



French Roots

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph was founded in Le Puy-en-Velay, France, in 1648 by six women and a Jesuit missionary, Jean-Pierre Médaille. From the beginning, the Sisters' apostolic religious life included service to and with people who were sick, poor, at risk, and vulnerable.

Although the congregation spread rapidly to the surrounding towns, the French Revolution saw the dissolution of the communities, the confiscation of properties, and the dispersal of the Sisters, several of whom were guillotined.

Called together in 1807 to address the great needs of post-revolutionary society, the congregation once again flourished, this time from the new headquarters in Lyons under the leadership of Mother St. John Fontbonne.

In 1836, six Sisters of St. Joseph travelled from France to St. Louis, Missouri, to teach native and poor children.

Toronto Foundation



In 1851, Mother Delphine Fontbonne and three other Sisters came to Toronto from the United States at the request of the bishop concerned for poor immigrants. Their work soon expanded in the areas of education, health care and social services.

Education

Beginning in 1852, the Sisters responded to the desperate need for teachers in Catholic schools in towns and cities in Ontario, including Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Cobourg, Oshawa, and Barrie, as well as in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. They founded five Toronto-area high schools, four being all girls'. From 1911–2006 St. Joseph's College provided community and academic support for women students of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto.

Health Care

The Sisters set up hospitals across Canada, with four in Toronto — St. Michael's Hospital in 1892, St. Joseph's in 1921, Our Lady of Mercy in 1925, Providence Hospital in 1962 — and one each in Comox, BC and Winnipeg, MB. Three schools of nursing were also attached to their hospitals, two in Toronto and one in Winnipeg. Today, the Catholic Health Corporation of Ontario sponsors Providence Healthcare, St. Michael's Hospital, and St. Joseph's Health Centre.



Social Services



The need for more social services led the Sisters to found the House of Providence, opened in 1857 for homeless, poor, elderly, and other people at risk. House of Providence was demolished in 1962 and the elderly residents were

moved to a new facility, Providence Villa and Hospital, known today as Providence Healthcare.

Over the years the Sisters have opened their doors to numerous men, women and children facing difficult times. The Sisters set up facilities to meet newly recognized needs including Nazareth House in 1985.

In the 1970s, they founded two organizations for recovering alcoholics: St. Michael's Halfway Homes and Matt Talbot Houses. The 1980s and 1990s saw individual Sisters founding agencies such as the Daily Bread Food Bank and the Furniture Bank.

Missions Near and Far

The Sisters had a mission in Guatemala from 1968–1981. Some Sisters also served in Nicaragua and Haiti. Currently, individual Sisters are working in Vancouver, northern Manitoba, northern Ontario and in the Niagara Region. One Sister continues with L'Arche in Honduras.

CSJ Associates

Since 1982, the CSJ Associate Program welcomes women and men who wish to share in the mission and spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto through a program of shared prayer, faith and service.

Ministries Today

Today, ministries have evolved from larger institutions to forms of ministry that relate more closely to the dear neighbour in a personal way. Their commitment to nurture community with the homeless, the alienated, the economically poor, women at risk and our wounded earth has led the Sisters to establish many social and pastoral ministries.

The Sisters have also initiated creative collaborations with other religious congregations and laity that have resulted in, among others, much needed affordable housing and assistance to newcomers to Canada.

Founded in 2000, Fontbonne Ministries is the response of the Sisters of St. Joseph to address current social needs. Named after Sister Delphine Fontbonne, the ministries continue the Sisters' tradition of nurturing community and assisting with the food, shelter, education and health care needs of their neighbours.

In our over 160 years of service in Canada, one thing remains constant: we continue to serve wherever there is a need.



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Our History

*Over 160 years
of service in Canada*



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