

The Daughters of Marguerite Bourgeoys in Toronto 1932 - 1982

by Sister Calista BEGNAL, C.N.D.
Montreal, Quebec

The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal have been part of the Canadian religious and educational picture for more than three hundred years. Their arrival in Toronto goes back only fifty years, but Golden Jubilees, whether in the lives of individuals or in the history of living institutions – like the C.C.H.A. – are worthy of note and celebration. Thus, my paper today tells of the coming of the daughters of Blessed Marguerite Bourgeoys to the “Queen City” in 1932, and something of the part they have played in the life of the people of the Toronto archdiocese since that time. There are three main areas in which the Sisters have made a notable contribution, namely, parish schools, bilingual education, and secondary school education for girls.

It was in St. Brigid’s parish that the Sister began their apostolate of education to the children and the young women of Toronto. This apostolate has its roots in the mission of their foundress, Blessed Marguerite Bourgeoys, a valiant woman whose heroic and saintly life will be honored by the Universal Church in the ceremony of canonization to be held in Rome next October.

In 1653, in Troyes, France, Marguerite, a young woman of thirty-three, seeking to serve God and to honor His Blessed Mother, and pondering her call to accompany Sieur de Maisonneuve to the New World, was told by Our Lady: “Go to Canada; I will not abandon you.” Obediently Marguerite came to the early colony of Ville Marie, now Montreal, where she taught the children, prepared young women for marriage, and ministered in various ways to the needs of the colonists. She recruited helpers from France and in due time she established her Institute, unusual for those times, a group of uncloistered religious women, to continue the mission entrusted to her by Our Lady.¹

¹ For further information see *Marguerite Bourgeoys and Her Congregation* by Sister St. Ignatius Doyle, C.N.D., Gardenvale, Que. 1940.

At Marguerite's death in 1700, she left thirty-nine Sisters of the Congregation to continue her work in New France. In the eighteenth century they and their successors opened schools in the parishes near Ville Marie and down the Saint Lawrence Valley and, at the insistence of Bishop de Saint-Vallier, even in the fortress town of Louisburg on Cape Breton Island. Not until the nineteenth century did the Sisters come to Upper Canada. In November 1841 in Kingston, which was then the seat of the country's government, two courageous Sisters opened a convent-school, the first outside of French Canada.² This was the forerunner of other schools in eastern Ontario. By 1890 seven more houses had been opened in the diocese of Kingston – at Williamstown in 1865, at Peterborough in 1867, at Brockville in 1878, at St. Andrew's West in 1883, at Cornwall in 1885, and at Westport and at Trenton in 1886. In Ottawa also, the new capital, a convent boarding school was opened in 1868. These foundations were indicative of the growth of the country and of the development of the Congregation whose numbers increased tenfold, from about eighty in 1840 to over eight hundred in 1890. The Sisters had responded also to calls from priests and bishops in the Maritimes, in several New England states and in Illinois as well as in Quebec. The first Bishop of Toronto, Michael Power, had known the Sisters and their work in Montreal, and in the 1840's he wrote to the Superior of the Congregation asking to have two young women accepted at the well-known Mother House Boarding School. This would be, his letter reads, "until a similar institution can be founded in Toronto." There is no record, however, of efforts being made for such a project in Toronto until the twentieth century, in the time of Archbishop McNeil.

Neil McNeil, who became Archbishop of Toronto in 1912, was a man of great vision and ability and a leader in the struggle for improved conditions in Catholic education in Ontario.³ Not only was he involved in policy and planning on the provincial level, but he also gave practical and concrete help to school officials and religious communities in his Archdiocese. It was he who in 1932 brought the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame to Toronto. Archbishop McNeil's contacts with the Congregation were many

² "The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Nineteenth Century Kingston" by Sister St. Calista Begnal, C.N.D., in *Study Sessions*, 1973, of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association.

³ A masterly study of the Catholic school question in Ontario has been made by Franklin Walker in his *Catholic Education and Politics in Ontario*, Vol. II, Federation of Catholic Educational Associations of Ontario, 1976. Chapters 12 to 16 are pertinent.

and close. He had long known many of the Sisters, especially from his years as Rector of St. Francis Xavier University in his native Nova Scotia, and within his family circle one of his very dear sisters and four of his nieces were members of the Congregation. More than once, before 1930, he had invited the “C.N.D.’s” to become one of the teaching communities in Toronto. Many of the Sisters, especially those with roots in Ontario, were eager to have a house there, but the Archbishop’s invitations could not be accepted because there were too few Sisters to meet the pressing needs elsewhere.

In 1931, on September 8, the feast of Our Lady’s Nativity, Archbishop McNeil was visiting his sister, Mother St. Martin of Tours, then Superior of Notre Dame Convent in Ottawa. Once again he told the Sisters that they were always welcome in his archdiocese. This apparently was “the acceptable time” in the designs of Providence. The Provincial Superior, Mother St. Ignatius (Doyle), who was taking part in the conversation, immediately took the matter to the General Administration in Montreal where the project was again considered and this time given approval. Before the month was out, Mother St. Ignatius and Mother St. Martin visited the Archbishop in Toronto to pursue the matter further.⁴

PARISH SCHOOLS

No record is available of the discussions that took place then or of the correspondence that followed, but there must certainly have been consultation with officials of the Toronto Separate School Board and with Father James Hayes, first pastor of St. Brigid’s parish, for in January 1932 it was announced that the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame were coming to St. Brigid’s School in September.⁵ At its meeting on January 13 the

⁴ It has long been a tradition for each CND house to keep a record of the happenings of each year. Unless otherwise indicated, the story that follows for the period 1932 to 1950 is taken from the *Annals of St. Brigid’s Convent, Toronto*.

⁵ At this time, according to the CND directory, *Nominations 1931-1932*, there were 2447 Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Canada and the United States. During that year the decision was made to send Sisters to Japan. The *Directory 1981-1982* lists 2668 Sisters in Canada, the United States, Japan, Central America and the Cameroons. The greatest concentration of CND establishments has always been in the province of Quebec and the greatest number of Sisters have always been French-speaking.

Property Committee of the School Board received and considered a proposal made by Archbishop McNeil that the Congregation should be offered, for purchase or long lease, property between Wolverleigh and Glebeholme Boulevards, part of St. Brigid's schoolgrounds, for the building of a residence for the Sisters. In the days that followed, this proposal was studied by the Board itself and by the Property Committee and received a favourable reception. But the Sisters themselves were undecided about the wisdom of the purchase of the land. They were already envisaging the start of a high school for girls, and they wanted property and a building that would be suitable for this purpose. Negotiations were suspended until a new proposal came from the Sisters in early April. This proposal received consideration in the Management, the Property, and the Finance Committees and at a full Board meeting. The Board, in need of teachers for its schools and eager to have the Sisters come to the city, in the final event offered an agreement whereby, according to the Minutes, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame would "be given a complete transfer of the land" in question and the Sisters, on their part, would "teach classes of boys or girls or mixed classes..., (would) provide three teachers commencing September 1 next and ... (would) provide further teachers from the Congregation from time to time as they reasonably can or as the Board may reasonably require." On May 10 the Board was informed that this offer had been accepted and that arrangements were proceeding satisfactorily.⁶

Since no convent had yet been built, the Congregation purchased a small house at 523 Glebeholme, and on July 26, Mother St. Ignatius and the newly-appointed Superior, Sister St. John of Meda (Hughes) arrived in Toronto and began the task of furnishing the little house and preparing it for occupation. On August 14, the eve of Our Lady's Assumption, they were joined by three young Sisters – Sister St. Winnefride (O'Brien), Sister St. Vincent (Corrigan) and Sister St. Mary Aloysia (Murphy). All three were to

The Sisters assigned to St. Brigid's parish in 1932 belonged to the canonical administrative division called Holy Angels Province which then comprised twenty CND convents in Ontario and the United States. Of the 330 Sisters in the province at that time 230 were in the United States and 100 in Ontario. In 1948 the house in the United States became a separate canonical province and were replaced in Holy Angels Province by the English-language houses in Montreal. In 1981-82 this province includes 257 Sisters in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Labrador. Of these 58 are stationed in Toronto.

⁶ *Minutes of the Toronto and Suburban Separate School Board*, January-April 1932.

teach in St. Brigid's school, with Sister St. Winnefride as principal. At all the masses the following morning, Father Hayes officially welcomed the Sisters to his parish. A musician and teacher of French, Sister St. Raymond of Toulouse (Prévost), and a cook, Sister Colin, completed the little group. Of these foundresses of St. Brigid's Convent, Sister Ann O'Brien and Sister Anna Murphy are still living. In fact, Sister O'Brien, who was principal at St. Brigid's until 1953, returned there nine years ago after serving in other administrative positions in the Congregation and she is still a dynamic force and a vital element in the life of the parish.

The leader of the little band for the first six years, and again at a later period, was Sister St. John of Meda. Sister St. John was a woman of strong character, full of zeal and of love of God. To her, perhaps, more than to any other one person is due the success of the C.N.D. foundation in Toronto. She was blessed with great energy and with organizational abilities, and she spared no effort in meeting the demands of those early days. What she asked of herself, she asked also of her companions, so that hard work and sacrifice and persevering effort were the order of the day for all. She had the gift of hospitality to an unusual degree, and she and her companions inaugurated at St. Brigid's a tradition of warmth and friendly concern for people. One of Sister St. John's first endeavours in Toronto was the formation of a Toronto Chapter of Notre Dame Alumnae, of whom there were many in the area, and these women continued for many years to be the loyal support of the work of the Sisters. She gave many hours of her time to working with Marian Sodalties as well as to tutoring prospective seminarians. From the start Sister St. John had a vision for the development of the Sisters' mission of education in Toronto that was to be realized in years to come.

Upon their arrival, and even in the months beforehand, the Sisters were warmly welcomed not only by the Archbishop, whom they looked on as "a kind father," and by the priests and people of St. Brigid's, but also by the officials of the School Board and by other religious communities in the city. Mr. Edward Henderson, Secretary of the Separate School Board, came on August 16 to greet the Sisters and to show them the school, and he continued to be a helpful friend as the years went by. Dr. John Bennett, then School Inspector, gave himself unselfishly to initiate the Sisters into the Toronto system, and his support and loyal friendship never wavered over the decades. Among those who were the first to offer hospitality and kindness in the early months were the Sisters of Loretto, the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of Service. These were the difficult depression years of the early thirties, and the Sisters of St. Joseph were particularly generous, arriving regularly from the House of Providence with gifts of produce from their gardens. The

generosity of parishioners and of other friends is recorded in detail in the Annals of the convent – a generosity that was appreciated and reciprocated.

It is interesting to note that those Annals record also the founding of our own Catholic Historical Society which we will be celebrating in the coming year. Presumably some of the planning for that foundation was done when the American Catholic Historical Association met, for the first time in Canada, at the University of Toronto in December 1932. Several of the Sisters from St. Brigid's attended the sessions that dealt with early Canadian history. The following June the Sisters were again present at the meeting at the Royal York Hotel when the Canadian Catholic Historical Association was formed. One of the members of that first executive group, Reverend John Boyle O'Reilly, later a President of the Association, is often mentioned in the Annals as a visitor at the convent. It is clear that the Sisters were appreciative of the educational and cultural advantages that Toronto offered, for they went to hear Jacques Maritain lecture and in the summers they registered for courses at the University.

As initially agreed with the School Board, the Congregation sent an additional Sister to teach at St. Brigid's in 1933 and Sisters for other schools in the following years. It was clear from the start that the little house on Glebeholme would not long be adequate. Even in January of 1933 the Sisters were looking for a house that would accommodate their expected growth. Through the fall and winter of 1933-34 this problem was a pressing one. Should they purchase, or should they build? Should they provide for classrooms or for a residence only? Where should they locate? Always in the mind of Sister St. John was the thought of a high school for girls. Advice came from contractors and from real estate men as well as from Archbishop McNeil, Senator McGuire and other people of experience. The hope for a high school, however, was premature, and it was finally decided that a residence should be erected next to the rectory, on Wolverleigh Boulevard, on the land that had been offered to the Congregation by the School Board. By April arrangements had been concluded with an architect, Mr. H.D. Martin, who offered his services *gratis*, and with the contracting firm of Mr. M.J. Callaghan. Construction was begun in June, and on October 2 the house was completed and ready for occupancy.

Even these larger quarters were soon to be outgrown as the Congregation continued to supply teachers for parish schools and eventually for a girls' high school. St. Dunstan's parish in 1934 and Holy Cross in 1935 each received two Sisters to direct and to teach in their Separate Schools. In the years that followed there were many requests from pastors in the Toronto area for

C.N.D. Sisters for their schools – requests that, because of the high school, could not be met until 1949. In that year four Sisters were assigned to Saint John's school. They replaced the Sisters of St. Joseph who moved to a school that was more conveniently located for them. In 1950 two Sisters began to teach at some distance from home in Wexford at St. Teresa's school, which later became Precious Blood School. The Sisters withdrew from here, however, in 1956.⁷ In February 1950 the parishioners of Canadian Martyrs parish, whose children had to travel to St. Brigid's school or else attend a public school, asked the Board for a school of their own. In September 1952 this new school opened with two Sisters of the Congregation in charge. The Catholic population was increasing rapidly in this eastern part of Toronto, and when a school was opened in Immaculate Heart of Mary parish in 1959, the Sisters of the Congregation accepted the responsibility for it. In the mid-sixties, as St. John's parish increased in numbers, a second separate school, called St. Denis, was opened within its boundaries with a Sister of the Congregation in charge. Then in 1968 the School Board initiated a new polity. The various teaching communities were asked to distribute their personnel so that each Separate school would have at least one religious on its staff. In compliance with this request Sisters of the Congregation were assigned to teach in St. Aloysius school, in St. Ann's, in Corpus Christi, in St. Nicholas' and in Holy Spirit schools. This CND presence in parish schools has continued to the present day, although to a lesser extent because of the situation created by the crisis in religious vocations. In recent years, in addition to their work in individual parish schools, the Sisters have worked directly for the School Board as supervisors or consultants in such areas as Religious Education, and have given service also as executives in the teachers' organizations.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

From the original foundation at St. Brigid's in 1932 two more CND communities were established in Toronto by 1950. The first was a residence on Sherbourne Street for the Sisters who had come to teach in the bilingual Ecole Sacré Coeur. The other was Notre Dame Residence for the Sisters teaching at St. John's school and at the high school.

⁷ *Annals of St. Theresa's School, 1950-1954; Annals of Precious Blood School, 1954-1956; St. Brigid's Annals, 1956.*

In the area of bilingual education for children whose mother tongue was French the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame made a notable contribution to the residents of Toronto. In the 1940's the only French-language Catholic parish in the city was Sacré Coeur, founded in 1887, and children from all parts of the city attended its parish Separate School, where part of the program was taught in English and part in French. In 1941 some of the parents became dissatisfied with the way that their children were being taught French, and through their organization, *l'Association Canadienne-Française de Toronto*, they appealed formally to the School Board to have the situation remedied. The letter of complaint, dated September 11, 1941, suggested that the Ursulines or the Sisters of the Congregation be asked to provide French-speaking Sisters for the school. Mr. Henderson, Secretary of the Board, wasted no time in approaching the Superior of St. Brigid's Convent on the matter. She referred him to the Mother House in Montreal with a letter of introduction to the Assistant General. Since there were no Sisters to be spared for Toronto at this time, Mr. Henderson's request was refused. Repeated requests over the next two years were unavailing.

At this time the Sisters of St. Joseph, who had capably conducted Sacré Coeur school for some years, were finding it difficult to provide French-speaking teachers and, according to correspondence in the School Board minutes, they were desirous of withdrawing their two Sisters from the school in June 1942. When the attempt to obtain replacements failed, they were prevailed upon to remain another year. Again in 1943, after further efforts were again unsuccessful, they generously agreed to remain for yet another year.⁸ In the meantime, however, the parishioners were persistent, and appeals were made to both Archbishop McGuigan and in Montreal to Archbishop Charbonneau to use their influence with the Congregation to have CND Sisters assigned to Sacré Coeur school. The intervention was successful, and just before the opening of school, in September 1943, two Sisters were taken from other schools and assigned to Toronto.

⁸ *Minutes of the Toronto and Suburban Separate School Board*, Sept. 19, 1941; July 23, 1942; Sept. 8, 1942; Sept. 7, Oct. 5 and Oct. 12, 1943. Also *Les Annales de l'École Sacré-Coeur*, and interviews with Sister Edna Poirier and Sister Rose Banville.

A graphic account of the arrival of the Sisters in 1943 and of the move into a new home in 1945 is given by Sister St. Mary Martha then Superior of St. Brigid's in her *Memoirs of Three Quarters of a Century*, (unpublished ms., c. 1956).

This last minute decision caused disruption in various quarters, but the two Sisters – Sister St. Joseph of Turin (Brunette) and Sister St. Marie Felicien (Poirier) – undertook their new apostolate with devotion and courage in spite of difficulties and even hardships. For the first two years they lived at St. Brigid's Convent and travelled each day, during rush hours, with several changes of streetcars, to Sackville Street, going even on Sundays to be with the children for their Mass. Their burden was not made any lighter by the anti-French prejudice that they often encountered in those days. But they were encouraged by their results, and in 1945 they were joined by two more Sisters and were ready to form a separate local community. A house was purchased for them on Sherbourne Street, but even here frustration was their lot. It was wartime, with its housing shortage and rental controls, and several very disturbing months elapsed before all the tenants could be persuaded to vacate the house. In the meantime, St. Brigid's Convent, which had been built for ten or twelve Sisters was housing twenty-five. On November 24, 1945, the new community of five bilingual CND's moved into their new home at 417 Sherbourne.

The period that followed is one of development and expansion in educational services to the French-speaking Catholics in Toronto. The Sisters continued to teach in Sacré Coeur School for over thirty years, while witnessing and promoting improvements elsewhere in Toronto as well. In 1948 the classes in the old school on Sackville Street were transferred to the new modern building just erected on Sherbourne. Two years later high school subjects were introduced into the program. Then in 1952, in a former Eaton home on St. George Street, the Sisters opened Villa Marguerite Bourgeoys, the first bilingual high school in Toronto. It was also a boarding school for girls. The high school classes were taught at Villa Marguerite Bourgeois while several Sisters travelled each day to teach at Sacré Coeur school. After a decade at the St. George Street location, the community of eleven Sisters and all the high school classes moved to Lawrence Avenue East. Five of the Sisters continued to travel each day to Sacré Coeur school. At the request of Cardinal McGuigan, who wished to honor one of his predecessors, the high school was renamed Ecole Secondaire de Charbonnel. In 1965 the Congregation agreed to staff another bilingual Separate school, and three more bilingual Sisters were sent for the new Ecole Sainte Madeleine in Don Mills. In 1968, in response to the School Board request for a sharing of personnel, one Sister joined the staff at Ecole George Etienne Cartier.

The turbulent sixties took their toll in many areas of society and of Church life, and religious communities were affected in various ways by the changes. By the early 1970's a combination of circumstances had reduced this

bilingual community at Marguerite Bourgeys Convent from fifteen to four. In 1976 these four Sisters were withdrawn to serve elsewhere, but by that time, the educational needs of French-speaking Catholics in Toronto were being well taken care of. There are today five bilingual parish schools in the Separate School system as well as the Ecole Secondaire Etienne Brulé.

NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL

Toronto today has an excellent system of Catholic secondary education, and Notre Dame High School in the east end of the city is an important part of this system.⁹ Fifty years ago, however, the young people of the diocese had practically no opportunity for education beyond Grade VIII unless they attended a publicly supported collegiate or were able to afford the tuition of a private Catholic school. Those who lived near the center of the city could attend St. Joseph's High School for girls on Jarvis Street or the Bond Street school for boys conducted by the Christian Brothers, but travel to these schools was difficult and beyond the means of the vast majority. Over the years Archbishop McNeil was in the vanguard of the struggle in Ontario for a more equitable governmental policy for Catholic schools, and he supported the efforts of the School Board and the religious communities to provide high school instruction in the Separate School system. Archbishop McGuigan, who succeeded him in 1935, was also deeply concerned about the religious and scholastic training of his young people. The difficulties they both encountered were immense.

In 1934 a step forward was taken when the School Board inaugurated high school classes in five of its parish schools. In the east end, for instance, Grade IX was taught at St. Brigid's (by its principal, Sister St. Winnefride) and Grade X was started in nearby St. John's school, then in charge of the Sisters of St. Joseph. But the Board soon had to discontinue its support for any instruction on this level, and after 1937 the burden fell upon the Archbishop. In a circular letter to the parishes in September 1938, calling for cooperation from clergy, religious and the faithful, Archbishop McGuigan asserted: "We must at all costs and at any sacrifice maintain St. Joseph's High School for girls and the Bond Street High School for boys until better

⁹ The story of Notre Dame High School and of the beginnings of Notre Dame Convent is taken from the *Annals of Notre Dame High School* and the *Annals of Notre Dame Convent, Toronto*.

arrangements can be made in the city of Toronto.” Three years later the opportunity came for him to initiate change and improvement.

In 1941 when the Canadian government needed accommodations for its Air Training unit, they took over the Jarvis Street building, and new quarters had to be found for the girls' high school classes. Archbishop McGuigan took the occasion to initiate his plan for expanding secondary school services. By mid-August arrangements had been made with the Sisters of St. Joseph to relocate their classes in a building on Adelaide Street in St. Mary's parish and with the Sisters of Loretto to teach Grades IX and X in Our Lady of Perpetual Help school to the north. The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame were asked in July if they would help in opening high school classes for girls in the east end of the city if a suitable location could be found. By a series of misapprehensions, however, when two Sisters, qualified high school teachers, arrived at St. Brigid's in August, their appointment had not been expected by the Archbishop and no arrangements had been made for a school in the area. Hurried consultations by the Archbishop with Father Thomas Manley, pastor of St. Brigid's and a member of the School Board, with Dr. John Bennett, school inspector and trusted advisor on educational matters, and with Father Denis O'Connor, pastor of St. John's parish, resulted in a decision to open two classes in a building in St. John's parish that had formerly been used as a parish hall. An announcement to this effect was made in the parishes on Sunday, August 24, and a week later on Tuesday, September 2, Sister St. Gabriel of the Angels (Garvin) and Sister St. Elizabeth Marie (McDermott) welcomed seventy-five young women from ten different parishes into the new-born Notre Dame High School.

This school had been born in poverty. From the Annals of Notre Dame High School, in which every gift, great and small, is recorded with evident appreciation, it is clear that the material difficulties continued to be very great. In spite of handicaps, however, the school developed steadily and efficiently. In 1942 the Archbishop's approval of the building of two classrooms and the Congregation's sending of two more Sisters made it possible to add Grade XI to the program and to open a second class of Grade IX. The next year Grade XII was added, and another Grade X class was opened. On June 18, 1944, the first graduation ceremony of Notre Dame High School took place in St. John's church. As the student body continued to grow in numbers, reaching 286 in September 1947, the problem of adequate accommodations became more acute, a problem which was only partially solved by the use of what were called “portables.”

Archbishop McGuigan was very much aware of this inadequacy and of

other problems concerning his young people. Throughout the 1940's he multiplied his efforts to provide a proper environment for Catholic teenagers by increasing school facilities and establishing recreational centres to combat the growing problem of post-war delinquency. Early in 1942 he launched an appeal for Lenten donations to support the four free high schools which received no financial assistance from the Separate School Board. The sum of \$12,000, which was required to keep them in operation, was quickly raised. The next year he entrusted to the Holy Name Society, then under the direction of Father Manley of St. Brigid's, a project to raise \$50,000 for the development of the high schools and of recreational centres in the archdiocese. The success of this project led to a larger campaign in 1944 during which \$1,500,000 was subscribed for the post-war expansion of the work of the Church. It was due to the organizing ability of the leaders of these drives and to the generous response of the faithful people that the development of the secondary school system in the archdiocese was able to go forward.

Thus in 1948 plans were made for a new building for Notre Dame High School, to be erected on Malvern Street next to the existing school. On December 14 the Archbishop, now Cardinal, McGuigan, assisted at the turning of the sod, and a year later, on December 11, 1949, he presided at the official opening of the completed building.

Cardinal McGuigan knew well how great was the need for a residence for the Sisters who were staffing the high school. As a fairly frequent visitor at St. Brigid's Convent, he had seen for himself how extremely crowded the conditions had become.¹⁰ By 1949, with nine Sisters teaching in the high school and four more newly appointed to St. John's school which was next to the high school, twenty-four people were living at St. Brigid's, more than twice the number for which it was originally intended. Even though the little house on Glebeholme had been retrieved from its tenants and converted into a dormitory, the situation was a very difficult one. To make possible the construction of a new convent, His Eminence, in February 1949, gave the Community a plot of land adjoining the high school. Sister St. John of Meda, who was once again the Superior at St. Brigid's, began with great joy

¹⁰ Like his predecessor Archbishop McNeil, Cardinal McGuigan had a sister in the Congregation. Over the years, when Sister St. George (Gertrude McGuigan) came to Toronto to visit her brother, there would always be a reunion at St. Brigid's. Sister spent the last year of her life, 1950-51, at St. Brigid's near to her brother.

and enthusiasm to plan a new home for the Sisters. Probably because of the financial burden involved, the necessary approval from the Mother House was not immediately granted. When no authorization for construction seemed to be forthcoming in the spring of 1950, arrangements were made to use the vacated classrooms of the old building on Malvern Street as a residence for the Sisters who had been travelling each day from the overcrowded Wolverleigh Boulevard house. On July 26 the move was made. The thirteen Sisters did not formally become a separate local community until October, when Sister St. John of Meda was appointed as their Superior and joined them in "Malvern House," as the new residence was called. Many are the stories that are told of the inconveniences and difficulties as well as of humorous experiences of those two years in Malvern House. The living arrangements were so inappropriate that effective plans were soon being made for the construction of a new convent. Approval of the architect's plans came from the Mother House in June 1951, and a year later the new Notre Dame Convent at 750 Kingston Road was ready for occupancy.

During the next decade enrolment at Notre Dame High continued to increase and the existing facilities soon became overtaxed. In September 1963 the sturdy old "Malvern House," which had served in turn as church, parish hall, school and Sisters' residence, was demolished, and in its place was built the modern O'Connor Hall, named in honor of the longtime pastor of St. John's parish whose wise and generous support had helped to make possible the beginning of Notre Dame High. O'Connor Hall was blessed on May 4, 1964, by His Grace, Archbishop Philip Pocock, and in September it opened its doors to 784 students. As the school grew, the Congregation sent additional Sisters to serve its needs. In 1968, for instance, of the forty-one members of the Notre Dame staff, twenty were C.N.D. Sisters. Over the years the school has always been under the capable direction of a CND principal and has had the blessing of a well-qualified and dedicated faculty. It has gained an excellent reputation among the high schools of the city and the accomplishments of its graduates reflect honor upon it. Today over a thousand young women each year enjoy the advantages of an excellent Catholic secondary school education at Notre Dame High. Of the sixty-six faculty and ten support staff members of the school, nineteen are Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

Thus the hopes of those CND's who came to Toronto fifty years ago have been realized. Over the years through their dedication and zeal and that of their successors the lives of numerous young people have been influenced for good. Many of the young people who came to know the Sisters have in their turn given their lives in service to others in the priesthood and in

religious life. Some who have entered the Congregation of Notre Dame are among Toronto's educators of today.

The contribution of the Sisters to education in Toronto was recognized formally when the Toronto Metropolitan and Suburban School Board named a new school in Agincourt in honor of their foundress. The Marguerite Bourgeoys Separate School was officially opened and dedicated on April 25, 1977. This year, on May 29, the golden anniversary of the CND foundation in Toronto was celebrated at St. Brigid's Church with His Eminence, Cardinal Carter presiding. A happy conclusion to this year of jubilee will be the celebrations – in Toronto and in all CND communities – that will follow the October thirty-first canonization of Marguerite Bourgeoys, whom Cardinal McGuigan has called “one of Canada's holiest and noblest women.”¹¹

¹¹ Foreword to *Marguerite Bourgeoys and Her Congregation*. Archbishop McGuigan there said, “Her life story was the first book I read in boyhood and it has left a deep impression on my soul.”