were graciously invited to stay with one of the families. The hospitality was simple and cordial and the Sisters felt at ease. They loved their students and won the favour of the protestants who had been hesitant about their arrival at the school.

With the objective of promoting bilingualism across the country, the Federal Government offered grants for cultural projects. Sister Rosanne obtained the funds necessary to

projects. Sister Rosanne obtained the funds necessary to undertake a trip to Quebec with her grade 11 and 12 French class. This April trip allowed them to visit a maple grove, to see the sap flowing into a vat and its transformation into maple syrup at the sap-house. The group was housed by French Canadian families all along the bus route. On the return trip the group was supposed to stop in Ottawa for a visit with the Prime Minister of Canada but he was absent at the time.

This teaching mission ended in June 1971. Sister Laurentia Beaudoin left for the Duck Lake school where she taught first-graders, while Sister Rosanne Favreau realized a dream of her youth when she was missioned to the Ivory Coast, Africa, that August²⁶.

Wakaw, Saskatchewan, 1973-1984

Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus Parish

The village of Wakaw is located some 35 kilometres (24 miles) east of Duck Lake, and the church was dedicated as a shrine, May 17th, 1925, the day that St. Theresa was canonized²⁷. The origin of this pilgrimage is interesting. A young man from Edmonton, Narcisse Burrell, wished to be a priest. As his wish was denied in his own diocese due to ill health, he decided to pray blessed Theresa of the Infant Jesus and promised that if he became a priest he would place his first parish under her patronage. Narcisse Burrell completed his seminary training in the diocese of Prince Albert and was ordained a priest in 1924. He was immediately named parish priest of St. Elizabeth Church at Wakaw. As the existing church was too small for the faithful, the parishioners contributed to the building of a new and larger building which was then named the church of St. Theresa of the

The Wakaw shrine was soon known in the area, and even as far as the United States. Each year many people would come to pray Saint Theresa²⁸.

Father G.W. Timmermans, a Dutch priest, who had been named director of the pilgrimage to Saint Theresa, had been seeking help at the rectory as well as the help of a secretary to take care of the abundant correspondence, care of the archives, various reports and the sale of religious articles. As it turned out, Sisters Angéline Plouffe, whom he had known as Zenon Park, and Sister Simone Lapointe volunteered their services. The Provincial Superior wrote to the pastor in order to define the working conditions and this mission of parish ministry. They arrived in Wakaw on April 17th, 1973.

The large sacristy was transformed into a community room and bedrooms for the Sisters; they shared the dining room with the Priest. Sister Angéline took on the secretarial work related to the pilgrimage held each year in June and October. She also taught catechism and did volunteer work in collaboration with the catholic ladies. Sister Simone assumed the housekeeping tasks²⁹. Life in this place of pilgrimage gave the Sisters a marvellous occasion to deepen their faith, as they witnessed the numerous favours accorded through the intercession of Saint Theresa.

The establishments of the Sisters of Charity of Notre-Dame d'Évron in Saskatchewan were successively closed, starting with Duck Lake (1974), Tisdale (1976) and Zenon Park (1978). Sisters Angéline and Simone, the last members of the congregation to leave the province, were recalled to Edmonton on February 16th, 1984, and the Wakaw community closed³⁰.

LOCAL SUPERIOR

Sister Angéline PLOUFFE

1973-1984

Saint-Paul, 1978 – 1985

Sister Henriette Beaudoin was teaching at the Saint Paul elementary school for several years; but as she lived alone in an apartment, Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill, Provincial Superior, proposed to open a community there. She was authorized to do so by Bishop Raymond Roy of the Saint-Paul diocese. The Sisters' work, would consist of visiting the elderly and carrying out secretarial work in the parish and they would be responsible to the Provincial Superior. A house was bought and, on November 6th, 1978, Sisters Annette Labbé and Rose Lemay joined Sister Henriette³¹.

Sister Annette began her volunteer work on December 4th; mornings she worked in the office of the rectory with Sister Anne-Marie Mirault, sasv, and in the afternoon she visited the sick in the hospital and the elderly in the nursing home.

In 1980 Sister Thérèse Verrier joined the group and was hired at the parish office. In addition to her normal duties she regrouped young girls from grades 3 and 4 and, with the help of Father Bissonnette, parish priest, taught them how to respect each other and help one another in their daily lives. She also taught them catechism and how to serve mass; at meetings they would discuss the gospel of the next Sunday, which helped the children to be more attentive to the homily.

Sister Thérèse also helped to organize youth 16 years and up in a program called 'Search', with the aim of helping them to deepen their Christian life and to journey with other youth. Twice a year the members gathered for a weekend of prayer and reflection. The first such meeting was held in the Saint Edouard Centre, located approximately 8 kilometres east of Saint Paul. Later, other groups came from as far as Fort McMurray, Plamondon, Lac La Biche, Athabasca, Whitecourt and Edmonton.

The way these encounters were organized is most interesting. When the young people arrived at the meeting place they handed over their watches to the monitors: time was to hold no importance! The youth were responsible for the unfolding of the day's activities. The success of their meetings, however, was in large part due to a back-up group unseen by them, who catered to the material needs but who also prayed night and day, in relays. On the last day, the participants shared their feelings and often mentioned the joy they had felt when celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation and to realize how much they were loved by God and others. Another aspect of Sister Thérèse's activities consisted in preparing the baptism of children and adults, and she also participated in Bible study groups.

Sister Cécile Goyer joined the Saint-Paul community in 1983. She devoted her time to the education of adults, helped in parish secretarial work, contributed to the 'Search' group activities and was a member of the team that led the 'Rite of Christian Initiation for adults'.

Since the Sisters of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin were already well established in St. Paul and fully integrated in parochial activities, the Provincial Council of the Sisters of Évron decided to close the St. Paul house on January 3rd, 1985, after

having evaluated the mission of the Sisters as being "too vague". The building was sold to the St. Paul Handicapped Society. Sister Henriette Beaudoin continued her work and remained *in situ*, in a rented apartment³². She left for Edmonton in September 1986.

LOCAL SUPERIORS

Sister Henriette BEAUDOIN	1978 – 1982
Sister Thérèse VERRIER	1982 – 1985

¹ Registre des Nominations, p. 3 (Mission du Lac Froid).

² "Mission indienne du Lac Froid" in *Petites Nouvelles*, May/June 1957, p. 23, 31-32.

³ "Au Canada sous la neige, Mission St-Raphael de LeGoff" in *Nouvelles de Chez nous*, No. 3, 1957- 58, p. 84.

⁴ "Dans la réserve" in *Nouvelles de chez nous*, No. 4, 1957-58, p. 126-127.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Chronique de la Mission Saint-Raphaël.

⁷ Registre des Nominations, p. 5 [LeGoff]. Read 1971 for 1771.

⁸ Chronique, Mission LeGoff.

⁹ Ernest Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French Régime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*, Ottawa, Department of the Interior, 1930, MS (Fort Vermilion 2).

¹⁰ *The Vermilion Standard*, ca 12 April 1953.

¹¹ *History of the Roman Catholic Parish*, Vermilion, AP SCE.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Chronique des Soeurs du Couvent de Vermilion.

¹⁴ Testimony, Sister Rosanne Favreau.

¹⁵ Registre des Nominations.

¹⁶ Pages Familiales # 116, Dec. 1985.

¹⁷ Registre des Nominations.

¹⁸ Chroniques des soeurs de Vermilion.

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- ¹⁹ Registre des Nominations, Pages Familiales # 3, June 1997.
- ²⁰ Gaston Carrière, omi, *Dictionnaire biographique des O.M.I. au Canada*, T.1, Ed. de l'Univ. d'Ottawa, 1976, p. 26.
- ²¹ Registre des Nominations, p. 4.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ²⁴ Chronique de Trochu.
- ²⁵ Pages Familiales # 49. P. 89.
- ²⁶ Testimony, Sister Rosanne Favreau.
- ²⁷ R. Lapointe et L. Tessier, *Histoire des Franco Canadiens de la Saskatchewan*, *op.cit.*, p. 253.
- ²⁸ *Kaleidoscope – Many Cultures – One Faith*, p. 161.
- ²⁹ Registre des Nominations. P.5.
- ³⁰ Registre des Nominations. P. 8.
- ³¹ Registre des Nominations, p. 7.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p.8. For further reading on the history of Saint-Paul see Alice Mignault, sasv, *Cent Ans d'Espérance*, Ed., sasv, p. 165-180, and *Du Passé au Présent St-Paul-St-Edouard, Alberta, 1896-1990*, Société du Livre Historique de St-Paul Historical Book Society, Friesen, 1990.



**Castledowns II – (Top) Formation Centre from 1985 to 1997
(Lower) Reflection Group during the 1993 canonical visit.**

**L. to R.: Srs. A. Knievel, L. Beauchesne, C. Dargis,
G. Butler, R. Favreau and M-L. Vallée (Assitant General),
(rear) C. Clermont, M-A. Clermont, C. Goyer, H. Beaudoin
A. Vachon and M. Bouttier (Superior General).**



Veteran, June 8th 1988: Sr. Anna Laforge celebrates her golden jubilee in the presence of Father G. Legré and Sr. Ruth Wirachowsky.



Clandonald, June 1993, Srs. Dolorès Beaudoin and Helen Levasseur are happy to share kitchen duties with Srs M-L Vallée (Asst. Gen.) and M. Bouttier (Sup. Gen.) during the canonical visit.



Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta 1992



(Top) – Sisters' residence
(Lower) – Sr. Cécile Goyer at the Correctional Centre



Sr. Maria Séguin, left of top photo and Sr. Rosanne Favreau in lower photo, about to return to their Ivory Coast mission in Africa.



**(Top) Sr. Cécile Goyer at work in her office.
(Lower) Srs. A. Vachon, C. Dargis, G. Butler, C. Goyer,
A. Laforge and R. Beaulieu share a cheese fondue.**

VII

FORMATION AND PASTORAL ACTIVITIES

Castledowns II, Formation House 1985 – 1997

In November 1984, St. Anne's Convent, former formation center, was earmarked as a reception house for Sisters visiting or on short stays in Edmonton. A new house was bought in the Castledowns subdivision, located at 16123 – 101 Street, North Edmonton. The community consisting of Sisters Helen Levasseur, local Superior, Antoinette Rocher and Gloria Butler moved in on January 30th, 1985¹.

On February 25th, Mr. Émile Dupuis, architect, visited the house at the request of Sister Helen, with a view to some renovations in the basement, namely adding a chapel, a bedroom and an office². The carpentry work was completed during the spring and summer; and, a house warming party was held on September 7th.

In answer to a request from some ladies in the parish, Sister Helen agreed to animate some retreat days.

On December 29th, the Sisters in the Castledowns community travelled to Notre-Dame Residence where they celebrated New Years with that community. In spite of inclement weather all the communities were represented and warmly received at the Residence and at St. Anne's Convent – a real family gathering where everyone contributed to the time together. "How good it was to pray and have fun with the elderly and ill members of the community."

On May 10th, 1986, Sisters Louise Ladouceur and Simone Lapointe, both from St. Ann's Convent, joined the Castledowns community³. In October, another companion, Sister Dolorès Beaudoin, joined the group to profit from a quiet and calm atmosphere in order to improve her health status⁴.

Sister Gloria was named responsible for formation on January 7th, 1988. Sisters Antoinette, Simone and Louise moved to Notre-Dame Residence and were replaced at Castledowns by Sisters Ursula Whitley and Helen Fedoruk⁵. On January 21st, Sister Cécile Goyer, Provincial Superior, visited the Castledowns community and missioned the members in their responsibility for formation.

The Castledowns community members were very active in parish work. Sister Ursula regularly visited the handicapped and sick at the Dickensfield Centre nearby. Sister Helen Fedoruk visited elderly and lonely people in their homes. Sister Gloria worked with young people and regularly participated in inter-community noviciate meetings. The Castledowns community joined the parishioners in a study with a view to plan and build a new parish church.

The Sisters hosted several other groups, one being the RCIA group (Rite of Christian Initiation for adults). Gloria was a member of a team of lay persons who prepared adults for the reception of the sacraments. Their journey is a discovery and growth in faith, which, at the same time, fully integrates their daily life. The Castledowns area is mostly populated by immigrants, sometimes the catholic catechists are of Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist origins. And Gloria adds: "It is hard but fascinating work to rub shoulders with people who are searching and who are interested in and question the

attitudes of a life of faith, fully aware of God's presence and action day after day".

In co-operation with the parish council and a few parents, Gloria worked on a program that would develop a method of teaching young catholic students of the area what apostolic religious life truly was. She spent several days using reflection, prayer and activities to involve these young people. It was a seed that would perhaps produce much fruit and help prepare the Church of tomorrow. The animating group reflected on how these sessions could be followed up so that the idea of apostolic religious life would be kept alive among these youth. For several years, a team of Sisters from different congregations led study and sharing encounters with youth from Sherwood Park, south-east Edmonton.

In 1993, Sister Gloria spent eight weeks in Africa with our Sisters from other countries who were responsible for formation. She quickly realized how much this experience opened new doors and helped to better understand the beauty of different cultures. It was a rich and enlightening experience from many points of view. After this international meeting, Gloria stayed in France for another year, wishing to study and work in another culture than her own, but especially with a view to better understand French culture and the life of the Congregation.

At this juncture only two Sisters remained at the Castledowns House: Sisters Claire Dargis and Laura Chalut. Each day Claire went by bus to the Provincial House to do secretarial and archivist duties, while Laura, Provincial bursar, and a registered nurse, helped to care for the Sisters of Notre-Dame Residence. The Castledowns House was officially closed May 30th, 1997 and sold shortly after.

CO-ORDINATORS

Sister Helen LEVASSEUR	1985 – 1988
Sister Gloria BUTLER	1988 – 1993
Sister Claire DARGIS	1993 – 1997

* * *

Veteran, Alberta 1987 – 1992

Shortly after Sister Cécile Goyer became Provincial Superior in 1984, Bishop J. MacNeil of Edmonton discussed with her the spiritual needs of the parish of Castor and its three missions. Veteran, like Consort, Loyalist, Throne and Coronation, had been founded in 1911 on the occasion of H.M. George V's coronation. Located some 100 kilometres (62.5 miles) east of Trochu⁶, Veteran is part of an agricultural district formerly served by four priests. Presently one priest, Father Kragbé Gervais Legré who comes from Ivory Coast, Africa, is responsible for these Christian communities. Aware of the immense pastoral needs of his parishioners he addressed himself directly to the Sisters of Évron. After a long discussion on the pros and cons, the Provincial Council believed it could answer the call which comprised elements of risk and unknown factors. Despite a shortage of personnel, three Sisters were prepared to accept the challenge⁷.

On December 31st, 1987, Sister Cécile Goyer, accompanied by Sisters Ruth Wirachowsky, Anna Laforge and Dolorès Beaudoin drove by car to Veteran where they inspected the house in which the Sisters would settle⁸. It was a 60 year old house – which is considered old in Canada – but in good shape. There was lots of storage space in the

basement, a kitchen, bathroom, living room and bedroom on the ground floor and two bedrooms on the upper level.

The Sisters invited the parishioners to visit their home and help them move in; this would allow them to meet some of the people with whom they would work. The two other missions, Coronation and Consort, each had some 80 catholic families but only about 20 of these in each village attended church regularly.

On January 24th, 1988 on the eve of the Sisters' official departure from Trochu, Sister Cécile Goyer presided a moving and prayerful ceremony of missioning. She presented each Sister with a rainbow coloured candle – a symbol of what they must be at Veteran – the light of the world – and she then said: "Called to follow Jesus Christ in the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron, to be servants of Jesus Christ poor, in the person of the poor, in simplicity and humility according to Perrine Thulard's charism, attentive to the Holy Spirit active in the world and in the Church, wishing to live in a community according to the spirit of Incarnation and together to announce Jesus Christ, Anna, Ruth, Dolorès, go and teach by example and word."

The following morning, on the feast of the conversion of Saint Paul, the missionaries left the Provincial House, en route for Veteran – heavy hearted but confident that the Lord accompanied them. Their first contact with children occurred at a catechism class; the students were anxious to meet the Sisters so the instructors invited the Sisters to a lunch served after the lesson. "Their simplicity is charming and impressed us" wrote Sister Ruth. That evening the Sisters were invited to accompany the parishioners to Castor, where the priest

lived. Each Monday night they would travel to Castor to participate in a series of talks on the Christian faith.

The mission tour began at Consort Saturday evening, January 30th, at the celebration of the Eucharist (anticipated Sunday mass). Sister Ruth introduced her companions and gave a brief history of the foundress and the Congregation, before mentioning the response of the Sisters to the Church's call to work in the Lord's vineyard in this rural milieu. On Sunday morning, the tour continued with Eucharistic celebrations at Veteran, Coronation and Castor. In each parish Sister Ruth gave the presentation and the Sisters were able to meet many parishioners and although it was a tiring morning it was a very enriching experience.

In the afternoon, despite a minus 30° Celsius temperature the blessing of the house was carried out in the presence of the Provincial Council, several Sisters from Trochu, Vegreville and Edmonton, as well as some 40 parishioners. The priest blessed the house, one room at a time, praying thus: "Lord give to your servants who will live in this home the grace to listen to your word with faith, to pray to you with grateful hearts, to seek you in their work and to find you in their brothers and sisters and to be witnesses to the Gospel, imitating Christ in all things. In this way they will joyfully see you revealed in glory". A crucifix and an icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary were blessed and installed in a place of honour⁹. Several years passed and the Sisters remained in Veteran; it was truly a spirituality of awaiting, "they were to be the seed waiting for the moment to germinate". The population was sympathetic and friendly, but since they had never before had Sisters in their midst, many thought that the latter would teach catechism and other similar duties. But right from the start the Sisters informed

them that they would not take over the parents' responsibilities, but were there to support them and encourage them to occupy their rightful place in the local Church. Indeed the Sisters' mission was to awaken lay Christians to their own responsibilities.

In 1991, a sudden change occurred with the departure of the parish priest, and it was difficult for the Sisters to collaborate fully with the new pastor. Sister Ruth, invited to do pastoral work with the sick at Vegreville, tended her resignation. Sister Anna, wishing to join the Sisters' Community at Fort Saskatchewan did the same, while Sister Dolorès returned to Edmonton.

The Veteran Mission was closed and the Sisters departed in the latter part of August 1992.

CO-ORDINATOR

Sister Ruth WIRACHOWSKY 1988 – 1992

Clandonald, St. Columba Parish, 1990 – 1993

Father Ken West, parish priest of Vermilion, asked Sister Marie Thérèse Laberge, the Provincial Superior, for a small religious community to live in Clandonald, a parish without a resident priest and situated about 20 kilometres north of Vermilion. The parishioners were hopeful that they would eventually have a priest but finally realized that it would not happen. Sisters Helen Levasseur and Dolorès Beaudoin accepted the call, and saw it as a new apostolate¹⁰. The Sisters would move into the empty rectory near the

church, and their role, according to Father West, was to help the parishioners build a community without a resident priest.

Sisters Marie Thérèse Laberge and Laura Chalut accompanied Helen and Dolorès on November 19th, 1990, when they moved to Clandonald. The priest and several parishioners welcomed them. Later they joined the Catholic Women's League as well as a seniors group. Dolorès helped with the teaching of catechism and initiated one of the mothers to this responsibility, while Helen led a Bible study group with the theme 'Mark in everyday life'¹¹.

In January 1992 Sister Dolorès underwent an operation for a malignant tumour. After a period of convalescence she accepted the ministry of music, playing the organ at Sunday mass and during other offices. Helen became a minister of communion and continued to incite lay persons to carry on various pastoral activities – a new and enriching experience for many.

The Sisters continued their apostolate of sharing, hospitality and assistance until July 1993 when Dolorès, seriously ill, had to return to the Notre-Dame Residence in Edmonton. Sister Helen stayed on alone for several months. When she realized that Sister Dolorès would not return, she also returned to the Edmonton Residence where she was named local Superior¹².

CO-ORDINATOR

Sister Helen LEVASSEUR 1990 – 1993

Fort Saskatchewan, 1993 – 1998

The Federal Government created the North West Mounted Police Force on August 30th, 1873, with the mission of maintaining order and the security of colonists heading toward Western Canada. The first contingent arrived on horseback at Calgary in 1874 and proceeded to build the Brisebois fort. The following year a detachment pushed on to the North Saskatchewan River and built a second fort some 20 miles (32 km) north-east of Edmonton, which was named Fort Saskatchewan. In 1914 after it was no longer used it became a provincial penitentiary. On the north bank of the river across from the fort, the Lamoureux brothers, who had settled before the arrival of the police, gave their family name in 1875 to the Notre-Dame de Lourdes parish¹³. On May 8th, 1908, the Franciscans founded the parish of Our Lady of the Angels at Fort Saskatchewan¹⁴. Nowadays this town has a population of 13,000 and serves as a dormitory town to Edmonton.

During the summer of 1991 a Sister of Charity of Halifax, who had carried out pastoral services at the jail resigned her post, but not before she had approached Sister Cécile Goyer and apprised her of the type of work she had done. After having obtained authorization from the Diocese Cécile was hired by Catholic Social Services on a two-year contract beginning September 1st, 1992. Since she had to take clinical pastoral education in Toronto, Mrs. Nora Lee-Benson carried out the task in the interim.

Meanwhile, the Provincial Council proposed to establish a new community in the parish, which Sister Cécile would join upon her return. Apprised of this project Father Duncan MacDonnell, parish priest, addressed an official letter

to the Provincial Superior on March 23rd, 1992, indicating his acceptance of the new community. The latter would be made up of Sisters Cécile Goyer, Aline Vachon from Vegreville, and Rosanne Favreau, who had returned from Africa and was on indefinite leave.

At the end of August Rosanne and Aline searched for an appropriate house. In the meantime, after the closure of the Veteran Community, Sister Anne Laforge requested to join the group of three. The new community was officially formed on September 2nd, 1992. A house was bought and the Sisters took possession October 8th. The furniture from the Veteran residence was transported and the Sisters moved in on October 14th.

On the following Sunday, during the Eucharist celebration, the Sisters were officially presented to the parishioners; a warm welcome awaited them. On another Sunday, the new families were welcomed, including the Sisters. The parish priest was invited to bless the Sisters' house after the house-warming party; several Sisters, province-wide, answered the invitation for November 14th, which was preceded by communal prayer and gift sharing.

In December Sister Marie Thérèse Laberge, Provincial Superior, came for her canonical visit; the theme being communal life. On Christmas Eve the Sisters joined other religious groups to sing carols at the prison. This season is a difficult time for people separated from their families. The day after Christmas the Sisters joined the internees at Mass and a time of socializing and lunch. At Christmas one of the sisters accompanied Cécile who led a liturgy of the word of God, after which boxes of cookies were distributed. In addition to her prison ministry Cécile

was a member of the parish council and of the committee for social action. She invited other parishioners to volunteer their services to their incarcerated brothers and sisters. Beginning May 17th she started working once a week at the Edmonton Detention Centre. The atmosphere here was very different as the people awaited judgement on their case and were often quite agitated and upset.

Sister Aline, still employed as a registered nurse in Vegreville, drove to Fort Saskatchewan when she had days off. She joined the parish team who brought communion to the sick, either in hospital or at home. Sister Anna participated in the weekly Eucharistic celebration in a home for the aged. Sister Rosanne worked with teachers and students in the three catholic schools in the parish; she also did home visits, helped in the formation of small communities and in youth animation. Beginning September 1st, 1993, she worked as a permanent member of the pastoral team, at the request of the priest and parish council. The reflection groups, which existed in the Province were regrouped. Anna continued with the rural group, which included Bonnyville, Vegreville, Vermilion and Clandonald. The three other Sisters joined the Castledowns group, which comprised Claire Dargis, Marie-Cécile Clermont, Marie-Anna Clermont, Agnes Knievel, Lina Beauchesne, Henriette Beaudoin, Laura Chalut and Gloria Butler.

The latter, back from France at the end of July 1994, after a year's sabbatical leave, had joined the Fort Saskatchewan community. She could not find employment in a hospital due to the tight economic situation in the province, so she worked twice a week for Catholic Social Services in a home for physically and mentally handicapped young adults.

She also worked two or three days a week in a shelter for street people.

For some time a Vocation Committee, consisting of Sisters Thérèse Verrier, Cécile Goyer, Ann Yuhas, Rosanne Favreau and Marie Thérèse Laberge representing the Council, reflected on a way to help people to be aware of what a Christian vocation is and possibly a call to religious life. The parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Sherwood Park had prepared an information program on vocations with the participation of Cécile, Rosanne and Gloria. Young men and women followed retreats during which they prayed, reflected and shared. The Sisters would tell the story of their religious vocation.

At Sister Cécile's request, Archbishop J.N. MacNeil of Edmonton and Father Bill Irwin, chairman of Catholic Social Services, would go to the detention centre at least once a year to celebrate Eucharist. "To proclaim the word of God in such a milieu is a moving experience" said the Archbishop¹⁵. Several volunteers offered their time and talents for the prisoners' benefit: music and hymns, regular visits, help for certain programs, occasional drivers, etc. Cécile held a barbecue once a year as a thank you gesture; this gave the volunteers a chance to enjoy each other's company and to reminisce.

In the fall of 1995 Sister Rosanne informed the community about her wish to return to the Ivory Coast where she had been a missionary for 20 years. The parishioners regretted her departure and offered her a generous sum of money as a token of their thanks.

The Vocation Committee was re-formed following Rosanne's departure. Its members were Sisters Aline Vachon, Cécile Goyer, Thérèse Verrier, Gloria Butler and Marie Thérèse Laberge. In the course of a meeting the wish to begin a program for associates, as mentioned in the 1986 General Chapter, was expressed. During the following three years lay persons from Fort Saskatchewan and Vegreville who were interested in becoming associates met with the Sisters. Eventually Sisters Mary Ellen O'Neill, Ruth Wirachowsky, Gloria Butler and Aline Vachon became the animating team. In the parish of St. Thomas Aquinas, in Edmonton, several members of the Bible Study Group conducted by Sister Rejeanne Beaulieu, pastoral agent, expressed a wish to study the spirituality of the French School. In the fall of 1998, these people accompanied by Sisters Rejeanne, Annette Labbé and Claire Dargis, began their journey toward becoming associates. Occasionally the two groups – the Fort Saskatchewan and the Edmonton groups – join together for sharing and friendship.

In 1996, at the General Chapter held in Évron, Sister Cécile Goyer was elected General Assistant; she therefore had to leave the Province of Canada to take up residence in France. All the Sisters who had known or worked with her were deeply affected by her departure. Sister Madeleine Bouttier, General Superior, sent these words to the Canadian Sisters: "Today, more than ever, the Congregation is called to express its international dimension, thereby giving a gospel message ...¹⁶"

On September 27, 1996, all the Canadian Sisters gathered at the Notre-Dame Residence to say goodbye to Cécile reminding her of their affection, support and prayers.

This time of prayer and sharing, rich in symbols and messages, allowed each sister to personalize her farewell.

From then on, only two Sisters continued living in Fort Saskatchewan. Help to the marginalized continued after normal professional work, as a response to Perrine Thulard's admonition: "Serve Jesus Christ poor, in the person of the poor."

Following Sister Aline Vachon's nomination as local Superior of Notre-Dame Residence, in July 1998, the house was officially closed in December of that year.

CO-ORDINATOR

Sister Cécile GOYER 1992 – 1996

Diverse Ministries

When the Sisters began to leave the hospitals and schools during the post-Vatican II era, many of them were authorized to seek new and individual apostolic insertions; in most cases this turned out to be pastoral work in a parish. Many who left their professional activities felt a need to share their experience, gifts and talents with their christian brothers and sisters. This transformation was meant to be a help to the laity so that they would assume their rightful place in the Church. Besides, the shortage of priests left certain parishes without a pastor. Members of religious communities as well as diocesan clergy were encouraged to renew their thinking. Instead of undertaking the planning and execution of ministerial work they would henceforth try to encourage and

help parishioners – male and female – to carry out tasks once thought to be the exclusive field of priests and Sisters. Some Sisters offered such apostolate service voluntarily, others received remuneration.

Many parish priests and parish councils have since become accustomed to the presence of pastoral agents who offer required service throughout the year. Generally speaking, this service comprises preparation for baptism and the other sacraments, liturgy, reflection and prayer groups, social justice issues encouraging youth participation in community building and promotion of christian life. Occasionally it includes secretarial duties, accounting services, choir direction and music ministry.

In Canada several Sisters of the congregation have already participated in this type of pastoral service or in similar endeavours. Sometimes these were carried out in parishes where the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron were established and occasionally in other parishes.

Sister Réjeanne Beaulieu was committed to pastoral work at Zenon Park, Arborfield and Vegreville for 20 years; she is now 'pastoral assistant' at Saint Thomas Aquinas parish in Edmonton. Sister Helen Levasseur did similar work at St. Ann of the Prairies parish in Trochu. For several years Sister Louise Ladouceur was secretary and receptionist at St. Louis of France parish in Bonnyville, while Sister Albertine Bureau worked at Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish in Sherwood Park, near Edmonton. Another member of the congregation, Sister Lina Beauchesne served for several years as housekeeper and cook at the St. Joseph's Basilica rectory, Edmonton, in addition to helping lonely people and voluntarily giving much time to working at the food bank.

Many others contributed, through their talents and in various ways, to improve liturgical celebrations by being part of pastoral teams or simply offering prayers for the parishioners and their pastors. Sister Marie Francis Lyons, who taught music at Trochu for several years, never hesitated to offer her talents at liturgical celebrations held at the parish.

After having been local Superior at Notre-Dame Residence in Edmonton, for two consecutive mandates, Sister Ann Yuhas was hired as a part-time nurse in Winnipeg. In her spare time she helps organize retreats and does religious vocation work. Sister Maria Lemay who had spent many years teaching music to school children at Zenon Park and Bonnyville, now offers her artistic and musical talents to her companion Sisters at Notre-Dame Residence.

In the early 1980's the Sisters at the Residence were asked to help a young woman who had recently emigrated from Vietnam. Sister Yvonne Gobeil took on the challenge, offering her friendship and support to the lady and, later, to her family; to this day she continues helping in various ways. Sister Henriette Beaudoin, after having retired as a teacher continues to help students at school or those who need tutoring. She encourages the teachers to assume their true missionary role in the universal Church. She is also often asked to help decorate at the residence when special community celebrations are held.

The Ivory Coast Mission, Africa

In 1957, responding to a call from the Holy Father, the General Council decided to open a Mission in the Ivory Coast. This new thrust awakened in several Sisters a yearning to dedicate their energy and talents in this new

mission. Two Canadian Sisters have given more than fifty years of service there: Sister Maria Seguin, since 1968, and Sister Rosanne Favreau since 1971. When they return to Canada every two years it is with joy and enthusiasm that they are received by their companions who listen eagerly to their many and varied experiences.

Since 1998 the entire Congregation has taken on a special millennium project. Each province and delegation offers financial assistance toward a project which has as an objective to alleviate and prevent the effects of malnutrition among children at the Guitry mission in the Ivory Coast. Each Sister is invited to create hand-crafted objects that would be sold at parish or local bazaars and so provide revenue with which to build a hostel-type accommodation at the said mission. Mothers and children coming from distant villages can thus stay there a few days in order to receive essential teaching on proper nutrition, as well as medical intervention aimed at relieving the symptoms associated with malnutrition.

The authors of *Back to our Roots* remind us of the ever present challenge to be in solidarity with the poor: "whenever we struggle to help a human being to grow to full potential, to help a man, a woman, a child to live according to the will of God, we are sharing in Jesus Christ's work of salvation¹⁷."

¹ Registre des Nominations.

² *Chronique de Castledowns, March 1985.*

³ Registre des Nominations.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Place names of Alberta, op.cit.*

⁷ Letter to General Council, Jan. 8, 1988.

⁸ Registre des Nominations, p. 8.

⁹ Chronique de la Maison de Veteran.

¹⁰ Registre des Nominations.

¹¹ Chronique des Soeurs de Clandonald.

¹² Registre des Nominations.

¹³ E. Legal, omi, *History of the Catholic Church in Alberta*, Winnipeg, MB, West Canada Publishing Co. Ltd., ca 1915, p. 77-79.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 104.

¹⁵ Chronique du Fort Saskatchewan.

¹⁶ Circular letter, M. Bouttier, General Superior, Oct 7th, 1996.

¹⁷ *Back to our Roots*, Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Évron, [original in French], Laval (France) Lib. -éd Siloë, 1990, p. 50.



(Top) Archbishop J.N. MacNeil of Edmonton, officially opens the Tercentenary celebrations at St. Thomas Aquinas church, Edmonton, May 8th 1982.

(Lower) Sisters gathered in Bonnyville during the Tercentenary.



(Top) Decor in the Mother House chapel at Évron, 1988 during the International summer assemblies. Each candle represents the participating countries.

(Lower) Reflection group in Vegreville, December 1997
L. to R.: Srs. U. Whitley, L. Boivin and R. Wirachowsky
(Back) H. Levasseur, H. Fedoruk, F. Clusiaux, M.E. O'Neill and A. Labbé.



Tercentenary symbol



'93 International meeting, Évion

**L. to R.: (front) Srs. Rosanne Favreau, Gloria Butler,
Mary Ellen O'Neill**

**(back) Ann Yuhas, Henriette Beaudoin, Thérèse
Verrier, Aline Vachon, Réjeanne Beaulieu, Cécile Goyer**

VIII

THE TERCENTENARY: A CHALLENGE FOR FURTHER ADAPTATION

The Tercentenary Celebrations, 1982 – 1983

A few years prior to the tercentenary of the Congregation, members of the Council of the Congregation discussed various ways to make of this event a time of thanksgiving, as well as an occasion to celebrate the lives of those valiant women who had served "Jesus Christ poor, in the person of the poor" over a three hundred year period. Each country would decide how it could best celebrate the memorable year and there would be ongoing communication between them.

In 1980 the Canadian Province formed a committee; Sister Ann Yuhas was designated as co-ordinator of events to be held between May 1982 and September 1983. The main committee consisted of a representative from each community. Sub-committees were also named to look after the details of the various festivities in the Province. A questionnaire was sent to each community asking for suggestions and each Sister was encouraged to participate according to her specific talents.

The initial celebration took place in Edmonton on May 8th, 1982. Dignitaries were invited, as well as the Sisters' family members, representatives from other religious communities of Alberta and Saskatchewan, priests with whom they had worked in the past as well as the priests of the parishes where they still lived, representatives from their hospitals and various associations. The Eucharistic

celebration was presided by Archbishop J.N. McNeil of Edmonton. A reception followed, and later that evening, a festive banquet was much enjoyed. A dance group *Les Blés d'Or*, from St. Paul, performed three folklore dances that were much appreciated.

The various parish celebrations were organized around the themes, "fidelity, union and commitment". In a beautiful logogram we see the cross representing our union with Christ, a large rainbow-coloured *e* represents our commitment [engagement], the promise and fidelity of God, and also symbolizes Évron. The dates 1682 and 1982 represent of course, the 300 years of dedication and service in the Church. The logo signifies that the Sisters of the Canadian Province enthusiastically take up the challenge of the future.

To accentuate the 300th Anniversary, the Council of the Congregation planned inter-provincial visits as part of the celebrations. There was even talk that the 1982 Council meeting might be held in Canada. Indeed, such a project, aimed at strengthening relationships, became a reality in mid-June of 1982.

Each parish where the Sisters lived and worked was invited to celebrate with them; dates were set and whenever possible the Sisters travelled to each locality for the celebration. The parishioners participated in large numbers, expressing their deep appreciation and their joy to be part of the special event.

One of the most touching celebrations took place in Trochu, on July 3rd, 1982. Several women, former members of the congregation, were invited to attend with their families and a great many responded. They not only met their former

companions but also their former nursing or teaching colleagues and friends from Trochu. One of them, as spokesperson, expressed the sense of belonging and the immense happiness felt by all to be included in this important event in the life of the Congregation. This renewed friendship was solidified and continued to grow and deepen. A well-chosen hymn, based on the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians, was sung: "I thank my God each time I think of you, and when I pray for you I pray with joy." (Phil. I, 2-3). Emotions surfaced, and tears flowed freely.

Several other projects were undertaken, such as financial contributions to certain charitable organizations dedicated to serving the poor. Tracts and pamphlets on the congregation's history were printed and several newspapers carried the event.

The last three weeks of the Tercentenary project were spent at Vegreville; here, all the Sisters took part in a renewal session, which included a retreat as well as an historical resumé of the most important events that had occurred during the 300-year history of the Congregation. The Sisters also assisted at conferences on "the spirituality of Incarnation" and a study of the 17th century French School of spirituality. A special reconciliation ceremony was also much appreciated. Everything was done to encourage the Sisters to pray and relax together during these three weeks.

In 1983, still within the context of the Tercentenary celebrations, the administrators of the Sisters' three Catholic hospitals in Alberta – Bonnyville, Vegreville and Trochu – and their wives, were invited to the Mother House at Évron, France. The aim of this visit was to help them to better understand the spirit of the Sisters of Évron, thus assisting

them to manage the hospitals according to Perrine Thulard's charism¹. They also visited certain places where the Sisters' history is particularly significant.

The Sisters considered it a special favour to have participated in these Tercentenary celebrations. Their meetings and dialogue with members from other provinces of the congregation increased their awareness of the international dimension and of the same family spirit that united them in spite of great distances².

International Summer Assemblies

During the 1986 General Chapter the Delegates heard a unanimous request concerning the 'spirit of the Congregation'. Expressed in different ways this wish was specifically aimed at a better understanding of the spirituality of Incarnation. In reply, the General Chapter proposed, among other things, to hold international summer meetings that would allow confrontation of ideas, experiences, exchanges and fraternal sharing. The aims were defined as follows:

- As Sisters of Évron to get to know one another better;
- Witnessing how the Spirit of Incarnation is lived by the Sisters;
- Communicating the lived reality and analyzing it to make the Sisters more aware of its value in daily life;
- Rekindling the Sisters' hope as they become more aware of the Congregation's life and activities.

A study group, designated by the Chapter, was asked to revitalize the spiritual and historical traditions of the Congregation. It was established on November 28th, 1986.

At the Council of the Congregation in September 1987, guidelines were established concerning the choice of representatives who would attend the summer sessions; each Provincial was to determine the number of participating Sisters in 1988 and 1989. "It is important to emphasize the international character of the congregation and to chose Sisters who can clearly explain, at the assemblies, how this experience is lived in the province"³.

The Provincial Council asked Sisters Mary Ellen O'Neill, Annette Labbé, Réjeanne Beaulieu and Aline Vachon to represent the Canadian group at the 1988 meeting. On January 6th, 1988 Sister Madeleine Bouttier wrote to the Congregation: "Let us prepare our hearts [and minds] for this fraternal get together. God is there already Let us remain confident that this event will increase our sense of belonging to the Congregation and shall be a source of renewal for us".

In January 1989, the second encounter was announced for that summer. The Canadian representatives were: Sisters Gloria Butler, Georgette Gagnon, Marie Thérèse Laberge, Simone Lapointe, Antoinette Rocher and Ann Yuhas.

A session for the first group was held in France with Father Michel Dupuy, pss, a specialist in religious history that corresponded with the period when the Sisters of Évron were founded. He helped write a booklet entitled *Back to Our Roots*, published in 1990 and which has since become the

Sisters' vade-mecum⁴. In the course of the same year Father Dupuy came to Alberta where he preached a retreat to the Sisters of the Canadian Province on the theme 'The spirit of Incarnation'; he had given a similar retreat in Évron, France.

Sister Cécile Goyer, Provincial Superior, expressed a wish that some French Sisters come and share with the Canadian Sisters the missionary dimension of their lives. The following were chosen: Sisters Marie-Thérèse Beaufay (Évron), Andrée Lesaint (Orne-Mayenne) and Thérèse Boureau (Sarthe). All three commented on how the spirit of Incarnation, lived in another culture was evident in the daily lives of the Sisters⁵. In the ensuing years several other French Sisters also were given the opportunity to visit and experience the mission of the Canadian Sisters.

International Commission – 1990

The Council of the Congregation decided to create an international commission with a representative of each Province and Delegation. The Canadian delegates, voted upon in a Provincial meeting, were as follows: Sisters Marie Thérèse Laberge, Helen Levasseur, Thérèse Verrier and Gloria Butler. The Commission met with the members of the Council of the Congregation in Pontmain, France, from September 4th to 8th, 1990. Sister Anne-Marie Duffaure, a religious sister of the Pommeraye, animated the sessions⁶. The task was to establish the themes to be studied at the General Chapter in 1991. Four subjects were chosen: two concerning research on apostolic religious life, and two on missionary priorities.

Reflection Groups and Council of the Province

Following the 1991 General Chapter, the Sisters discussed ways to incite each member of the Province to study in depth the Chapter Acts. Five reflection groups were organized; later, to be reduced to four.

The Sisters' first assessment revealed that they enjoyed this initiative and wished to continue this innovative way of sharing. Each one felt that she had personally been involved in setting out the aims of her group; these groups were to be a means of communicating information, study and reflection, sharing, prayer, support, and recreation. They wanted the guidelines to remain flexible. In the wake of regular meetings they discovered a dynamism, a certain vigour that is different from their everyday community living. It was evident that these groups had brought about creativity and a new vitality.

Father Raymond Deville, pss, Superior General of the Sulpician order in France, a specialist in the Spirituality of the French School, visited Edmonton in June 1992. He was invited by the Sisters of Évron to give a series of conferences to local congregations who claimed this same spirituality. It was a unique occasion to deepen their rich spiritual inheritance.

Following a survey, the Sisters agreed on a new way of forming the 'Council of the Province': the Provincial Council were ex-officio members and delegates from each group were added. The first meeting of this restructured Council was held on October 21st, 1993; objectives and responsibilities were written. Each one appreciated this new

resource which would help everyone live more fully the present.

The '93 International Meeting

The idea of this get together came out of the summer international assemblies of 1988 – 89 as well as the sessions on apostolic religious life and from the Chapter Acts of 1991. The aim of this meeting was to deepen and define the evangelization mission of religious life, in the year 2000. It would awaken the Sisters in the use of modern communication techniques in order to improve the sharing of ideas between countries. Sisters born in 1931 and later were invited. In Canada, nine Sisters qualified: Henriette Beaudoin, Thérèse Verrier, Réjeanne Beaulieu, Mary Ellen O'Neill, Ann Yuhas, Rosanne Favreau, Aline Vachon, Cécile Goyer and Gloria Butler.

The "93 Encounter" allowed for a wonderful exchange among the participants. The objectives of the meeting were: getting to know one another better, a deepening of the international dimension, progress in ways of listening and expressing oneself, improving communication skills. The Canadian Sisters were inventive in communicating what they had experienced in Évron to the rest of the members of the Province. They organized a retreat for the Province and the group considered themselves privileged to have contributed to this important Congregational session.

Community Retreat

At a provincial assembly held in October, the Sisters who had participated in the 1993 international meeting, gave a resumé of their experience in Évron; they dwelt especially

on the animation provided by Sister Lucie Licherie, former Novice Director of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, who had been invited to Évron for the session. Sister Marie-Thérèse Laberge asked the group of 9 to animate the community retreat to be held in April 1994, on the theme "poverty and detachment". It would be held at the *Star of the North* retreat house which is owned by the Oblate Fathers at St. Albert.

The group of 9, happy to take on the challenge, were grateful to the Sisters of the Province who had entered fully into this time of prayer and reflection. Many enjoyed the positive approach taken towards the vow of poverty, adding they would happily participate in future retreats dealing with the other vows.

The sharing time brought the Sisters of different communities closer together and it seems that spiritual growth resulted. Each day they pray God that Jesus model of "the poor" draw them closer to Him so that they can more freely choose to adhere to Perrine Thulard's testimony: "Serve Jesus Christ, poor, in the person of the poor."

The fraternal climate of the '93 Meeting was extended through mail and electronic communications between countries. The Canadian group, known as the "group of 9" meets regularly in the hope of deepening the experiences and appreciating the richness of each member⁷.

Pan-Canadian and International Studies

During the post-Vatican II period, as mentioned in Chapter V, many of the Canadian Sisters enrolled in theology

or renewal courses. Following is a list of the courses taken by several sisters:

Pan-Canadian Courses:

Dominican College of Philosophy and Theology – Ottawa, ON, or Newman College – Edmonton, AB: Bachelor of Theology.

Cécile Goyer
Ann Yuhas
Marie Jenkins
Rosanne Favreau

Aline Vachon
Henriette Beaudoin
Réjeanne Beaulieu

St. Paul's University or Dominican College of Philosophy and Theology – Ottawa, ON: sabbatical year; theology courses.

Anne Laforge
Annette Labbé

Helen Levasseur
Ursula Whitley

Sisters of Providence Mother House – Montreal, QC: Sabbatical year, formation and renewal year.

Marguerite Plouffe
Rose Lemay
Yvonne Laforge

Florence Clusiaux
Simone Lapointe

Cap-de-la-Madeline, QC: Sabbatical year, Formation and Renewal year.

Albertine Bureau
Florence Verrier

Lina Beauchesne

International Courses:

Gonzaga University, Spokane, U.S.: Sabbatical year, Credo Program (Formation and Renewal)

Ruth Wirachowsky
Maria Séguin
Hélène Fedoruk

Dolorès Beaudoin
Laura Chalut

The Catholic University of Angers, Angers, France: Institute of Doctrinal and Pedagogical Formation: Sabbatical year

Thérèse Verrier

Gloria Butler

In addition, several Sisters have followed and continue to engage in various continuing formation⁸.

CONCLUSION: FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

by Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill

In August 1999 we will celebrate the 90th anniversary of our humble beginnings in the Trochu Coulee. We recall with grateful hearts the countless graces that God has granted us during these ten decades. We owe so much to our pioneer French sisters who carved out our niche here in Western Canada. Faithful to the spirit of our foundress, Perrine Thulard, these dedicated and generous women overcame tremendous obstacles to establish in several rural communities the apostolic works of teaching and care of the sick.

During the founding years the general councils of the day realized that at such a great distance it was imperative that this young branch of the Congregation must possess the ability and the authority to make some of its own decisions. Although the principle of subsidiarity became a popular concept after the second Vatican Council, fortunately for the Canadian Province, the wisdom of those in the position of authority in the early 1900's permitted a measure of autonomy in this distant mission. With little or no communication during two world wars it would have been virtually impossible to govern the province had a certain authority not been divested to the Provincial Council. Along with this autonomy of administration the establishment of a novitiate in Trochu also contributed to the Province taking on its own identity. The French sisters left a lasting spirit in the Province, which to this day binds us together in spite of our great diversity of culture and inheritance.

In a few short months we will join with the Universal Church to celebrate two thousand years of Christ's entry into the world. The Incarnate Word of God set up his tent among us and He remains our model of fidelity and service in a world that is called to be a sign of God's active presence.

At the dawn of the third millennium the issues and the concerns facing our society, our church, and our religious community are many and varied. We realize that the responses to these challenges are as complex as the questions themselves and it is only in collaboration with others that we can contribute our small part to the creation of a more just and loving world.

Diminishing resources as well as the number of sisters involved in active ministry and with no recruitment of young Canadian women to the congregation for several years we are perhaps tempted to question our viability in the future. Many of our contemporary religious sisters on this continent are also reflecting on like circumstances in their communities. We have come to realize that in the beginning of this century existing conditions required that religious take up the task of providing health and social services as well as education in our developing nation. Today, most of these services in our society are very adequately provided by the laity. On the whole we did offer a marvellous service in the areas where we worked and the accolades are numerous from those who benefited from our expertise and competence.

It is true that we were quite comfortable in these settings where our active participation, our personal gifts and charism produced many successes as well as rewards. However that chapter in our history is closed and today we must continue to witness to the love and compassion of Jesus

so that our brothers and sisters may come to know the Incarnate Word of God in their midst.

During the years of growth in our apostolic endeavours we became quite self sufficient and independent in the administration and stewardship of our human and financial resources. Today in our health care institutions where we are still involved we rely almost totally on our lay contemporaries to manage and administer the facilities. For several years we have been actively involved in an ongoing education program to enable the laity to understand and embody the mission, values and vision of our healing ministry.

Several years ago the Provincial Council took the option of assuring as much as was possible that the Sisters would be cared for in the community and that a retirement and care facility would be designed and maintained for this purpose. Today we find ourselves ever more dependent on lay staff for the care of our aged and ill sisters as well as in the provision of other services in our communities. We are in constant admiration of these people who provide such dedicated and competent services to us. Our role of being providers of service has now changed to that of being receivers of these services and our attitude of grateful appreciation and affirmation of the providers is another way of being Christ's face in the world.

Today many aspects of our lives have changed radically from what we once thought were very much a part of religious commitment. We have moved toward individual ministries and our concept of community life is understood less as uniformity and more as a life of sharing and solidarity. Our vowed life is seen more as our specific way of living out

our baptismal commitment rather than a giving up of certain privileges and is valued for its positive attributes. We believe we are still called to be a sign in our world today and to be a witness to the love, mercy and compassion of our God who so loved the world that He sent His Son to be our Emmanuel.

It is in the very ordinary things of each day that we discover and experience the living God and in encountering Him we seek to share Him with all those we meet. Everyone can engage in this mission as it is a mission of trying constantly to be awakened and enlivened by the marvels of a God who knows no limits in His love and mercy. It is in being faithful to our call to follow Christ in the minute details of our daily lives that we engage our energies, our gifts and talents in furthering God's kingdom among His people who are searching for meaning and fulfillment in their lives. In multiple ways we try to reach out to a broken, wounded and disillusioned society which produces no end of victims caught up in a race for survival in a world preoccupied with a philosophy of consumerism and immediate satisfaction. Wherever possible we speak of and witness to the inherent dignity of each and every person and that each individual is deserving of respect and care. Because we love and serve a God who has promised to be with us always we can dare to hope for today and tomorrow and by witnessing to this faithful God we can help to spread this message of hope to those around us.

The Gospel imperative to work for justice is unrelenting and we can never lose sight of our responsibility to do what we can to contribute to a just society. We are concerned with and offer our contribution to a safe and healthy environment and join our voice to those who

advocate for and work toward the protection of our precious planet earth.

A return to a deepening of our founding charism and how it can speak to our contemporaries today has provided an impetus for our Congregation to invite a number of lay men and women to reflect with us on the Spirituality of the French School. This initiative which was a call from the 1996 General Chapter of the Congregation has resulted in a response from a number of people who find in this spirituality a way for them to live more fully their Christian vocation. A charism is a gift to the whole church and must be given flesh in each generation. Sharing our charism and spirituality with our lay brothers and sisters in Christ and collaborating with them in various endeavours appears to be where the Spirit is leading us today. This spirituality which has endured for more than three hundred years is very relevant today as it finds its source in the great mystery of the Incarnation. As we move into a new century and as we celebrate the great jubilee of redemption we praise and glorify God for sending His beloved Son to our World and we ask the Spirit to lead us onward in our mission. We continue to pray, and to hope that others, both youth and adults, may be inspired by the message of Perrine Thulard, and that they accept to keep alive the flame of love and compassion toward the poor and suffering as they seek to be the heart, the hands and the touch of Jesus in our world.

¹ Échos du Conseil de Congrégation, Évron.

² Pages Familiales.

³ Conseil de Congrégation 1987.

⁴ SCE, *Back to our Roots*, Évron, 1990, p. 63.

⁵ Information No. 15, Jan 15, 1989.

⁶ Informations No. 20, 29 Mars 1990.

⁷ Pages Familiales No. 25, Dec 1994 p. 13 – 14.

⁸ SCE Charte de formation continue, Évron, 1995.

APPENDICES

- A.** The Constitutions, Coat of Arms, and Motto of the Congregation.
- B.** The Habit.
- C.** List of the Reverend Mothers General.
- D.** List of the Provincial Superiors in Canada.
- E.** List of the French, Irish and Canadian Sisters.
- F.** The Origins of Trochu.
- G.** The Sisters' cemetery at Trochu.
- H.** The Blessing of the Bell.

This appendix comprises information on the Constitutions of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron, and on their coat of arms and motto, in the following order:

- Historical summary, from 1682 to 1986.
- The 1986 Constitutions.
- Copy of a letter from Sister M. Cousin, Superior General, Évron, dated January 25th 1913.
- Copy of an Act to Incorporate Les Soeurs de la Charité de Notre Dame d'Évron, assented by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, on March 25th 1913.
- Copy of a document authorizing the establishment of the Noviciate at Trochu, signed by the Archbishop Émile Legal, OMI, of Edmonton, on June 25th 1914.
- Coat of Arms and motto of the Congregation SCE.

Historical Summary

The first rule written by Madame Thulard was modeled on the rule which Saint Vincent de Paul had given to the Daughters of Charity in 1646. Louis de Tressan, Bishop of Le Mans approved the first Rule in 1709.

In 1838 Bishop J. B. Bouvier composed a new set of rules and changed the status of the Society to that of a Congregation and introduced the three religious vows.

Pope Gregory XVI granted a Decree of Praise (Commendation) to the Congregation on September 3rd, 1843.

The Congregation became one of Pontifical Right on March 4th, 1879, when approved by Pope Leon XIII.

The Code of Canon Law promulgated by Pope Benedict XV required a reformulation of the Constitution; these were approved on July 17th, 1921.

The General Chapters prescribed by Vatican Council II (Aggiornamento – 1968; constitutional – 1980-1981) called for a return to the original inspiration of each Institute and the updating of the Rule of Life; the text of the present Constitutions was approved by Pope John Paul II on February 2nd, 1986¹.

The 1986 Constitution

In May 1986, as the new Constitution was about to be distributed to the Sisters in France, Sister Andrée Levraut, Superior General, wrote the following letter:

“This new Rule of Life calls us to consciously renew our commitment to Jesus Christ, and urges us to adhere to the demands expressed in the texts; it is also an invitation to conform to

the spirit and life style of a Sister of the Congregation. You will rediscover all this as you read the document, individually or in community, and realize how it permeates our apostolic religious life. Our vocation invites us to enter more fully into the adventure of this choice of life. Our initial "Yes" must always be more fully owned, to the point where we become witnesses to what, one day, we publicly professed forever².

The new Constitution was given to the Sisters in Canada during a Provincial meeting held on October 4th, 1986. Sister Cécile Goyer, Provincial Superior, invited the Sisters to receive the Constitution using the following excerpt from the Rule of Life:

Called to follow Jesus Christ in the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron, you commit yourself to be a servant of Jesus Christ who was poor, serving Him in the person of the poor in simplicity and humility, according to the charism of Madame Thulard³.

The gift you have received, namely, 'to be servants of Jesus Christ, poor in the person of the poor' is a gift given to the Church. Even if they have never heard of Madame Thulard or of the Congregation, the men and women to whom you are sent expect you to be what you are called to be, and what this Constitution indicates for the years to come.

Sister Cécile then gave a copy of the Constitution to each Sister, as she named her:

Receive this Book of Life. Open to the Holy Spirit at work in the world and in the Church, live according to the spirit of Incarnation, and with your Sisters proclaim Jesus Christ⁴.

Community of Notre Dame d'Évron, January 25, 1913



My dear Sister Superior.

After receiving an Indult dated September 9th 1912, the General Council canonically established the Province of Canada and elected you as Provincial Superior.

A second Indult, dated January 8th 1913 authorizes you to retain your responsibilities as local superior of the Trochu community.

Your Provincial Council will be the same individuals as your present local council; and as you did not have an appointed secretary, Sister Marie Rondo, the first councillor will fill the role of Provincial Secretary (# 243 of the Constitutions). Your local bursar will also be your provincial bursar.

We have no doubt dear Sister Superior that you will welcome this news of your election with the same religious submission that you have shown in all circumstances and that you will see it as giving Glory to God and that this new function is for the common good of the Institute.

Imploring God's blessings on this appointment, I assure you my dear Sister Superior, of my devoted affection in our Lord.

Sister M. Cousin

Superior General

1913

Chapter 84.

**An Act to Incorporate Les Soeurs de la Charité de
Notre Dame d'Évron**

(Assented to March 25, 1913.)

Preamble

WHEREAS an association of nuns has existed for some time in the Province of Alberta under the name of "Les Soeurs de la Charité de Notre Dame d'Évron," having for its object charitable works, comprising the teaching of catechism, missions and congregations for ladies, orphanage schools, boarding schools, working places, housekeeping schools, agricultural orphanage, industrial schools, deaf and dumb institute, hospital, homes for incurable, dispensaries, boarding houses for lame and aged persons, and to impart education and moral training to pupils in convent and schools;

And whereas the petition presented in their name prays that the association may be vested with corporate powers and it is expedient to grant their prayers;

Therefore His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, enacts as follows:

Incorporation

1. The Reverend Soeur Marie Louise Recton, Soeur Marie Francoise Jouin, and Soeur Alphonsine Hareau, all of the City of Edmonton in the Province of Alberta, and such other persons as are now or may hereafter become under the provisions of this Act members

of the said corporation, shall be and are hereby declared to be a body politic and corporate in deed and in name by the name of "Les Soeurs de la Charite de Notre Dame d'Evron," for the purposes and objects aforesaid.

General rights
and obligations

2. The said corporation shall have perpetual succession and a common seal, and may at all times hereafter contract and be contracted with, including the borrowing of money on mortgage or promissory note, sue and be sued, implead and be impleaded in any matter whatsoever in all courts and places whatsoever in this province.

Property vested in
the corporation

3. All lands, tenements and hereditaments, property (real and personal) and all buildings, schools and convents belonging to, possessed or enjoyed by the said association at the time of the passing of this Act, and the lands thereto pertaining shall be and the same are hereby declared to be vested in the corporation for the purpose thereof.

Acquisition and
Alienation of property

4. The corporation shall have power from time to time and at all times hereafter to acquire by gift, devise, bequest, transfer, purchase or otherwise for the benefit of the corporation any land or real or personal estate and the same or any part thereof, may from time to time dispose of by sale, transfer or mortgage, lease, exchange or otherwise, and with the proceeds therefrom may acquire other lands, tenements, hereditaments and other property (real or personal) or invest the same in any security whatsoever for the use of the corporation.

Appropriation of
Revenues

5. The revenues, issues and profits of all property (real or personal) held by the corporation shall be appropriated and applied to the maintenance of the members of the corporation and of the institutions carried on by the corporation and the construction of property (real

- or personal) requisite for the purposes of the corporation and for the advancement of charity and benevolence.
- Head Office 6. The head office of the corporation shall be at Edmonton, in the Province of Alberta, or at such other place in the province as may from time to time be determined by the by-laws of the corporation.
- Branches 7. The corporation may from time to time have or establish and maintain any number of branches thereof to promote the object of the corporation and such purpose to appoint such subordinate officers with such powers and tenure of office as the corporation may deem advisable.
- By-laws 8. It shall be lawful for the corporation to make by-laws, rules, orders and regulations for the government and proper administration of the property, affairs and interests of the said corporation, and to repeal and amend the same from time to time including the enforcement of discipline and the admission, and retirement of members, the appointment, deposition, or removal of any person as member of the corporation or bearing office therein and generally for the internal government of affairs of the said corporation.
- Management 9. Until otherwise directed by by-law the incorporators mentioned herein shall be the officers of the said corporation and the present existing rules and regulations of the said association shall be *mutatis mutandis* the rules and regulations of the corporation until changed by by-law.
- Exercise of industries 10. The said corporation may exercise any industry that may help them to maintain their institution

and may bargain and sell the products of the same provided they conform to the laws of the province.

11. The corporation shall at all times whenever required so to do by the Lieutenant Governor in Council make a report in writing of their affairs and property.

12. Provided that the powers herein granted shall be subject to the general laws of the province now in force or hereafter enacted.

Excerpt from: *Statutes of Alberta*, 1913, Chapter 84, (March 25, 1913)



We, Emile J. Legal, o.m.i., Archbishop of Edmonton, by virtue of the authority entrusted to us by the Sacred Congregation in charge of matters related to Religious Congregations dated May 20th 1914.....

Hereby canonically establish a Novitiate for the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron in the convent of the Institute at Trochu in the Archdiocese of Edmonton; and we give to the Reverend Sister Provincial, while awaiting the appointment of a Novice Mistress, the authority to admit Postulants to the Novitiate according to the Rule and Constitutions of the said Institute.

In St. Albert, this 25 day of June of the year 1914.

*Emile J. Legal
Archbishop of Edmonton*

Document, canonical erection of the Noviciate in Trochu,
signed by Archbishop E.J. Legal, omi, on June 25, 1914.

The Congregation's Coat of Arms and Motto

The Coat of Arms of a congregation reminds its members of the aims, the works and the spirit which must inspire its members. Our Coat of Arms responds to the spirituality of Madame Thulard who invited her followers to live and die in the Congregation serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor and the sick they care for, the children and the youth they teach to live by Christian principles. The olive branch represents the healing and caring ministries; the palm branch symbolizes our commitment to Christian education.

The very first Coat of Arms of the Congregation appeared in 1838, when Mother Poussier was Superior General. In November of that year at the Council's deliberations she affixed the seal with the monograms of Jesus and Mary, with a star between the two. Thereafter this seal was found on most of the circular letters sent to the Sisters.

In 1911, Mother Cousin, wishing to show her gratitude, and that of the Institute, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the protection accorded to the Congregation, replaced the monogram of Christ by an image of his Sacred Heart. Mother Georgette Guet updated the Coat of Arms, keeping the same symbols but arranging them in a different style.

At the 1958 Chapter, there was a proposition introduced, requesting that a motto be adopted for the Congregation. Mother Guet and Mother Germond, while attending a major superiors meeting in Fourvière, had noticed that the words of St. Paul, *Major est Caritas*, (the greatest virtue is charity) were engraved in the stone on the exterior of

the Basilica. These words seemed very appropriate for the congregation and would remind the Sisters that we are committed to practicing charity according to St. Paul's teaching. The General Council accepted this suggestion and *Major Est Caritas* became the motto of the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron.



¹ Extract from: *Constitutions de la Congrégation des Soeurs de la Charité de Notre-Dame d'Évron*, Mayenne (France), Imp. Floch, 1986, p. 89.

² Circulaire, Soeur Andrée Levrault, May 8, 1986.

³ C.C. 1.1.

⁴ C.C. 1.2.



NOVICE, SOROR DE CHOEUR, SOROR CONVERSE, POSTULANTE.



The Sisters' habit

(Top) novice and postulante dress until 1954 – choir sister in 1967 and converse sister until 1948.

(Lower) dolls dressed with the various habits adopted through the years.

Historical Summary

For approximately 100 years, right until the French Revolution, the uniform dress of the Sisters changed very little: following is the history of the habit.

In 1682, when Madame Thulard, a 25-year-old widow, began her works of charity, she wore a grey dress, black cape and linen head dress that attached under the chin. This was the usual type of dress for women of her status. She asked her recruits to adopt it, with the addition of a veil that everyone was required to wear in church or when visiting the sick, but not at home.

Nothing was changed until the revolutionary tempest forced the Sisters to abandon their peaceful homes and seek shelter with parents and friends. They could hardly continue to wear their habit, which made them conspicuous and open to persecution and put those who sheltered them in danger. They therefore adopted simple and very ordinary clothes, with one thing in mind: avoid recognition and pursuit. Most of them wore a black dress along with the head dress and shawl usually worn by peasant women in the Lower Maine part of France.

When the Congregation regrouped at Évron, the Sisters could have returned to wearing their former habit. Instead, they kept the costume that most were wearing, adding a simple mantle (or cloak).

In 1841 the Sisters expressed a desire to wear a black veil in instead of the cloak¹. The veil replaced the need to wear a cloak. As a result of the Pope's directives in 1953, and because of practical and economical factors, a new change occurred. The Sisters continued wearing a white head band and black veil, but their dress was simplified: they would henceforth wear an anthracite black dress in tergal, a crumple-resistant material. They were to wear a scapular of identical material and of the same length as the outer dress. The sleeves would be simplified, and small sleeves of helanca material were added. The wimple would be replaced by a dickey with a small neckpiece in helanca. The crucifix was worn at the V in the scapular. The crucifix in coconut wood was to be 9 centimetres in length, whereas that worn by the Superior General, which was silver was 12 centimetres long, bearing the inscription: Superior General of the Sisters of Charity of Évron.

In 1967 the Sisters replaced the headband with a short black veil trimmed in white and rounded out in the back. The dickey was replaced by a white blouse. The antracite black dress in tergal is the same.

The religious habit, worn with dignity, keeps its symbolic meaning for those who wish to wear it. However, in 1968, the Sisters were allowed to wear simple and discreet civilian clothing. The external sign, a metal cross worn on a chain, was approved in 1980.

The presentation of the Cross

The General Chapter held in August 1980, responded to the Sisters' request for a simple metal cross. The chosen model designed and molded at the *Monnaie de Paris* workshop, is unique and reserved. Each Sister, however, is free to continue wearing the wooden cross².

In Canada, the following ceremony took place at Vegreville on May 11th 1984. After the opening hymn, "You loved me, God", Sister Andrée Levrault, Superior General, welcomed everyone and spoke of the four proclamations based on the Gospel; the cross is a sign of **unity** among us; a sign of **belonging** to Jesus Christ, a sign of **belonging** to the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity Notre-Dame d'Évron, and a sign of **strength** in daily life, as it was for our Sister Martyrs³.

The following refrain was sung between stances of the proclamation:

It is you, Lord, who has chosen us
You call us your friends
Help us become witnesses of your Love.

The Gospel reading and the exhortation of Sister Andrée increases the virtue of hope and encourages us to return and meditate upon these words.

After the blessing of the Crosses by the presider according to the ritual of the Sisters of

Évron, Sister Andrée presented each sister with her cross saying – “Receive this Cross sign of Jesus Christ’s saving love and carry this love to the world.” Then the *Magnificat* was sung using the refrain “All ages will call me blessed – as the Lord has done great things for me”. Then Sister Andrée missioned the sisters to go forth.

¹ [Sister Ernestine Godefroy]. *La Congrégation des Soeurs de la Charité de Notre-Dame d'Évron*, Paris, 1933, p. 340.

² Circular letter, Chapter General, August 1986.

³ Extract of Sister Levrault’s words at the ceremony of the presentation of the crosses, Vegreville, May 11th 1984.

APPENDIX C

LIST OF THE REVEREND MOTHERS GENERAL

GENERAL SUPERIORS

Mother Perrine Thulard – Foundress	1682-1735
Sister Mathurine Pottier	1735-1746
Sister Suzanne Fussot	1746-1752
Sister Julienne Rivoire	1752-1754
Sister Suzanne Fussot	1754-1760
Sister Marie Anne Bisson	1760-1766
Sister Françoise Beunoust	1766-1772
Sister Marie Louise Letourneux	1772-1778
Sister Françoise Beunoust	1778-1784
Sister Marie Mailay	1784-1805
Sister Marie Chanteau	1805-1817
Sister Marie Madeleine Dubray	1817-1826
Sister Anne Barbe Landelle	1826-1832
Sister Madeleine Pôté	1832-1838
Sister Anne Françoise J. Poussier	1838-1856
Sister Rose Lecottier	1856-1862
Sister Jeanne Pieau	1862-1863
Sister Charlotte Houdayer	1863-1871

Sister M. Aimée Morinière	1871-1877
Sister Anaïs Coupris	1877-1901
Sister Françoise Cousin	1901-1913
Sister Marie Bourgouin	1914-1916 ¹
Sister Claire Roimier	1916-1937 ²
Sister Marie Louise Montagu	1937-1952
Sister Georgette Guet	1952-1968
Sister Odette Blin	1968-1980
Sister Andrée Levrault	1980-1986
Sister Madeleine Bouttier	1986-

¹ Mother Marie Bourgouin was elected Superior General on February 17, 1914, 6 months after the death of Mother Cousin.

² Mother Claire Roimier, Vicar general at the time of death of Mother Bourgouin, in 1916, took on the responsibility of administration, as it was impossible to call a Chapter General in wartime. She was elected Superior General on July 2nd 1919.

APPENDIX D

LIST OF PROVINCIAL SUPERIORS IN CANADA

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Sister Marie-Louise Julienne Recton | 1909-1930 |
| 2. | Sister Marie-Joseph Rondo | 1930-1954 |
| 3. | Sister Eugénie Aucherie | 1954-1966 |
| 4. | Sister Marie Cécile Clermont | 1966-1975 |
| 5. | Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill | 1975-1984 |
| 6. | Sister Cécile Goyer | 1984-1990 |
| 7. | Sister Marie-Thérèse Laberge | 1990-1996 |
| 8. | Sister Mary Ellen O'Neill | 1996- |

APPENDIX E

LIST OF FRENCH, IRISH AND CANADIAN SISTERS

French Sisters in Canada

Name	Birthplace	Year of Prof.	Date of Departure
Sr Marie-Louise RECTON	Aron (Mayenne)	1896	29 Jul 1909 +
Sr Marie (Marie-Joseph) RONDO	La Baconnière (May.)	1896	29 Jul 1909 +
Sr Marie (Léontine) REBOUX	Bellême (Orne)	1895	29 Jul 1909 +
Sr Joséphine BOISSEAU	Congrier (Mayenne)	1895	29 Jul 1909 +
Sr Marie-Victoire BRUHAY	Moisdon-la-Rivière (Loire Atlantique)	1899	29 Jul 1909 +
Sr Louise FÉVRIER	Cossé-le-Vivien (May.)	1897	29 Jul 1909 +
Sr M. Joseph (M. Thérèse) LAIGRE	Luitré (Ille-et-Vilaine)	1901	29 Jul. 1909 +
Sr Marie-Augustine BUTTIER	Beaulieu (Mayenne)	1905	29 Jul 1909 +
Sr Joséphine COTTEREAU	Mayenne	1890	13 Jul 1910 +
Sr. Marie-Louise MARTIGNÉ	Arquenay (Mayenne)	1901	13 Jul 1910 +
Sr Victoire PERLEMOINE	Meslay (Mayenne)	1901	13 Jul 1910 +
Sr Angèle BOUHOURS	Paris	1903	13 Jul 1910 +
Sr Marie DOISNEAU	Château-Gontier (Mayenne)	1903	13 Jul 1910 +
Sr Alphonsine HAREAU	Trans (Mayenne)	1891	1 Dec 1910 +
Sr Marie-Augustine GUESDON	Évron (Mayenne)	1900	1 Dec 1910 +
Sr Joséphine VAILLANT	Guérande (Loire Inf.)	1903	1 Dec 1910 +
Sr Angèle (Agnès) FOUCHER	St-Poix (Mayenne)	1903	1 Dec 1910 +
Sr Victoire (Valérie) JEUFFRAULT	Méral (Mayenne)	1895	13 Dec 1910 +
Sr Maria FOUCHER	St. Poix (Mayenne)	1900	13 Dec 1910 +

St. Eugénie (Louise) VERRON	Beaulieu (Mayenne)	1905	13 Sep 1911 +
Sr Victoire (M. Thérèse) HÉLIE	Domfront (Orne)	1897	13 Sep 1911 +
Sr Cécile VEILLARD	Laubrières (Mayenne)	1904	13 Sep 1911 +
Sr Marie-Françoise JOUIN	Visseiche (I. Et Vil.)	1898	13 Sep 1911 +
Sr Eugénie AUCHERIE	Courberie (Mayenne)	1907	13 Sep 1911 +
Sr Marie-Gabrielle GUERRIER	St Denis-de-Gastines (Mayenne)	1898	13 Sep 1911 +
Sr Eugénie CHEVROLLIER	Congrier (Mayenne)	1896	24 May 1912 +
Sr Berthe LOTTIN	Le Mans (Sarthe)	1911	24 May 1912 +
Sr Berthe GAUTRIN	Fougères (I. et Vil.)	1912	20 Oct 1912 +
Sr Marguerite-Marie MAIGNAN	Bais (Mayenne)	1912	3 Oct 1912 +
Sr Marie NEUVILLE	La Bazouge du Désert (Ille-et-Vilaine)	1912	3 Oct 1912 +
Sr Marie-Louise (Marie) PERVIS	La Poôté (Mayenne)	1902	9 Oct 1913 +
Sr Esther LEGENDRE	Le Breil (Sarthe)	1890	12 Mar 1914 +
Sr Marcelline (Marcelle) ÉDON	Bais (Mayenne)	1909	12 Mar 1914 +
Sr Marie FRITEAU	Pontmain (Mayenne)	1899	6 Aug 1919 +
Sr Marie-Augustine MOTTIER	Parcé (Sarthe)	1935	22 Jun 1938 +
Sr Antoinette ROCHER	Brée (Mayenne)	1924	8 Oct 1947 +

French Sisters (Profession in Canada)

Name	Birthplace	Year of Prof.
Sr Marguerite AUTHENAC	Angoulême, (Charente) France	18 May 1916+
Sr Gabrielle (M. Eugénie) AUTHENAC	Angoulême, France	12 Aug 1919+
Sr Carmen (Henriette) AUTHENAC	Angoulême, (Charente) France	12 Aug 1919+
Sr Angèle CULERIER	Le Breil, (Sarthe) France	2 Aug 1924+

Irish Sisters in Canada

Sr Catherine (M. Francis) LYONS	Dublin, Ireland	23 Jul 1925 +
Sr. Anna KEOHANE	Lislebane, Ireland	21 Oct 1929 +
Sr. Annie (Anna) DONAVAN	Barryscove, Ireland	21 Oct 1929 +

Canadian Sisters

Sr. Blanche COUTURIER	La Malbaie, Québec	8 Jul 1914 +
Sr. Madeleine (M. Anne) HARTMAN	Zurich, Ontario	18 May 1916+
Sr Yvonne (M. Madeleine) de BEAUDRAP	Whitewood, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1919+
Sr. Aurore (Angéline) PLOUFFE	Ste Brigitte, Québec	12 Aug 1921+
Sr. Louisa THÉROUX	Warwick, Alberta	12 Aug 1921+
Sr. M. Rose BEAUDRY	St-Marc, Québec	12 Aug 1921+
Sr. Albertine LANDRY	St-François, NB	12 Aug 1924+
Sr. M. Anna CLERMONT	Lowell, U.S.A.	12 Aug 1924
Sr Léona BOIVIN	Coaticook, Québec	12 Aug 1925
Sr Léona (Antoinette) LABONTÉ	Ste-Eulalie, Québec	12 Aug 1925+
Sr Catherine BUREAU	Madison, U.S.A.	12 Aug 1926+
Sr Berthe PLOUFFE	Marieville, Québec	12 Aug 1927*
Sr Diana (Mathilde) BIENVENU	Vegreville, Alberta	12 Aug 1927+

Sr. Maria LEMAY	Villeroy, Qubec	12 Aug 1927
Sr Flore (Florence) VERRIER	St-David d'Yamaska, Québec	12 Aug 1928
Sr Béatrice BIGELOW	St-Albans, U.S.A.	12 Aug 1929+
Sr Alberta (Albertine) BUREAU	Madison, U.S.A.	12 Aug 1929
Sr M. Cécile CLERMONT	Lowell, U.S.A.	12 Aug 1929
Sr Arabella (Marguerite) PLOUFFE	Marieville, Québec	12 Aug 1930+
Sr Vivian (M. Louise) SAMPSON	Plumas, Manitoba	12 Aug 1933+
Sr Marie (Agnès) KNIEVEL	Spring Lake, Alberta	12 Aug 1933
Sr Jeanne ALBERT	Bonnyville, Alberta	12 Aug 1933*
Sr Élizabeth SABO	St-Brieux, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1934
Sr Louise LADOUCEUR	St-Malo, Manitoba	12 Aug 1934+
Sr Germaine LABONTÉ	Edmonton, Alberta	12 Aug 1935
Sr Irena (Jeannette) BUREAU	La Corey, Alberta	12 Aug 1936
Sr Annette LABBÉ	Ste-Hélène-Chester, Québec	12 Aug 1936
Sr Lily (Helen) LEVASSEUR	Durlingville, Alberta	12 Aug 1937
Sr Béatrice RABY	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1938*
Sr Anna LAFORGE	Perkinsfield, Ontario	12 Aug 1938
Sr Florence CLUSIAULT	Lac Mégantic, Québec	12 Aug 1939
Sr Yvonne LAFORGE	Perkinsfield, Ontario	12 Aug 1939+
Sr Marie Thérèse LABERGE	St-Vincent, Alberta	12 Aug 1939
Sr Laura CHALUT	Marquis, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1940
Sr Ursula WHITLEY	Simpson, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1940
Sr Flore (Claire) DARGIS	Bonnyville, Alberta	12 Aug 1941
Sr Rose LEMAY	Eldersly, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1942+
Sr Hélène FEDORUK	Mundare, Alberta	12 Aug 1942
Sr Murielle BEAULIEU	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1943-
Sr Georgette GAGNON	Mont-Laurier, Québec	12 Aug 1943
Sr Elsie (Adèle) HEWKO	Mundare, Alberta	12 Aug 1943
Sr Eugénie BUREAU	La Corey, Alberta	12 Aug 1944*

Sr Yvonne GOBEIL	Albertville, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1945
Sr Lina BEAUCHESNE	Arborfield, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1945
Sr Thérèse HANDFIELD	Beaumont, Alberta	12 Aug 1947*
Sr Simone LAPOINTE	Bonnyville, Alberta	12 Aug 1947
Sr Dolorès BEAUDOIN	Storthoaks, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1949+
Sr Henriette BEAUDOIN	Storthoaks, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1949
Sr Maria SÉGUIN	Bonnyville, Alberta	12 Aug 1949
Sr Thérèse VERRIER	Bonnyville, Alberta	12 Aug 1952
Sr Réjeanne BEAULIEU	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1953
Sr Ruth WIRACHOWSKY	Kerrobert, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1953
Sr Émilie LABOSSIERE	Bonne-Madonne, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1953*
Sr Thérèse VILLENEUVE (Ricard)	Prince Albert, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1954
Sr Gisèle BEAULIEU	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1954*
Sr Annie (Ann) YUHAS	Cherry Grove, Alberta	12 Aug 1956
Sr Laurentia BEAUDOIN	Storthoaks, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1956*
Sr Liliane BARIL	Bonnyville, Alberta	12 Aug 1957*
Sr Monique BEAUDOIN	Storthoaks, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1957*
Sr Yvonne CHAMBERLAND	St Isidore Bellevue Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1958*
Sr M. Ellen O'NEILL	Vermilion, Alberta	12 Aug 1960
Sr Rosanne FAVREAU	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1960
Sr Aline SIROIS	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1961*
Sr Cécile GOYER	Arborfield, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1962
Sr Marcella ALAIN	Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1962*
Sr Adeline MOYEN	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1962*
Sr Angèle FORTIER	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1964*
Sr Lucienne MERCIER	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1965*
Sr France (M. Madeleine) MOYEN	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1965*+

Sr Aline VACHON	Bonnyville, Alberta	12 Aug 1965
Sr Marie JENKINS	Long Lake, Alberta	12 Aug 1966*
Sr Irène ROULEAU	Zenon Park, Saskatchewan	12 Aug 1967*
Sr Gloria BUTLER	Vermilion, Alberta	24 Sep 1977

Legend:

- + The Sister is dead
- * The Sister withdrew from the Congregation
- The Sister left the Congregation to join the Carmelites in Montreal



Colonel Armand Trochu



Armand Trochu dressed as a rancher, with his horse *Cosny*
[Photo courtesy of L. Frère]



(Top) L. to R.: (front) M. Zede, Dr. L. Sculier, L.C. Eckenfelder, A. Trochu (bearded), P. Beauchamp, J. Butruille and F. de Torquat; (back) Tymmis, X. de Beaudrap, J. Crépin, P. de Beaudrap (father) and G. de Vautibeaut.

**(Lower) St. Ann Ranch houses in the Coulee.
Note St. Mary's Hospital on the hill
[Photo courtesy L. Frère]**

APPENDIX F

THE ORIGINS OF TROCHU

In 1904, not only was there no town of Trochu, but there was not even a trace of it. As far as the eye could see there was only endless prairie with its hills and coulees and its short thick grass. Here and there a few herds of animals grazed or roamed about. At about that time Mr. Armand Trochu came as an explorer; he later gave his name to the new settlement, which he was to found. Mr. Trochu was the nephew of General Trochu who was charged with defending Paris during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Mr. Trochu in looking for a suitable place for a ranch was attracted by this well protected coulee with its excellent springs of water, in the center of a rich and uninhabited district. Soon a very modest building sprang up to house the three partners in St. Anne's Ranch, namely: Mr. Armand Trochu, Mr. Devilder and Mr. Eckenfelder. The latter was a brilliant Light Cavalry Lieutenant; Mr. Devilder, a former French Army Officer was the son of a rich banker from Lille, France.

This was the beginning of the purely French settlement composed almost exclusively of ex-military men. It included a General's nephew, an Admiral's son and several young French noblemen. Later they were joined by a representative of the high Roman nobility, Captain Theodoli.

The arrival of these new comers who were so different from the few settlers on the prairies caused quite a stir in the district. Father Voisin hearing about the rather mysterious group of men living in the area, and he set out on the difficult task of finding them. Six miles from the Ranch, he found Mr. M.L. de Chauny's shack, and with him as a

guide, he arrived at St. Anne's Ranch about 10:00 p.m. one evening. The young officers all slept in a single, narrow room which was decorated with panoplies, revolvers, swords and spurs. Mr. Devilder kindly offered his bed to Father and he slept in the barn that night.

Very cordial relationships were established at this very moment and the men invited the missionary to renew his visit one Sunday a month, which meant a trip of 64 kilometres in a buggy or on horseback.

About 20 kilometres from St. Anne's Ranch a new satellite ranch was being established. It was called the Jeanne d'Arc Ranch and also had a typically military characteristic. These were somber days in France where the Government of the day used the army for the expulsion of religious men and women from their religious institutions. Many officers gave up their military career rather than obey these unjust laws. At Vannes, the imprisonment of five officers who had refused to march caused quite a commotion.

Jeanne d'Arc Ranch was privileged in having two of these staunch Christians who came to Canada, seeking freedom of conscience which the Government of France refused them. One of these men was Captain de Beaudrap who had been the recipient of three military medals; a born soldier, a man of honour and duty, but above all, a man of faith; simple and kind in his relationships, but firm and independent when his principles were a stake. His lieutenant, de Torquat, who had been imprisoned also, followed him to Canada. A typical "Breton" Christian, with a faith as strong as granite he was also a true "patriot" and when ten years later in 1914 his country was invaded and needed the help of all her sons, the frustrated and unjustly treated officer went to

her help, laying down his life in her defense on the battlefield with a magnanimous soul, as was later revealed in his memoirs which have since been published. Mr. Paul de Beaudrap and his family completed the group of settlers of Jean d'Arc Ranch, and Mrs. Paul deBeaudrap had the honour of being the "first lady" of this French settlement.

The early beginnings of these two groups on neighbouring ranches were truly unique. A combination of French gaiety seasoned by the "gallic" wit, enhanced by a superior education and a sincere strong faith gave to these groups a certain characteristic. Happy were the evenings on the Saturday preceding the monthly Mass. The colony counted five musicians: Doctor Soullier played an old untuned piano; Father Voisin played the cello; the magnificent base voice of Mr. Devilder mingled nicely with the tenor voice of Lieutenant deTorquat and the concert started....meanwhile the eldest member of the family headed for bed, saying with a paternalistic tone: "il faut que la jeunesse s'amuse". (The young need to amuse themselves).

On the Sunday, when mass was to be offered at the Jeanne d'Arc Ranch, (mass was offered on alternate months at the two ranches) all the inhabitants of St. Anne's Ranch, with the Reverend Father leading, rode horseback through the open, unobstructed prairie towards their friends, who kept watch from their house which was perched, like an eagle's nest, on the slope of a deep coulee. As soon as the group was seen, the French flag was raised and the visitors were received with the singing of "La Marseillaise". Then there was an endless exchange of news and it took all the missionary's diplomacy to see that the Sacrifice of the Mass would not commence too late.

The first Mass at Jeanne d'Arc Ranch was on "Corpus Christie" Sunday 1905. The ranch still consisted only of two log buildings which proved inadequate to accommodate the participants. It was then decided to have Mass outside, on the bank of the coulee. The altar surrounded by leafy branches, had Captain de Beaudrap as its designer. That particular Corpus Christie Mass, celebrated so far from the homeland, had something very poignant about it. It made a real impression on those who assisted as it was offered in the midst of a still wild and solitary country. The priest was surrounded by the officers, who were victims of the same persecution that afflicted their beautiful and beloved France.

On April 1st, 1906, a terrible prairie fire threatened to cause a real disaster in the area. It was on the eve of the monthly Sunday Mass; a fire had been burning all day six miles north of the St Anne Ranch and in the evening the men climbed up to the top of the surrounding hills to watch it. It had made little progress it appeared and the night was serene with no wind. Everything seemed calm and peaceful.

About 10:00 p.m. conversation was suddenly stopped short by the roar of a violent wind. The men went outside; the sky seemed ablaze behind the hills and a sinister noise came nearer and nearer. A wall of flames and smoke rushed toward the settlement.

At the time, there were only two men at the Ranch, plus a Chinese cook and Father Voisin who had been accompanied by a captain of the Madagascar Militia. Hastily, positions were taken. Mr. Eckenfelder and the Captain ran to the pasture at a distance of a half kilometre, in an endeavor to save the horses. Meanwhile Father Voisin and Mr. de Cathelineau tried to get the horses out of the stable and as

well threw sets of harnesses outside and obtained a supply of wet gunny sacks and pails of water. But the fire was already there, flames leaped from the top of a high hill to the very bottom of the coulee and, seconds later, the inhabitants of the ranch were enclosed in a sea of flames and smoke. Sheltered in a small garden, his head wrapped in a wet sack, Father Voisin heard a voice shouting, "Did you set the stallion loose?" "No." "He will burn --- try to get him out". This was a difficult task for the stable was already surrounded by flames and seemed doomed. Father Voisin rushed to untie the horse and pushed him toward the door of the stable, but frightened by the flames the animal turned back each time he approached the door. Finally Father succeeded in his efforts by hitting him with a wet sack.

By this time a pile of planks behind the house had caught fire and a haystack close to the stable began to burn; the corral posts looked like so many giant-lighted candles and the windstorm was to continue for another twenty-four hours.

The men succeeded in protecting the house and the barn from the devastating flames. The two men who had gone to the pasture returned to help out. In that sea of fire, they had met with great difficulty; one of them saved himself by jumping into a stream of water while the other had crossed the raging flames with his head hidden in his coat. Mr. Devilder arrived with one of his men; they had been keeping a watch on the fire all afternoon and when the wind had risen they rushed to help out at the Ranch; but all in vain. The sea of fire was rolling on with frightening speed, outdoing even the galloping horses.

A part of the night was spent trying to extinguish the fire in the haystack. The Sacrifice of the Mass offered early

on Sunday morning saw a saddened group: celebrant and parishioners alike were worn out and downhearted at the serious disaster. Haystacks had been destroyed, corrals burnt down, pastures ruined for the time being and, worse still, thirty prize horses were piled up in a corner of the pasture where they had rushed to escape the fire. The dead horses had been scorched by the fire and their swollen bodies and burned eyes were indeed a pitiful sight. The fire had continued to burn for a long time, leaving in its devastating path a burnt out strip fifty miles long.

It was too much for the Militia captain who soon said farewell to Alberta.

During the summer of 1907 the company of Ste. Anne's Ranch undertook the construction of a church and Bishop Legal of St. Albert was invited to come to Trochu to bless the new building. His visit was indeed a memorable one. The whole colony set out on horseback to meet the Bishop who was travelling from Innisfail in a buggy. Six miles from Trochu the group met the Bishop and had him step from his buggy into a democrat drawn by six beautiful and identical grey horses harnessed "à la Daumont" (with four horses and two Postilions). Once the greetings were exchanged the entire group headed for Trochu in high spirits.

The next day to honour their Bishop, the horsemen who were all expert officers, ran a most interesting "steeple chase".

That Episcopal visit coincided with the birth of the town of Trochu: three buildings marked its future site on the hill overlooking the primitive coulee.

In 1908, Trochu had its first resident priest, Father Pierre Bazin who had as his first assistant his brother Reverend Father Joseph Bazin and then successively Fathers Chauvin, Anciaux, Roney, and Robveille. From this area these priests performed their ministry in the areas extending eastward well beyond the Red Deer River, southward to the Kneehill coulees and Carbon and in the regions now known as Drumheller and Munson, and northward as far as Delburne.

No trees existed on these bare prairies to act as a windbreak and during the winter months the trips made by these brave men of God to these distant places were indeed difficult because of the accumulation of snow in the coulees.

In 1909, the Sisters of Charity of Notre Dame d'Évron, a French community, devoted to teaching and nursing works, came to establish a mission in Trochu. They needed a great deal of courage and self denial to accept to settle forty miles from a railway, in a village which was very new and to live for almost two years in a miserable shack which had been used as a store the preceding year. This was the first hospital and the pioneering Sisters had fond memories of their first home. The attachment to this place was surely born because of the sufferings and sacrifices and also the joy that the first inhabitants had.

Gently but gradually, thanks to the energetic perseverance of Father Bazin, the parish grew. At first exclusively French, it became mixed, as Catholic families were attracted to Trochu by fertile and easily cultivated land but much more by the presence of a resident Priest, a beautiful convent, hospital and boarding school, a famed

separate school where children were assured of a thorough catholic education under the devoted guidance of the Sisters. N.B. In 1923, Father Chauvin had two churches built in the Missions of Three Hills and Delburne. They are served from Trochu¹.

¹ Translated from an article written in the bulletin "Notre Dame de la Bonne Mort", August – September 1924.



The Sisters' first cemetery in Trochu



Monument erected in 1991

APPENDIX G

THE SISTERS CEMETERY AT TROCHU

Sister Angèle Bouhours was the first Sister of Évron to die in Canada. Her death occurred in 1917. The parish of Trochu graciously offered the Sisters a plot of land in the Parish Cemetery, where Sister Angèle's body was laid to rest. Over the next few years four other Sisters' remains were buried in the parish cemetery. The Trochu Sisters disliked the distance that separated them from the parish cemetery as they tried to visit the graves as often as possible to maintain them and to lay flowers.

In 1932 Father Wilfred McNabb, parish priest, made a request to the civil authorities that the Sisters have their own cemetery on the property. On April 27th, the five coffins were exhumed, placed in a vehicle, and slowly driven to the convent cemetery where five graves had been prepared; the previous remains were then lowered into the graves, Mother Marie-Louise Recton's being placed in the centre. This was the anniversary day she had joined the Congregation (April 27, 1895).

Since then, regular visits are made by the Sisters who consider this as a reliquary, a family sanctuary, where they can pray and meditate on the happiness which awaits them in heaven when all will meet again.

Since then, the Sisters have done their best to make this place of rest as esthetic as possible. Father McNabb offered a bronze Corpus for the Cross placed at the head of

Mother Recton's tomb, she who had promised on her deathbed "to help us as much as she could"¹.

In July 1933, a small chapel that would later be consecrated to Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, was built at the end of the main alley leading to the cemetery. The Trochu parishioners had promised to pay for a memorial for Mother Recton's tomb; instead, they were asked to pay for the chapel statue; as a child Mother Recton often prayed before a similar statue. A simple Way of the Cross, erected around the cemetery brought to mind the cemetery on the Mother House grounds in Évron.

On October 8th, 1934, the coffins of Sisters Marie-Louise Martigné (1918), and Alphonsine Hareau (1934), were brought from Vegreville to the Sisters' cemetery in Trochu. In 1942 a telegram from France informed the Sisters that Mother Marie-Joseph Laigre, 4th Assistant, had died. The Sisters did not have the consolation to pray at her grave so Sister Marie-Joseph Rondo had a commemorative plaque designed to place at the foot of Mother Recton's grave. The plaque was inscribed with the following words:

In Memory of
Mother Marie-Joseph Laigre
Who spent 29 years of her life in Trochu,
Seven as Superior, 1931-1939.
Deceased in Évron
During her term as Assistant General of the Congregation
R.I.P.

Following the move of the Province Headquarters to Edmonton in 1976, and the establishment of a home for the retired Sisters, a lot in Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, St. Albert, was purchased. Henceforth, the Sisters of Évron will be buried there.

In 1990, the Trochu Community moved to a house in the village. In order to assure adequate maintenance of the cemetery and a proper enclosure, a steel fence was erected and grass was sown. An onyx monument was purchased and the names of all the Sisters buried there were engraved on it.

¹ Chronique de Trochu, 1930 (written by Sister M. Joseph Rondo).



**Left: Blessing of the
bell on July 21st 1912.**

**Right: Taken down
in 1975, the bell
was reinstalled in
the former belfry
and placed to the
west of the Health
Centre.**



On July 21st, 1912, Reverend Father Rondet, psm, during a visit of the Priests of Sainte-Marie de Tinchebray in Canada, blessed the bell that had been donated by Father Pierre Bazin to the Sister of Évron at Trochu.

Father Bazin was asked to be a sponsor and Mother General Marie Françoise Cousin also agreed to be a sponsor. But as she could not remain in Canada any longer she asked Sister Marie-Louise Rector, Superior of the St. Mary's Convent, to stand in for her. Before leaving, however, she had chosen the names that would be given to the bell: **Marie**, name of the sponsor and of the establishment; **Anne**, in memory of Mother Anaïs Coupri, her immediate predecessor; **Perrine**, in honour of the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron's foundress; and **Julienne**, requested by Sister Marie-Louise Rector, local Superior.

The first group of Sister of Évron had arrived in Calgary on August 15th, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. The convent and hospital were built in 1910-1911 and the establishment was called St. Mary's. A niche had been left in the bell tower above the main entrance, to house a statue of Our Lady of the Assumption.

In March 1916, the Sisters redecorated the sanctuary and the altar of the parish church. This work was much appreciated by the members of the Parish and in recognition for their work the Ladies group helped to defray the cost of a statue.

On September 10th, 1916, the statue was blessed following High Mass and placed in the niche prepared for it.

This statue reminded the Sisters of the memorable date of August 15th, 1909, when they arrived in Canada and of the fact that their eternal home would be heaven.

The statue was taken down twice from the niche. On August 15th, 1954, when the dogma of the Assumption of Mary was officially proclaimed, the statue was taken to the parish church where it was temporarily placed near the altar. In 1975, when the hospital/convent was demolished, the bell tower and the statue were taken down and relocated in a beautiful thicket to the west of the new hospital and nursing home.

The management team and other employees of Saint Mary's Health Care Centre are very conscious of keeping very much alive the charism of the Foundress as well as the pioneer Sisters in Trochu¹. They came up with the idea to re-install the bell on the roof of the 1949 building.

During the week dedicated to the memory of the foundress, Father Gianni Avivante, parish priest, solemnly blessed the bell again, on November 5th, 1995 and it was then put in its new place.

The bell, silent since 1975, now rings twice a day, at noon and at 6 p.m., to announce the Angelus².

¹ Pages Familiales #29, Feb. 1996.

² From a text written by Sister Thérèse Verrier.

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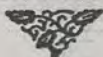
Abbreviations:

AG SCE (General Archives) Évron

AP SCE (Provincial Archives) Edmonton

Provincial Historic Site

St. Ann Ranch Trading Co.



COUNTRY BED AND BREAKFAST Open Year Round

RATES - \$45.00 - \$75.00 double occupancy

- Accommodation For 10 Adults In Main 30 Room Ranch House
- 5 Adults In Private 2 Bedroom Pioneer House With Private Deck
- Antique Furnished
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- Peaceful And Private
- Romance Renewed

PRIVATE GUEST: Entrance, Library, TV Room, Breakfast Room, Patio, And Parlour With Fireplace.



Meeting of the Editorial Committee at Trochu during the July 1995 festivities. L. to R.: A. Bugeaud, omi, J. Pariseau, Srs. C. Dargis and M-T. Laberge



Rev. Father Antoine Bugeaud, omi, who died on August 16th 1996



**The Editorial Committee at work in Edmonton
L. to R.: Sr. C. Dargis, archivist; Dr. J. Pariseau,
historian; Sr. T. Verrier, secretary and typist;
Sr. M-T. Laberge and Sr. M.E. O'Neill.**

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MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

1. (Front cover) Coat of Arms and Motto of the Sisters of Charity Notre Dame d'Évron sce
2. (Inside front cover) Map, SCE Communities in Alberta [W. Constable]
3. Map, Region of Évron (France) [W. Constable]
4. (Inside rear cover) Map, SCE Communities in Saskatchewan [W. Constable]
5. (Rear cover) Stylized painting representing the Rocky Mountains, the Rivers and Lakes of the area and a Prairie landscape in Alberta/Saskatchewan

EXCERPTS FROM WRITINGS OF
SAINT FRANCOIS OF SALES

*I cry to you, O my God,
I call out your Holy Name,
But I can never grasp you.*

*O Lord my God,
you are greater than any of our words,
more silent than our silence,
deeper than our thoughts,
higher than our desires.*

*O Sovereign God, God so great, so near to us,
give us a living heart
and new eyes to find you,
and to welcome you
when you come to us.*

St. Francis de Sales

"You must learn to pass from prayer to the duties of your state, no matter how far removed they seem from the thoughts you had in prayer. The lawyer must learn to pass from prayer to pleading a cause; the business-man to commerce, the married woman to her housework, with such gentleness and tranquility that the soul is not disturbed. Since both prayer and the duties of our state are God's Will, we should pass from one to the other with humility and devotion".

St. Francis de Sales

Intro. To the Devout Life; part 2: ch. 8.

EXCERPTS FROM WRITINGS BY SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

"Love is infinitely inventive". (XI 146)

"There is no charity unless it is accompanied by justice".

(11 : 54)

"Let us love God, my brothers, let us love him with the strength of our arm and in the sweat of our brow. For all too often so many acts of love of God, so many good intentions and good deeds and other similar sentiments and interior practices of a tender heart, however good and desirable they may be, are nevertheless suspect when they do not lead to the practical expression of love" (XI 40).

St. Vincent de Paul

"Our Lord, the Sovereign Lord, the Creator and rightful owner of all good things, seeing the great disorder which the desire for the possession of riches has caused on earth, has wished to remedy this by practising the contrary". (XII 378-9)

St. Vincent de Paul

"In serving the poor, you are serving Jesus Christ. O my daughters, how true that is! You are Serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as we are standing here. A Sister goes ten times a day to visit the poor, and ten times in that day she finds God. What an obligation that lays upon you! The Houses you go into may be poor, but YOU WILL FIND GOD THERE! Once again, my daughters, what an obligation that lays on you!" (IX, 252)

"To be a servant of the poor that is the same as saying to be a servant of Jesus Christ." (IX, 324)

St. Vincent de Paul

[Taken from Back To Our Roots Srs of Charity N.D. d'Évron
Château-Gontier, France, May 1990]



Sisters of Charity N.D. d'Évron in Canada



My ways are not your ways
Is. 55, 6-9