Tribute to the Catholic Women Religious Congregations

Legacy of Care, Courage & Compassion
Serving a group

Some religious congregations sought to meet the needs of specific ethnic groups. “Such was the case, for example, of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate, or SSMM, who work with the Ukrainian community, or the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonck and the Benedictine Sisters who have helped Manitoba’s Belgian and Polish immigrants,” says Carole Boily.

“Similarly, several congregations send their Sisters abroad to meet the needs of people in other countries,” she adds. “The missionary outreach of the women religious from Manitoba is practically global.”

The archivist goes on to say that “many Manitoba congregations were founded elsewhere, so they already had a connection with a foreign country or specific community.”

The power of prayer

Less present on the ground but equally important and supported by the community, some congregations of Catholic women religious such as the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood or the Carmelite Sisters fulfilled their mission through contemplation.

“The conventions of each congregation always set aside time for prayer and contemplation,” says Carole Boily. “Sometimes it is in addition to their mission work, while for others praying IS their mission.”

“People were very supportive of the contemplative communities. The Sisters received donations in exchange for specific prayers. They brought great comfort to the people through their prayers, as intermediaries to God,” Boily says.

Despite the dwindling numbers, their legacy lives on

Today, there are fewer and fewer women religious in Manitoba, and each congregation is rapidly shrinking due to the increasing average age of the sisters. However, there are still many women religious who are actively involved such as the Sisters of Charity, the SNJM, the SSMM and the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus while others volunteer, support vulnerable communities and sit on boards of directors.

“We women today have many more career options than they did in the last century, when they could primarily choose to be mothers, teachers, nurses or women religious,” says Carole Boily. “A hundred years ago, a Sister had a higher level of education and a more diverse career than other women.”

Nevertheless, the archivist does not see Manitoba’s community of women religious disappearing altogether. “The future of these religious orders could be abroad,” she says, or those from abroad are immigrating here. “The congregations working overseas as missionaries have often been the most successful in recruiting new Sisters.”

“Just as we are seeing more African priests coming to work in Canada, the face of Manitoba’s women religious, like the clergy, is changing.”

But whatever the future has in store, the 50 or so congregations of women religious that have been in Manitoba since 1844 will leave their mark for a long time to come. Many of the English- and French-language institutions that they established, such as schools, hospitals and community centres, still exist today.

“Everyone who has known the Sisters talks about their human warmth will continue to be passed on in families. Fond memories. These women have always connected with people, from children to seniors, and those memories of human warmth will continue to be passed on in families for a long time. The Sisters’ role in Manitoba communities will not soon be forgotten,” concludes Carole Boily.

This is a listing of where the Catholic Women Religious have served in Manitoba, as well as the date of arrival of each congregation in Manitoba.

| Grey Nuns of Montréal | 1844 |
| Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary | 1874 |
| Sisters of the Savior | 1895 |
| Faithful Companions of Jesus | 1883 |
| Franciscan Missionaries of Marie | 1897 |
| Misericordia Sisters | 1898 |
| Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Hyacinthe | 1901 |
| School Sisters of Notre Dame | 1902 |
| Sisters of Providence | 1903 |
| Sisters of Holy Cross | 1904 |
| Missionary Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate | 1904 |
| Filles de la Croix de St-André | 1905 |
| Sisters of the Immaculate Conception | 1905 |
| Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate | 1905 |
| Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions | 1898 |
| Saurs Dominicas de l’Enfant Jésus | 1910 |
| Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd | 1911 |
| Carmelite Sisters | 1911 |
| Sisters of the Good Shepherd | 1911 |
| Little Sisters of the Holy Family | 1912 |
| Sisters of St. Benedict | 1903 |
| Saurs de la Charité (Saurs Grises) St. Hyacinthe | 1912 |
| Ursulines of Tildonck | 1914 |
| Congregation of Our Lady of Sion | 1914 |
| Sisters of the Presentation of Mary | 1918 |
| Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood | 1918 |
| Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto | 1919 |
| Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul | 1923 |
| Sisters of Service | 1924 |
| Petites Missionnaires de St. Joseph d’Otterburne | 1925 |
| Sisters of Charity of Halifax | 1929 |
| Felician Sisters of Buffalo | 1935 |
| Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus | 1935 |
| Saurs de Sainte-Marthe de Saint-Hyacinthe | 1935 |
| Sisters of Our Lady of the Cross | 1936 |
| Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception | 1938 |
| Servantes de Marie (ND du St Rosaire) | 1938 |
| Sisters of St. Joseph (Bourg) | 1941 |
| Groupe Monde et Esperance | 1960 |
| Missionary Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate | 1962 |
| Faithful Companions of Jesus | 1983 |
| Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa) | 1984 |
| Sisters of the Child Jesus | 1986 |
| Sisters of Mission Service | 1996 |
| Daughters of the Holy Child Jesus | 2006 |
| Daughters of Wisdom | 2005 |
| Missionary Apostles of Christ in the Eucharist | TBD |
| Sisters of Providence (Kingston) | TBD |
| Ursuline Sisters of Prelate | 1912 |
| Pallotine Sisters of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate | TBD |
When the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, the Grey Nuns, came to Manitoba in 1844, they were sent with a mission targeting education and youth," says Sr. Juliette Thévenot, coordinator of the Grey Nuns of Manitoba. "However, when they got here, they saw that there were healthcare needs, and they set about taking care of them."

With a sister nurse who was among the four first Sisters arriving from Montreal in 1844, the Grey Nuns of Manitoba lost no time in delivering healthcare, taking elderly people in need of care into their own residence, and visiting the sick.

In 1854, a new and bigger Provincial Grey Nuns House was built to meet the growing need, as the Sisters were now taking in the sick as well as the elderly.

Later, in 1871, the Grey Nuns founded a four-bed hospital – the first one in the Red River Settlement – separate from their convent. It would later become the St. Boniface Hospital. In 1931, they also created a St. Boniface sanatorium for people with tuberculosis.

"The arrival of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM) in 1874 was a great help to the Grey Nuns in their healthcare mission," says Sr. Juliette Thévenot. "The SNJM Sisters took over education, which allowed the Grey Nuns to focus more on healthcare and the elderly."

Likewise, the Misericordia Sisters who arrived in Winnipeg in 1898 were behind the establishment of the Misericordia General Hospital. They started out working with single young mothers and their babies and went on to expand their services to meet a range of needs in the community. Their establishment continued to grow and has become the present-day Misericordia Health Centre.

The Benedictine Sisters, who arrived in Manitoba in 1903, also had a healthcare mission," adds Sr. Juliette Thévenot. "They cared for the sick and the elderly in areas where there was no Grey Nuns presence," such as Arborg or the Winnipegosis-Mossey area.

The Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception worked with seniors in remote Manitoba communities like Dauphin, while the Grey Nuns were present in Ste. Rose-du-Lac, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Other religious congregations targeted the healthcare needs of specific communities, such as the Sisters Servants of Marie Immaculate, whose mission was to serve the Ukrainian Catholic community.

"The most important thing for those Sisters was to care for the poor, who were often sick and aging," says Sr. Juliette Thévenot. "The government did not take them into account. Without the congregations of women religious, Manitoba’s healthcare system would have developed much more slowly, at the expense of those who needed it most."

Lastly, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who came to Manitoba in 1911, soon established Marymound, an organization that continues to work with youth facing challenges in their lives, including mental health issues, addiction and psychological trauma.

Mental health has always been a key part of the work of the women religious congregations. For instance, in 1974, the Grey Nuns opened St. Amant for people with mental disabilities, and Sara Riel in 1978 for people with psychological issues.

"In the past, people with mental health concerns were placed and left in institutions. When they left, they were released into the community without anyone to take care of them," says Sr. Juliette Thévenot. "That’s why Sara Riel was created. It was vital to offer these people a rehabilitation period between leaving the hospital and re-entering the community."

Today, the congregations of women religious are much less active in healthcare due to their advanced age. In 2000, the Grey Nuns transferred the administration to the Catholic Health Corporation of Manitoba (CHCM), including their works and those of other women’s congregations, to laypeople.

However, there are still many Sisters in the various congregations who are involved in a healthcare mission and who “continue to visit the sick in hospitals and seniors in homes,” says Sr. Juliette Thévenot.

Some of the healthcare institutions created in Manitoba by congregations of women religious that are still active today include St. Boniface and Misericordia Hospitals and the Winnipeg and District Health Centre for the sick, St. Amant and Sara Riel for people with mental health issues, St. Joseph Residence and Actionmarguerite St. Boniface and St. Vital for seniors, and Marymound for youth, among several others.
A PASSION FOR HELPING PEOPLE

A member of the Sisters of the Saviour congregation, Sr. Denise Jubinville worked for more than a dozen years with the sick and seniors in homes.

“If you combine all of my experience, I worked for around 12 years in the healthcare field,” says Sr. Denise Jubinville of the Sisters of the Saviour congregation. “And I have no regrets! I really loved being able to help people.”

Sr. Denise Jubinville’s interest in healthcare developed due to circumstances. It was when she was doing the bookkeeping at the Notre Dame Hospital in Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes and helping patients fill out their admission papers in the 1950s that she began to take an interest in them and their health.

“I therefore asked my congregation for permission to take a nursing course,” she remembers. “I took that course at St. Boniface Hospital from 1956 to 1958. My congregation then suggested that I also take a one-year hospital administration course so that I could better serve the Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Hospital.”

Sr. Denise Jubinville ended up not returning to the Notre-Dame Hospital, but was sent to the Foyer Notre-Dame-du- Lac, where she worked from 1958 to 1967. “I managed that home with personal care home that had just opened and where she resides,” she says. “I also had the head nurse,” she says. “I was very busy, and I was the only one familiar with the medications! However, the seniors living in the home at that time were not as ill as today’s residents.”

Sr. Denise Jubinville rekindled her passion for healthcare in 1977, when her congregation sent her to Ottawa to take a pastoral course in caring for the sick.

“I went on to be the director and healthcare supervisor at the Foyer du Dr. Gendreau home in Ste. Rose-des-Lacs,” she continues. “If residents were sick, I had to make the decision about whether to send them to the hospital.”

The Sister of the Saviour also took her healthcare mission abroad, to Haiti, working with the very poor.

“I was in Haiti from 1982 to 1998,” she says. “I worked mostly as a nurse, first at the Hospital of the Missionary Sisters of Christ the King, and then at the Foyer de Charité Les Cayes charity home. It was a very poor community. We often dealt with seniors who had been picked up on the streets with no one to take care of them.”

“Haiti was the most powerful experience of my life,” says Sr. Jubinville. “Especially when the Foyer was flooded and we had to get the 120 or so senior residents out and take them to the highest hill. Then I had to wade through the water to get the trays of medicine for them!”

Those poor people who had nothing were so grateful for everything that we did for them, it was incredible. Never before have I seen such gratitude,” she says.

TREATING THE WHOLE PERSON, LIKE THE SISTERS

While St. Boniface Hospital’s capacity has grown more than one hundred-fold since its creation in 1871, it has remained true to the original mission and vision of the Grey Nuns.

The first hospital in Western Canada and Manitoba’s second-largest tertiary care hospital, St. Boniface Hospital (SBH), built by the Grey Nuns, has gone from four beds in 1871 to 554 beds and 78 bassinets today. In 2014-2015, the hospital admitted some 22,000 inpatients and had 122,000 outpatients from across the province.

While SBH has grown considerably over the decades, passing from the hands of the Grey Nuns to a lay administrator in 1969, it has always reflected the original mission and vision given to it by the nuns.

“Remembering where we come from is important to us, and we always remind new employees about this,” says Hélène Vrignon, Director, Corporate Affairs and Communications.

“Today, as in the days of the Grey Nuns, the patients are central to everything we do and in all the decisions we make,” she says. “They aren’t just a number; they are human beings who must be respected as a whole person, the way the Sisters did.”

“SBH also has a pastoral care team of some fifteen chaplains from various cultures, offering emotional, spiritual and physical care to each one of our patients,” says Ms. Vrignon. “Typically, hospitals only have one or two pastoral care workers, not 15! What’s more, we have an art gallery and a music at bedside program to soothe the whole being,” she adds. “We were the first hospital in Manitoba to put such a program in place, in 2001.”

The Lean program for improving patient care that SBH introduced in 2011 is another excellent illustration of this legacy. “Lean is aimed at treating the patient more effectively and quickly, with better care, and using our human and financial resources to the best of our ability; to be there when and where there is a need,” says Ms. Vrignon. Communication between staff, patients and families is therefore essential at all levels at SBH.

SBH, which has never moved from its original 1871 location, has built a solid reputation for its Mother Child Unit, with some 5,800 annual births, and for its cardiology expertise.

“We head up the cardiology program for all of Manitoba at SBH, and performed our first cardiac surgery here in 1959,” says the Corporate Affairs and Communications Director.

The bilingual hospital employs 3,800 staff and 400 physicians, and has around 400 volunteers.
Do you remember how excited you were about learning for Guatemala in 1974? And two years later how disappointed you were when an earthquake left you with rheumatoid arthritis that forced you to return to Toronto for five months of rest and treatment? One day a friend’s invitation over lunch brought light and hope into the darkness.

“How would you like to come to Tansania and live at Arche?” You wondered what you could do at Arche while you were still suffering and needed to heal. Can you still see the smile that Marie took out of her pocket, which read “COME AND SEE!”

You were welcomed by the people of Arche at Rasentea Court and you soon learned about the home’s history. Including back, I want to tell you how grateful I am for the reception, prayers, healing and joy I experienced at Arche. The people in that community taught me about reception, prayers, healing and joy I experienced at Arche. You wondered what you could do at Arche today…”

“Those words touched me deeply and are still with me today… I am keeping you… I am inviting you to give of being loved by my Saviour. Then one day, He spoke to me: ‘When I was 13, I used to go to visit Jesus in the convent and go where your community sends you, and then you work in an area and you will answer with faith. In teaching, you go where your life is leading you. In religious life, you are invited to respond not only to that first call from the Lord but to all the others along the way. In teaching, you go where your life is leading you.

If you feel the call to do something important from deep within, to choose your profession or vocation, and you believe you have the necessary abilities, take that step forward and continue along your path, even if those around you try to talk you out of it. Trust in yourself and trust in God who loves you and is always with you. You will, you can succeed and be happy.

There will be wonderful surprises at different stages in your life. There will also be disappointments. Leave those behind you and go where your life is leading you.

In religious life, you are invited to respond not only to that first call from the land but to all the others along the way. Some are easy, while others require greater submission, and you will answer with faith. In teaching, you go where your community sends you, and then you work in an area where you never thought you would serve. You face your daily crosses and they awaken your compassion.”

“When was I 15, I used to go to visit Jesus in the convent chapel. There, I healed in the peace, joy, and happiness of being loved by my Saviour. Then one day, He spoke to my heart: ‘Franco, I have choosened you… I am setting you aside… I am keeping you… I am inviting you to give yourself to me. Come with me so that together we can build my Father’s Kingdom. Come, my beloved, take the Good News to all those poor who are thirsting for love.’

Those words touched me deeply and are still with me today…”

“I entered the Good Shepherd to respond to the call of Jesus who chose to image himself as the Good Shepherd, and to live by the singleness of purpose: to care for the lost, wandering, and wounded people. During my sixty years of service with the Good Shepherd, I have served the congregation from coast to coast. I have received many blessings. Over three hundred children have been placed directly in units under my care. Today, many of these children, now grandmothers, keep in touch to share their memories and life experiences.”

“This is the story of a missionary who chose to image himself as the Good Shepherd, and to live by the singleness of purpose: to care for the lost, wandering, and wounded people. During my sixty years of service with the Good Shepherd, I have served the congregation from coast to coast. I have received many blessings. Over three hundred children have been placed directly in units under my care. Today, many of these children, now grandmothers, keep in touch to share their memories and life experiences.”

“It was a deep awakening to my own compassionate nature as worked at St. Joseph’s Vocational School with boys from the age of 6-11, having come to us from broken families and the juvenile court system. It was a challenge as religious to provide a home-like environment in a family atmosphere in which those boys could flourish. As I reflect on my experience with those boys, I realize it was more than a momentary blessing in my life. It gave me a focus which has prevailed throughout my life.”

“Tribute to the Catholic Women Religious Congregations

September 11, 2015

494 Taché Ave.

OPENING

11:00 a.m.

Musee de Saint-Boniface Museum

494 Tache Ave.

Winnipeg, MB

PRESS CONFERENCE

September 11, 2015

11:00 a.m.

Tribute to the Catholic Women Religious Congregations

Sisters’ Reflections exhibit September 11, 2015

5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Three years in Colombia – what joys and pain? The desire to help the less fortunate was fulfilled. Children, the elderly, students and the sick gave a great deal to you. Even today, when you think about the painful times, you can rejoice in them; for example, the nameless and on that 1991 Christmas Eve who you took to the hospital, and even the hospital didn’t want to take you. You asked them to give him oxygen as he didn’t suffer too much, and to call you when he was dying and that you could take over. Which they did. What was it? In the end, you left him, for the glory of God. The community was always present and everyone helped to the best of their abilities.”

“Tribute to the Catholic Women Religious Congregations

Sisters’ Reflections exhibit September 11, 2015

5:30 – 7:00 p.m. ”
Since 1844, some 15 orders of women religious have overseen the education of Manitoban boys and girls in English, Ukrainian, and especially French, in urban and more remote rural areas.

“The Grey Nuns were the first to arrive in Manitoba, so they created many schools,” says Normand Boisvert, a retired educator and author of the *Écoles à caractère francophone au Manitoba depuis 1818, un répertoire directory*. Even though the Grey Nuns were always there when schools needed to be established in Manitoba, it was the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM) who became education leaders after they arrived in 1874, allowing the Grey Nuns to focus more on healthcare.

“The SNJM were highly influential at the provincial level,” says Normand Boisvert. “They were very involved in founding schools. They showed exceptional leadership, especially in the cities and bigger communities.”

“They were pillars of French-language education in Manitoba, even creating ties with the University of Manitoba in collaboration with College Saint-Boniface, so that university courses could be offered to women as early as 1930!” he says. They went on to contribute significantly to the development of the French-immersion system in Manitoba in the 1970s.

While the Grey Nuns and SNJM Sisters had a huge impact on education, other religious congregations also made their own contributions and faced challenges to give young Manitobans improved access to education.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Ste. Hyacinthe went to open schools in the remotest and poorest communities with very few students,” says Normand Boisvert. “It was quite a challenge. They barely had enough to make ends meet financially.”

The sisters of the Saviour, the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, and the Daughters of the Cross of St. André are three other congregations who took French-language education in the rural communities under their wing. The first was in the Mountain region, the second south of Brandon, and the third in the St. Claude and St. Adolphe area. “The Daughters of the Cross even opened one of the first rural boarding convents,” says Boisvert.

Similarly, some congregations focused on the educational needs of specific communities, such as the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate, who served the Ukrainian Catholic community, and the Benedictine Sisters, who worked with Polish immigrants.

Lastly, the Oblate Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and of Mary Immaculate were also “very much ahead of their time in the education field,” says the educator. They opened the first kindergarten, Jardin Langevin, in 1909, to prepare boys for school at Collège.

“They also opened a home economics school in St. Boniface for women who were less interested in formal education, to prepare them to be good mothers and housewives. In the 1930s, seeking to meet the needs of people who were not inclined to go to school was ground-breaking!”

While the Grey Nuns worked mainly in healthcare, they also continued to play an important educational role in some communities such as St. Norbert and Ste. Anne.

The religious congregations also all played a critical role in ensuring the survival of the French, Ukrainian and Polish languages in Manitoba.

Today, even though the religious congregations have had to turn over most education to the governments and lay administrations due to a lack of new Sisters, “they all made an exceptional contribution in Manitoba by playing a key role in educating the population and in French-language retention,” says Normand Boisvert. “They went above and beyond, pouring everything they had into the cause.”
WHEN MISSION MEETS TALENT

Sr. Rachel Schaubroeck of the Daughters of the Cross congregation has been an educator for some 30 years.

When Sr. Rachel Schaubroeck was at the novitiate in the early 1950s, she was told she could become either a nurse or a teacher. She therefore began her 30-year teaching career in St. Malo in 1954-1955.

“M My first year, I had 45 Grade 2 and 3 students, including the current Provincial Superior of the Daughters of the Cross!” recalls Sr. Rachel Schaubroeck. However, she preferred teaching adolescents, and in 1956-1957 took over the Grade 8 class.

“I taught adolescents for the rest of my career, first in St. Malo, then in Saskatchewan, St. Adolphe, St. Norbert and Ste. Anne,” she says. Even though Sr. Rachel Schaubroeck taught all the subjects to her students, her favourite was unquestionably home economics, where she was a pioneer.

“I was sent to St. Norbert in 1968 as the director of the home economics department for the two Seine division schools in 1982 to work in the parish. However, she never really abandoned her passion and continues to teach in one way or another to this day.

“With our elective programs and compulsory French courses from Grades 7 to 9, the Daughter of the Cross was talked into becoming a Guide leader. This ‘new way of teaching adolescents about life’ also left her with fond memories. Sr. Rachel Schaubroeck wrapped up her teaching career in the schools in 1982 to work in the parish. However, she never really abandoned her passion and continues to teach in one way or another to this day.

“I have prepared parents for catechism, developed and delivered a program aimed at deepening personal faith, and started a catechism class in St. Adolphe when it stopped being taught in the schools. Teaching is truly my passion, and I have had a meaningful and interesting life. I don’t regret having chosen that mission over nursing at the novitiate,” she says.

The popularity of St. Mary’s Academy is due especially to its programs, which have something for everyone, including art, choral singing, science, pottery, sports, humanitarian and environmental studies, journalism, home economics, event planning, and public speaking.

“We have elective programs and compulsory courses such as religion, we are continuing the mission of the SNJM Sisters to nourish the whole person: spirit, mind and body,” says Connie Yunyk.

True to the Quebec roots of its founders, St. Mary’s Academy continues to offer compulsory French courses from Grades 7 to 9. After 110 years, St. Mary’s Academy is still a girls-only school. “In a non-mixed school, there is a strong sense of community; the students are really there to learn and think about their future,” says the president. “When they leave, they are well-prepared for the world, with a strong sense of how they can make a difference. We feel good about that. Our students often become real community and even world leaders.”

Connie Yunyk also says that St. Mary’s Academy continues to be open to students from all social backgrounds, as in the beginning, thanks to its scholarship program. In 2015-2016, some $277,000 in scholarships were distributed to 74 students.

“Past or present, our objectives have stayed the same,” says, Connie Yunyk. “We look to the future without forgetting our roots, just like the SNJM Sisters who left Quebec to settle here in the West and teach French.”

Sr. Rachel Schaubroeck
Daughter of the Cross

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“Social action aimed at serving the poor is at the heart of everything done by many religious congregations,” says archivist Carole Boily. “The Grey Nuns, who were the first to arrive, founded hospitals where they helped those who could not pay, and schools where they welcomed poor children. People counted on the Sisters of all of the congregations to provide them with medical care at home and even feed them.”

Helping the most vulnerable members of our community, including youth, seniors, the poor, offenders, and immigrants is an important part of the mission of many Catholic congregations of women religious.

For instance, in the 1970s, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM) did a great deal of work in prisons and social rehabilitation centres.

“We recognized that our ‘involvement in the educational mission of the Church aimed at contributing to the full development of human beings’ (SNJM const. # 11) had no direct presence in the prisons,” says Sr. Léonne Dumesnil, SNJM. From that time onward, we have always had a few members working in those institutions or in post-incarceration rehabilitation groups.”

The SNJM Sisters were also pioneers in helping young offenders, and in 1974 they opened Winnipeg’s Rossbrook House, a drop-in centre for street youth having trouble adapting to the mainstream education system. They also help refugees and newcomers from all ethnic backgrounds and cultures at their House of Peace and Micah House centres.

While there was no shortage of poor people in Canada, “my heart told me that there were poorer people in other parts of the world,” says SNJM Sr. Corinne Chartier. Humanitarian missions in less-advantaged countries are often encouraged by the religious congregations.

Sr. Corinne Chartier spent 27 years in Haiti, while Grey Nun Aurise Delaurier worked in Brazil and Colombia.

“I joined the Grey Nuns more because I wanted to be a missionary than a nun. However, in those days, it wasn’t easy to be a lay missionary,” says Sr. Aurise Delaurier. “I saw those people who hardly had anything while we had so much, and I wanted to work with and for them.”

“I started working in the Aboriginal and Inuit communities in northern Canada, teaching and leading retreats for young people,” she says. “But after those initial experiences, I wanted something more permanent and was sent to Brazil.” Sr. Aurise Delaurier spent 10 years in northwestern Brazil in the small and very poor villages of the interior, where she worked with the Grey Nuns of Brazil, teaching local communities, parishes and young candidates interested in entering an order. “I was shocked by the degree of selfishness and injustice,” she recalls. “The poor were forced off their land when that was all they had! But I was also struck by the boundless generosity and hospitality I found there. People who had nothing still welcomed us. They gave me so much, and I was deeply touched.”

She continued her mission in Colombia, in the impoverished suburb of Cúcuta, for eight years. “I liked Brazil and it was hard to leave. But there was a need in Colombia, so I accepted that new mission to serve people there.”

In Colombia, she did similar work to what she had done in Brazil, in addition to teaching English to Colombian seminarians.

“Colombia was a very difficult experience,” she says. “There was so much violence. So many people were assassinated, including the poorer street people that we visited and who came to our little school. There was an endless string of funerals and we couldn’t say anything, or our Colombian Sisters could have been killed, as well.”

“It taught me to love people as they are, to accept their differences. But I felt very cowardly about not being able to denounce anything. That’s why I finally came back to Canada. I was emotionally and psychologically burnt out.”

Today, Sr. Aurise Delaurier continues her mission with the needy and people from around the world, in Manitoba. Since 2013, she has been a volunteer at the Flavie Laurent Centre, where she helps many needy families, including several newcomers.

“Africa was a difficult experience,” she says. “After Colombia, I realized that missionary life is possible anywhere,” says Sr. Aurise Delaurier. “In Canada, there are people who don’t have the means to live in dignity and respect, and with whom we also need to show solidarity.”
CONNECTING WITH YOUTH

Sr. Janet Kozak, of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate, enjoys serving the community by working with local youth.

“With the congregation, we move around a lot, staying no more than four or five years in one place” says Sr. Janet Kozak. “That’s why it was important for me to make a connection with the people where we were, especially youth. It’s my passion and our future!”

From 2007 to 2012, in Winnipeg’s North End, Sr. Kozak organized or was involved in many activities and camps for the children, teens and young adults in her Ukrainian Catholic diocese.

“It creates energy in our youth,” she says. “When young people have a positive contact with a Sister, a Brother, or a priest, they are more likely to embrace religion as they are growing up. I hope they have seen me as a mentor, a spiritual yet human guide, and their friend. I hope I have made them feel loved, because I have a great deal of love and respect for them. I like learning to get to know them, and vice versa.”

Sr. Janet Kozak’s most fulfilling experiences with her young people were at summer camp, north of Roblin, on the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border. She continues to organize these camps every summer, even though she is no longer in Winnipeg.

“With the youngest participants, we have religion classes, liturgical services, and we do sports and activities on the lake,” says Sr. Janet Kozak. “I take part in all of their activities! But my favourites are the teen camps. Each year, we work with these youth on a project for the host community.”

These youth projects included sprucing up old cemeteries, “a highly spiritual experience, given that they adopted the deceased buried there and prayed for them,” making traditional Ukrainian perogies and offering them to the hungry, or renovating a bell tower and a church that no longer holds services but is still a place of pilgrimage for many Ukrainian Catholics.

“Those experiences give them a sense of belonging,” says Gilbert Vielfaure, Executive Director CFLC

Led by Sr. Janet Kozak, a group of youth renovated a small abandoned church, which is now a pilgrimage site.

FOLLOWING THE SISTERS FOOTSTEPS: THE FLAVIE LAURENT CENTRE

While the Flavie Laurent Centre was not created by the women religious themselves, it has followed directly in their footsteps.

The Flavie Laurent Centre in St. Boniface is now one of Winnipeg’s main non-food resources for the needy. From the dozen or so families served each day in 2005, the Centre now helps up to 100 people a day, and has more than 26,000 different clients.

“We have three trucks and make five to six daily deliveries,” says Gilbert Vielfaure, executive director of the Flavie Laurent Centre. “We pick up and donate furniture, appliances, clothing, luggage, lawnmowers…even cars! We accept pretty much any non-perishable item that can be used in or around the home.”

Created in the 1990s by a lay group from the St. Boniface Cathedral parish to provide the basic necessities to those in need, the Flavie Laurent Centre is directly inspired by the work of the Grey Nuns.

“Even our name is that of a Grey Nun, Sr. Flavie Laurent, who came from Montreal in 1850, when she was 18 years old,” says Gilbert Vielfaure. “For 75 years, she walked the streets of Winnipeg, helping the sick and the poor. She visited people to help them. Some 50 years after her death in the 1970s, the Grey Nuns picked up her social mission by starting a clothing depot, which they named Laurent Centre,” he continues. “While that depot closed in the 1980s, there is clearly a link with today’s Flavie Laurent Centre, which initially collected and distributed clothing before branching out.”

Gilbert Vielfaure can therefore say without hesitation that “we are directly linked to the Sisters’ legacy. Our roots are there.”
The Legacy project, a Comprehensive Tribute to the Women Religious Congregations of Manitoba:

A beautiful photo book published by Les Éditions des Plaines

“The photo book, Legacy of Care, Courage and Compassion: 200 years of history of the women religious congregations of Manitoba, traces the history of the 50 or so congregations of Catholic Sisters involved in Manitoba since the founding of the St. Boniface Mission in 1818. Contemporary photos complement archival photographs and the rich history presented by the authors.”

“They were healthcare, social services and education pioneers who helped tens of thousands of people in all aspects of community life. This beautiful book presents a brief history of each of these congregations who made a unique contribution to the development of Manitoba and Western Canada.”

Joanne Therrien, Owner, Les Éditions des Plaines

A commemorative monument in honour of the women religious congregations of Manitoba, to be unveiled in June 2016.

When creating this sculpture, I had to reach beyond simply illustrating the various areas of service provided by women religious.

A visual metaphor seemed to be the only way to gather into imagery the many contributions of these women, past and present. I chose to depict a symbolic weaving of the fabric of our society. Called into existence by Spirit, this work is their legacy and, continuing forward, a model to emulate.

Madeleine Vrignon

Documentary on the Catholic Sisters of Manitoba

This documentary is an intimate and reflective look into the lives of the Catholic Sisters of Manitoba. Humour, feminism, intelligence and compassion flow through their stories as they recount their life experiences.

Throughout their ground-breaking work in our society’s social fabric, their sisterhood, sense of social justice, and religious faith uphold them through various challenges with the world that tests even their own faith. These refreshing and articulate women reflect on the future of their work and their kind, in a time when women no longer seek out the nunnery to effect change in this contemporary world. This documentary is a testament to the deep and permanent imprint the Catholic Sisters of Manitoba have and continue to leave on our soil.

Danielle Sturk, director

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