

Hi, I thought you would like to go with me on my journey through the time of the Ghosts of St. Anne's Past. I wanted to start off with who and where the Grey Nuns came from. I learned a lot about them in Canada when we visited the Grey Nuns Archives and the historical tour of the facilities they took us on. I loved the story of Marguerite and all she did for humanity she was a selfless person and with so much love and compassion to help the needy and having little for herself. I hope you like the version I have put together let me know what you think. I do hope this is okay I really need input because a lot of people will hopefully see and read what I've put together. I really feel this introduction is important don't you think? If it wasn't for her there never would have been an order of the Grey Nuns!

Merci Beaucoup – Rosalie 'La Fontaine' Massie Blackburn

## Saint Marguerite D'Youville the founder of the “Grey Nuns”

It was a “Journey of love” in Varennes Quebec that started on October 15, 1701. It's about a young girl named Marguerite who when she was old enough was sent away to be educated and absorbed the prevailing French spirituality which taught her to go to the Father through Jesus and to go out to others in service. Marguerite was very special in the ability to reach out and enter into the sufferings and joys of others, to be truly compassionate. It has been written” Her inner qualities as well as her physical appearance made her one of the truly beautiful persons of her time.”

By the time she was 30 her husband Francois D'Youville died of an illness and four of her six children. She now had to survive taking care of her two remaining children and herself. At 26 she made handiwork and household items and sold them in her home. She visited the poor at the hospital and mended their clothes. Anybody in need of food, clothing, shelter or love struck a chord in her generous heart. Her love was limitless, its power was healing, challenging and life-giving. Three of her friends were inspired by her mission to share, so they moved in and lived together. They consecrated themselves to God to serve the poor. In the hearts of these four woman God's grace was at work. This was the founding date of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal “Grey Nuns”.

Father Louis Normant, Marguerite's and the sister's spiritual director, wanted Marguerite to take over Montreal's General Hospital for the poor. Awhile later there was a devastating fire that destroyed all they worked for but Marguerite thought what we can learn from this “Maybe we have been too well off. Now we have to live poorer!” On Feb. 2, 1745 a Commitment was documented that states, “For the greater glory of God... for the relief of the poor... we are united in pure charity to live and die together...to consecrate without reserve our time, our days, indeed our entire life, to labor...to receive, feed and support as many poor as we can take care of...” “Since then every Grey Nun has signed her name to this commitment.”

Times were changing and it was announced that they only needed one hospital so they merged with one in Quebec. The first concern was for the poor who would be displaced, she needed to soften this blow to the sisters and her charges. Marguerite accepted the harsh reality and said “If God calls us to govern this house, his plan will succeed. God has a way of comforting those who depend on him no matter what, I place all my trust in him. Madame d'Youville was appointed the Directress of the General Hospital of Montreal. It also established the new institute of the Sisters of Charity “Grey Nuns”. At this time the sisters made their first appearance in a uniform dress expressive of their dedication to simplicity and poverty. The habit was a simple grey dress and black head covering similar to a widow's cap. There was also a silver cross with a heart in relief at the center, and a fleur-de-is at each corner of the cross commemorated their French origin.

In 1756 war broke out between France and England. They willingly made room for soldiers from both sides, because all human life was sacred. England conquered after seven years of conflict. Marguerite found it difficult to say goodbye and loose one's King, country, goods, and friends was worst yet, and to live in fear of having ones religion banned was very difficult. For her leaving was the only option, she saw a broader picture and trusted that a new life would emerge from this.

After the great fire of Montreal in 1765 all was destroyed. Marguerite was thankful for this and prayed that they take courage and that this house would not burn again, and she was right! A new beginning and Marguerite was 65 years old. Her hope was such that she inspired hope in those around her, and donations poured in. She prayed for more means to help, there was so much good we could do. Now there were 17 sisters managing 170 dependents, doing the best they could with the little they had.

It was Marguerite's journey's end and she knew her service to the poor would come to an end. She knew she had to give the sisters a spiritual legacy. This has been an inspiration to Grey Nuns ever since. Her last request was that her sisters remain faithful as they journeyed along the path chosen for them by God, that they assure proper balance in their lives and always in the way of obedience to the will of the Father and in the joy of selfless service. Above all, she urged them to live in perfect union and charity.

Her journey ended in glory. She not only helped the poor the orphaned and homeless people she gave them joy and hope for a better life and existence. She opened the first foundling home for the wayward girls condemned to be punished and called it "Jericho" and gave them refuge, peace and taught them to love. There were young men aspiring to the priesthood, too poor to fulfill their dreams of serving at God's altar, and she sent them to school even though she could not afford it. Helped the Indians that were abandoned and sick, and pointed them in the right direction. You welcomed all into your heart and home, they energized you to action and showed your love for me not merely in words, but by deeds and mercy. Your tender compassion made known my Father's love. Enter the kingdom of peace and be blessed by all for all eternity!

Pope John XXIII beatified Marguerite on May 3, 1959 and called her the 'Mother of Universal Charity'. The first woman to be called 'Blessed'. On December 9, 1990 she was also canonized by Pope John Paul II. "Now in this great plan of God this Mother of the Poor is given to the entire world as a model of compassionate love, a Saint of the Church." Saint Marguerite d'Youville

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