



“Non Nobis Solum”

“Not For Ourselves Alone”

Within the sorority formed by the congregations of the Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of the Most Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the Canadian Sisters of St. Ann completed the portrait of compassion, and extended it north of the 49th parallel. Though the title and theme of this conference refers to ‘game changers and history makers’, the question arises – is there a place at the podium to speak on behalf of peaceful, prayerful women who changed the world outside, from inside convent walls? Alongside their dear sisters who marched, carried placards, and behaved bravely in the face of stony opposition, religious Sisters acted with steely resolve and patient piety to change the social, civic and educational landscape. This story is about the members of the Sisters of St. Ann who have changed the Pacific Northwest in almost as many ways as their activist counterparts. The educational institutions of the religious congregations of women and men throughout the Pacific Northwest number among them countless examples of creative and audacious installations, built on foundations of love and charity. This brief journey is through the history of St. Joseph’s School of Nursing, established in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada in 1900, and continued until its closure and transfer to the School of Nursing at the University of Victoria in 1981.

From all the Biblical mandates and Latin dictates, the school motto -- Non Nobis Solum – Not for Ourselves Alone -- distinguished St. Joseph’s School of Nursing from its beginnings. It imparted a great degree of selflessness to school grads, and compelled a persistent forward movement in learning and applying skills for the benefit of others.

Theresa Vogel

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TITLE SLIDE: Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the influence of the *Sisters of St. Ann* in healthcare in the Pacific Northwest, specifically in British Columbia, the Yukon and Alaska. Within the sorority formed by the congregations of the *Sisters of Providence* and the *Sisters of the Most Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, the Canadian *Sisters of St. Ann* completed the portrait of compassion, and extended it north of the 49th parallel.

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SLIDE 2: Mother Marie-Anne Blondin

The story of *St. Joseph’s School of Nursing* begins in Quebec fifty years before the school in B.C. opened its doors. The Foundress of the *Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann*, Marie-Esther Blondin, now Blessed Mother Marie-Anne, was herself, an innovator, a game changer and a history maker. Against all social dictates of the time, she insisted

on education for both boys and girls in the strict Quebec municipalities. When she approached the rock of the church, her idea of mixed schools was met with disfavour, yet she persevered, knowing instinctively that education for all children, regardless of gender or economic status, was the key. She found little support among church authorities for her ideals and even less understanding for her approach in founding a religious order of women dedicated to teaching.

There remain, to this day, countless questions about the formation of a corporate ideal in a religious congregation. Is there such a model? Is a corporate ideal or attitude formed by the discipline of religious life? Do the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience strengthen the spirit for carrying out unpopular actions in light of ‘doing the right thing’?

SLIDE 3: Sister Dorothy Bob

Layered atop the corporate identity of any religious congregation of women is the feminine nature of its adherents. Or, perhaps the identity of the congregation is seen through the filter of the feminine nature. Regardless of what forms the visible layer, the response of religious Sisters to need were formed and carried out, despite personal hardship. Sister Mary Theodore (Pineault), great chronicler of the *Sisters of St. Ann* in the west, captured the heartache inherent in the sacrifice on the part of a family when relinquishing a daughter to the nunnery. Theodore was also acutely aware that these same self-sacrificing women would be met with little beyond despair in early Victoria. In fact, she wrote that the challenges to the Sisters in 1858 in B.C. were: disappointment with their lot, isolation, poverty, dangers in the environment, and challenges to piety. In the face of all of this, the call for religious women in the city was a request to meet a “...*need for civilization in the colony, for a feminization and taming of the savage nature of the settlement.*”

SLIDE 4: Mother Mary Providence McTucker

As much as the story of *St. Joseph’s School of Nursing* began in Quebec in 1850, it came to life in the hands of Mother Mary Providence McTucker. Mother Providence arrived in Victoria B.C. in 1859, to take over leadership of the fledgling institute in the west. Though only a tender 23 years of age, Providence was a woman of mettle beyond her years, and in history is now counted as one of the great ‘builders’ in the

city of Victoria. She expanded *St. Ann's Academy*, built *St. Joseph's Hospital*, looked up-island for need, and crossed the Strait of Georgia to provide education for the mainland area of British Columbia. Despite the rigours and challenges, she moved the congregation into the north of the continent. Mary Ellen McTucker was a woman who had experienced hardship and disappointment and faced her family's loss of status, brought about by a reversal of financial position. Yet, she evidently never lost her instinct for the powers of self-determination in women. In 1891, she prophesied the possibility of a rich and rewarding life for women.

Mother Mary Providence was a peerless collaborator of her time, seeking mutually respectful working relationships with both women and men. Her un-heard of friendship with the (Protestant) Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken produced Victoria's enduring healthcare institution, *St. Joseph's Hospital*. Her understanding of the economics of healthcare was evident in 1886, when she instituted the *St. Joseph's Hospital Society* a group which administered a kind of health insurance scheme. The object of the plan and the organization was: "*All persons in good health, without distinction of age, sex, creed, or colour, on payment of one dollar a month, shall be enrolled.*" A fee of five dollars was requested of any new member joining after September 30, 1886, and \$100 purchased a life membership. Members were entitled to free admission to the hospital, visits of the hospital doctor at a reduced rate, and medicines free of charge. Any surplus funds were earmarked for the free treatment of patients devoid of means. Indeed, the first patient admitted to *St. Joseph's Hospital* was a Mr. Bowden, a 'charity case' without friends or means.

SLIDE 5: Patients in *Saint Joseph's Hospital* in 1901

From the very first week after the arrival of the *Sisters of St. Ann* in Victoria in June of 1858, there was evidence of the need for medical care in the city and the colony. A boisterous city of 30,000, most of them living in tents was the final outfitting post for adventurers destined for the gold fields of the Fraser River. In addition to the disease which accompanied hundreds of people flocking to the city, there was the inevitable outcome of excitement, adventure, and lawlessness. Within weeks, the Sisters took responsibility for care of

the sick, fostering of orphans, laying out of the dead and rudimentary instruction in healthcare.

To add insult to injury, as it were, most of the gold seekers returned to Victoria poorer than when they had left. As a result, misfortune conspired with need to inspire the *Sisters of St. Ann* to apply their pioneering spirit to healthcare. In ‘spiritual’ partnership with Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken, the Sisters set to work on developing a hospital. On August 25th, 1875, the cornerstone of *St. Joseph’s Hospital* was laid, and the hospital opened on April 11, 1876. The total cost for the edifice was \$13,900, an unimaginable amount at the time, painstakingly collected after Dr. Helmcken’s initial donation. The first hospital had 35 patient rooms, though no operating room. When the first operation took place in the hospital on July 18, 1877, newspapers were spread on the floor of a parlour, and doctors were outfitted with white cotton gloves (so the internal organs would not slip from their hands) washed in the same laundry boiler as the instruments. Surgical sponges were harvested from the sea, washed repeatedly to remove sand, and soaked in carbolic acid until needed.

Sisters on staff in the hospital taught and mentored each other in giving nursing care, and learned from the example of the *Sisters of Providence* and others in Washington and Oregon, and the doctors in the hospital.

All the members of the religious community worked in the gardens, fields and barns to provide food for patients or to prepare wool for mattresses and bedding. For example, Sisters were dispatched before breakfast to gather eggs if the hens had failed to lay sufficient the previous day, or if there was an increase in admissions. In an emergency, it was recorded that Sister Mary Bridget could milk the cow!

SLIDE 6: *St. Ann’s Hospital, Juneau, Alaska, 1888*

Governor Walter J. Hickel, in his foreword to the 1992 book *North to Share* spoke of the arrival of the *Sisters of St. Ann* in the far north as a moment when women saw need and responded to it. Governor Hickel said: “...although rarely armed with more than their faith in God and people, these women dreamed, dared, and were undaunted...”

Though there had been significant exchange among the Bishops of the church, the leadership of the religious community, and the people of

the region, the initiative to Alaska was accomplished with scarcely a notice. Three Sisters left Victoria on August 13, 1886 on the steamer *Ancon*, and their main mission was to establish a hospital to care for the sick. Their arrival in Alaska took place without fanfare, and the Sisters went to work immediately, dedicated to the people of the area who were employed by continuing gold finds and several successful mines in the area.

The *Sisters of St. Ann* went on to ministries in education and healthcare in Douglas, Holy Cross, Akulurak, Nulato, Cheforak, Nightmute, Fairbanks, Skagway, Sitka, Glenallen and Copper Valley, finally withdrawing from the state one hundred years later.

**SLIDE 7: *St. Joseph's School of Nursing Uniforms,*
1904 – 1908**

While the ministries of the *Sisters of St. Ann* were expanding throughout the region we know as the Pacific Northwest, the need in Victoria continued to be pressing. The staunch supporter of the Sisters' efforts, Dr. J.S. Helmcken continued to challenge their charitable spirit. He recommended that the perfect adjunct to the newly opened hospital would be a training programme for nurses. "*A well-organized school of nursing will guarantee good nursing, which is more important than good medicine.*"

Once again, the Sisters rose to the occasion, and developed the iconic *St. Joseph's School of Nursing*. The school operated between 1900 and 1981, and graduated 2,321 nurses (including 10 men).

The first four Sisters who staffed the hospital included the Superior, Sister Mary Bridget (yes, the same Sister who could milk the cow!) and three others, three colonial doctors, and three lay nurses. Regardless of status, the staff trained one another, learned from each other, and began to document their knowledge. One of the early doctors tells of his experience, from fourteen years of age, first in delivering medicine, then as a doctor's apprentice, and finally, as a full-time medical apprentice who was permitted to "*compound, apply leeches, bleed, cup, and administer enemata.*"

The first director of the school was Sister Mary Gertrude of Jesus, a self-taught practitioner who hand wrote her own textbook of nursing procedures. Sister opened her lectures to students with the challenge to

be as proficient in practice as the doctors who fancied themselves in charge in the hospital.

SLIDE 8: Evelyn Stibbard, RN, RCN

A total of 102 *St. Joseph's School of Nursing* graduates served in the two World Wars, with the first two being from the class of 1906. The services in which they enlisted included the British Expeditionary Forces (World War I), the Canadian Army Medical Corps, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Canadian Air Force, the South African Medical Army Nursing Service, the British Imperial Army, and the United States Army and Air Force (World War II).

The first two nurses to enlist in the Royal Canadian Navy were graduates of the School of Nursing, and both of them went on to become matrons of hospitals.

The selflessness of training led those nurses who were singled out for honors to suggest that they had only done what others would have done had they been given the opportunity. This was despite challenging conditions, as described in one memoir: *"We used to get the wounded flown in from other places. There was grass in their wounds, a dressing shoved on, and a big 'M' on their foreheads indicating they needed morphine."*

SLIDE 9: Radiological Technology

Within twenty years of the opening of the School of Nursing, it became evident that adjunct, support services such as radiological technology and associated disciplines were needed to complement the nursing training. As a result, a school was opened in 1920 and continued, throughout its duration, as a leader in the field, both in training and in developing innovative services. One hundred and fifty-six X-ray technicians graduated from the programme between 1920 and 1970, when the training was transferred to *B.C.I.T.* The school was commended in 1950 by the *Canadian Board of X-Ray Technicians* as the only training school in Canada teaching the full curriculum for X-Ray technicians.

Students in the school followed the nursing training programme closely, and the curriculum was totally hospital-based. The training programme also enabled *St. Joseph's School of Nursing* to be in the forefront of a number of innovations of healthcare in Canada.

SLIDE 10: Sister Mary Bertholde, SSA (1923)

As early as 1917, there was recognition that a School of Laboratory Technology was integral to innovative nursing care. As a result, a training programme was developed, once again under the leadership of the existing staff and faculty in the hospital, and relying on practical experience and peer mentoring.

Sister Mary Bertholde was the first graduate of the school, opened in 1921. In 1943, the training was approved by the *Canadian Association of Laboratory Technologists*, and sanctioned as the first such training school in B.C. The programme was transferred to *B.C.I.T.* in 1970, and graduated one hundred and twenty-seven students in fifty years. In similar fashion to the School of Radiological Technology, the School of Laboratory Technology made possible a number of `firsts` at the Victoria hospital.

SLIDE 11: Sister Mary Justinian, SSA

In addition to an abiding interest in the education of children the *Sisters of St. Ann* had a compelling urge to take special care of children in the pioneer city and colony. In September of 1868, a massive measles and whooping cough outbreak wreaked havoc on the children of Victoria, and severely disturbed the social equilibrium of the region. The thought of children falling ill and dying before their time urged the Sisters to pay special attention to the little ones, almost from the very beginning.

On January 1, 1875, Dr. J.S. Helmcken's daughter brought in a twenty-five cent piece she had received as a Christmas gift, and asked the Sisters to use it to build the children's ward. The first children's unit at the hospital was opened in 1919 after a very successful `tag day` netted \$2000 for the cause.

A specialty Paediatric Unit opened in 1953, and Paediatric Intensive Care Unit opened in 1971. In 1983, the unit was transferred, in its entirety, to the new *Victoria General Hospital* in suburban Victoria.

SLIDE 12: Medical Stenography

The first association of Medical Stenographers was founded in 1877 by British physician Sir William Richard Gowers, who deplored

the “...clumsy, handwritten scribbles of physicians who wrote their notes while they treated their patients.”

Sister Mary Catherine of Sienna, SSA proposed the first school for Medical Stenographers in Canada in 1957, and becomes first Vice President of the Canadian association.

Of all the innovations undertaken by the *Sisters of St. Ann* in Victoria, Medical Stenography may be the only one which will not endure. Instead of laborious transcribing of notes and dictations, the current advances in *Voice Recognition Software* will soon eliminate the need for human transcribing of medical recordings.

SLIDE 13: Sister Clarisse Belanger, SSA

From the very beginning, Sister Mary Gertrude of Jesus pressed the students of the school to be independent thinkers and innovators. Unfettered by political correctness and confident in individual and corporate ability, *St. Joseph's School of Nursing* was the site for a number of healthcare and nursing innovation in Canada, as follows:

- 1926 -- *Vernon Villa* purchased and re-named and re-purposed in 1940 as *St. Joseph's Villa*, the first dedicated tuberculosis unit in B.C.
- 1945 -- *Saint Joseph's Hospital* accepts the first *Red Cross* blood transfusion in Canada
- 1950 -- the first cerebral angiogram on Vancouver Island completed
- 1960 -- the first ophthalmology tomography laboratory on Vancouver Island opened
- 1973 -- the first centralized ambulance unit operates out of the re-named *Victoria General Hospital*

SLIDE 14: Graduation Class at St. Joseph's School of Nursing (1975)

Nursing and nursing education have changed, perhaps more than any other discipline, with the advent of complex scientific and technological procedures. The value of `comfort care` in nursing has not been diminished, but has been augmented by scientific advances. The graduates of *St. Joseph's School of Nursing* and its associated training programmes will no doubt avow that modern times have given nursing

a different aura than that of the days when their training was dominated by a religious orientation, an unspoken devotion to the healing and wholeness of the human spirit.

With the transfer of the nursing training programme to the *University of Victoria* in 1982, the *Sisters of St. Ann* reduced their direct involvement with nursing education in Victoria. However, the last Administrator of *St. Joseph's Hospital* acted in a founding role at the School of Nursing at *UVIC* and continues in an advisory role.

In 2008, in recognition of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the arrival of the *Sisters of St. Ann* in Victoria, a student award of \$150,000 was established at the university to support the aspirations of mid-career nurses, with particular interest in women and men who will be returning to remote communities in the Pacific Northwest to share their skills.

SLIDE 15: 1908 Addition to *St. Joseph's Hospital* – Fairfield Block

With the closure of the nursing school in 1981-1982, and the transfer of the acute care services to the new *Victoria General Hospital* in 1983, the former *St. Joseph's Hospital* was designated as the *Fairfield Health Centre*, specializing in geriatric care. In 1993 – 1994, the devolution of the *Fairfield Health Centre* was begun, and in 1999 the centre was completely vacated and prepared for partial demolition, with re-use of the property for the new *Mount Saint Mary Complex Care Hospital*, opened in 2003.

The heritage portion of the building was restored and re-engineered into fifty-nine studio suites and eleven one bedroom suites, with particular appeal to persons with restricted incomes.

SLIDE 16: Rt. Hon. Kim Campbell, PC, CC and QC

The collective spirit of thousands of students, boarders, nurses, Sisters, staff and supporters echo through the years the lessons learned from the *Sisters of St. Ann*.

Perhaps the most eloquent of speakers is the Rt. Hon. Kim Campbell who spoke to the hearts and minds of the assembled on June 7, 2008, the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the *Sisters of St. Ann* in Victoria, and the founding of *St. Ann's Academy*.

Before Kim Campbell served as Canada's nineteenth Prime Minister, first female Prime Minister, and founder and first Chairperson of the Council of Women World Leaders, she was a pupil and boarder *St. Ann's Academy*.

Her words echo the spirit of *Non Nobis Solum*, in the avocation of the importance of living a life ``...which is not just about yourself.``

SLIDE 17: Thank You!

I am particularly grateful to the *Sisters of St. Ann* in Victoria, BC who have been a major part of my life for over forty years. In the last six years, my study of the history of the city and the province has been made complete by access to the *Archives of the Sisters of St. Ann*, under the guidance of Archivist Mickey King. Through the archives and the Sisters, I have been introduced to a few of the publications about the history of the Sisters and a few of the characters among the Sisters, whose memories of mission work forms `living history.`

Throughout it all, I am grateful to my `dear old Auntie` a *Sister of St. Ann* for sixty-seven years, and one of the adventurous women in a clan of fearless pioneers. Thank you, all, for your attention to this story of a few history-makers.

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``I remember Auntie!``