



The Sisters of St. Joseph

In 1836, a small band of women, Sisters of St. Joseph, impelled by the love of God, stood on the dock in the harbour of Le Havre, France, waiting to take ship for an arduous journey to the uncertainty of life in the New World, leaving behind them all that they had known and loved, family, friends, community. Answering God's call, they wanted only to bring the Faith and God's love to the New world, starting in Carondelet, St. Louis.

Four of the Sisters traveled to Toronto in 1851 and started their ministries, caring for the Irish immigrants in a typhoid epidemic, gathering the young orphans together, teaching them and providing for the homeless and elders in what became the House of Providence, now Providence Health Centre. Some were to die at a young age because of their ministries.

From these early and humble beginnings, St. Michael's hospital was born and in later years, St. Joseph's and Mercy Hospitals. Their classrooms grew into St. Joseph's College School, the Commercial school, and two other high schools, St. Joseph's High School, Islington and Morrow Park High School and St. Joseph's College, University of Toronto in 1910. At one period in time, the sisters taught in sixty- five elementary schools in Toronto.

This was the institutional period for the Toronto Sisters and it reflects the significant impact that the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph had on the city of Toronto.

More recently, the Sisters have returned to many of the ministries of the first four sisters, working in social services, ministering to the poor, the homeless, the elderly, promoting the faith of young people, founding a Food Bank and a Furniture Bank.

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph spread across Ontario, and Canada, to Haiti Guatemala and Honduras, with schools, hospitals and spiritual ministrations in all these areas.

As we celebrate 160 years in Toronto, we reflect with admiration and wonder that it all happened because four young women had the courage to leave the comforts of home to face the unknown so others might know and love God.



Courtesy Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto Archives