

The Sisters of St. Joseph. Beginnings in London Diocese 1868-1878

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The first ten years of the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, 1868-1878 is the subject of this paper. However, since the London Community traces its roots to the first foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph made at Lepuy, France in 1650, I shall refer briefly to our origins. The first Sisters were brought together by a French Jesuit, Jean-Pierre Médaille. This holy man, reflecting upon his country's sufferings resulting from the aftermath of the Wars of Religion, longed to heal its wounded people. That is the reason why the Congregation he founded had as basic concept UNITY; this is also interpreted as Reconciliation or Healing. The first members visited and cared for the sick, ministered to the poor, the aged, the imprisoned and instructed young girls in spiritual matters.

In the early years, the Congregation grew steadily in numbers of Sisters and established Convents keeping pace with the growth. The French Revolution brought its sufferings, and the persecution of the Terrorists caused the dispersement of the members of the Community. Before the Reign of Terror was over, five Sisters of St. Joseph had been guillotined and another five were awaiting the same fate in the prison of St. Didier-Haute Loire. With the fall of Robespierre, the imprisoned Sisters were freed and one of them, Mother St. John Fontbonne, reorganized the Community members, assembling them at Lyons in 1807.

From there in 1836, she sent Sisters to St. Louis, Missouri at the request of Bishop Rosati who wished assistance for the deaf mutes of his diocese. From Carondelet near St. Louis, the Sisters sent representatives to Philadelphia to establish a Convent. From that branch house, the first five Sisters of St. Joseph came to Canada in 1851 establishing a Community in Toronto. From this tiny start, there developed Canadian foundations in five other centres: Hamilton, London, Peterborough, Pembroke and North Bay. Each of these units has its own Motherhouse and administration.

Today they are united in a Canadian Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph whose membership numbers 1734 sisters serving in Canada and in Latin America. The individual Federation members have

established houses in Canada in the provinces of Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia and in the North West Territories. They are engaged in every type of education from nursery school to the office of area superintendent. They are deeply involved in music education. They have responsibility in almost every branch of the healing arts; they work with aged, infirm and emotionally disturbed; they engage in social work and child care, in the deaf mute ministry, in parish ministry and in chaplaincy of schools and jails. Many of these activities indicate that the Sisters of St. Joseph operate schools, hospitals, homes for the aged and other institutions. However, some of the ministries are exercised by sisters working as a reach-out from an institution, e.g. pastoral care, or as a ministry separate from any institution, e.g. retreat work.

The American Sisters of St. Joseph have a Federation paralleling the Canadian Organization. Their Federation embraces thirty congregations whose membership totals about 25,000 Sisters. The two Federations extend reciprocal affiliated membership to their counterparts. Internationally, the bond is strong with the cradle of the Institute at Lepuy. A very active research team composed of American and Canadian Federation members has been doing continuing study of the original spirit or charism of the founder. An outstanding French Jesuit scholar, Father Marius Nepper¹ has devoted the past twenty-five years of his life to assisting in this work. His visits and lectures on our heritage to American and Canadian convents are always enriching and unifying events.

THE LONDON TO WHICH WE CAME

As we have said, Toronto saw the first Canadian foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1851. That parent body sent sisters to Hamilton in 1852 and to London in 1868. The charism was flourishing in its Canadian setting.

Let us now take a brief glance at the London to which the pioneer band of five Sisters came the year following Confederation. Governor Simcoe's enthusiastic prediction of London's future, because of its "situation eminently calculated for the metropolis of Canada,"² was never fulfilled. However, it did emerge from the

¹ Reverend Marius NEPPER, S.J., is the author of *Aux Origines*.

² Violet M. CUNNINGHAM, *London in the Bush 1826-1976*. Verification by Daniel J. BROCK, London: London Historical Museum, 1976, p. 1.

category of “only a place on a surveyor’s map”³ to an incorporated city in 1854. It possessed a Court House which led to the quip that London had “litigation at its chief business.”⁴ This business was not remunerative enough to ensure the Corporation’s financial position. In 1848 the Bank of Upper Canada required the endorsement of three leading citizens before advancing necessary funds for the Council’s current expenses.⁵

Railway expansion in the fifties opened the way for wheat exportation but also for wild land speculation. The Crimean War, the cause of inflationary wheat prices at its close, plunged the western world into financial depression. In that year, 1856, the London and Port Stanley Railway was finished. Designed to connect London with its natural lakeport for freer grain marketing, the completed project seemed tragically timed to the collapse of the wheat market, the failure of crops, the tightness of money and the beginning of depression. London’s citizens suffered from the application of the Debtors’ Act which crowded the city jail between 1857-59. The newly incorporated city had to look to relief measures for its poor. Soup kitchens were set up with municipality, charitable institutions, churches and fraternal organizations sharing the responsibility. “At one time at least five public soup kitchens were operating.”⁶

An examination of people and events shaping London’s history must recognize “the presence of the military.”⁷ A kind of military partnership began with the arrival of the Thirty-second Regiment in 1838. This influence in social, educational, religious, entertainment and family circles distinguished London from non-garrison cities. With the British North America Act of 1867, preparations were made for permanent withdrawal of the British garrisons and this was accomplished about two years later.

In this same period small manufacturers began to appear. Iron and wood workers produced staves and furniture for household use.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴ Orlo MILLER, “The Fat Years and the Lean—London (Canada) in Boom and Depression,” Edited by Dr. J.S. NOIR, *Ontario History*, Vol. LIII, no. 2, June 1961, Journal published by Ontario Historical Society, p. 74.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁶ W.A. and C.L. GOODSPEED, *History of the County of Middlesex, Canada*, Originally published by W.A. and C.L. GOODSPEED, Publishers, Toronto, 1889. Facsimile, Mika Studios, Belleville, 1972, p. 285.

⁷ *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Middlesex, Ontario*, Toronto, 1878. Reprinted by Edward C.H. Phelps, Samia, 1972, p. 8.

Some sale was found also for pianos and organs made in London. The city's market was even in the sixties a centre of much activity as shoppers secured provisions and supplies from the stalls of seasoned rural growers. Market shoppers exchanged news of the day as they availed themselves of the 12½¢ meal on the spot. The more official current news was at hand also in a regular newspaper. *The Western Free Press and Daily Advertiser*, a daily founded in 1852 by Josiah Blackburn, is today *The London Free Press*. The early paper covered a wide range of subjects. Civic pride in the law-abiding record of its people shows for example in the review of criminal figures for 1866. "It is questionable if any city of the size of London-the-less can exhibit such a brief record of crime ..."⁸ However, Londoners could not boast of great progress against the ravages of the very prevalent disease, consumption. The Sisters of St. Joseph felt its impact as a number of the first sisters who died in these early days in London were victims of the dread disease.

What can be said of the social and religious climate of London in the period of which we are speaking? J.M.S. Careless is of the opinion that "an aristocratic leaven that had to do with officers of the British Garrisons lingered in London due to a continuing fount of honour and prestige, strength of conservatism and British loyalty."⁹ He believes, however, that among the working class, some deep-rooted divisions were wrought when Protestant and Catholic antipathies divided that class itself.¹⁰

A glance at the ecclesiastical state of London shows that the Anglican Diocese of Huron was established in 1851 with Bishop Benjamin Cronyn's Episcopal seat at St. Paul's. Huron College, founded for the education of Anglican Clergy, dates from 1863.

Sam Baker, long-time City Clerk of London, reports that in 1850 there were two hundred and fifty Roman Catholics in London.¹¹ Bishop de Charbonnel of Toronto dedicated the first Cathedral in 1852 and four years later Right Reverend Adolphe Pinsonneault of Montreal became first Bishop of London. His

⁸ *Western Free Press and Daily Advertiser*, London, Ontario, October 13, 1866.

⁹ J.M.S. CARELESS, Cited in *Aspects of Nineteenth Century, Ontario*, Essays presented to James J. TALMAN, Edited by F.H. Armstrong, H.A. Stevenson, J.D. Wilson. Published in association with The University of Western Ontario by University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1974, p. 75.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹¹ Samuel BAKER, *The Rise and Progress of London*, London, Ontario, Hayden Press Limited, 1923, p. 44.

observations upon the London to which he came noted the paucity of Catholic population, the scattered nature of their missions and the atmosphere of a somewhat closed rich Protestant society. His transfer of the diocesan seat to Sandwich indicates that his impressions of London's possibilities for the future development of the Church of London were poor. He saw permanent disability here.¹² Sandwich, considerably larger than the adjoining town of Windsor, but incorporated as it was in 1856, at that time centered along what is now Russell, Sandwich and Peter Streets. Assumption Church was the Parish Church.

From Sandwich, with characteristic despatch, Bishop Pinsonneault turned his attention to securing Religious foundations for the diocese. In November, 1861, his Pastoral Letter shows the degree of success he had. "What a bright and cheering future may we not anticipate under the combined efforts of the zealous sons of St. Ignatius, St. Benedict and St. Dominic and of the devoted daughters of St. Ursula, of St. Vincent de Paul and of the Sacred Heart."¹³

That list does not include the Sisters of St. Joseph as they had come to Amherstburg in August, 1853 while it was still part of Toronto's jurisdiction and had found it necessary to withdraw in 1857. Before recounting their re-entry into the Diocese, we will look at London's educational scene. In 1857 the first Separate School opened in London receiving Catholic children previously attending the Common Schools. The efforts of Monsignor J. M. Bruyère and his powerful defense of the minority rights of Catholic parents to have government support paralleling the Common School system are well known; especially so is his published correspondence with Egerton Ryerson known in Ontario as "Father of Public School Education." The legislation (Taché Bill 1855) granted permission for Separate Schools but many circumstances made the implementation difficult. In London some of these circumstances were a mistrust engendered by the withdrawal of Religious after only a brief period of service, the transfer of the Bishop's See to Sandwich in 1856, disappointment in not securing Brothers to teach the boys and the perennial financial difficulties.

¹² Memorandum, June 29, 1858, "Correspondence of Bishop Pinsonneault," Diocese of London Archives, London, Ontario.

¹³ Circular, Bishop Pinsonneault, November 1861, Diocese of London Archives.

The school manned by lay teachers suffered a brief closure following the summer of 1858 but donations and a church collection furnished funds “establishing Separate Schools in London as a fixed act.”¹⁴

The London schools were still not reaching all eligible children in 1861. Poor children were missing an educational opportunity because of the shortage of teachers in the Separate School. The Sacred Heart Sisters were reaching the girls of better families in their school. Father O’Brien, O.P., Pastor of St. Peter’s Parish in 1861 made the needs of the poor and also of orphans the object of his efforts.

The School Board members numbered fourteen in 1868 – two from each Ward. On December 31 of that year, Mr. James Egan in his Report to the Board, indicated what was at stake at this juncture of London’s Separate School history and how important was its success to the rest of Western Canada. He declared:

Our career has been strenuously watched the last twelve months with much anxiety by the Catholic population of Western Canada. If the Episcopal City failed in sustaining Separate Schools in their first attempt, the natural conclusion would follow that they had not that regard for the education of which they professed. If they had, they were neither able nor disposed to pay for, or make any sacrifice to obtain it. The importance of this point gave you courage.¹⁵

It was into this delicate and highly-charged situation that the Sisters of St. Joseph entered upon their arrival in London. A few weeks after their coming, in January 1869, three sister teachers joined Principal Samuel Brown’s staff at St. Peter’s School. The Archives record, “Many Londoners received the newcomers warmly and the School Board made everything as agreeable as circumstances would allow.”¹⁶

¹⁴ John Kevin Anthony FARRELL, Unpublished thesis, “The Roman Catholic Church in London, 1826-1946,” London: Regional Collection, Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario, p. 191.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Appendix.

¹⁶ Sisters of St. Joseph of London Archives, London: Mount St. Joseph.

OUR FIRST YEARS IN LONDON

The Sisters of St. Joseph, therefore, date their presence in London from December 11, 1868, the day on which five Sisters from Toronto accompanied by their Superior General, Mother Antoinette came to the city to establish a “branch house” of their Community. They came on the invitation of Bishop Walsh, second Bishop, of London, former Vicar General of Toronto Archdiocese, successor of Bishop Adolphe Pinsonneault upon his resignation on December 18, 1866. The new Bishop, consecrated at St. Michael’s Cathedral, Toronto, November 10, 1867 and installed in his new diocese at Sandwich four days later, had removed the Episcopal headquarters to London in January, 1869. The official name “Diocese of London” was confirmed November 15, 1869.

Bishop Walsh’s Vicar General, Monsignor Bruyère greeted the Sisters on their arrival in London on that historic day December 11, 1868. With him were Rev. P. Egan, Pastor of St. Peter’s Parish and a number of parishioners. They took the Sisters to their Convent on Kent Street where the ladies of the parish served them their first dinner in London, in the house built by the Dominican Fathers as the proposed home for the Christian Brothers. Bishop Walsh had plans not only for the educational needs of the children of his diocese but also for the care of the orphans and aged. St. Peter’s School, scene of the first apostolic labours of the Sisters of St. Joseph in London Diocese, was close at hand. The yearly remuneration of each Sister was one hundred dollars. On occasion the Community had only twenty-five cents on hand in their Convent.¹⁷

During the first two years while London was a branch house of Toronto there was considerable interchange of members. Several Sisters made valuable contributions to the initial foundation and then returned to the Motherhouse. The earliest indication of a Congregation wishing Diocesan Status of its own was voiced in a letter from the Sisters in London to His Lordship Archbishop Lynch on September 18, 1869.¹⁸ The letter written by Mother

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Letters from Sister de Chantal to Archbishop Lynch, Archdiocese of Toronto Archives, Toronto, Ontario.

deChantal in the name of the little Community would appear to have been expected, since it was dispatched very soon after the arrival of the Sisters in London. Bishop Walsh and Archbishop Lynch were very close friends and it would not seem to be making too big an assumption to say that all parties were aware of the implications of the correspondence.

From St. Michael's Palace, Toronto, September 20, 1869, Archbishop Lynch in a very gentle refusal, gave assurance of an affirmative answer "in a year or two."¹⁹ His reason is "the very delicate health of so many of the good Sisters ... brought on "by the over exertion of the Sisters and their too long stay among the sick."²⁰

"So many of the Sisters" could not have been more than five; that was their total number. On his visit to their house, he had seen the necessity of the Sisters depending a little longer on Toronto for relief personnel and for the moral support of the larger Community. Perhaps, too, he recognized that the work ethic of service, always a danger, might stifle the dynamism of the Congregation's Charism in the individuals who exercised it.

ORPHANS AND AGED – MOTHERHOUSE AND NOVITIATE

The little Community accepted the decision without question and continued to strive to fulfill the purpose for which they had come to London Diocese. Their apostolate of teaching was progressing well but they were eager to reach out in the name of Christ to the care of orphans and aged. This responsibility to which Bishop Walsh had asked them to address themselves would require more helpers and larger facilities. The Kent Street Convent, considered from the first a temporary residence, would serve only until a suitable property could be secured. This transpired very shortly. The original Barker house and property, later the first home of the Sacred Heart Sisters in London, owned in 1869 by J. C.

¹⁹ Letters of Archbishop Lynch to Sister de Chantal, Archdiocese of Toronto Archives.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Meredith was up for sale. On May 1 of that year Mr. Francis Smith purchased it for the sum of \$9,250 and two weeks later transferred it to Bishop Walsh for the same amount (being recognition of the mortgage upon it). This three and one-half acre parcel of land bounded by Grosvenor, Burlington (now Richmond), Thomas (now College) and George Streets, seemed ideal for the developing plans of the Sisters of St. Joseph and of their chief shepherd who placed the property at their disposition.²¹ Besides using the original house, the Sacred Heart Sisters had added classrooms and living quarters for the resident students of their Boarding School. All of these facilities were usable and practical when the Sisters of St. Joseph took possession of “Mount Hope” as the Institution had been and continued to be called. The title was still appropriate for a home in which the Sisters and their co-labourers would try to bring new life and hope to God’s special ones – children and the aged poor.

On October 2, 1869, the Sisters moved to Mount Hope and on the same day received seventeen orphans into their Institution. Of these, fifteen were London-area children who had been staying at the House of Providence in Toronto awaiting the opening of the London Orphanage. The number in residence by the end of the year was over fifty. We must look for a moment at who these children were.

The term “orphan” in the days of which we are speaking was loosely used to mean a child who had suffered the loss of one of both parents. It was common for a parent unable to support the family after the death or during the protracted illness of a spouse to ask to place the children in the orphanage. This was a manner of keeping the family together even though they were not under the parental roof. There are examples of the admission of neglected and abandoned children also. There is recorded the arrival of a penniless immigrant woman and her five children whose husband remained a prisoner in their native country while she sought to get a new start in Canada. She became a devoted House Mother at Mount Hope and helped to care for the larger family that she found there.

²¹ On February 20, 1880, the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of London transferred the Deed to the Sisters of St. Joseph of London for the sum of \$5.00.

The Sisters gave themselves earnestly and joyously to the unifying and healing of fragmented individuals and of families to whom they ministered. They soon became aware of aged poor, some of whom were rejected by their families and these were brought within the shelter of Mount Hope. At the same time the Community Life of the Sisters of St. Joseph was moving into a new phase of development. A little more than one year after the Sisters moved to Mount Hope, Archbishop Lynch of Toronto transferred his authority over the Toronto "branch house" to Bishop Walsh. The Archbishop in his last message to the Sisters reminded them of the need for fidelity to the original inspiration of their Founder, for, he said, "in your mutual charity will depend the future prosperity and sanctification of those who will succeed you."²²

Six members constituted the new community and Mount Hope became their Motherhouse. The Sisters of St. Joseph of London began the first chapter of their history as an autonomous Diocesan Congregation with Sister Ignatia Campbell (Catherine Ann Campbell), named by Bishop Walsh on December 18, 1870 as the first Superior General.

She was a native of Brock Settlement and entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Toronto at the age of 15. She made her Novitiate under the guidance of Mother Delphine Fontbonne, niece of Mother St. John, restorer of the Congregation after the French Revolution. This fortuitous closeness to the fountainhead gave Mother Delphine a true interpretation of the original Community's spirit of Unity. This she passed on to Mother Ignatia. Bishop Walsh, as Father John Walsh in Catherine Ann Campbell's home parish had encouraged her in her desire to become a Sister of St. Joseph. Now with great confidence in God and with Episcopal approval, she set about her task of leading her Sisters in serving God's people. She came to London as a teacher and taught in St. Peter's School, she cared for orphans and aged involving herself thereby in practical nursing and domestic duties. She exhibited a supple willingness to joyfully accomplish whatever God's Will called her to do.

²² Letter of Archbishop Lynch to Sisters Mary Ignatia, M. Bonaventure, M. Vincent, M. Ursula, Francis, and M. Lucy. Toronto: St. Michael's Palace, December 10, 1870. (Original Letter in the Sisters of St. Joseph of London Archives, Mount St. Joseph, London.)

As Superior General, now, she would be deeply concerned with signs of vocations that were drawing young women to the Congregation. On the day Mount Hope became the Motherhouse, the Novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London was opened with two Londoners as postulants. Let us pause to examine the meaning of the act performed by these two generous young women on that day in 1870. Why did they enter a Religious Congregation and why do individuals continue to do so today? Like the first apostles they had been captivated by the person of Christ or by His message. Yielding at all costs to the attraction of the Lord's call they would change their style of life by leaving home and family to attach themselves to the Person of Jesus. They had understood and are echoing St. Paul's words: "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal."²³

Then as now, the candidate for a Religious Congregation with companions sharing in faith the same goal, places all her gifts and talents at the disposition of God through community to be used wherever the needs of God's people require them. The Congregation's responsibility is to discern the qualities of its members, the greatest needs of the Church and the best manner of giving assistance. Each Community is guided in this by many factors all in relation to its original spirit which although it may be specialized, is never restrictive.

The Sister of St. Joseph called to the apostolate of Unity, healing or reconciling, carries her mission beyond physical healing. Like Christ whom she serves, she strives to bring spiritual healing to the sick, suffering and deprived. She loves Him in His poor, His neglected, His repulsive, His ungrateful creatures, and she ministers to them tenderly because in them she ministers to Christ.

ON-GOING CARE OF ORPHANS AND AGED

The significant events marking the new status of the Congregation served only as an incentive to greater effort to serve God's poor.

²³ St. Paul, Philippians 3: 8-14. R.S.V.

This did not preclude a certain worldly wisdom, for one of their first acts was to secure the Congregation's legal incorporation by Provincial Statute on February 15, 1871. The City Hospital, the local Home for the Aged and parish priests who encountered helpless aging residents of their parishes, were the ordinary channels by which Mount Hope received its old people. An oral tradition prevails in social welfare circles that a number of elderly homeless and destitute persons housed in jails, "vagrants," were received. Our Archives do not intimate this. The orphans and the aged always had separate quarters and each had its own small staff of sisters and lay women. The dining room was shared and each group had its own long tables and benches. Substantial plain food was provided and when supplies were scarce, Mother Ignatia and Mother deChantal appealed to Catholics of the city for help which was never lacking.

Social welfare legislation in 1868 had created a single department dealing with three branches of work – Prisons and Reformatories, Houses of Refuge (for aged and neglected) and Orphan Asylums. The first head of this Department was John Woodburn Langmuir who gave good leadership to a mammoth task. One of the greatest difficulties for those who had Institutions within the newly-created department, was their haphazard approach to a grant system. Very little relationship existed between services provided and financial assistance. The Sisters' Orphanage at Mount Hope received in 1874 less than ten per cent of its expenditure for the previous year.²⁴ Consequently Mount Hope and the Charitable Institutions were forced to appeal to various sources for assistance.

The Inspector's Report of his first visit to Mount Hope Orphanage made on July 28, 1875 gives some interesting details.

ROMAN CATHOLIC ORPHAN HOME, LONDON

For the first time, a statutory inspection was made of this Institution on the 28th of July. It is situated on a very healthy site, with four acres of land attached. The buildings were not erected for the purposes of the Charity, and in some respects are unsuitable, although the main building is a good substantial brick structure. The dormitory for the boys is a

²⁴ Province of Ontario Statutes, 1874 (First Session), C.33, quoted on page 83 in *Social Welfare in Ontario 1791-1893*, Richard B. SPLANE.

detached building, having the laundry underneath, and, for the number of boys found in residence, is altogether too limited in space. The same may be said of the dormitories for the girls in the main building, although they were kept in excellent order, and scrupulously clean and neat in appearance. With the exception of overcrowding in the dormitories, everything seemed to be done to make the inmates comfortable.

The education of the children is carried on in the House, and the whole affairs of the Asylum are conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

The classes of children admitted to the Asylum are orphans, half orphans, and neglected or abandoned children, some of whom only stay for short periods, and others until provision is made for them in respectable families.

At the time of my visit there were 64 children in the House, all of whom I saw; of this number, 42 were girls and 22 boys.

The number of inmates received into the Asylum during the year was 110 – 47 boys and 63 girl; of this number 39 were discharged during the year, leaving 71 in residence on the 30th September. All the inmates were of the Roman Catholic religion, and 107 were Canadians by birth, the remaining number (three) having been born in the United States. 60 of the inmates were received from the City of London, 8 from the County of Middlesex, 39 from other Counties of Ontario, and three from other countries.

The collective days' stay of inmates amounts to 28,026 days, entitling the Asylum to a grant of \$560.52 for next year.²⁵

We glean a good deal about that early group of Sisters and children from the account of the Inspector, but there is much that can be read between the lines.

At Mount Hope Orphanage, fully qualified Sister Teachers taught the same academic subjects as were taught in the Separate School. In addition, the girls learned knitting, sewing and other useful skills. In an Institution of this kind the household tasks and recreational duties were very numerous; caring for sick members, sewing, laundering, supervising dining rooms and playgrounds were shared activities. The women residents helped with some of these. The Sister Teachers from St. Peter's School did their part also when they arrived home after their day's teaching. In addition, these

²⁵ *Province of Ontario Statutes 1875-76*, "Inspector's Report, July 28, 1875."

Sisters visited the sick in St. Peter's Parish and the inmates of the Jail. The wide area from which the children came, 39 counties other than Middlesex, reflects the fact that Priests of the Diocese were sending from their parishes orphans and needy children to the Sisters' care. It is likely also that the reasons for the numbers of orphan children at the time had relation to immigration and the epidemics that so frequently claimed the lives of new arrivals. Cholera played havoc in 1854 and again in 1866 leaving sick and destitute immigrants from Europe in dire need. Of the children and aged who survived, some of them could well have been taken to Mount Hope Orphanage.

Besides this, Dr. Barnardo and Miss Rye, famous early "Social Workers," had devised plans by which they were able to bring large numbers of waifs from England and elsewhere to provide workers in both rural and city areas. These great numbers of children, not always well integrated into the society to which they came, frequently caused problems. These children must have found their way into orphanages. This cannot be documented in the case of admissions to Mount Hope Orphanage. We do know however, that in 1869 Miss Rye visited the City of London and was entertained by the Corporation in recognition of her work on behalf of the waifs of England,²⁶ whether any of her waifs were received in London is not recorded.

The practice of adoption of children from the orphanage was common. The eligible children were normally those who had lost both parents. There were not at first formal papers of adoption, but the "parents" looked upon the act of adoption as a sacred obligation. Another reason for placement of older children in homes was the request of would-be-parents for a girl to aid in domestic duties or a boy to help on the farm. The Parish Priest usually acted as consultant regarding the suitability of the home and the type of work to be expected. The frequent visits of the pastor served as an evaluation of the success of the placement. The Sisters also had an opportunity to observe the state of the child's integration into his new home and the relationships that existed. This they did when they made their "Collection Tour."

²⁶ *Illustrated London – City of London, Ontario, Canada. The Pioneer Period and the London of To-day*, Second Edition, Original, October 1900, Editor : Archie Bremner. Reprinted by the London Public Library Board to commemorate Canada's Centennial, 1967, p. 38.

The Inspector's Report of 1875 had emphasized the very overcrowded state of the orphans' quarters, particularly the dormitory areas. Such a situation endangered not only the comfort but also the safety of the children. Mother Ignatia determined that more adequate quarters must be provided for the increasing numbers of children and also for the aged. The Sisters' Community needed extended facilities for its activities as well as an adequate chapel.

Suitable plans were drawn, calling for expansion covering the requirements of the total family of Mount Hope – Sisters, orphans and aged. Though united in heart and mind, the individual life-style of each group had to be delicately considered and preserved. On June 26, 1876 Bishop Walsh blessed the ground and turned the first sod for the new building. This project Mother Ignatia undertook with faith. The Community, with the security of Bishop Walsh, borrowed as they built from Banks and private individuals at an interest rate as high as 8%. Within two years a functional \$40,000 addition was completed and officially opened on October 7, 1877. Among the guests present for the ceremony were Right Honourable Sir John A. McDonald, Honourable M. Fraser, Colonel Walker, Major Leyes, Sir John Carling, J. Blackburn, Editor of the *Free Press* and many others. All that remained was to pay the debt. Although there were no large donations, small regular amounts, along with receipts from picnics and bazaars helped to reduce the staggering debt. One very successful bazaar held in the City Hall netted \$3,000. The public nature of this event and its support from all classes of people and from all religious denominations showed that the Charism of Unity was having its effect upon London's citizens in 1880. Over two hundred people were at that time living at Mount Hope. From there also the first teachers named to St. Mary's Separate School began their school apostolate in 1874.

In spite of the regular daily routine required to provide for those residing at Mount Hope, the Sisters shared their facilities and services for diocesan activities. Corpus Christi processions, Priests' Retreats and Ordinations were held there from 1870 until Bishop Walsh's dream of a fitting Cathedral was realized in June, 1888.

These were joyful events and they were unifying; the Sisters shared in sorrowful incidents also. One of these was the Victoria Disaster of May 24, 1881 which spread a shadow of gloom over the city and saddened every home in London. The "Victoria," an Excursion steamboat, at 5 p.m. on that sad day left the dock at

Springbank on what proved to be its last trip. Overloaded, it had between 600-800 passengers aboard. As it neared Cove Bridge and the bend in the Thames River, the vessel careened, rolled over and crushed about one third, or one quarter of the passengers. The exact figures were never confirmed. To help console the grieving members of over two hundred stricken families, Mother Ignatia sent the Sisters in twos to visit them. They comforted Protestants, Catholics and Jews, and witnessed all barriers melting as compassion and sorrow united their hearts. All religious denominations mingled at Mass offered at St. Peter's for the victims.

St. Peter's Cathedral was the scene of an unusual Religious Reception on May 21, 1873 when Misses Mary Ann McGrath and Rosalie Dertinger were received into the Community. Bishop Walsh requested the holding of the Ceremony in that setting to show the beauty and joy of a life chosen freely in response to God's call. Mother Ignatia, aware that Religious Life was misunderstood by many people, agreed that the opportunity was ideal for the enlightenment of the citizens. The Bishop in his sermon clearly explained the faith, love and true freedom with which the Sisters sacrificed their lives in serving God's poor.²⁷

One of the ways of serving God's poor was "begging" for them. In those early days, when money and supplies were scarce, the Sisters appealed personally to individuals, storekeepers and farmers for assistance in supporting their work. The "Collection Tour" as it was more politely called, was initiated by Mother Ignatia and Mother deChantal. It took place annually in the fall or winter, a free time for farmers. The Sisters were often away for three months at a time. They stayed in the homes of kind people who helped them plan their itinerary, helped them to pack the provisions donated, and then accompanied them to the home of the next benefactor. A great sense of oneness flowed out of this combined effort. The Congregation's motto "CONGREGAVIT NOS IN UNUM CHRISTI AMOR" was being lived out.

²⁷ One hundred years later, May 1967, a Reception Ceremony was held at St. Peter's Cathedral, London. False notions were again abroad. This time, the emphasis on "Renewal" and "Holiness for all" were interpreted by some as the demise of Religious Life. Bishop G. Emmett Carter, in his Homily, clarified some of the half-truths being spoken and written. He said that if Religious Congregations did not already exist in the diocese he would be required to be a founder today.

MISSIONS

Once launched in London, the See City of the Diocese, it was to be expected that the Sisters of St. Joseph would be asked to establish houses in other parishes. Father Boubat, Pastor of St. Peter's Church, Goderich, made the first out-of-London request which the Congregation answered by sending four Sisters on November 4, 1873. The parishioners under the Pastor's direction had just finished the building of a Convent fully furnished, complete with a piano for the newly appointed Music Teacher. The Sisters of St. Joseph's Archives possess letters written by one of these first Sisters. They reveal the happy events of early Community Life in Goderich.

Goderich had many children wishing to register in the parish school. It was a frame two-storey house on the school grounds west of the Convent, the former residence of Father Schneider. The present Pastor had converted it into classrooms. Equipment and furniture were woefully lacking but eager teachers and receptive students made up for the lack of material props. Further accommodation very soon became imperative. The opening of a Select School would allow for the acceptance of more students and the inclusion of some of the non-Catholics who were asking for tuition. Before Christmas of the year of opening, Sister Ursula McGuire took on the task and found the necessary classroom space.

St. Thomas and Ingersoll claimed the Sisters of St. Joseph in the same year, 1879. In both cases the parishioners wished Sister teachers. In the first Separate School in St. Thomas, a succession of dedicated lay teachers had laid a solid foundation of instruction. Then Father William Flannery initiated steps towards erecting a new school and Convent in anticipation of securing Religious teachers. He decided to make an appeal to the citizens after the School Board's request for funds had been refused by the Town Council. In a house to house canvass, the Pastor personally collected from Protestants and Catholics \$1,000. The St. Thomas chronicles record: "\$500 more obtained from the Insurance Company by the accidental burning of the old school."²⁸

²⁸ Chronicles, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, London.

Father Flannery needed \$5,000 to meet the local builders construction quotation (\$2,600 for School and \$2,400 for Convent). Encouraged by the response of the people, Father Flannery, the parishioners and the School Board launched the project. It produced a very compact Convent-School building satisfactory for Community Life of the Sisters and the educational needs of their students. Besides this, the Sisters involved themselves in the various activities of Holy Angels' Parish wherever they could assist.

It was Father Boubat, transferred from Goderich to Ingersoll, who asked for and received the Sisters to teach in Sacred Heart School in his new Parish. The little parish Convent had a Community of four, two School teachers, a Music teacher and a Housekeeper.

The first Sister teachers laboured in Ingersoll for six years at which time a problem caused a temporary withdrawal of the Community from the school and parish. A difference of opinion arose over appointments to the Ingersoll school. The Board claimed the right to select the personnel and in effect to name the Sister to the School and class, and hence to the Community's Mission House or Convent. The Congregation seeing the individual first of all as a member of Community, held to its right to assess the suitability of the person's placement. In what might be termed a "clash of authority," the Board referred the matter to the Bishop and he replied that the Board should regard the Community aspect in the life of Religious Teachers.²⁹

Rather than further fragment the relationship of two parties in good faith, the Sisters, faithful to their Charism of Unity, decided it was wise to withdraw from Ingersoll in the summer of 1885.

Four years later upon earnest application for the return of the Sisters, the Pastor, Trustees and people welcomed the Sisters back to Ingersoll to assume charge of unheard of numbers in the classrooms.³⁰

²⁹ Letters of Bishop Walsh, Diocese of London Archives.

³⁰ Chronicles, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, London, Ontario.

CONCLUSION

Looking back over the first ten years of the History of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, we may ask how effective was their living out and application of their basic concept of Unity? What contribution have they made to the Diocese and consequently to the Church by the quality of Unity, Reconciling and Healing which constitute their main thrust?

We believe that although the ideal can never be entirely achieved, the first Sisters of St. Joseph brought their original inspiration to bear in their field of labour and did bring a unifying presence. They witnessed to Unity by their singleness of purpose in their Community Life lived totally for love of God and love of neighbour. They exhibited this desirable single-mindedness as they took the avenue of teaching to bring Unity into their relations with children whom they instructed, the teachers whom they assisted and the parents with whom they shared responsibility.

In the little world of orphans and aged they brought the Unity of a home life that had been suddenly disrupted by sad or tragic circumstances. They helped to heal the hearts and lives of individuals and of families by their ministrations to the afflicted. In the spirit of Christ's compassion they went out to all people regardless of class or creed and thus helped to level barriers that divide. It was an early step in Ecumenism. Diocesan Unity also benefited by the fact that the Sisters shared their facilities for significant occasions such as Priests' Retreats and Ordinations. This sharing was strengthening and unifying for all. Beyond facilities however, the invitation of Sisters to share in parish life by establishing Convents in the towns to which they were called, created a true spirit of Unity. It was always a joint effort although we have recorded at least one incident of misunderstanding resulting from the human condition. Even that, however, is the soil for a triumph of the Unity which was authentic. Principle must stand but Unity and principle are compatible.