



The Contribution of the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) to Catholic Education in Toronto

The Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) came to Toronto in the early 1950s and settled in the Weston area. They were already well established in several places in Alberta, where they arrived in 1885. They were soon seen to be travelling two by two to many schools in the west and north west of the city. Among the schools where they taught were St. John the Evangelist, St. Bernard, St. Philip Neri, Our Lady of Victory, St. Andrew, St. Benedict, All Saints.

In 1963, the FCJs were invited to open a high school. Madonna High School started with 75 girls but this number rapidly increased to more than 700 as the program and facility expanded. Madonna Catholic Secondary School was founded on the tenets of faith, charity and justice, ideals which all who inhabit Madonna are encouraged to mirror in their daily lives. The FCJ tradition has always been "to communicate and give witness to Gospel values and attitudes, to emphasize education in faith; a faith that sees and discerns reality from the point of view of the Gospel and confronts reality with the Gospel." For many years Sr. Philomena Fitzgerald FCJ guided the growth of Madonna with a quiet but effective leadership. Many teachers spent their whole teaching career at Madonna, giving witness to the strong sense of community that permeated the school. Before full funding in 1985, Sr. Philomena had to constantly worry about having sufficient funds to pay staff and provide the students with all they needed to excel in education. For most of this time there were three or four FCJs on staff, which helped with the finances. To this day Madonna is providing excellent education and foundation in faith to the young women who will be our future leaders.

In 1984, the Metropolitan Separate School Board (now the Toronto Catholic District School Board) asked the FCJs to establish a secondary school under the leadership of Sister Bonnie Moser, who was the last FCJ Principal at Madonna. St. Mary's Catholic Secondary School was founded to serve the increasing population of the Bloor - Dufferin Catholic community. St. Mary's occupied the J.J. McGrand Elementary School building, located in a quiet residential neighbourhood. In keeping with the FCJ's spirit and desire to educate the whole person, St. Mary's has been guided by the idea that "that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Thanks to the Faithful Companions of Jesus, St. Mary's carries on the tradition of nurturing the lives of all young people, bringing to them a distinctive Christian presence.

There is still an FCJ presence in Toronto: one sister volunteers in an elementary school; others are involved in spiritual direction, work with immigrants and refugees through the FCJ Refugee Centre (www.fcjrefugeecentre.org), and other pastoral activities.



www.fcjsisters.org

