

MARY-CLARE HAVEY

THE REDEMPTORIST INFLUENCE  
ON THE INSTITUTE OF THE SISTERS  
OF SERVICE OF CANADA

1. – *The Portraits*; 2. – *Setting the Scene*; 3. – *Enter the Redemptorists*; 4. – *The Planning Stages*; 5. – *Catherine Donnelly's Vision Realized*; 6. – *Looking at Big Maps, Serving the Abandoned*; 7. – *St. Christopher, Do Your Stuff in Remote Areas*; 8. – *Alphonsian and Redemptorist Influence*; 9. – *Adaptations in the Post-Vatican II Era*

1. – *The Portraits*

In the boardroom of the Sisters of Service headquarters in Toronto, four photographic portraits hang prominently on the north wall. These photos are of the foundress and the three priests who were instrumental in the establishment and the early vision of this women's missionary community in Canada.

On the wall, the central photo is of Catherine Donnelly, the foundress of the Sisters of Service, who originated the idea of an institute of women religious serving in Western Canadian settlements.

Two Redemptorists are placed together: Rev. Arthur Coughlan, Provincial Superior of the Toronto Province who with Catherine Donnelly initiated the founding, and Rev. George Daly, who directed and supervised the development of the Sisters of Service for 34 years. The other photo is of Archbishop Neil McNeil of Toronto, who guided the early canonical establishment of the institute.

This article proposes to examine the influence and the later connection of the Toronto Province of Redemptorists in the development of the Sisters of Service with particular focus on Father Daly's direction from 1922 until his death in 1956.

## 2. – *Setting the Scene*

The idea of the Sisters of Service originated with Catherine Donnelly as a result of her experiences in Western Canada at the end of the First World War.<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Donnelly was born in 1884 on a farm fifty miles north of Toronto. Her parents were Irish immigrants, and she grew up in a community of Irish Protestant and Catholic settlers, who had come to the central Canadian province of Ontario after the potato famine in Ireland.

The eldest of three daughters, Catherine Donnelly earned a teaching certificate in 1902 and taught in one-room school-houses in Ontario. After the death of her mother in 1905, Catherine Donnelly, then twenty-one, became the sole financial support for her two teenage sisters and her father, who had sold their heavily-mortgaged farm. For almost twelve years, Catherine Donnelly taught in a series of public schools in rural and central Ontario, moving frequently to seek a higher salary and became one of the highest-paid teachers in Ontario at \$925.00 a year.<sup>2</sup>

By the late summer of 1918, as family obligations had lessened, Catherine Donnelly and a fellow teacher traveled to the Canadian West in a spirit of adventure.<sup>3</sup>

The previous year, 1917, Canada with a population of eight million had celebrated fifty years as a country.<sup>4</sup> A railway crossed the vast land from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific. In 1905, the two prairie provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were established, partially with the intention that the settlement of their expansive arable land could fill the Eastern Canadian desire for new markets of their manufactured goods in exchange for prairie wheat.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sister Catherine DONNELLY, *Ecumenism Blossoms*, 1965, 21, Sisters of Service Archives (hereinafter SOSA) Series 1-01.4, Box 11, File 1. It is her account of the beginnings of the Sisters of Service.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne BECK, *To Do and To Endure*, Toronto 1997, 29-40.

<sup>3</sup> Sister Catherine Donnelly, *Ecumenism Blossoms*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Census of Canada, 1917.

<sup>5</sup> The economic context of this period is discussed in Robert CRAIG BROWN and Ramsay COOK, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed*, Toronto 1974, 50-67.

Just before the turn of the twentieth century, the Canadian government accelerated its immigration search and opened these prairie lands to East European and Slavic immigrants beyond the previous settlers from the British Isles and Western Europe. Under the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, which only applied to the prairies, a homesteader would receive 160 acres for ten dollars. The act also called for a house, often of log or sod, to be built and a specified area of land to be cultivated within three years.<sup>6</sup>

This policy of almost free land grants was successful in attracting an influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe. In a fifteen-year period, more than a million homesteaders took advantage of the free land in the prairie provinces. In the central prairie province of Saskatchewan, the population jumped to 650,000 in 1916 from 91,000 in 1901.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the cheap land, life was difficult. Homesteaders and their families were often separated from their friends and relatives. Many suffered years of hardship and loneliness with the absence of roads and bridges.<sup>8</sup>

Catherine Donnelly and her friend discovered firsthand the lack of services and infrastructure in these newly-established communities. They taught in two small one-room schoolhouses near Stettler, in the heart of Central Alberta, for six weeks before the dreaded Spanish influenza, brought by the returning soldiers from Europe, spread throughout the district. By mid-November, the schools were closed. The two teachers served as volunteer nurses and undertook home nursing duties.<sup>9</sup>

What struck them as they helped these families was the absence of recognition of any spiritual help. They had found that

---

<sup>6</sup> Ronald REES, *New and Naked Land: Making the Prairies Home*, Saskatoon 1988, 8-13. Clifton Sifton as Minister of the Interior in charge of the immigration policy and promotion, set his sights on northern Slavs, the crowded and impoverished peasants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His description of a prospective immigrant became an informal dictum: «I think a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born of the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and half a dozen children is of good quality». *Ibid.*, 11-13.

<sup>7</sup> Census of Canada, 1901, 1916.

<sup>8</sup> REES, *New and Naked Land*, 54-59, 65-66.

<sup>9</sup> DONNELLY, *Ecumenism Blossoms*, 2-3.

many Catholics, the majority of them Eastern European, especially of the Ruthenian Rite, no longer practised their religion. Catherine Donnelly observed:

Their Catholic faith is the one treasure these newcomers have brought from the Old Land, and heresy, schism and atheism are working hard to rob them of it... Who is there going to be to ensure that they retain their treasure? Not the priests, who are so few, not lay teachers, not any order of nuns working at present.<sup>10</sup>

The Church's indifference to the spiritual and educational needs of the rural areas of the West deeply distressed her. She was certain that this would result in irreparable harm to these abandoned souls and also damage the Church's reputation. With this constant reminder, she came to the conclusion that a teaching order of Sisters would be the solution, but she felt that none of the religious communities working in the West was suitable.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. – *Enter the Redemptorists*

In November 1919, she returned home to the deathbed of her father, who died a few weeks later. Early in the next year, Catherine sought an interview with Father Arthur Coughlan. Her sister Mamie, then a novice with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, had recommended him. Father Coughlan had gained a reputation for kindly and practical advice on spiritual matters. He was also a popular retreat master and confessor to several religious orders.<sup>12</sup>

A member of the Baltimore Province, Father Coughlan had come to Toronto in 1913 to fill a request from Toronto Archbishop Neil McNeil, who wanted the Redemptorists to work among the Italian immigrants in Toronto. For two years, Father Coughlan, who spoke Italian, had performed well in this appointment – so much so that in 1915, he was appointed as rector

---

<sup>10</sup> Sister Catherine Donnelly, «Ukrainians», [1920], SOSA, Series 1-01.4, Box 11, File 14.

<sup>11</sup> Sister Catherine Donnelly, «SOS History», SOSA, Series 1-01.4 Box 11, File 10.

<sup>12</sup> BECK, *To Do and To Endure*, 55-56.

of St. Patrick's Church, the Redemptorists flourishing downtown Toronto parish and as secretary consultor to the Vice-Provincial Rev. Patrick Mulhall.<sup>13</sup>

When Catherine Donnelly came to see Father Coughlan, the Toronto Province had been founded two years previously with nine foundations, having «mission bands»<sup>14</sup> attached to most of them. The Province consisted of five large city parishes in Eastern Canada: Saint John in New Brunswick; Quebec City, Montréal in Québec and Toronto and London in Ontario, and the four small parishes in Western Canada: Yorkton and Regina in Saskatchewan; Brandon and East Kildonan (Winnipeg) in Manitoba.<sup>15</sup>

As secretary-consultor of the Toronto Vice Province and Toronto Province, Father Coughlan was aware of the problems of the booming West from the confreres posted there and understood Catherine Donnelly's concern about the «abandoned» rural families in Western Canada. He was impressed with her plan of teaching Sisters in rural communities. However, he suggested that Catherine Donnelly join an established order and persuade

---

<sup>13</sup> Paul LAVERDURE, *Redemption and Renewal*, Toronto 1996, 115.

<sup>14</sup> These «bands» were made up of several Redemptorists who, as a group, went out to each a series of sermons for renewing the spiritual life of a parish.

<sup>15</sup> Rev. Karl J. SCHINDLER, C.Ss.R., *To Serve God's people*, Toronto 1981, 4-26; LAVERDURE, *Redemption and Renewal*, 85-121. In August 1912, the Baltimore Province re-established the Vice-Province of Toronto. Rev. William Brick (1912-1915) was appointed as the first Visitor/Vice-Provincial and Fr. Mulhall was second Visitor/Vice-Provincial (1915-1918). The Vice-Province was formed from three foundations of the Baltimore Province in Eastern Canada: St. Patrick's in Québec City, established in 1874; St. Patrick's in Toronto, established in 1881 and St. Peter's in Saint John, New Brunswick, established in 1884. The Toronto Vice-Province also was formed with three foundations of the Province of Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré: St. Ann's in Montréal, established in 1884 and transferred in 1912; St. Augustine's in Brandon, Manitoba, established in 1898 and transferred in 1913 and St. Gerard's in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, established in 1904 and transferred in 1913. The Toronto Vice-Province established two foundations: St. Patrick's in London, Ontario in 1912 and St. Alphonsus in East Kildonan, Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1914. The Vice-Province also assumed the care of Holy Rosary Cathedral in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1915. All of the nine foundations/houses of the Vice-Province formed the Toronto Province when it was established officially on May 19, 1918 and Fr. Mulhall was appointed as its first Provincial Superior.

them to expand into this promising field of religious and secular education.<sup>16</sup>

Her two attempts of joining the Sisters of St. Joseph met with disappointment. She was refused acceptance to one community and left as a postulant after three months from another. Just before Christmas in 1920, Catherine Donnelly reported her lack of success to Father Coughlan, now the Toronto Provincial Superior,<sup>17</sup> who remarked: «You probably spoke too much about the West». Suddenly he threw his head back and laughed heartily, suggesting, «You had better start a community of your own».<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. – *The Planning Stages*

During the next eighteen months, the two consulted and consolidated the details of the new community along with Archbishop McNeil, who extended his support. Both clerics accepted Catherine Donnelly's choice of the name as the «Sisters of Service», and agreed the Sisters would teach in the rural settlements in western Canada. Breaking free from the semi-cloistered monastic restrictions, the Sisters would live among the people they were serving, would dress in a simple uniform, would keep their Christian and surnames and observe a modified daily regimen.<sup>19</sup>

However, Father Coughlan was immersed in the Provincial administration of launching a juvenate and Novitiate and expanding the Toronto Province farther into Western Canada.<sup>20</sup> He de-

---

<sup>16</sup> DONNELLY, *Ecumenism Blossoms*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> SCHINDLER, *To Serve God's People*, 26. In November 1920, Father Coughlan was appointed to finish the term as Provincial of the ailing Father Mulhall, who died in August 1922.

<sup>18</sup> Sister Catherine Donnelly, «Why I am a Sister of Service»? SOSA, Series 1-01.4, Box 11, File 15.

<sup>19</sup> Sister Catherine Donnelly, «Birth of the SOS», 25-28, SOSA, Series 1-01.4, Box 11, File 17.

<sup>20</sup> SCHINDLER, *To Serve God's People*, 26-29. In the spring of 1920, students arrived at the newly-constructed juvenate, St. Mary's College in Brockville. In August 1921, a Novitiate was opened at St. Peter's Monastery in Saint John. Three foundations in Western Canada were erected while Father Coughlan was Provincial until 1927: Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Vancouver (1923); St. Alphonsus in Edmonton, Alberta (1924) and St. Joseph's in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan (1927).

cided to delegate some responsibility for the Sisters of Service and appointed Father Daly to assist in establishing the institute. Within a month, Father Daly arrived at St. Patrick's monastery, the provincial headquarters, where he would live for the rest of his life.<sup>21</sup>

Father Daly was a native of Montréal, whose family were parishioners of the Belgian Redemptorist parish of St. Ann's. At the age of sixteen, he entered the Redemptorists novitiate in St. Trond, Belgium, where he was ordained in 1899. Returning to Canada in 1900, he was a rising star with much potential as a Canadian fluent in both English and French. During the next twelve years at the preparatory seminary at St.-Anne-de-Beaupré, he was appointed to a series of positions as socius,<sup>22</sup> prefect of students and, finally, seminary director. In 1912, he returned to his home parish of St. Ann's in Montréal as its first rector under the new Vice Province of Toronto.<sup>23</sup>

As part of the English-Canadian Redemptorist expansion into Western Canada, he was sent in 1915 as rector of the newly-built Holy Rosary Cathedral in Regina, Saskatchewan. In this farthest west of the Redemptorist Canadian foundations, Father Daly used every minute to learn and travel about the booming area, which was dominated by the Protestant and English culture. He gave retreats in the poorest areas and established the Catholic Truth Society in Saskatchewan. However, it was his free-wheeling ways, use of modern technology of telephones and automobiles, friendships with politicians and bishops as well as his public appearances for the war effort which caused his superiors to conclude that Father Daly did not have the proper humility and adherence to poverty.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Rev. Arthur Coughlan to Rev. George Daly, 29 September 1921, 31 December 1921, SOSA, Series 1-01.2, Box 1, File 7. *Annals*, St. Patrick's Monastery, Toronto, 14 January 1922, Archives of the Edmonton-Toronto Redemptorists, Series, 7-25.

<sup>22</sup> The Latin term «socius» literally means «companion» but among Redemptorists it took on several specific meanings. Here its meaning is roughly equivalent to «Assistant Director of Students».

<sup>23</sup> Paul LAVERDURE, «George Thomas Daly: A biography», in *Redemptorist North American Historical Bulletin*, April 1997, 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 17; also, see LAVERDURE, *Redemption and Renewal*, 118-119.

He was removed abruptly in 1918 to Saint John, New Brunswick, as a missionary. Despite the change in assignment, he remained interested and concerned about the plight of immigrants and isolated settlers, meeting the immigrant boats at the city's harbour and corresponding with Mother Mary McKillop's missionaries in the outback of Australia.<sup>25</sup> During this time, he also wrote the book *Catholic Problems in Western Canada*, as a result of his appointment in Regina. In it he outlined plans for the Canadian Church's expansion in the West.<sup>26</sup>

Archbishop McNeil of Toronto shared the analysis which Father Daly's outlined in his book, as well as Daly's concern for the Church's response to newly-arrived immigrants. Critical of «our lack of success in the past ... due to insufficient effort», the archbishop described the founding of the Sisters of Service as «a very important step towards a solution of the problem of immigration, safeguarding of the faith with social and civic betterment».<sup>27</sup>

Foreseeing the Sisters of Service as a non-monastic community, wearing uniforms, not habits, and travelling in pairs into lonely settlements, Father Coughlan was clear on the priorities: «What we need now is money and candidates».<sup>28</sup>

These two tasks were assigned to Father Daly, who was in his prime at fifty years old and his «dark days had passed».<sup>29</sup> With a beaming smile, outstretched hand, boundless energy, an apostle's determination along with an executive's organizational skill, Father Daly possessed the entrepreneurial spirit and engaging

---

<sup>25</sup> Rev. George Daly to Mother Mary McKillop, 21 December 1920, SO-SA, Series 2-08, Box 7, File 4.

<sup>26</sup> Rev. George DALY, *Catholic Problems in Western Canada* (Toronto 1921). In this work Father Daly urged the Church to use all of its means to provide settlers with help in their faith, especially through education, Truth Societies and Extension Societies to battle against the aggressive proselytizing tactics of Protestants. In a letter to Father Daly on September 29, 1921, Father Coughlan described *Catholic Problems* as «very instructive and interesting».

<sup>27</sup> Archbishop Neil McNeil to Rev. George Daly, 4 September 1922. SO-SA, Series 1-01.1, Box 1, File 4.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. Arthur Coughlan to Rev. George Daly, 29 September 1921, SO-SA, Series 1-01.2, Box 1, File 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



personality needed to raise funds and attract candidates to the fledgling community.<sup>30</sup>

In a whirlwind of speaking engagements, he made new contacts and renewed others with Catholic organizations like the Truth Societies, the Catholic Women's League as well as with influential and well-connected friends and financial backers. A number of the pioneer Sisters became interested in the community after attending one of Father Daly's talks. He wrote to each of the Bishops in Western Canada, enclosing a booklet he had written about the new community as a point of information for donations and invitations to come and work in their dioceses.<sup>31</sup>

The Rule of the Institute of the Sisters of Service, also drafted by Father Daly, was based primarily on the previous agreements of Catherine Donnelly, the archbishop and Father Coughlan and on the theology and spirituality of St. Alphonsus «to serve the most abandoned».<sup>32</sup>

The writings and spiritual teachings of St. Alphonsus formed the basis of the novitiate training: *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, *The Glories of Mary* and *The Way of Salvation and Perfection* were the basic texts.<sup>33</sup> Patron Saints of the institute included Our Mother of Perpetual Help, St. Joseph, St. Alphonsus and St. Theresa. Like the Redemptorists, the characteristic virtues of the Sisters of Service were charity, humility, mortification and zeal.<sup>34</sup>

Other Redemptorist practices, including the *Virtue of the Month*, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary were part of the community spirituality. A reproduction of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help hung in each mission at the centre of a shrine. Father Coughlan, who

---

<sup>30</sup> «The Magnanimous Heart», was a publication begun by the Redemptorist George Daly which chronicled the ministry of the Sisters of Service from 1925 until 1965 when it ceased publication.

<sup>31</sup> Father Daly – Correspondence, SOSA, Series 1-01.3, Box 2, File 17, 18, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Father Coughlan-Correspondence with Sister Catherine Donnelly, 1921-1942, SOSA, Series 1-01.2, Box 2, File 11.

<sup>33</sup> Conversation of author with Sister Patricia Burke, SOS, 5 September, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> The Rule of the Sisters of Service, 1922, 3, SOSA, Series 2-03, Box 1, File 35.

was the spiritual director for the first five years, introduced the custom of the coronation of Our Lady in the month of May, which was continued when Father Daly succeeded him as spiritual director.<sup>35</sup>

With a sense of urgency, Father Daly began putting into reality the ideals of the Rule. The Redemptorist mission clearly can be seen as the Sisters of Service «were to possess the zeal for the salvation of the most abandoned souls in the outlying districts of our new Provinces. This zeal will manifest itself particularly in dealing with the poor, the ignorant and the most abandoned».<sup>36</sup>

Under the chosen motto of «I Have Come to Serve», the Sisters were called to be a Catholic presence among the immigrants from the ports to their homesteads as teachers, catechists, nurses and social workers among the most destitute of spiritual help in the outlying districts of the home missions. In establishing the hostels for transient women immigrants in the major cities and near the ports, the Sisters would help in the transition to Canadian life.<sup>37</sup>

In their religious work, the Sisters were to establish «catechism centers», to provide religious instructions to children who attended public schools and to prepare them for the sacraments. In the settlements, they were to gather the people together on Sundays in the absence of the priest, pray the rosary, sing hymns and read the gospel. In other spiritual work, they were to instruct converts and prepare them for baptism; to take care of the chapel or churches in the district; to bring back inactive Catholics and to help those Catholics who were married outside the Church to have their marriage convalidated according to Catholic norms.<sup>38</sup>

In education, the Sisters were: to be qualified teachers wherever they taught; to take particular care of the children of immigrants; to distribute Catholic literature among the Catholics

---

<sup>35</sup> Conversation of author with Sister Patricia Burke, SOS, 5 September 2010.

<sup>36</sup> The Rule of the Sisters of Service, 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 5.

by circulating libraries in their districts. In the health field, the Sisters were: to establish small hospitals; to qualify as Public Health Nurses; to provide medical care to the poor; to visit the sick at home and in the hospitals; and to prepare the dying for death, and mothers for birth.<sup>39</sup>

#### 5. – *Catherine Donnelly's Vision Realized*

On August 15, 1922, the thirty-eight year-old Catherine Donnelly saw her vision realized: a new community of Sisters dedicated to immigrants and Western Canada was established and celebrated with a Mass in the new Motherhouse.<sup>40</sup> From that day until after the Second Vatican Council, she became known as the first Sister of Service and the growth of the community lay in the hands of others.<sup>41</sup>

Two years later, three newly professed Sisters were ready to embark on the first mission at Camp Morton, Manitoba. A farming and lumbering community, sixty miles north of Winnipeg, the mission was selected by Father Daly and Winnipeg Archbishop Alfred Sinnott because of its recent immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Chosen for the first mission were two experienced teachers: Sisters Catherine Donnelly and Margaret Guest, and a nurse, Sister Catherine Wymbs, who had been decorated by the French government for her service during the First World War. Shortly afterwards, Sister Mary Ann Brid-

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Annals*, St. Patrick's Monastery, Toronto, Archives of Edmonton-Toronto Redemptorists, Series 7-25. The handwritten entry for August 15, 1922 states: «Feast of the Assumption. The new order – Sisters of Service was formally inaugurated this morning at the house, 2 Wellesley Place. His Grace, the Most Rev. Archbishop [Neil McNeil] celebrated Mass and addressed the first members (four in number), Father Provincial was present and thanked the Archbishop for his interest in the work».

<sup>41</sup> After Sister Catherine Donnelly wrote *Ecumenism Blossoms* in 1965, it was distributed widely among the community and was used to examine the charism of the Sisters of Service following the Second Vatican Council. The delegates of the 1990 Chapter declared that the Sisters of Service were founded by Sister Catherine Donnelly in co-operation of Father Coughlan and Father Daly. In 2000, the Catholic Register named Sister Catherine Donnelly as one of the ten people who helped to shape the church in Canada.

get Burke, the second Sister of Service, joined the mission as housekeeper.<sup>42</sup>

Like St. Alphonsus living among the hill people of Scala in eighteenth century Italy, the Sisters of Service [SOS] lived among the people in their more than fifty missions during the next eighty years. Like the Redemptorist foundations in Western Canada, the missions were small. In the cities, the SOS houses followed the Redemptorist example, and were located in the inner cities. In their parishes, the Redemptorists combined the practice of religion with social events, including concerts, plays and sports teams.<sup>43</sup> The Sisters reflected this custom in their seven women's hostels across Canada. The hostels served as an avenue to assist in the integration to Canada as well as social and spiritual support. The Sisters led Bible study groups, Sodalties and the May coronation processions in honour of Our Lady. They also organized plays, concerts, dances, teas, bridal showers, wedding breakfasts as well as baseball and bowling teams. The hostels also provided classes in English and in various household sciences since many of the early women immigrants were seeking jobs as domestic servants. In their teaching missions in small communities, the Sisters led many extracurricular activities, such clubs as 4-H,<sup>44</sup> drama, music as well as sports ranging from track to ice hockey.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Camp Morton-Correspondence, 1924, SOSA, Series 6-04, Box 1, File 1. The correspondence relates to the founding of the mission between Father Daly and Archbishop Sinnott, who in 1916 was installed as the first archbishop of the newly-created archdiocese of Winnipeg. After the arrival of the Sisters of Service in August 1924, most of the correspondence is between Father Daly and the Sisters at the mission.

<sup>43</sup> The two most active parishes were St. Ann's in Montréal and St. Peter's in Saint John, where Father Daly had been assigned in the decade prior to his appointment to the Sisters of Service.

<sup>44</sup> Founded c. 1902, the 4-H organization encouraged youth to reach their fullest potential of *Health, Head, Hands and Heart*.

<sup>45</sup> *The Field at Home*, *passim*, 1925-1965. *The Field at Home* was a quarterly magazine, which Father Daly began in January 1925 to document the activities of the Sisters in the missions through articles and photographs. The issues for the first 40 years document the Sisters' missions before the changes of the Second Vatican Council.

6. – *Looking at Big Maps, Serving the Abandoned*

On Father Daly's office wall on the second-floor of the Motherhouse was a large framed motto: «Look at the Big Maps». In these early years, Father Daly strove to implement a broader community vision through the ideals of their Rule. In the first fifteen years the Sisters not only taught in rural public schools, but were also operating a Motherhouse and a novitiate in Toronto as well as two hospitals in rural Alberta, two religious correspondence schools and seven women's hostels. In 1925, the women's hostel in Halifax was acquired. Mindful of the Redemptorists' foundations, Father Daly arranged the establishments of the early SOS missions. The first three hostels for immigrant women in Western Canada were located in the same cities of Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver as newly-founded Redemptorist parishes.<sup>46</sup>

In 1925, the women's hostel in Halifax was acquired through a donation and thus in 1926 began forty years of welcoming immigrants at the three eastern ports of Halifax, Québec City and Montréal. The Sisters' tireless efforts in Halifax, the main eastern gateway for immigrants to Canada, now known as Pier 21, are documented on large display panels at the National Historic Site in that city. Following the departure of the immigrant trains from the ports, the Sisters sent names and addresses to chancery offices and parishes of the immigrants' destinations. Sisters also assisted in locating family or relatives in Canada as well as mailing letters to announce safe arrivals in Canada.<sup>47</sup>

In 1930 during the six months when the Québec City port was open from spring to late fall,<sup>48</sup> two Sisters met 184 ships and welcomed 10,724 Catholics among the third-class passengers. The Sisters distributed medals, prayer books, holy pictures

---

<sup>46</sup> Winnipeg-Correspondence, 1925-1926, SOSA, Series 6-50.1, Box 1, File 1; Edmonton-Correspondence, 1928-1929, SOSA, Series 6-09.2, Box 1, File, 2; Vancouver-Correspondence, 1928, SOSA, Series 6-48, Box 1, File 1.

<sup>47</sup> Immigration-Halifax Reports, 1955-1967, SOSA, Series 2-02.3 Box 2, File 9.

<sup>48</sup> Québec lies on the St. Lawrence seaway, which in winter is blocked by ice.

and rosaries, visited the hospitals, detention quarters as well as arranging marriages and funerals.<sup>49</sup>

The arrival of the Sudeten refugees in 1939 illustrated the Sisters' system of assisting immigrants to Canada as well as the interconnection with the Redemptorists. The Sisters in Montréal welcomed the Sudeten refugees, who had left Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia when it was transferred to Germany under the Munich Agreement in September 1938. After receiving the lists of immigrants' names on the special train coaches, the Sisters provided the Sudetens with clothing before the train travelled to Western Canada. In Edmonton, the Sisters also welcomed the Sudetens and notified the Redemptorists, who were serving at the journey's end in the northwest Alberta area of Peace River.<sup>50</sup> In the following summers, the Sisters conducted two-week religious vacation schools for the children, who were instructed in their faith, prepared for the sacraments and the visit by the Bishop.<sup>51</sup> In another joint collaboration, the Sisters assisted for the first two years when the Redemptorists established Settlement House in 1930 for newly-arrived German immigrants to Toronto. Two Sisters visited homes, taught English and singing, and helped with the sewing, cooking and kindergarten.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Québec-Correspondence, Reports, 1930, SOSA, Series 6-34, Box 1, File 35. The correspondence and reports were between the Sisters at the port and Sister General at the Motherhouse in Toronto.

<sup>50</sup> «Sentinels at the Gate», *The Field at Home*, July 1939, 8-9; Rev. Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R. to Sisters of Service, Montréal, 21 July 1939, SOSA, Series 6-26, Box 2, File 1. In the letter, Father Owens, who was assigned to the northern British Columbia mission of Dawson Creek, expressed gratitude to the Sisters for a list of Sudeten Germans. «These lists are of invaluable help to us.» Assigned to help the Sudetens (1939-1944), Father Owens, who was fluent in German, remained in touch with some of the Sudeten families for the rest of his life. After that assignment, he completed graduate studies at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (PIMS) in Toronto, gaining a Licentiate in 1946. He was awarded the Doctorate of Mediaeval Studies from PIMS in 1951 and became a PIMS fellow in 1954. At PIMS and the University of Toronto (1952-1996), Father Owens taught and wrote on the philosophy of St. Thomas, especially in the areas of metaphysics, the philosophy of the human person and the philosophy of knowledge and ethics. Author of nine philosophy books, almost 150 articles and forty book reviews, he died in 2005 at the age of ninety-seven.

<sup>51</sup> «Among the Sudetens in BC», in *Field at Home*, April 1941, 7-8.

<sup>52</sup> Toronto-Settlement House, SOSA, Series 6-47, Box 1, Files 34, 35.

Within four years of the community's founding, a Canadian religious correspondence school or catechism centre was established in Edmonton, located across the street from the Redemptorist parish of St. Alphonsus. This catechism by mail was adapted from Monsignor Victor Day's correspondence school in Helena, Montana.<sup>53</sup>

Eight years later, a similar school was set up in Regina and a third school was founded in Fargo, North Dakota, U.S.A., in 1939. In the first report of the Regina school in 1935, 12, 101 lessons were corrected; 937 personal letters and 2,364 circular letters of information were mailed and 234 magazines were redistributed.<sup>54</sup>

In the winter months, the children in isolated rural areas would receive the lessons and the corrections by the Sisters at the correspondence school. Often little notes would be exchanged between the Sisters and their students. In the summer months at the religious vacation schools, the Sisters would meet many of the students and their families, further cementing their connection.<sup>55</sup> Just as with the Sudetens, the Sisters prepared the children for First Communion and Confirmation. The missionary zeal clearly was apparent in these summer catechetical tours, beginning in 1925 and continued until the late 1960s. Every available Sister was assigned to religious vacation schools as the Sisters traveled in pairs to small communities at the request of the dioceses. During those years, the Sisters also instructed students in the Western Canadian Redemptorist parishes at Athabasca, Edson, Grande Prairie in Alberta; Williams Lake and Dawson Creek in British Columbia and Yorkton and Moose Jaw in Saskatchewan.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Sister Madge BARTON, SOSA, Series 8-08, Box 1, Files 2-7, *Gather Up the Fragments*, unpublished manuscript, 1997, 51. In 1934, Sister Barton, a teacher, established the religious correspondence school in Regina. In 1997 for the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the community, she completed this history of the Sisters of Service's seventy years in religious education. The history traces the development through the religious correspondence schools and religious vacation schools before the Second Vatican Council and the Sisters' adaptations to religious education after 1965.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 290, 291.

<sup>56</sup> Religious Vacation Schools, SOSA, Series 2-02, Box 3, Files 3, 6, 12.

7. – *St. Christopher, Do Your Stuff in Remote Areas*

Through donations, Father Daly acquired two catechetical vans, which the Sisters drove and lived in during their catechetical tours. Sister Margaret Murphy, then twenty-one, recalled the drive in 1932 through the mountainous interior of British Columbia:

Will I ever forget the swaying of the van negotiating the hairpin curves! Sister instructed me well: «Pray the rosary, and don't you ever scream»! When we began to roll backwards on a curved hill, my only reaction was a fervent «St. Christopher, do your stuff».<sup>57</sup>

In 1935, Sister Alice Walsh wrote of the six weeks of «roughing it» in the Redemptorist missions around Yorkton with large charts, project books and teaching supplies:

Six weeks of talking and laughing and singing with children we have learned to know and love through the Correspondence Classes, six weeks of golden summery days, of long buggy rides across the prairie, of sweet clover perfumed air, and of new surroundings, new people, new customs. Teaching Christian Doctrine is as much as part of our daily existence as is breathing in the ozone-freighted air.<sup>58</sup>

In the summers of 1934 and 1936, Sisters Catherine Donnelly and Irene Faye toured the Cariboo district of the interior of British Columbia. Sister Donnelly relished the adventure of a missionary in the wilderness, sleeping in the car or a makeshift camp and meeting and assisting the pioneer families.<sup>59</sup> The teaching missions, the other heart of Sister Catherine Donnelly's dream, expanded to twenty-one by the time of the community's golden jubilee in 1972.

---

<sup>57</sup> Sister Margaret Murphy, SOSA, Series 7-03, Box 8, File 7.

<sup>58</sup> «Reaping Harvest in Saskatchewan», in *The Field at Home*, January 1936, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Sister Catherine Donnelly, Writings – Cariboo, SOSA, Series 1-01.4, Box 10, Files 18-20.



From the period of 1936 to 1942, Father Daly was appointed as consultor for the Toronto Province, holding a unique position in both the Redemptorists and Sisters of Service. During his term, six Redemptorist foundations in remote areas of Western Canada were established: Dawson Creek (1936), Williams Lake (1938); Nelson (1939), Wells (1941) in British Columbia, and Athabasca (1940) and Claresholm (1941) in Alberta.<sup>60</sup>

#### 8. – *Alphonsian and Redemptorist Influence*

Through all of the Sisters' hardships in their remote missions, Father Daly underlined Redemptorist spirituality in their mission work. Sister Alice Walsh recalled his conference to the novices in 1927.

Father Daly's first concern was, of course, our spiritual development... He pictured for us the thousands of people in areas remote from the Church, in need of our spiritual help. We were on fire to be out and doing. But with the appeal came the warning: «Weaklings will not stand the test of the missions. Your contact will be fruitful just inasmuch as you are in habitual contact with our Divine Saviour, no more, no less».<sup>61</sup>

He wrote regular circular letters to the Sisters from 1922 until 1956. In these letters, he repeatedly encouraged the Sisters to pursue their missionary zeal for the most abandoned souls in their missions. Father Daly also sent to each mission writings by St. Alphonsus on various subjects, such as Christ's Incarnation and Passion – as well as on prayer, charity and humility.<sup>62</sup>

In her personal notebook of spiritual reflections, Sister Beatrice DeMarsh retyped devotional prayers to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, and St. Alphonsus' Method of Making a Meditation.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Toronto Provincial Consultations, 1915-1942, Archives of the Edmonton-Toronto Redemptorists, Series 2-01, Oversized Box 1.

<sup>61</sup> «The Magnanimous Heart», 14.

<sup>62</sup> Father Daly – Circular Letters to Sisters of Service, 1922-1956, SOSA, Series 1-01.3, Box 1, Files 30-50; Box 2, Files 1-13.

<sup>63</sup> Sister Beatrice DeMarsh, SOSA, Series 7-03, Box 8, File 2.

Much of the Redemptorist spirituality was explained, explored and emphasized in the more than sixty retreats given by Redemptorists to the Sisters between 1922 and 1959.<sup>64</sup> During an early retreat in 1925, Father Peter O'Hare quotes St. Alphon-sus: «A religious who does not strive to save her soul as a saint, runs a great risk of losing it».<sup>65</sup>

The Redemptorist influence was visible and pronounced in the number of vocations from direct or indirect contact. Of the 125 Sisters of Service, approximately twenty-five per cent or thirty-two Sisters attributed the development of their vocation directly to the Redemptorists. Of those thirty-two, twenty Sisters came from Redemptorist parishes. Fifteen of the twenty Sisters grew up in the Redemptorist strongholds of St. Peter's Parish in Saint John and St. Ann's Parish in Montreal. Seven of the thirty-two Sisters were related to Redemptorists. Father O'Hare, the retreat master, was uncle to Sister Margaret O'Hare. When she received her habit in 1926, he blessed the habit and celebrated the Mass. Sister Anne Johnson was sister to Father Bernard Johnson, the first Provincial Superior of the Edmonton Province, and cousin to Fathers Kleinnart and Clair Johnson of the Toronto Province. The remaining eight of the thirty-two became aware of the Sisters of Service and their missionary work from parish missions, retreats or talks given by Redemptorists.<sup>66</sup>

Like Father O'Hare, Redemptorists also presided at SOS ceremonies. Senior members of the Toronto Redemptorists served on a canonical panel examining Sisters for final profession and presiding at the profession ceremonies in Toronto.<sup>67</sup>

Administratively, the Sisters were governed in a similar manner as the Redemptorists with a Sister General and three councillors, initially for a five-year term and later a six-year term.<sup>68</sup> Once during a council's term, an extraordinary visitor in the place of Sister General would conduct the annual visits to each mis-

---

<sup>64</sup> Retreat Masters, SOSA, Series 7-01, Box 1, File 15.

<sup>65</sup> Sister Florence Regan, SOSA, Series 7-03, Box 2, File 10.

<sup>66</sup> Dictionary of Biography, SOSA, Series 7-03.

<sup>67</sup> SOSA, Boxes 1-26, Personnel Series 7-03.

<sup>68</sup> Rules and Constitutions of the Sisters of Service, 1934, 51-57, SOSA, Series 2-03.1, Box 1, File 29.

sion, similar to the custom of the Redemptorists with the visitors from Rome.<sup>69</sup>

In 1937, the administration of the Sisters of Service changed when the Chapter delegates elected the Sister General and the Council.<sup>70</sup> Previously, the administration had been appointed by the Toronto Archbishop on the advice of Father Daly.<sup>71</sup> This change also coincided with the start of Father Daly's term as consultant for the Toronto Province.

During the next decade, a gradual shift occurred with the Sisters' elected council assuming more of the administrative duties. After the Chapter of 1948, Father Daly, then seventy-six, relinquished most of his responsibilities.<sup>72</sup> However, he continued yearly visits to the missions and encouraged the connection with the Redemptorists.

In 1948 when the Redemptoristines arrived in Toronto, the Sisters assisted them in establishing a monastery. When the Redemptorist Superior General Leonard Buys visited the Sisters of Service Novitiate in 1951, the Redemptoristines joined him and a family portrait was taken.<sup>73</sup>

#### 9. – *Adaptations in the Post-Vatican II Era*

By the time of Father Daly's death in June 1956, the Sisters of Service were debt-free<sup>74</sup> and had established thirty-two missions, which fulfilled all the components of the Rule. His death, along with changes in both the SOS and Redemptorist

---

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> First General Chapter, 1937, SOSA, Series 3-01, Box 1, File 1, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Sister General and Appointment, 1928, 1931, SOSA, Series 2-03.1, Box 2, File 4, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Third General Chapter, 1948, SOSA, Series 3-01, Box 1, File 10. In Father Daly's address to the Chapter on July 14, 1948, he states «For 26 years, I have carried your responsibilities... The future will be in your hands. Be prudent and fearless».

<sup>73</sup> Father George DALY, «The Meeting of the Waters», in *The Field at Home*, January 1952, 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> Father Daly-Circular Letters, 1950, SOSA, Box 2, File 7. Father Daly wrote, «As of today, May 1, 1950, the Institute of the Sisters of Service for the first time since its foundation in 1922, is now free of debt».

communities after the Second Vatican Council resulted in less contact than in former years.

Toronto Provincial Superiors still presided at profession ceremonies and confreres led retreats, celebrated Masses for jubilees, funerals and Chapters. As the Redemptorist membership declined, celebrants were drawn from other congregations.

However, the changes which followed the Second Vatican Council also saw the Sisters and the Redemptorists serving in parallel ministries in Brazil during 1969 to 1971.<sup>75</sup> In examining their charism after the Second Vatican Council, the Sisters were assisted by a survey conducted by Father Edward Boyce,<sup>76</sup> who was later the first elected Provincial Superior of the Toronto Province in 1968.

Since 1965, the Sisters have continued the broader vision to serve «the most in need» as parish workers and religious education co-ordinators in eight Canadian parishes, including the Redemptorist parish in Edson, Alberta. The Sisters have welcomed the new wave of immigrants, with spiritual support and English classes. In ten missions, the Sisters have served Canada's natives peoples as teachers and social workers with their living accommodations being in trailer homes or apartments. Instead of the two hospitals in rural Alberta, SOS nurses were employed in seven public health positions located from the Canadian Arctic to remote northern communities, where the Church is not present.<sup>77</sup>

Following the Second Vatican Council, the community collaborated with the National Office of Religious Education in Ottawa to develop home catechetical programs to enrich the faith of families and children as well as to assist teachers and catechists to update their teaching methods.<sup>78</sup>

Continuing to be pioneers in mission, the Sisters in 2003 established the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, a registered

---

<sup>75</sup> Brazil – Correspondence, reports, 1969-1971, SOSA, Series 6-03, Box 1, Files 20-27.

<sup>76</sup> Sixth General Chapter – Survey of SOS by Father Edward Boyce, August 1968, SOSA, Series 3-06, Box 2, File 23.

<sup>77</sup> *The Field at Home*, *passim*, 1965-1984.

<sup>78</sup> BARTON, *Gather Up the Fragments*, 367-433.

non-profit charitable organization, to honor the memory and extend the mission of their foundress. Partners with the wider community across Canada, the Sisters through this foundation remain promoters of positive social change and in the spirit of St. Alphonsus seek «to serve those most in need».

#### SUMMARY

Among the Women Religious who have known significant Redemptorist support and influence are the Sisters of Service of Canada. Father Arthur T. Coughlan (1868-1943), the second provincial of the Toronto Province, along with Sister Catherine Donnelly, initiated their founding. Father George Daly (1872-1956) directed their development over thirty-four years. Both men are revered in the history of these Canadian Sisters. The present article gives an overview of the history of the Sisters of Service, highlighting the roles which Coughlan, Daly and other Canadian Redemptorists played in this history. The Sisters' charism has maintained an Alphonsian spirituality, while their zeal has sought to serve those «most in need», especially immigrants into Canada's vast prairie lands. In recent years their success has been in promoting positive social change.

## RÉSUMÉ

Parmi les Congrégations religieuses féminines qui ont bénéficié d'un grand support des Pères Rédemptoristes et qui ont subi leur influence, on peut ranger les "Sœurs Servantes" du Canada. C'est le Père Arthur T. Coughlan (1868-1943), deuxième supérieur de la Province de Toronto qui, de concert avec Sœur Catherine Donnelly, est à l'origine de leur fondation. En outre, le Père George Daly (1872-1956) a suivi leur développement durant trente-quatre ans. L'un et l'autre sont tenus en honneur dans l'histoire de ces Sœurs canadiennes. Cet article esquisse dans ses grandes lignes, l'histoire de cette Congrégation, soulignant le rôle qu'y ont joué les Pères Coughlan et Daly, avec d'autres Rédemptoristes canadiens. Le charisme de ces Religieuses a conservé une note spirituelle alphonsienne et leur zèle a cherché à servir les «plus abandonnés», en particulier ceux qui immigraient dans l'immense Prairie canadienne. Ces dernières années, elles ont réussi à promouvoir un changement social positif.