



## From A Bishop's Journal (786)

### Do You Know the Grey Nuns of Montreal?

**T**he Sisters of Charity of Montreal, better known as the Grey Nuns, will be leaving our Diocese this fall, after more than 65 years of loyal and self-sacrificing service to our population. On behalf of the Edmundston diocesan Church and in my own name, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for all they accomplished and still accomplish in our midst.

#### Snippets of History

The Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal goes back to 1737. The founder, Marguerite d'Youville, is a widow with two children. In order to support her family, she turned to the people that life had dealt a losing hand. In their hearts, bodies and wounded souls, she recognised Jesus himself. With three friends who shared with her a desire to serve the poor, she courageously opened a house to welcome them, give them lodging, and food. Despite much criticism and many difficulties, she never gave up and continued her work until her death in 1771. At her beatification, Pope John Paul II proclaimed her the "Mother of Universal Charity." In 1990, she was canonised and became to the world a model of love and compassion. Marguerite d'Youville (1701-1771) gave her contemporaries and to the generations to come a spiritual legacy stamped with boundless compassion for the poor and with unshakeable faith in God our Father and His Providence. Early in life she was given the certainty that all humans are brothers and sisters before God. She has no hesitations in defending the principles of dignity and equality for all. Her example is still today a source of inspiration to those who work for the coming of a civilisation of love and justice. The community's regulations urges the member to seek Christ in the poor to whom they have the honour to be associated. Poverty, humility, and submission do not erase understanding and humanity. Three words express the whole of Marguerite d'Youville's spirituality: Father, Providence, and the Poor. Her charity was so well adapted to every distress that people would say: "Go to the Grey Nuns, they never refuse anything!"

#### Disciples of Mother d'Youville

The Grey Nuns walk in the steps of Mother d'Youville. They seek to reflect in their daily lives the love of God for all, and especially for the voiceless, the marginalised, the excluded, and the poor. Among other works, they have homes for women in danger (with or without children), for single women and those with problems, food kitchens and clothing depots, homes for the elderly, centres for the handicapped, and a number of health centres. Besides, they share in the life of their neighbourhood and work at defending human rights. They work with youth, with those suffering from alcohol and drug

addiction, AIDS patients, the homeless, and refugees. A number of them are involved in pastoral work, whether in health services, or in parishes and schools, where they work at evangelising. Many lay men and women of every status of society share the mission and values of the Grey Nuns. Thanks to all of them, Marguerite d'Youville's charism is very much alive and is still appropriate to the ever-growing needs of today's poor. Whether they be associates, volunteers, or collaborators, these people follow the example of their founder. Like her, they serve the dispossessed with the same dedication and the same world vision.

### **Among Us**

The Grey Nuns have been part of the Madawaska region scenery since July 25, 1944, when they opened a home for the elderly at Baker Brook – the Hospice Sainte-Élisabeth, later known as the Foyer Sainte-Élisabeth. There are common features tying Saint Marguerite d'Youville to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231), especially love of the destitute. Due to a lack of personnel, the Grey Nuns left the seniors' home in February, 1985, after 41 years of service there. Five years later – in August, 1949 – they accepted the charge of the School Centre at Clair, with its 160 students. Besides regular school teaching, they offer courses in music, sewing, and other incidental activities. In July, 1956, they leave Clair and are replaced by the Daughters of Wisdom. In 1951, the Grey Nuns founded the Foyer Notre-Dame in Saint Léonard, for the elderly and the poor. In 1990, they started taking in the 1939-1945 war veterans. The sisters left their community quarters and moved into a house next to the Foyer Notre-Dame. Fifty years after its founding, a new Foyer Notre-Dame was built and dedicated in August, 2001, thanks to the generosity of the general population. The work of Saint Marguerite d'Youville continues today within these walls as elsewhere, with the same concern of bringing relief and comfort to the elderly of the region.

### **Witnesses of the Compassion of God**

Through their consecrated life, the Grey Nuns witness to the Father's love for every human being. They witness to the love of Jesus our Saviour, and to the love that flooded the universe through the Holy Spirit. The love that they show is a fruit of their prayer and intimate union with God. The communion they want to create among people, they discover it in God himself. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, founder of the Missionaries of Charity, said: "The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace." It often happens that people address the one who inspired such a ministry in these words: "Saint Marguerite d'Youville, woman of love and compassion, your life is a Gospel page that inspires our action. Lend us your eyes, to discover the most urgent needs of our time. Lend us your ears to listen to the cries of suffering and distress. Lend us your hands to heal the wounds and bring comfort. But give us your heart to show divine kindness in love that knows no boundaries. Pray the Father to give us, as He gave you, a dauntless faith, invincible hope, and universal charity."

### **Four Testimonies**

I give the last words to the four remaining Sisters of Charity of Montreal, in Saint-Léonard: "I owe my vocation to the Holy Spirit who gave my heart the extreme desire to love him, to have others love him, and to serve him" (Sr. Geneviève Michaud). "I am from Saint-Quentin. I met the Grey Nuns of Saint-Léonard who had just opened a home for the elderly. This helped me get to know them, love them, and

love their works of charity. I joined the community six years later” (Sr. Rose-Anne Bérubé). “The happiness of belonging to Jesus, the warp and woof of my life’s unfolding, made me discover in God an extraordinary Spouse! Through trials, suffering, and darkness, He has always been my “protective Rock,” and if I had to redo my life again, my choice would be no different” (Sr. Réjeanne Fortin). ““Sing, my soul, sing, my heart, sing the love of your Lord:’ These words often come to mind, but especially today when I look back on the story of my vocation” (Sr. Anita Rioux).

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