

Historical Highlight #1 – Toronto Congregation 170th Anniversary



The Toronto Congregation recently celebrated the 170th anniversary of their arrival to Toronto, with events that embraced the congregation, staff and volunteers and the community at large. This celebration year was challenged with the many restrictions we all had to, and continue to, face with the ongoing COVID-

19 pandemic, but we survived! Our anniversary prayer, composed by Sister Mary Anne McCarthy, honours Mother Delphine and her young community of Sisters. Those early challenges are reflected in the challenges that are evident today. This prayer was said before every meeting and gathering:

Mother Delphine, during a time of plague in Toronto, you gave your life in caring for the sick and died 'a martyr to charity.'

With your guiding spirit, may we, as we live through the crisis of COVID-19 in our time, follow your example of prudence and wisdom and hold in prayer our suffering world.

With Jesus, may we be healers and show the compassionate face of God to our neighbor as we celebrate God's goodness to us for 170 years.

A special land acknowledgement was also composed by our Social Justice ministry and voiced at all our events.

COVID-19 was an integral part of the congregation's 170th anniversary celebrations as we grappled with pandemic restrictions and lockdowns, switching in-person events to Zoom platforms or in the case of an anticipated public lecture, no platform at all. It was a great disappointment to cancel a free public lecture by Maude Barlow on water justice at St. Michael's College. New plans are underway to organize this lecture later in 2022. Working with Salt + Light Media, we were grateful to be able to livestream the closing Eucharistic Celebration held at St. Paul's Basilica on Sunday, October 10th. Embracing technology and social media opportunities was the cornerstone for this anniversary.

In November 2020, Charism Alive! CSJ Mission and Values was the Sisters' first event and was directed specifically for staff and volunteers working with the Toronto congregation and Fontbonne Ministries. This presentation highlighted the Sisters' history and explained how their mission and legacy shape the work they, staff and volunteers, continue to do today. Beth Johnson, president and CEO of the Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario (CHSO) and former

Executive Director of Mission Integration, Volunteer and Visitor Services for Unity Health was our presenter.

In March 2021, a Novena of Creation was created by Sisters Betty Lou Knox, Janet Speth and Mary Mettler with nine consecutive days of daily reflections on the call to honour and care for creation. This online series concluded on the Feast of St. Joseph.

Early on, we had hoped to organize a walking tour of Toronto's St. Michael's Cemetery, a historical site that connects us to the first Sisters and the Congregation's early history in Toronto. Due to provincial lockdown restrictions, this idea pivoted into a short video presentation, Exploring Our Heritage & History at St. Michael's Cemetery, in which Sisters Penny McDonald and Kristine Fernandes, along with Sabrina Chiefari, offered a unique insight into our CSJ history. This video was shared with the community on Thursday, October 7, 2021 and continues to be available through the congregation's website.

In 2020, the Leadership Team invited scholars and authors to research topics as they relate to the Sisters of St. Joseph and chosen their field of expertise. An edited volume titled, 170 Years of Service. A collection of essays on the History and Mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph will soon be available for distribution in 2022.

The closing Eucharistic Celebration was held at St. Paul's Basilica on Sunday October 10 2021 with a small number of Sisters and guests in attendance and a much, much larger number praying and celebrating with us at home. Sister Georgette's welcome included poignant reflections on today's needs:

We pray with gratitude for all that we have accomplished, and we look towards with the future with hope that together with others and many of you here today, we can continue to meet the needs around us.

Needs such as: greater compassion towards those who are underhoused and those individuals suffering from systemic inequalities, gratitude for our beautiful planet which we should protect, clean drinking water as a shared resource and a human right, increased empathy for the suffering of others and the desire to protect "the dear neighbour".

There is a need for Truth and Reconciliation as we reach out to the original inhabitants of this land, hear their stories, respect them, and walk with them.

And there is a need for faith. We must have faith that God will provide us with the wisdom and creativity we need and willingness to roll up our sleeves and keep doing what God has called us to do for 170 years.