

Celebrating the Arrival of the Sisters of Mercy at Sandy Point July 28, 1873

The Foundation

On July 18, 1873, Bishop Howley of the West Coast, along with four sisters from Providence, Rhode Island, Sisters Antonio Egan, Corsini Dempsey, Veronica Payne, and Sylvester Carver boarded the Olivette for Halifax. Their sponsor, Mrs. Henriette Brownell, accompanied them. Sailing from Halifax aboard the SS Harlow, the missionary group arrived at Sandy Point on July 28, 1873. The dream of Father Thomas Sears had finally taken shape and the new mission of the Sisters of Mercy on Sandy Point was about to begin.

The pioneer group was quickly faced with the stark realities of missionary life in Western Newfoundland. The area was largely undeveloped and lacking in any amenities consistent with progress. The houses were rude shelters and the roads were mere footpaths. But the sisters seemed undeterred both in their resolve and in their zeal, and they prepared assiduously for the opening of school in September.

The school at Sandy Point was a combination school-hall, a crude structure, part of which had been the log cabin home of Father Belanger. Most of the children were extremely poor, lacking food and proper clothing. They had little or no knowledge of their faith. In addition, those of French extraction spoke a dialect the sisters found difficult to understand. Since instruction was in English, this made school more problematic, for both children and sisters.

Despite all the deficiencies and difficulties, the sisters were not discouraged. These courageous and talented women, supported by their sponsor and friend, Mrs. Brownell, began the arduous work of developing the educational, spiritual and social capacity of their young scholars. They worked tirelessly to provide an all-round education for the children of Sandy Point along with visitation of the sick. In time, the students of the convent school became known for their love for and proficiency in music, song, painting and embroidery. – excerpts from Women of Providence by Sr. Charlotte Fitzpatrick

Blessings – Inspired by Hildegard of Bingen

Spirit of Life,
as we ponder the beginnings of the Mercy Mission on the West Coast
we ask that you bless us in our ministries.
In this time of hope we wish to affirm life for all.
We commit ourselves again
to bring Your hope of freedom to all who suffer despair.

Fill us with a thirst for Your justice
and teach us to move beyond reliance on empty promises and false hopes.

Spirit of Life, renew our vision of a different possibility,
a different world as the pioneer group did.
Open the eyes of those who are fed to the cries of the hungry.
Move the hearts of those who are whole to offer healing to those who suffer.
Turn our eyes inward and outward to the beauties within and without.
Help us to be mindful of Your presence in each other and in all creation.

Bless us and all the women of the future,
and grant us loving, listening and compassionate hearts.
Open for us a way of peace and love. Amen.

Readings:

"I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you... I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my Spirit in you... you shall be my people and I will be your God." (Ezekiel 36:26-28)

"In responding to the demands of our mission we rely on the Holy Spirit to lead us. The Word of God opens us to contemplate the Divine Presence in ourselves, in others and in the universe." (Constitutions #9)

Reflection:

- We can only imagine the other challenges the early sisters encountered upon their arrival and early years on Sandy Point. Recall who or what inspired you to overcome similar difficulties during your early years in Mercy.
- Who or what helps you today to let go of feelings of doubt, frustrations, discouragement, regrets, misunderstandings, etc. so that you continue to live Mercy to its fullest?

Magnificat for Today

Our souls magnify the holiness
that dwells within us.

And our spirits rejoice in the
presence of the Holy One.

Because we as women have been
touched and called.

Yes, from this day forward all
generations will call us blessed.

For great things have been done through us,
and through those who went before us.

Holy is our name, and we have shown
MERCY and strength as women, from age to age.

We have gathered our courage and steadfastness
and we have worked to heal
the broken-hearted with tenderness and care.

Yes, we have been hungry and filled
one another with good things.

For we have kept our promises and journeyed and struggled...
touching and healing... laughing and crying... questioning and loving...

Yes, indeed, by our living and our faithfulness,
by our passion and our courage,
all generations of women from this day forth will be blessed. (Diane Neu)

Song: How Wonderful is My Soul (Mechtild of Magdeburg) Music: Briege O'Hare,osc



01 How Wonderful Is
My Soul.mp3

Singer: Marie Cox, rsm

How wonderful is my soul
Which you, My God, have created.
Nothing can truly show its beauty.
Nothing can truly set me free.

Chorus: Except your love flowing through my being
Speaking to me of things unknown
And in your love flowing through my being
My soul awakens to you, Holy One.

And the joy of this awakening
Just cannot be described.
Nothing can truly tell its wonder
Nothing can ever give such peace.