

Celebrating 150 Years in Solidarity with the People of Alberta

Sisters of Charity of Montreal “Grey Nuns”

by Sr. Rosaleen Zdunich

In 1857, Bishop Alexandre Tache made a request to Sister Julie Deschamps superior of the Sisters of Charity “Grey Nuns” of Montreal: “There are many needs in the far-west! Would you have Sisters ready to come to Lac Sainte-Anne”?

Sister Dechamps sent the Sisters quoting Saint Marguerite d’Youville, Foundress of the Grey Nuns, “Take good care of the poor”. These words epitomize the life of the Grey Nuns.



St. Marguerite d’Youville, founder

With deep faith and incredible courage, three young Grey Nuns left Montreal on September 19, 1858 and reached Saint-Boniface, Manitoba 42 days later. They remained there for nine months to become acclimatized and to learn pointers from the Native people. Marie-Louise, a young Métis interpreter, asked to join them on their trip and became a very important member of the community.

After journeying 53 days through sloughs, muskegs and creeks with the ox carts, finally September 24, 1859 the Sisters reached the Sacred Ground of Lac Sainte-Anne. They were greeted with prayers of thanksgiving, ringing of the church bells and dances by the Natives. Within a week of their arrival, the sisters were visiting families, teaching day school to some forty adults and learning Cree. Living in extreme poverty and sharing the people’s hunger, they wrote home, “We keep no account book as no one here has money or salary”.

The Sisters, with seven orphans, left Lac Sainte-Anne March 23, 1863 and travelled a full day to St. Albert. They opened a school, an orphanage and a rudimentary hospital where all people found care and respect. Soon local women joined in their work.

In 1895, the Grey Nuns established the first Edmonton hospital, Edmonton General and the first Nursing School in 1908. At the opening, the Sisters confirmed: “The Sisters of Charity have the pleasure of announcing to the public that the new hospital is open. It is to be clearly understood that this is a General Hospital, run by the Sisters of Charity, and all have free access without distinction of race, creed or nationality. The sole object of the Sisters is to minister to the temporal wants of suffering humanity; the rest will be left to the Lord who watches over all”.

With fortitude, they passionately transmitted the flame of healing, service, faith and love to the people of Alberta

The General Hospital is now home to a Continuing Care Centre while a new Grey Nuns Hospital opened in 1988.

...and the journey continues!