

## **Making a Path by Walking: Loretto Pioneers Facing the Challenges of Catholic Education on the North American Frontier**

Marion NORMAN

The five Loretto pioneers who, after an exhausting six weeks' journey from Dublin via Liverpool and New York, arrived on the Toronto waterfront on the early afternoon of 16 September 1847<sup>1</sup> had little idea of what lay in store for them in this first mission of their community to North America. They came without clear directives or general master plan. They were forced in consequence, as suggested by my title, to "make a path by walking," adapting with resourcefulness and courage to new problems as they arose. They were confronted with the first of these when, upon landing, they found no one to meet them and, at the suggestion of the friendly black cab-driver who, perceiving their hesitation and inexperience belied by their rather old-fashioned secular clothing, asked to be driven to the residence of the Catholic bishop, Michael Power.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately the circumstances behind this seeming negligence became apparent. The two young priests who shared the bishop's living quarters and ministry were still convalescing after a critical illness. The bishop, himself, exhausted from his tireless caring for the sick and dying in the fever sheds, had already contracted the fatal typhus that, within two weeks, would claim his own life. The Sisters, faced with this dilemma, were forced immediately to make whatever adaptations the situation demanded. Embarrassed by his failure in hospitality and fearful lest the newcomers contract the infection, the good bishop at once arranged for temporary accommodation for them through the generosity

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<sup>1</sup> *IBVM Chronicle* by M. Teresa Dease, in Loretto Abbey Archives.

<sup>2</sup> *Jubilee Volume: Archdiocese of Toronto 1842-1892*, J.R. Teefy, ed., (Toronto: Geo. T. Dixon, c.1892), 131-2, 207-17.

of a leading Catholic benefactor, Mr. Samuel Goodenough Lynn.<sup>3</sup> While the latter's wife and daughters made room for them in their home, the gentleman and his sons found rooms in a nearby hotel. By the end of the week the Sisters were settled into a rented house at 45 Duke Street (now Adelaide East) for which furnishings at a total cost of £42 were hastily procured by the still convalescent young Vicar General, Father John Hay.<sup>4</sup> Although the house was described as damp and dreary and (with a Canadian winter approaching) virtually without heat,<sup>5</sup> even if they had been able to afford fuel, they were ready to start teaching within a fortnight of their arrival.<sup>6</sup> Nine of the daughters of Toronto's leading Catholic families were enrolled in the boarding school while increasing numbers of day students soon registered in the Academy.<sup>7</sup>

Announcements appeared on September 29 in the city's two newspapers, *The Mirror* and *The British Colonist*, of the opening of a school "under the direction of the Ladies of Loretto." The curriculum would cover the material then considered appropriate for girls of the time: Reading, Elocution, Arithmetic, Languages – English, French, and Italian – as well as History, Geography, Music, Painting, and "every kind of useful and ornamental needlework." There would be accommodation for fifteen to twenty residents for an annual fee of £25.<sup>8</sup> Text books, paid for by the pupils, presented no problem for the newcomers. They were those with which the Sisters were already familiar from their use in the Irish National Schools and which were favoured by the Chief Superintendent of Education of Upper Canada, Egerton Ryerson.<sup>9</sup> The only additional subject matter prescribed were some Canadian poems, stories, and songs and some history and geographical facts to be gleaned from American texts.<sup>10</sup> No difficulty, seemingly, was encountered over their authorization to teach, despite the fact that Ryerson had made a special issue of the rigorous screening of teaching applicants by local trustees.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [Bride Costello], *Life and Letters of Rev. Mother Teresa Dease*, (Toronto: 1916), 46-8.

<sup>4</sup> Loretto Abbey Archives.

<sup>5</sup> *Chronicle*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen McGovern, *Something More Than Ordinary*, (Richmond Hill: I Team, 1989), 94.

<sup>8</sup> Margarita O'Connor, *ibvm*, "Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary," *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Report* (1944-1945), 69-82.

<sup>9</sup> J.G. Hodgins, ed., *Legislation and History of Separate Schools in Upper Canada 1841-1876*, (Toronto: 1897), 88-9.

<sup>10</sup> J.G. Hodgins, *Documents Illustrative of Education in Ontario*, (Toronto: 1910) 5 vols., 2:97.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 53, 97, 200.

This was aimed at stamping out republican ideas, spread allegedly by American teachers or by Canadian sympathizers with the recent rebellions led by William Lyon MacKenzie and Louis Joseph Papineau.<sup>12</sup> Ryerson, too, had inaugurated a scheme for general improvement in the quality of teaching by the founding, a year earlier, of his Provincial Normal School and Model School.<sup>13</sup>

Enough has been written about the early history of Canadian public education to require little further elucidation here. Wherever the number of taxpayers and children warranted, school boards had the right to establish their own free schools. Elected trustees were responsible for the hiring and payment of teachers.<sup>14</sup> The provincial government funded school buildings and furnishings (partially from revenues from Crown lands and the confiscated Jesuit estates). Despite Ryerson's heroic efforts, however, the sad fact remained that less than half the approximately 125,000 potential pupils attended school for even part of the year. An even smaller percentage of the children of Toronto's Catholic population of 3000 were in regular attendance at the four schools (two each for girls and boys) at the time of the Loretto Sisters' arrival.<sup>15</sup> Chronic financial problems left the existing schools inadequately staffed, furnished, and maintained, let alone prepared to cope with the continuing influx of immigrants, mainly from Ireland, but also from revolution-torn Germany. Despite the £5 tax per annum levied on each Catholic household since the time of Bishop Macdonnell, operating costs could barely be met. Because their salaries continued to be well below the cost of living especially for women, lay teachers in Catholic schools had usually stayed less than a year.<sup>16</sup> In addition, because most of the parents were recent

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<sup>12</sup> Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton, eds., *Egerton Ryerson and His Times*, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1978), 107-28.

<sup>13</sup> Hodgins, *Historical Documents*, 1:23, 33-7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:193.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:203-04.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:98, 193. *City of Toronto Directories 1846-1851*, ed., Brown; E. Kelly, *Story of St. Paul's Parish*, (Toronto: 1922), 79-82. Women's salaries in public schools at that time were between £20 and £40 per annum; males' £30- £60. In Catholic schools, as acknowledged by Ryerson, they were considerably lower. The first known Toronto Catholic teachers were a Mr. Harvey, who taught boys only in his Nelson St. home; Miss Robertson, who had to give up teaching girls because her salary was below the cost of living; Messers. P.B. McLaughlin, Taafe, and O'Halloran, who left for much the same reason, and a Mr. and Mrs. Denis Heffernan who taught both boys and girls in their home on Richmond St. (probably the frame building erected at his own expense by the convert Sir John Elmsley, who also gave the land for St. Michael's College). The Heffernan School building, which is of special interest, appeared in the John Ross Robertson Collection *Landmarks of*

immigrants, too poor to own property or pay local school taxes, the tax base for Catholic schools continued to lag considerably below that of their non-denominational counterparts.

The primary task envisioned by Bishop Power, when inviting the Loretto Sisters to Toronto, was evidently that of providing young Catholic girls with the best religious, intellectual, and cultural training of which they were capable.<sup>17</sup> They would thereby be equipped to assume their proper place among their social peers in the predominantly Protestant Establishment. These future wives and mothers would also be adequately prepared to pass on their faith heritage to the next generation. As contemplatives in action, these members of the Irish Branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary were committed, like the Jesuits, whose Rule their Foundress Mary Ward (1585-1645) had adapted for women, to preparing youth for responsible service to the Church and society.<sup>18</sup> For over two hundred years their schools, in England, on the Continent, and more recently in Ireland, India, Gibraltar, and Mauritius, had built up an enviable record for excellence. Their general plan was to provide that kind of broad cultural development similar to that advertised in those two Toronto newspapers, and widely accepted as the most appropriate for girls of that time. It was upon their well-earned previous reputation as well as that almost immediately recognized upon their coming to Canada, that high hopes for this new educational apostolate rested. Following their first “public exhibition” (graduation exercises), it was remarked that “the devoted Ladies of Loretto ... are already labouring with the utmost assiduity to form the minds and hearts of the female children of the city.”<sup>19</sup> Sometime later, Bishop Charbonnel was stopped on the street by a Protestant gentleman, a Professor of Toronto’s Normal School, who observed that the Loretto examinations from which he was just returning had been ‘the best he had ever witnessed.’<sup>20</sup>

No one coming from Ireland in those times, however personally preserved from the worst effects of the Famine, could have failed to have their hearts wrenched by the fate of their fellow countrymen. Those who managed to escape hunger and cholera by emigrating to Canada now faced the even more disheartening struggle to establish a foothold in the

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*Toronto*, (Toronto: 1898), 2:124-9.

<sup>17</sup> Letter of Teresa Dease, 6 June 1850 in Loretto Abbey Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Ward’s “Memorial to Pope Paul V,” 1616, cited by Catherine Elizabeth Chambers, *Life of Mary Ward*, (London: 1882, 1885), 2 vols., 1:375.

<sup>19</sup> *Jubilee Volume*, ch. IV: “Life and Times of Bishop Power,” 132, 207-21.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of Teresa Dease, 1 August 1859; *Chronicle*, Loretto Abbey Archives; McGovern, 100.

indifferent if not hostile new environment.<sup>21</sup> The sight in particular of the hundreds of destitute homeless children who swarmed Toronto's muddy streets and waterfront was sufficient to disturb even those most opposed to their presence.<sup>22</sup> To the recently arrived Irish Sisters their plight presented a challenge to which they felt an immediate need to respond, with whatever means were available, despite their insufficient numbers and inadequate resources. Inspired by their English Foundress, whose gravestone immortalized her preference for the marginalized,<sup>23</sup> and her example of rescuing the child prostitutes of Rome and Naples by providing them with literacy skills and trades by which to earn an honest living, these Loretto educators addressed themselves to combatting the illiteracy, idleness and vagrancy of Toronto's street children. Having mastered the rudiments, it was hoped they would be enabled to support themselves and, if necessary, their families.

As a consequence of this perceived need of making education available to all Catholic children of the province, the Canadian Loretto community became involved very early in this urgently needed new apostolate. The honour of being the first religious to teach (early in 1848) in what became the vast Separate School system of Ontario, belongs to Sister Gertrude Fleming.<sup>24</sup> The twenty-four year old daughter of a Dublin physician, she was assigned to this challenging work by her Superior, Ignatia Hutchinson, either because she was perceived to be the sturdiest of the original group or, possibly, had some previous teaching experience. Within a few weeks of their arrival she began instructing girls only, in a small overcrowded building near St. Paul's Church in Power Street, Toronto's oldest Parish.<sup>25</sup> For most of her pupils this proved to be their first and in many cases their only experience of the inside of a classroom.

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<sup>21</sup> Donald MacKay, *Flight from Famine; the Coming of the Irish to Canada*, (Toronto: McClelland Stewart, 1992), 310 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Robert. O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds, *The Untold Story: Irish Catholics in Canada*, (Toronto: Celtic Arts, 1976), 338-9; MacKay, *Flight from Famine*, ch. VI; John S. Moir, *Church and Society*, (Toronto), 26-9; cartoon by Bengough from *Globe*, 1896.

<sup>23</sup> "To love the poore, persevere in the same, live, die and rise with them was all the ayme of Mary Ward," cited by Chambers, 2:504. This preferential option for the poor had also been maintained by the Irish IBVM. See also: Desmond Forristal, *The First Loretto Sisters*, (Dublin: 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Mary Fleming (Sister Gertrude) was born in Dublin in 1821, entered at Rathfarnham 1 February 1845, was professed 5 April 1847, left for Toronto 4 August 1847 and died there 25 December 1850. (Archives, Loretto Abbey, Rathfarnham; [Costello], 49-50).

<sup>25</sup> Kelly.

As with most new ventures, the work constantly required the making of *ad hoc* decisions as to ways and means on the part of Sister Gertrude and her community, without the benefit of either their own previous experience or that of their deceased bishop whose successor did not arrive for several months.<sup>26</sup> According to Victorian social conventions, the sight of women, let alone religious, walking unattended on public streets, especially those like Toronto's notorious for drunkenness, rowdiness, and violence, was virtually unheard of.<sup>27</sup> But in the opinion of Sister Gertrude and her Superior, the needs of the children took precedence over propriety in such cases. The same sensible attitude prevailed whenever local conditions "quite different from those at home" required immediate decisions on points for which appeals for advice from their Irish Chief Superior were either misunderstood or ignored.<sup>28</sup> Such situations included matters like teaching boys as well as girls in elementary school classes<sup>29</sup> or when the Sisters and the children's choirs they directed for parish liturgical services were more exposed to public view and had to return later to the Convent than was deemed appropriate. For such practical adaptations, the only apparent measuring rod was that of fidelity to "the Spirit of the Institute" rather than the letter of the law.<sup>30</sup>

It seems that Ryerson had secretly hoped that, by their being consistently deprived of adequate financial support, the Separate Schools of the Province would eventually die of attrition.<sup>31</sup> Writing several years later, he even claimed that Bishop Power had favoured as the only viable alternative, the enrolment of *all* children in the non-denominational

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<sup>26</sup> Armand François Comte de Charbonnel (born 1802) came to Montreal 1839, was consecrated Bishop of Toronto 26 May 1850 by Pius IX and arrived in his diocese (which then included the present dioceses of London, Hamilton, and Sault Ste. Marie), 27 September 1850. (Compare: *The Mirror*, Toronto, 27 September 1850).

<sup>27</sup> Susan Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schools and Scholars in Nineteenth Century Ontario*, Ontario Historical Studies Series, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 193, 281-2; O'Driscoll, 338-9.

<sup>28</sup> Dease Letters, 17 March 1851, 20 April 1851, 27 March 1852, 5 February 1853, 23 February 1854, 11 October 1854, and 11 July 1884, in Loretto Abbey Archives.

<sup>29</sup> Dease Letters, 11 July 1884.

<sup>30</sup> Dease Letters, 17 March 1851, 27 March 1852, 5 February 1853, 11 October 1854, 11 July 1884; McGovern, 95-6.

<sup>31</sup> Hodgins, *Documents Illustrative*, 2:124, 193; *Historical Educational Papers*, 5:38.

“public” schools.<sup>32</sup> Such a misinterpretation of Bishop Power’s attitude seems quite unwarranted in view of other evidence. Despite his own poverty and the heavy debts incurred from building the new cathedral, he had shown his priority for education by travelling at once, after his consecration, to Ireland and Europe. There he begged for both funds and volunteers from the Loretto, Jesuit, and Christian Brothers’ congregations to staff his schools, Seminary and a college.<sup>33</sup> The fact that the schools did survive was due largely to the heroism and “contributed services” of these religious teachers.<sup>34</sup> As for the parents concerned, largely the “helpless and ghettoized Irish,” so despised by the Protestant majority in this “Belfast of the North,” they continued to send their children to be taught in the Catholic schools which they helped to support with the few pennies they could spare beyond their immediate needs.<sup>35</sup>

The most immediate challenge to be faced at the outset by the early volunteers to this parochial school apostolate was the unexpected cold of the Canadian winter. To a Dubliner like Sister Gertrude, the unpaved, muddy, and often ice-covered streets proved particularly trying. Frequently that first winter her own were the first footprints to break a pathway through the snowdrifts. Her shoulders were protected only by the flimsy traditional Irish shawl, totally inadequate in such a climate. She had to carry under her arm the kindling wood required to heat the ill-ventilated, under-equipped classroom. Once there, she taught from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in wet footwear and sodden ankle-length skirt. Three times, that first winter, she had her feet frozen and began to show evidence of having contracted tuberculosis of the bone.<sup>36</sup>

As the pain continued and at length became almost unbearable, the indomitable Gertrude continued her daily journeys<sup>37</sup> to and from St. Paul’s school. These walks became even longer after the disastrous 1849 fire, which destroyed most of Toronto’s commercial district, when the boarding school moved to Simcoe Street south of King (now the parking lot behind Roy Thompson Hall). Meanwhile, Sister Gertrude was asked

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<sup>32</sup> *Canadian Register*, 9 June 1951 (Kingston): “Dr. Ryerson misjudged Catholic attitudes and hoped Separate Schools would be starved out.” Based on Historical Appendix of Minority Report of Royal Commission on Education in Ontario.

<sup>33</sup> *Jubilee Volume*, 130-2.

<sup>34</sup> Historical Appendix to Minority Report; Pastoral letter of Bishop Charbonnel, 19 February 1850: “We will be able to increase the number of our Catholic schools as it is much needed. When shall we see the Venerable Ladies of Loretto ... embrace all the City of Toronto and other important places in the diocese?” Both cited in *Canadian Register*, 14 April 1951 and in *Jubilee Volume*, 158, 207, 212.

<sup>35</sup> Howard Adams, *Education of Canadians*, (Montreal: Harvest, 1968), 79-90.

<sup>36</sup> *Chronicle*; [Costello], 52-3.

<sup>37</sup> McGovern, 100-01

to take charge of a new school, St. Francis Xavier's, on Church Street close to the unfinished St. Michael's Cathedral. There she was joined by a second Loretto Sister, the twenty-year old Sister Joachim Murray, who had arrived from Ireland on 16 June 1849 and was destined for a distinguished teaching career in the Institute.<sup>38</sup> Soon afterwards, upon the appearance of a suspicious lump on the knee, Sister Gertrude was advised to undergo surgery. When an amputation was performed (on the kitchen table with a blunt instrument and no anaesthetic), Sister Gertrude received an artificial limb donated at the expense of the community's first benefactor, Mr. Lynn. For a short time this indomitable woman resumed her work of teaching until gangrene set in and further surgery was ordered. After this, she had to be content with tutoring in the Academy and with helping out with household tasks. Finally, while still a few months short of her thirtieth birthday, she died on Christmas day, 1850.<sup>39</sup>

When by early spring 1851, three of the original five pioneers had died and a fourth, Valentina Hutchinson, on her sister's death and at the bishop's request, had been obliged to return to Rathfarnham,<sup>40</sup> it might have well have been expected that this arduous Separate School apostolate would have been abandoned in favour of the less demanding teaching, either in the Academy or back in Ireland, where plenty of worth-while work still remained to be done. Such alternatives, however, would not even have occurred to their young Superior, Sister Teresa Dease and to the other survivors who had witnessed Sister Gertrude's heroic sacrifices. The very fact that they themselves had been spared the worst excesses experienced by their fellow countrymen made them more anxious to do whatever they could to help the children especially to survive in an environment too often indifferent, if not actively hostile, to their plight.

Fortunately, new recruits had begun to arrive to join in this much needed and worthwhile apostolate. The first to enter in Toronto, on 8 May 1849, had been Sister Joseph MacNamara, already a trained teacher, who was at once assigned to teach in another parish school.<sup>41</sup> She was followed by Sister Ignatia Lynn, the first Canadian-born postulant and eldest daughter of Loretto's first Toronto hosts. After finishing secondary

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<sup>38</sup> Letters of Teresa Dease, 21 March 1852, 23 February 1854, 11 October 1854, 9 June 1881; *Chronicle*; [Costello], 67-8, 70-71.

<sup>39</sup> [Costello], 52-3.

<sup>40</sup> *Chronicle*; McGovern 115-16. Apparently Sister Valentina returned to Canada unexpectedly on her own, 15 September 1851. She was again sent back to Rathfarnham where she did good work in the Institute.

<sup>41</sup> [Costello], 51; McGovern, 98.

school she had entered on 27 May 1851, just before her fifteenth birthday.<sup>42</sup> Next to join the Separate School apostolate were Sisters Teresa Corrigan and Gonzaga Donovan, followed by Sister Magdalen Shea, who died after only a few months and, in 1853, Sisters Stanislaus Hennigan, Ambrose, and Francis de Sales.<sup>43</sup> Within ten years thirty-four novices had entered and by this time the Sisters were teaching in Separate Schools in other parishes near the Simcoe Street Convent. These were located above the old St. Patrick's Market and on Bathurst Street, close to St. Mary's Church and near the western city limits. Enrolments in each school rose rapidly from forty to fifty and even ninety.<sup>44</sup>

The struggle to carry on this demanding apostolate exacted a heavy toll, however, in human lives. The cumulative effect of poverty, malnutrition, chronic fatigue from overwork, together with the unhealthy environmental conditions of damp, draughty, under-heated, overcrowded, and ill-ventilated living space and unsanitary ill-equipped classrooms, would have been sufficient to undermine the most robust constitutions. Added to this was the severity of the climate to which Irish-born Sisters were especially vulnerable. As if this were not enough to discourage all but the most heroic, there was the fact that, after teaching the rudiments to unruly urchins for six hours daily, these young teachers on their return home were required to fulfil their spiritual obligations as well as to help with the laundry, cleaning, and other chores connected with the growing boarding school.<sup>45</sup>

Further, these same teachers were expected to take charge of the parish choirs and sacristies and the preparation for the sacraments of Eucharist, Penance, and Confirmation. Little wonder that Mother Teresa Dease reported to her Irish Chief Superior that the Sisters were expected to work so "incessantly" that they had little time either for prayer or much needed rest.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the fact that their high-spirited young Canadian charges (particularly the coeducational students they were more and more frequently called upon to teach) were "less manageable" than their Irish counterparts.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, they were constantly being asked to supply teachers for parochial schools in other dioceses. Schools were rapidly opened in Brantford, London, Hamilton, Guelph, Niagara Falls, Stratford, Lindsay, and Belleville, and even in the United

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<sup>42</sup> *Chronicle*; McGovern 101.

<sup>43</sup> *Chronicle*.

<sup>44</sup> Letters of Teresa Dease, 6 June 1850; 5 February 1853.

<sup>45</sup> [Costello], 69; *Chronicle*; Letter of Teresa Dease.

<sup>46</sup> Letter of Teresa Dease, 27 March 1852; *Chronicle*, 121-3.

<sup>47</sup> Letters of Teresa Dease, 27 March 1852, 11 July 1884.

States – in Joliet and Chicago. As many again had to be refused from lack of members.<sup>48</sup>

While these first generous and seemingly indefatigable Separate School teachers were prepared to “soldier on” uncomplainingly, their plight did not go unnoticed. No sooner had Bishop Charbonnel<sup>49</sup> been installed on 27 September 1850 in his Toronto See than he dispatched, unknown to the Sisters, a letter to Archbishop Murray of Dublin, who had made the original arrangements in 1847 for sending the Loretto mission to Canada. In it he expressed sincere pastoral concern for the only religious yet to be located in his diocese and whose numbers at that time had been reduced to eight:

I come to interest Your Grace on behalf of the Ladies of Loretto whom I have the happiness of having in Toronto. Your Lordship is aware that the zealous Bishop Power, their founder in this episcopal city, died with the ship fever a few days after their arrival. Since, these good ladies have suffered more than I can say. Deprived of a bishop, of a house and of many other things during three years, I am amazed at their having got through the numberless difficulties they met with. It is for me the best proof of their pleasing God and the motive of my devotedness to them. As soon as I arrived, six weeks ago, my first alms, my second Mass were for them. I gave them for Director a distinguished Jesuit. There is a good spirit in the house, they are esteemed and

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<sup>48</sup> *Chronicle*; McGovern, 121, 129-31, 133, 139, 144-5. At the time of the Brantford foundation (April 1853) there were eight professed Sisters (Teresa, Berchmans, Purification, Joachim, Joseph, Ignatia, Ita, and Dolours) as well as eight novices, Gonzaga, Teresa, Stanislaus, and Magdalen, and four lay-sister novices). Later that year three more arrived from Ireland and within ten years thirty-four Canadians had entered, chiefly Loretto pupils. See *Chronicle*; Loretto Archives (“Dease”); McGovern, 121, 128-33, 139, 141-5. The decision to expand to new places and dioceses was made by the Superior, Sister Teresa Dease, in consultation with the Bishop of her home diocese and the diocese concerned.

<sup>49</sup> In 1847, Government records reported forty-one Separate Schools in Ontario – four in Toronto. In 1867, the Separate School Enrolment was 828 of whom 560 children were Catholic, 268 Protestant. By the end of the century there were eleven Loretto Sisters teaching in Toronto Separate Schools, the total Separate School enrolment at that time being about 450 pupils in thirteen schools.

In 1916 Sisters’ salaries were increased by \$50 per annum. By 1928, there were 11,668 children receiving instruction. By 1938 enrolment had reached 13,857 but no new schools were built till 1941. One teacher vividly remembers that her sister’s classroom “was in the Chapel of St. Mary’s Church. They (the Grade One pupils) sat on the kneelers and wrote on the benches.” Another woman teacher taught in a hallway for three years. In one school, the staff-room was a converted coal bin. Double desks sat three children and all the women teachers acknowledged using their own money to supplement the meagre school supplies. Pupils did not receive free text books as they did in Public Schools.

cherished by their pupils and all those who are acquainted with them; they have done and will do much good amongst the Catholics and Protestants . . . Still the members of the house are too few; the Reverend Mother Superior is very delicate; Sister Gertrude keeps her bed, one has died; in fact they are overwhelmed. . . .

Most Reverend Lord, I earnestly beg Your Grace the favour of obtaining from the Mother House of the Venerable Sisters whatever you can on their behalf. They are children of Ireland and a glory to their country; they were your special daughters before they became mine; they have suffered heroically; they are sinking under the hardships of their situation.<sup>50</sup>

No record of the Dublin Archbishop's response has survived but relief, in the form of other personnel, was fortunately on the way. Repeated requests to the Ontario Government from Bishop Charbonnel and his lay advisors for a more equitable distribution of tax funding for Catholic schools of the province were either ignored or flatly rejected.<sup>51</sup> Alternative ways were urgently needed to relieve the intolerable school situation, with its over-crowded classrooms and chronically underpaid, over-burdened, and insufficiently numerous teachers. In May 1851 the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who had been invited before Bishop Power's death, arrived in the city.<sup>52</sup> Originally they were intended to teach in what would later become St. Michael's College and until the end of the year were lodged in the Bishop's own residence. But when funding proved inadequate and enrolment did not fulfil expectations, it was decided they could be used more effectively in teaching two classes for boys in the old St. Patrick's Market on Queen Street. Two Loretto Sisters assumed responsibility for two parallel classes for girls under the same roof.<sup>53</sup>

In October of the same year (1851) the Bishop welcomed a second group of women religious, four Sisters of St. Joseph, whose congregation, founded in France, had made foundations in the United States in 1836, first in St. Louis, and then in Philadelphia. As they were under direct diocesan jurisdiction, the Bishop was responsible for providing them with both housing and maintenance. A convent on Nelson Street (later Jarvis) was prepared for their arrival. Later other Sisters were given accommodation in their orphanage and House of Providence in St. Paul's Parish. For the first year, until their American teaching certification had been

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<sup>50</sup> Manuscript copy in Archives of Archdiocese of Toronto.

<sup>51</sup> Letter of Bishop Charbonnel to Ryerson, Chief Superintendent of Education, 1852, cited in *Jubilee Volume*, 159-60; Historical Appendix of Minority Report, cited in *Canadian Register* for 9 June 1951, 4 August 1951.

<sup>52</sup> *Jubilee Volume*, 130, 152, 155; McGovern, 118-19.

<sup>53</sup> *Chronicle* and Miscellaneous Records in Loretto Abbey Archives.

accepted by the Upper Canadian Educational authorities, their pupils, too, were crowded somehow into the classrooms still being taught by Loretto Sisters at St. Paul's.<sup>54</sup>

On a visit to his native France the following year (1852), Bishop Charbonnel obtained further assistance for the educational needs of his diocese from the Congregation of St. Basil of Anonay. Four priests were charged with the task of opening the diocesan seminary next to St. Mary's Church at the foot of Bathurst at King, just north of the lake-shore. When funding again failed to materialise, the Basilian priests were asked to take over the secondary education for boys.<sup>55</sup> The building was offered for sale to the Loretto Sisters to accommodate their expanding boarding and day schools. From this new site, two members of their community went out daily to teach in the new parish school, which boasted over 90 pupils. Free classes were also provided to teach working and servant girls the basic literacy skills needed for employment.<sup>56</sup>

Two further concerns regarding educational policy claimed the attention of Loretto teachers and their Superiors during this time. The first was the matter of teacher training, and the second was the subject matter required to be taught in the classrooms. The training and supervision of these young teachers had always been a top priority for Mother Teresa Dease. As most of them had been educated in Loretto schools in Ireland or in Canada, they were already familiar with the community's educational methods. While a few, like Sisters Joseph MacNamara and Aloysius McLaughlin, had had professional training and experience before they entered, the rest were trained and supervised at first by the older religious. Mother Teresa Dease made a practice of visiting their classrooms regularly to advise the teachers and to encourage their pupils.<sup>57</sup> It was also the custom (maintained until the 1930s) for the experienced Separate School teachers to present demonstration lessons for the novices on Saturdays. Even though vocations increased, the number of aspirants, particularly those with teaching certification, could not keep pace with the demands for the Sisters' services. So, it became the practice to send the postulants, who still dressed in secular clothing, to the Toronto Normal School or for secondary school training to the Faculty of Education. Still later, some Sisters wearing full habit began to attend the training schools as well, although they were only

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<sup>54</sup> Letters of Teresa Dease, 27 March 1852, 5 February 1853; *Chronicle*; J.C. McKeown, *Life of Archbishop Lynch*, (Toronto, 1886), 186.

<sup>55</sup> *Jubilee Volume*, 119, 158, 161 (August, 1852 – four Basilians arrived under Farther Soulerain as Superior).

<sup>56</sup> *Chronicle* and Miscellaneous Records in Loretto Abbey Archives.

<sup>57</sup> [Costello], 73-4; *Chronicle*; unwritten verbal traditions.

allowed to practise-teach in the Model School or in two inner-city schools because of possible anti-Catholic opposition to their presence in public schools. Others, who had begun teaching in the private schools, were able to become certified and earn specialist training skills by attendance at a series of summer sessions.<sup>58</sup> When university degrees became a pre-requisite for teaching at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, the Sisters earned degrees at first extra-murally through Queen's University or the University of Toronto and, after 1912, once women were admitted to full-time attendance to the University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto, where qualified Loretto Sisters served as their professors.<sup>59</sup>

As to the question of classroom subject matter, that was largely determined by the regulations of the provincial Department of Education. In addition to the Chief Superintendent Egerton Ryerson's insistence on regular Bible reading, opening prayers, and moral instruction in all the publicly funded schools, the Separate School System provided daily periods of instruction in the truths of the Catholic faith. With respect to other areas of subject matter, the only indication of Mother Teresa Dease's views occurs in her comment in a letter to her Irish Superior where she commented that in the Canadian curriculum there was an overemphasis on Mathematics especially at the elementary level.<sup>60</sup>

In the final quarter of the nineteenth century Mother Teresa Dease and her community, along with other Catholic educators, were confronted with a further challenge. Parents of children attending Catholic schools were faced not only with paying the regular provincial taxes for elementary education but with providing fees to cover the total cost of the secondary level as well. They were understandably anxious that, in return for these sacrifices, their children should at least receive the full benefits enjoyed by their peers in the public system. Pressure began building up to demand preparation for both sexes to sit for the provincial matriculation examinations required for entrance to Normal School and Universities.<sup>61</sup> This would, of course, entail full government certification as well

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<sup>58</sup> Miscellaneous Records in Loretto Abbey Archives.

<sup>59</sup> O'Connor, 69-81.

<sup>60</sup> Letters of Teresa Dease, 10 February 1878, 10 February 1885 in Loretto Archives, Rathfarnham. The Sisters had been sent to Quebec by Bishop Charbonnel to consult with the cloistered Ursulines who had been teaching aboriginal as well as white children there since the early 17th century. These two groups of religious continued to keep in close contact and to share their educational expertise.

<sup>61</sup> Memorial Tribute, privately printed at death of Monsignor Michael Stafford, 12 November 1882, copy of which is preserved in Loretto Abbey Archives (Lindsay). The Separate School he built at Lindsay, accommodating 300 pupils cost \$5000, while the Convent and Academy, partially government funded, had cost another

as regular classroom inspection, in privately maintained schools as well as in the Separate Schools where this direct government supervision had been the common practice.

For the Loretto community this new challenge first presented itself in connection with their proposed new foundation in Lindsay. In 1874, Monsignor Michael Stafford, prominent internationally as a temperance advocate and highly respected in Ontario educational circles, had invited the Loretto Sisters to teach in his parish.<sup>62</sup> In anticipation of their arrival he had built and fully equipped, largely from his own resources, a convent, academy, and nearby Separate School. He insisted on one condition – that all the teachers be fully qualified according to provincial standards. Teresa Dease, herself, as revealed by her letters, appeared to have some personal reservations regarding “higher education,” on grounds of its “unfemininity” and possible threat to humility. She was also aware of some opposition from within and without the community.<sup>63</sup> But she followed her consistent policy of flexibility towards the changing conditions of the pioneer environment for the sake of improved educational results. Instead of blocking necessary progress she even encouraged pupils from other Loretto schools whose parents wanted them to matriculate to transfer to the Lindsay school. Her reward came in the growing number of these graduates who attended Normal School and subsequently either as laity or religious joined the ranks of the Separate School teaching staffs throughout the province.

Although it is evident that neither Ignatia Hutchinson, Teresa Dease, Gertrude Fleming, nor any of the other pioneer Loretto Sisters, so many of whom wore out their lives prematurely in the demanding Separate School apostolate,<sup>64</sup> came prepared with ready-made blueprints, their priorities were clearly evident to themselves and others. Guided unerringly by the principle laid down in their Rule: “Not merely to form the minds of their pupils by secular learning but to inspire them with lofty ideals and, above all, with a love of goodness,” they literally “made a path by walking.” Their genuine personal concern for each child’s welfare, especially the underprivileged, helped to establish for them an enviable reputation for what today would be called “holistic education.” In the process, they blazed a trail of which all subsequent teachers in the

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\$40,000. Compare: letter dated “Lindsay, 1868.” (Loretto Abbey Archives); [Costello], 171-6, 185.

<sup>62</sup> Miscellaneous Letter of Monsignor Stafford to Teresa Dease, 18 March 1879 in Loretto Abbey Archives.

<sup>63</sup> McGovern, 156-7, 165-7.

<sup>64</sup> See the Appendix for a list of schools served by Loretto Sisters.

Separate School system can well be proud and which they can, hopefully, emulate.

## Appendix

### Schools served by Loretto Sisters in their first half century in Canada:

- 1847 Sr. Gertrude Fleming (1821-1850) “Poor School” in St. Paul’s parish a few blocks from Duke St;
- 1847 Sr. Gertrude Fleming - St. Michael’s Parish;
- 1848 Sr. Gertrude Fleming & (after 1849) Sr. Joachim Murray (1829-1896) – St. Francis Xavier’s school;
- 1849 Sr. Joseph MacNamara – first Canadian postulant (1833-1881) – “day school” on Church Street;
- 1850 Sr. Teresa Corrigan and Sr. Gonzaga Donovan, “day school” on Church Street;
- 1853 “Poor school” in the neighbourhood of Loretto House, Simcoe St. – with ninety children;
- 1853 “Poor school” in St. Patrick’s Market, Queen Street W. – two Loretto Sisters (Stanislaus and Ambrose);
- 1853 “Poor School” classrooms in St. Joseph’s Convent next to Orphanage, near Jarvis St. (Letter of February 5, 1853);
- 1853 “Poor School” moved to St. Mary’s, Bathurst St. – sixty children (Letter October 11, 1854); Sr. Magdalen Shea taught there until her premature death;
- 1853ff: Foundations (with elementary Separate Schools) at:
  - 1853 Brantford; London;
  - 1856 Guelph;
  - 1857 Belleville separate school, 230 pupils;
  - 1861 Niagara Falls Academy (Separate School, 1870);
  - 1865 Hamilton (Loretto Academy);
  - 1874 Lindsay Separate School (for both boys and girls);
  - 1876 Belleville (second foundation); Separate Schools for boys and girls;
  - 1878 Stratford (Loretto Academy and Separate Schools)
  - 1880 Joliet (Illinois) – parish school for both boys and girls;
  - 1882 Toronto, Bond Street, St. Michael’s Separate School;
  - 1884 Stratford and Guelph -Separate Schools (teaching boys as well);
  - 1890 St. Helen’s School (Brockton, W. Toronto) for boys and girls;
  - 1890 St. John’s (later St. Martin’s) on Parliament St.; Our Lady of Lourdes;
  - 1892 Chicago (Englewood).
  - 1900 Holy Family, Parkdale (4 Loretto Sisters); St. Vincent’s (one sister);
  - 1900 St. Cecilia’s (2 Sisters);
  - 1906: St. Anthony’s (5 Sisters); St. David’s (2 Sisters); St. James (2 Sisters).