

# Celebrating 160 Years of Service in Canada

## Backgrounder

Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto  
December 5, 2011

This year, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto celebrated 160 years of service in Canada. Four Sisters arrived in Toronto at the request of the local bishop, Bishop de Charbonnel . They came in 1851 to run an overcrowded orphanage amid the typhus- and cholera-stricken poor in the city.

Impelled by their mission of serving “those in need in simplicity and compassion,” the early Sisters began their ministry of healing with the founding of the House of Providence in 1857. By 1925 five new hospitals were established by the Sisters of St. Joseph, one in Comox, B.C., one in Winnipeg and three in Toronto, including St. Joseph’s Hospital in 1921. The Catholic Health Corporation of Ontario has sponsored the Toronto healthcare institutions since 1998.

Catholic education was another pressing need, so the Sisters established elementary and secondary schools in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Thanks to the efforts of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Loretto Sisters in 1911, two women’s colleges were established through St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto providing women with the opportunity to obtain a university education under Catholic auspices. St. Joseph’s College was established in 1911 and continued to operate until 2006.

The Sisters’ shared Ministerial Commitment, their focus on ministry, commits them: “to nurture community with our neighbour, especially with the homeless, the alienated, the economically poor, women at risk and our wounded earth.” This commitment has led to many social ministries in Toronto, including the founding of St. Michael’s Halfway Homes, Matt Talbot House, the Daily Bread Food Bank and the Furniture Bank. Sisters continue to engage in ministries in remote areas, and are found in northern Canada in Thompson, Manitoba, and Fort St. James, B.C., as well as in Haiti and Honduras.

Today, the Sisters’ ministries have evolved from larger institutions to new forms of ministry that relate more closely to the dear neighbor in a personal way. In 2000 they founded Fontbonne Ministries, each of whose ministries nurtures a spirit of community. Fontbonne Ministries offers: drop-in centres; programs that offer life-skills in an accepting environment; rent-geared to income housing for older single women; opportunities for young adults to grow spiritually and engage in community building; opportunities for seniors to gather or have in-home visits; and a pottery studio where ‘there are no mistakes only new creations.’

Sisters can be found in ministry in many forms such as visiting shut-ins and faith formation programs. They have initiated creative collaborations with others that have resulted in, among others, much-needed affordable housing and assistance to newcomers to Canada. In their 160-years of service in Canada, one thing remains constant: they continue to serve wherever there is a need.

### **For more information contact:**

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