

**Norean Joan McColgan (Sister St. Edward)**  
**(May 12, 1920 – December 8, 2003)**

Sister Norean McColgan's deep Irish Catholic faith was nourished within her family home in Quyon Quebec, in the Pontiac County Ottawa Valley farmland. Her parents were Maude (Landon) and Edward Robert McColgan. Her sisters were Anne (Kennedy), Bessie, Geraldine (Joyce), Maudella (Charbonneau), Catherine (Dunlop), Margaret (Farand) and Terry (O'Brien). Her brothers were Edward, Arnold and Msgr. Charles.



At the age of 17 Norean entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie on September 8, 1938 taking the religious name Sister St. Edward. Her cousin Mary Cavanaugh, only a month older than Norean had invited her, having entered the previous year. Norean had begun her high school education at Notre Dame Convent in Ottawa and completed it as a postulant at St. Joseph's College North Bay. After attending North Bay Teachers' College in 1941 – 42, Sister St. Edward went on to teach Grade 1 at St. Albert's School in Sudbury from 1942 to 1945, at the same time, serving as Sacristan at St. Clements's Church.

Her leadership qualities were recognized early. In 1945, she was appointed Directress of Boarders (1945 – 1952) at St. Joseph's College while at the same time (1945 – 48) teaching Grade 1 at St. Rita's School. From 1952 – 1962, with special permission from Rome because she was below the required age of 35, she was appointed Directress of Novices. In this role, she is remembered for her understanding and compassion while she endeavoured to instill in the Sisters a solid spiritual foundation for apostolic religious life rooted in prayer.

In 1962, Vatican Council II (1962 – 1965) opened in Rome and Mother St. Bride (Watters), while still "in office" and following a short illness had died unexpectedly. Sister St. Edward, with no prior General Council experience and at the unusually young age of 42 was elected as the fifth General Superior of the congregation. She was the first General Superior not to be a "founding Sister", i.e. to have entered in Peterborough. Her General Councilors were all "veteran" council members and all older than she was. She was also one year short of her Silver Jubilee in the congregation, which at that time numbered 320 members. The Sisters were working in health care, education and music ministry in the cities of Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury and North Bay; in eight smaller towns along the railway line throughout Northern Ontario and in the Bahamas, the first of several foreign missions.

During Sister St. Edward's term of office, a second foreign mission was opened in Gualan, Guatemala and a Sister was sent, one each to the Democratic Republic of Congo, (Zaire at the time) and to Rampur, India. Additionally, two hospital based OHIP funded addiction treatment centers were opened in Thunder Bay and North Bay, a first in Ontario. Spiritual retreat centres were opened in Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie. Parish ministry was initiated in Cobalt; ministry on Indigenous Reserves was initiated in Sagamok and Heron Bay; a crisis center was opened in North Bay and a halfway house for released prisoners was opened in Thunder Bay. Convents for teaching Sisters were opened in four more small Northern Ontario communities.

By 1966, the congregation had grown to 410 members. At the same time, a small exodus began of women for whom the changes of Vatican II were not a good "fit" and who took up ministry elsewhere, often while retaining a long-lasting bond with the congregation. It was a time of great uncertainty and upheaval. During these years of renewal of religious life Sisters resumed their baptismal names.

In 1968, during Session I of our Seventh General Chapter, ("the Chapter of Change"), Sister Norean was re-elected to a second six-year term. At this Chapter, experiments were initiated that were evaluated during Session II of the Chapter in 1971. The revision of our Constitutions, which took several years, was also underway. For some Sisters the changes in horarium, ministry, dress, community life and common prayer and more, were too rapid; for other Sisters, the changes were too slow. Sister Norean's frequent community letters helped to calm the waters, guide the congregation forward and maintain unity among the Sisters as they negotiated the renewal of religious life mandated in "Perfectae Caritatis" proclaimed by Pope Paul in 1965.

During her time in leadership, Norean's wisdom and insight enabled her to respond to the challenges of Vatican II and the Church in a deeply courageous and serene manner. She was one of the founding Superior Generals of the Canadian Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1966. She appointed two Sisters to establish, organize and maintain the congregational archives. She encouraged the advanced secular and spiritual education and development of women religious. Sisters were sent for advanced studies, not only within Canada, but also to France, Italy, England, Belgium, and the USA.

Collaborating with Bishop Alexander Carter, she brought to the congregation and beyond – to the religious of Canada and internationally - the spirit of renewal for which the Council called. She was the confidant of many priests. At Bishop Carter's invitation, in 1965, Norean attended the final session of the council in Rome. After her last term in office, Bishop Carter presented Norean with the Diocesan Award of Merit for outstanding service and appointed her in 1974 as Vicar for Women religious, English Sector. She continued to serve the diocese and Congregation in various leadership positions. In 1978 Sister Norean was re-elected to leadership as Assistant General Superior. In 1982 – 1983 after pursuing the C.A.P.E program at Sudbury Memorial Hospital, she was from 1983 – 1992 a member of the Pastoral Care Department at Sudbury General Hospital.

Following a sabbatical, Sister Norean moved to the Motherhouse where she exercised a gentle ministry of presence. She accepted her final debilitating illness graciously and passed into Eternal Life on December 8, 2003, Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Sister Norean McColgan is remembered as one of the inspired architects and gifted spiritual leaders of our congregation during the renewal years of Vatican II.

Mae Kierans, CSJ, March 2023