

Immigrants and the Church

The Sisters of Service – 1920 - 1930

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I wish to thank the Canadian Historical Association for the invitation to speak at your annual meeting. It has provided an opportunity to gather up and tie together the threads of both written and oral history which, I believe, make our story interesting and significant.

Fifty-four years ago the Sisters of Service were founded in Toronto to work in the outlying districts of the home mission field of Canada, particularly among New Canadians.¹ The home missions of that day were in the west, thus it was toward the west that our Founders and first sisters looked; the problems of the Catholic immigrants in the west originally sparked our foundation.

It is not the purpose of this paper to delve deeply into the history of Western Canada or of the Church in that area. However, it is necessary to sketch the broad background against which the Sisters of Service were founded and developed.

The 1920s have been described by one writer as a hyphen period in Canadian history.

Surveys of Canadian history tend to leap from the glorious days of the First World War to the grim ones of the Depression. Such views necessarily consign the 1920s to the insignificant position of a hyphen ... The Twenties were turbulent times all over Canada but particularly in the West. Agriculture was ceasing to be, both statistically and spiritually – the accepted and honoured way of life for Canadians. In statistical terms, agriculture's percentage of the G.N.P. dropped continuously throughout the decade; the brief depression of the early twenties cut farmers' revenues in half. In spiritual terms, burgeoning towns with all their novel amenities – cars and radios and films and electricity – undermined the cohesiveness of the family farm and the

¹ Rules & Constitution of the Sisters of Service, Toronto, 1932.

authority of the father. Onto this scene of unresolved tension came waves of new immigrants and shades of new religions. Many westerners looked suspiciously at both.²

This suspicion was understandable. Immigration to Canada had been heavy from Great Britain. In 1911, out of 262,000 British emigrants to places out of Europe, Canada received a record number of 134,784, an increase of 19,000 over 1910 and two and a half times as many as in 1909. Not all of these settlers went west but a great number did. Similarly with Americans. Between 1907 and 1915 forty percent of all homestead entries by immigrants on the prairies were made by United States citizens.³

The British and American settlers were largely English-speaking and Protestant, though there was a significant number of Catholics of German origin among the Americans. One can easily appreciate the concern of those who wanted to keep Canada British, English-speaking and Protestant especially in view of the influx from Europe, from both preferred and other countries, of immigrants totalling 599,677 between 1915 and 1925.⁴

Thus, at the beginning of the century most Canadians agreed that immigrants were needed but, following the very heavy immigration of the first two decades, the country did an about-face. There was already racial and religious tension between the French and English; an influx of Europeans, many of whom were Catholic, were seen by some Westerners as a conspiracy between the Federal Government and the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ In fact, so American an organization as the Ku Klux Klan made a brief appearance on the Canadian scene and won strong support in Saskatchewan for the proposal that the government should place the Union Jack in every home and public school, and that only Protestants should be hired as civil servants and teachers in all public offices and schools in Canada.⁶ The prevailing atmosphere was not conducive to making immigrants feel at home. This was particularly true of the Ruthenian Rite Catholics who were exposed not only to a new country, new customs and a new language, even the Latin Rite of

² S.M. TROFIMENKOFF in the "Twenties in Western Canada," (Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972), pp. 1-2.

³ Cf Robert ENGLAND, *The Colonization of Western Canada*, London, P.S. King & Son Ltd., 1936.

⁴ Cf ENGLAND, *op. cit.*

⁵ William CALDERWOOD, *Pulpit, Press and Political Reactions to the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan*, Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972.

⁶ *Ibid.*

their own Mother Church was strange to them.

In an article written in 1921 Catherine Donnelly, who was to become the first Sister of Service, wrote about the plight of the Ruthenian-rite immigrants:

In the prairie provinces there are hundreds of these compact settlements of Ruthenians. In one such settlement, near Yorkton, Saskatchewan, the writer spent several fact-finding weeks teaching in a public school. The pupils were fifty Ruthenian children, all Catholics. As far as could be ascertained there had never been a Catholic teacher in this school. There were many similar districts populated entirely by Ruthenian Rite Catholics. Not only do their schools have no Catholic teachers but there is a strong and enthusiastic missionary work being done by teachers of other faiths ...

Their Catholic faith is the one treasure these newcomers have brought from the Old Country. Who is there going to ensure that they retain their treasure? Not the priests, who are so few, not lay teachers, not any order of nuns working in Canada at present.⁷

In addition to agriculture falling from first place as a way of life for Canadians, there was a trend toward urbanization, a trend which was growing steadily. Indeed, in the 1921 census the rural population of Canada was 50.48 percent, the urban 49.52 percent.⁸ This urbanization was to have an effect on the apostolate of the Sisters of Service.

I have very briefly outlined some of the sociological and religious conditions against which the Sisters of Service were founded. I have merely tried to indicate the general climate of the times particularly as it affected Catholic immigrants in the west and the problem it posed vis-à-vis their faith.

To quote again from Catherine Donnelly:

Only an order of nuns whose rule would not forbid their living in (these) teachers' residences, whose habit would not be in the least conspicuous, and who would be qualified to teach in the prairie

⁷ Article by Catherine Donnelly, handwritten, in S.O.S. Archives, Toronto.

⁸ W.L. MORTON in *The Canadians*, ed. J.M.S. Careless & R. Craig Brown, Toronto, MacMillan of Canada, 1967, p.210.

provinces and capable of handling the situation tactfully, can serve the purpose. As far as we know no such order exists in Canada.

To deal with unprecedented circumstances we need unprecedented methods, and where there is no vision, the people perish. A united body of qualified teachers, nurses and others, with a rule to suit their particular needs, and an expectation of reward only in the hereafter is absolutely the only way to overcome the difficulty... The Departments of Education of the three Provinces assist teachers to secure positions without any questions as to creed. The salaries are generous. Wonderful work could be done if, in these rural districts a nurse or a social worker were assigned to live with the teacher. A uniform could be designed which would not in the least resemble a conventional religious habit.

It would be unwise to choose a habit or a name which would antagonize public opinion. On the contrary such workers would need to give markedly efficient service in order to create a lasting popularity and demand.⁹

Clearly this young woman had thoroughly thought through the details of establishing a new community. How revolutionary was her proposal?

Women religious in the 1920s, even those who were, members of active congregations, were almost semi-cloistered. I examined the Constitutions and Customs of that time of two of the largest English-speaking Communities in Canada. Both documents were characterized by minute attention to "enclosure" and detail. Sisters were walled off. They were not allowed to visit, not even their homes except for very serious reasons; they could not eat nor sleep outside their convents; they could travel only in pairs; two sisters must always be present if one of them was speaking to a man. In fact, one document said that *at least* three sisters must be present if a man was involved. Sisters were not allowed to speak to people on the streets, etc.

Bishop Huyghe observes:

The whole history of religious orders and congregations is that of a struggle between the unchangeableness and rigidity of law and the thrust of life, which, faced with the magnitude and diversity of the tasks now presented to the Church requires a total religious consecration without being forced to submit to juridical conditions which are

⁹ Catherine DONNELLY, *op. cit.*

inimical to carrying out this commitment.¹⁰

In the light of history and tradition, there was no possibility that existing orders could or would want to adapt the modifications to their life style which Catherine Donnelly considered necessary to meet the challenges and the needs of the west. It must be remembered that, for the most part, religious congregations of women in Canada and the United States were not really indigenous. Speaking of American sisters, Adrian Van Kaam, C.S.Sp. wrote:

Unfortunately, until recently many American sisters were so imbued with the impact of foreign styles of spirituality that they found themselves unable to grow organically into a spirituality truly their own, one which would allow them to remain genuine religious while developing in the light of grace the best that American womanhood has to offer the world.¹¹

“To grow organically into a spirituality truly their own” – this, without being expressly formulated, was indeed one of the tasks which the Sisters of Service would accomplish.

Until this point in late 1920 or early '21, the idea of an entirely new community existed only in the mind of Catherine Donnelly, a native of Alliston, Ontario. She was a teacher who had left the security of an Ontario school and had gone west in a spirit of adventure. Appalled by what she had seen happening she had moved around in the west gathering facts. For obvious reasons, when she returned from her self-appointed fact-finding mission to the west, existing communities could not reconcile Catherine's vision with their traditional modes of apostolic endeavour. But Catherine was not easily daunted. A quotation from Nellie McClung, a great Canadian feminist during the early years of the century, aptly describes, to me, what I believe Catherine's attitude must have been:

‘Thy will be done’ should ever be the prayer of our hearts, but it does not let us out of any responsibility. It is not a weak acceptance of

¹⁰ Bishop Gerard HUYGHE, *Religious Orders in the Modern World*, Westminster, Md., The Newman Press, 1966, p. 16.

¹¹ Adrian VAN KAAM, C.S.SP. in Judith TATE, O.S.B., ed., *Sisters for the World*, New York, Herder & Herder, 1966, p. 6.

misfortune, or sickness, or injustice or wrong, for these things are not God's will. 'Thy will be done' is a call to fight-to fight for better conditions, for moral and physical health...¹²

Catherine did find a friend. Father Arthur Coughlan, then Provincial of the newly-erected Toronto Province of the Redemptorist Fathers. Father Coughlan not only believed in her dream, he took it to Archbishop Neil McNeil of Toronto. Archbishop McNeil had missionary experience at home in Canada. He realized what this proposed new Community would mean to the missionary Church in the West. His support, which was formidable, was easily won.

On August 24, 1921, Father Coughlan wrote to Catherine Donnelly who had returned to teaching in the West:

...I had a good talk with the Archbishop a few days ago ... We came to the conclusion that the only practicable plan was to establish a new Order for work among the poorer children in Canada, especially in the west. He spoke principally of educational work but I would judge that medical work might also be added ... Our plan would be to have the Order diocesan (Toronto) for the present, so as to be under His Grace and also not to be obliged to have recourse to Rome for approval ... His Grace claims, for different reasons, it would be best for the Sisters not to wear a regular habit, but some uniform dress that would not attract attention. He says that sisters in a regular habit would never be admitted into the public schools of the Ruthenians in the west ... The Archbishop also agrees that your novitiate should be held in the city close to us for personal guidance ... We have both come to the conclusion that the best plan for a novitiate would be to ask the St. Joseph or Loretto Sisters to loan for novice mistress some able, experienced member of their Order who would train you and your companions in the religious life. After a time she could return to her own Community and you could do this work yourselves ... His Grace proposes as a title for the Order "The Teaching Sisters" but I suggested that that title would be too limited, as the sisters would do other work besides teaching. Can you make a suggestion on that point? ... The Archbishop and I will be glad to hear any suggestions you may see fit to make, so do not hesitate to tell us your mind. I wish you were here to consult with us but you had better

¹² Nellie MCCLUNG, *In Times Like These*, University of Toronto Press, 1972, p.9 (originally published in 1915).

continue where you are until we call you east. We don't want to take a decisive step until we are sure of our ground. We do not wish to make the matter too public and then have a failure.¹³

In the same letter Father Coughlan said that he was willing to assume the spiritual direction of the new Community and that the Archbishop concurred. Father Coughlan was worried about the candidates and money, though more worried about the latter than the former.

On September 12, 1921, another letter from Father Coughlan called Catherine Donnelly east and informed her that Mother Victoria, then Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, had agreed to lend a sister as novice mistress. The letter also said:

The matter of the title, habit, rule, etc. can be settled in time. "Service Sisters" is a good suggestion for a title. We have decided to include medical and social work among the doings of the Order as well as teaching. We hope some day to establish smaller hospitals in the west as the Presbyterians and Methodists are doing.¹⁴

About this time a blatant example of male chauvinism occurred which deserves to be described here. A letter from Father Coughlan to Father George T. Daly dated September 29, 1921, reads in part:

You will be surprised to learn that Archbishop McNeil and I are trying to establish a religious order of women to do educational, medical and social work among the poor in western Canada, particularly the foreign born. The undertaking has come about naturally though I believe providentially. Modern conditions will require quite a modification of the usual rules and customs of ordinary religious orders. For example, we think the nuns should not have a special religious habit but should dress ordinarily; they would have to go by twos into lonely settlements and be deprived of Mass and Holy Communion for long periods, et cetera. What we need now to begin the foundation is money and candidates. But I think with God's help we can surmount all difficulties. I wish I could have a talk with you on this matter and learn from your

¹³ Letters from Father Coughlan, S.O.S. Archives, Toronto.

¹⁴ Letters from Father Coughlan.

experience.¹⁵

Not a single word about Catherine Donnelly whose brainchild the whole idea was. It is also interesting to note that while Catherine could accept a simple uniform for the new Community, the Archbishop and Father Coughlan were opting for ordinary clothes.

It required more than a courageous young woman, a Provincial Superior busy with the affairs of his own religious province, and an Archbishop occupied with the business of an Archdiocese to set the wheels in motion for a new religious congregation. Father Coughlan sent for Father George Daly who was then in Saint John, New Brunswick, to take over the Sisters of Service.

Father Daly had been Rector of the cathedral in Regina from 1915-1918. While there he had become deeply interested in Western Canada and had written a book, *Catholic Problems in Western Canada*. Thus he was hardly unprepared for the work confided to him by his Provincial, work to which the remainder of his life was dedicated until his death, in fact, in 1956.

In the Archives of the Redemptorist Fathers' Toronto Province it is recorded that Father Daly came to Toronto in January 1922, and immediately began his active work for the S.O.S., talking to groups in private homes, speaking at large meetings, visiting the Archbishops and Bishops of western Canada who, considering the innovative plans for the S.O.S. were very open to the concept of the new Community.

On September 22, 1922, Father Daly went to Winnipeg on one of the most important missions of his career with the Sisters of Service. He went to address the National Convention of the Catholic Women's League of Canada and he secured their promise of continuing support for the new Community. This support continued for twenty-five years during which time the C.W.L. contributed over \$200,000 to the S.O.S. We will always rightly be deeply indebted to the League.

On August 15, 1922, the Sisters of Service came into being in a house on St. Joseph Street, Toronto, where the present Basilian Seminary stands. Sister Mary Lidwina of the Sisters of St. Joseph was the local superior, novice mistress and superior general.

Catherine Donnelly and three companions were the first novices.

From the very beginning the Sisters of Service were committed not only

¹⁵ Letter from Father Coughlan, Sept. 29, 1921, S.O.S. Archives, Toronto.

to the preservation of the immigrants' faith but to instilling the principles of good Canadian citizenship. In a letter to Father Daly dated September 4, 1922, little more than two weeks after the establishment of the Institute, Archbishop McNeil wrote:

There are indications that immigrants from continental Europe will soon be coming out for settlement on the land in Canada. Our experience of former movements of this kind points to the need of more systematic care after settlement than the Church has given in the past. Immigrants come as individuals or as separate families. They need to be organized not only to preserve and practice their faith but also to enable them to take their place in the civil life of the nation. Our lack of success with them in the past, as far as it existed, was due in part to insufficient effort to combine social and civic formation with missionary zeal.

I regard the founding of the society known as the Sisters of Service as a very important step towards a solution of the problem of immigration. Its purpose combines the safeguarding of the faith with social and civil betterment from a Canadian point of view. It is constructive work of the best kind. Though originating in Toronto, it is not in any sense for Toronto. Its appeal is to the whole Dominion. One needs but two qualities, love of God and love of Canada, to become interested in the success of the Sisters of Service.¹⁶

Since Father Daly himself was an ardent Canadian, there was a meeting of minds on this topic which had its effect on the Community.

Sometime in 1923, the petition is not dated, Archbishop McNeil wrote to Rome for permission for the canonical erection of the Sisters of Service. Under date of May 15, 1924, the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Religious replied:

Whilst praising this project the Congregation cannot yet concur because of certain persistent misgivings. First of all the name of the Institute, which seems unsuitable, and another name should be chosen for it. Moreover the financial arrangements are not wholly satisfactory. Wherefore this pious society of women must be subjected to a further suitable trial...¹⁷

¹⁶ S.O.S. Archives, Toronto.

¹⁷ S.O.S. Archives, Toronto.

On July 31, 1924, Archbishop McNeil replied to Rome. His letter is a masterpiece which deserves to be quoted in full but this would take too much time. However, in answer to the two specific objections which Rome had posed the Archbishop said:

Your letter of May 15 forbids us to use the title "Sisters of Service" for the Institute already named thus. I think there must be some slight mistake in this. In English this name has not the slightest suspicion of servitude. In French the name that most resembles it is "Les Sœurs de Bon Secours." During the past forty years the reaction against economic individualism of the nineteenth century has used the word "service" in English to denote all sorts of beneficial service to the neighbour. For example, I have been reading a book written by an American for young men. Among the chapters there is one "Prepare for Service" which the author begins by saying "Only what we do for others makes us immortal. This life is short, we cannot afford to waste it on selfseeking.."

The Archbishop goes on to comment on the many varieties of names of religious communities, some taken from the place of foundation, some from the type or colour of the habit. He concludes:

The title Daughters of Wisdom is hardly more suggestive of religion than that of the Sisters of Service.¹⁸

He then explained that during the year from June 1, 1923 to June 1, 1924, the Redemptorist Fathers of Toronto had collected and expended the sum of \$11,600 (266,800 lire) on the Sisters of Service, the C.W.L. had contributed \$4,850 and during the following month three sisters would start to teach in Manitoba with salaries amounting to \$1,600.

This time Rome said yes, but even before they did so, the Archbishop signed the decree of erection on August 1, 1924. That same day he received the vows of the first sisters and on August 9, 1924 Sister Donnelly and Sister Wymbs, a nurse, arrived in Winnipeg en route to open the first S.O.S. mission at Camp Morton, Manitoba in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg.

In a letter to the Community in 1952, Father Daly enclosed an excerpt

¹⁸ S.O.S. Archives, Toronto.

from the proposed memoirs of Archbishop Sinnott which described the first S.O.S. mission. Archbishop Sinnott wrote:

Previous to the ceremony (of canonical erection and the making of vows) arrangements had been made to open a house in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. Camp Morton, on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg, had been chosen as the place for the new foundation. This was a rural settlement composed of people who had come from Galicia in Central Europe. They were of various nationalities and they spoke German, Polish and Ukranian... they were all Catholics. Accordingly, three Sisters of Service set out from Toronto to take up their new home. They were Sister Wymbs, the Superior and a nurse, and Sisters Donnelly and Guest, two teachers. The teachers were to take charge of the two public schools of the district and the nursing sister would look after the sick. It is difficult to conceive what a decided change was effected in the very first year of their ministrations. When the sisters commenced their work, the children knew next to nothing about their religion, many of them did not even know how to make the Sign of the Cross. The change was noted at once, and now one can say that the children in this locality are well instructed and as well behaved as Catholic children anywhere. The foundation of the Sisters of Service is a complete vindication and the wisdom and foresight of Father Daly.¹⁹

That last sentence is an example of a widely prevailing misconception about our Founders. Father Coughlan and Father Daly were actually named co-founders by Archbishop McNeil who did not himself want to be so designated. When Father Coughlan's term as Provincial was over he went for a time to St. Alphonsus Seminary which was then located in Woodstock, Ontario, and from there he returned to the Baltimore province of the Redemptorists. He had certainly been both prominent and effective in the founding of the Institute, he it was who had called Father Daly to Toronto to take charge, but he was known only to the Sisters, and the first Sisters at that. He was spiritual director to the Community as long as he remained in Toronto and kept in touch with individual sisters until his death in 1943. But he was not known outside the Community.

Father Daly, on the other hand, was the director, the guide, the trouble-shooter, the travelling salesman, the fund-raiser. He travelled the length and breadth of the country countless times on behalf of the S.O.S. He

¹⁹ S.O.S. Archives, Toronto.

was known to every Bishop in Canada, both English and French because he was fluently bilingual. It was understandable that people generally considered him as *the* founder although this was a source of some friction for many years in the Community.

But what about Catherine Donnelly? She faded into the background and this suited her admirably. Having had a taste of the west she had no desire to live in the east; she had even less desire for administration. She was a born missionary whose sole desire was to be hard at work in the mission field. Nevertheless, she was rather glaringly passed over.

I have mentioned Nellie McClung before. I have never read Nellie McClung without having the image of Sister Catherine Donnelly come before me. I have always imagined that they would have found much to admire in each other. So I shall quote from Nellie McClung on the position of women in the Church in those days:

Women have certainly been allowed to labour in the church. There is no doubt of that. There are many things they may do with impunity, nay, even hilarity. They may make strong and useful garments for the poor; they may teach in Sunday school and attend prayer-meeting; they may finance the new parsonage, and augment the missionary funds by bazaars, birthdays socials, autograph quilts and fowl suppers... The women may lift mortgages, or build churches, or any other light work, but the real heavy work of the church such as moving resolutions in the general conference or assemblies, must be done by strong, hardy men.²⁰

The author was talking about the Protestant churches but I do not believe there was much difference between denominations in their attitude toward women. There is no need to belabour the point.

About this time another bone of contention appeared which has been gnawed at and on through the years. Catherine Donnelly had conceived the idea of the Sisters of Service as a means of preserving the faith of immigrant settlers in *the rural West*, specifically among the Ruthenians. She was then and always has been adamant that our work lies in the rural areas of Western Canada. But the degree of canonical erection of 1924 specifically states:

The purpose of the Sisters of Service is to sanctify themselves in the

²⁰ Nellie MCCLUNG, *op. cit.*, p.72.

service of God and His Church *by the care of female immigrants* and by educational and social work in the Home Mission Field.²¹

I have emphasized the care of female immigrants and we shall return to that in a moment. In 1924 we had one mission. Obviously it was not then possible nor would it ever be possible for us to work with all the immigrant settlers in Western Canada. Furthermore, not all of these newcomers were going to the west nor to rural areas; some were settling in the cities. In fact, between 1925 and 1931 some twenty percent went to the cities.²² Some means needed to be devised to put these people in touch with the Church.

Father Daly had met a Mr. W.J. Egan, then Deputy Minister of Immigration and Colonization. From this gentleman he procured a copy of the proceedings of the Federal Provincial Conference on Immigration and Colonization which had been held in Ottawa on November 14-15, 1923. The document describes the reception of immigrants at the ports and mentions that the Churches are represented by three chaplains, one representing the Roman Catholics, one the Anglicans and the third the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists. The Catholic chaplain at the time was Abbe Philippe Casgrain.

Did Father Daly get the idea of meeting immigrants at the ports of entry from the proceedings of this Conference? We do not know. We do know that in 1924 he went to Halifax to see the then Rector of the Cathedral, Reverend Dr. Foley, to discuss with him the possibility of the Sisters going to Halifax to devote themselves to Port Work and Immigration. Dr. Foley was open to the idea and on October 4, 1924, Archbishop McNeil wrote formally to Archbishop Edward J. McCarthy of Halifax asking that the S.O.S. be permitted to go to Halifax for the purpose stated above. The first three sisters arrived on September 4, 1925. It is interesting to note that their procedure at the ports followed very closely the guidelines laid down by the Federal Provincial Conference. Beginning in 1928 a sister from Montreal travelled to Saint John, New Brunswick, a winter port, and to Quebec City, a summer port, to meet all immigrant-carrying liners. Until 1932 this work was under the direction of Abbe Casgrain who had appealed to the Knights of Columbus for support and by 1928 we find regular acknowledgements of sums of money received from the Knights.

The port work did not consist merely of meeting and assisting the immigrants upon arrival. Once they had left the port the work of referral

²¹ Decree of Election, S.O.S. Archives, Toronto.

²² Cf ENGLAND, *op. cit.*, p.91.

began. Every individual or family with the names and ages of the children, was referred either to the Chancery Office of the diocese in which they were to reside or to the Immigration Convenor of the local C.W.L.

To return to the care of the female immigrants. On May 31, 1922, the Empire Settlement Act received Royal assent in London, following consultation with the Dominions. Under the Act, agreements with the various Dominions were made and assisted passages were put into force confined to those taking up agricultural pursuits or entering domestic service.²³

This assisted passage did not last very long-but it did bring single young women to Canada to do domestic service. These girls were not the sophisticated globe-trotters whom we find coming to Canada today. They were poor, they were alone, they had little education and no training for the kind of work they were coming to do. The Federal Provincial Conference of 1923 also indicated that hostels for single young women should be opened with employment bureaux and plans for training domestics.

The first hostel for young immigrant working girls to be operated by the S.O.S. was taken over from the C.W.L. in Toronto on May 31, 1924. Similarly the Montreal hostel was taken over from the C.W.L. in October 1926. Both these hostels enjoyed the continued support of the League. Prior to the Montreal Hostel, one was opened in Winnipeg in April 1925. In May and October 1929 two more hostels were begun at Edmonton and Vancouver respectively. Halifax eventually developed a hostel but only because the Federal Government had decided, under the Empire Settlement Act, to bring ten girls from Great Britain to Halifax per month and to confide them to the care of the S.O.S.

Work in the hostels and at the ports was exhausting and often frustrating. Correspondence between the various missions and the Mother House indicate that the sisters were often engulfed with worries – lack of time, lack of funds, the sensibilities of the very good people who were helping them but who could be so easily slighted and hurt. Yet there is tremendous good humour in these letters and evidence that the sisters were indeed “growing organically into a spirituality truly their own.”

Considering the speed with which the Community was opening missions one is amazed at the faith and the courage which permitted the work to grow so quickly. On November 18, 1925, yet another apostolic endeavour was begun with the opening of Our Lady's Hospital, Vilna, Alberta. A small building which had formerly been a bank was converted to hospital use minus plumbing, running water, electricity. Vilna was, and is, a hamlet in the midst

²³ ENGLAND, *op. cit.*, p. 93 ff

of a grain-growing area largely inhabited by Ukrainians. In December 1926, our second hospital was re-opened in the town of Edson, Alberta, which lies just about midway between Edmonton and Jasper. The hospital had operated under the title Lady Minto but had been closed and left vacant for some time before the Sisters of Service were able to gain title and re-open it as St. John's Hospital. Edson is on the main CNR transcontinental line and was, for years, a railroad town. Father Daly, through the unbelievable contacts which he had made everywhere, negotiated a grant from the CNR for the hospital which grant continued for many years.

January 22, 1925, two sisters arrived in Edmonton to open the second S.O.S. mission. Their immediate purpose was to do a survey on the state of religious instruction in Edmonton. This survey resulted in the important commitment of the Sisters of Service to the cause of religious education through correspondence courses and through summer vacation schools of religion. Though I cannot prove this statistically I would hazard a guess that this is the branch of our work for which we are best known, particularly in the West; this is probably the branch of our work which has affected the greatest number of people.

So we come to 1929, five scant years after the canonical erection of the Institute, five scant years after the first sisters made their vows. There were 45 professed sisters, 11 postulants and 11 novices. The sisters were stretched thinly from Halifax to Vancouver working in ten different locations including the Mother House and the Novitiate which had been separated from the Mother House in 1927; the apostolate included teaching, nursing, social, and catechetical work.

There was a great urgency about our Institute in its infancy. There was work to be done, therefore the work was done, no matter that training was often deficient, if not entirely wanting; no matter that financing was a perennial problem. There were oceans of love and zeal and self-sacrifice which, possibly, were a more desperate need at that time than lofty academic and professional training. The Sisters of Service have never grown to be a large Community, we have never become really well known. Perhaps the reason is that we have always worked with the little, seemingly unimportant people. Perhaps, too, a little of the reason is found in this Chinese poem:

“Go to the people
Live among them
Learn from them
Love them

Start with what they know
Build on what they have;
But of the best leaders
When their task is accomplished
Their work is done
The people all remark
“ We have done it ourselves.”

– Old Chinese Poem