

May 9, 2020

Dear Sisters and Friends,

This May we mark the 160th anniversary of the arrival of Mother Xavier LeBihan and Mother Angela Doyle in Chatham. It is an interesting exercise to re-read the first volume of Pilgrims in Service in order to recall the flavor of those challenging and exciting days. (*Thank you Margaret Pray for your careful and dedicated efforts!*)



One of the recurring themes of Mother Xavier's adventures is the concept of 'not what I expected'. So many times in her life, she was surprised by the way circumstances unfolded. She entered a cloistered community, only to return home to care for her dying mother and settle the family estate. She prepared for her missionary adventure expecting to be joined by two companions and ended up travelling alone. When she finally arrived at 'the Soo' she was relieved to be alone because she found the situation so disappointing that she was concerned that her companions would have wanted to return home immediately. And her life continued to unfold with many unexpected situations which she could not have anticipated – some of them distressing, some of them comforting. In the midst of all this, she continued in a spirit of fidelity, rooted in the One who first called her name and who shepherded her through every twisting, turning, unexpected path.

Isn't this how we all travel through life, perhaps expecting one thing and being surprised by something else? We have met up with acceptance when we expected hostility. We have been asked to do work for which we felt unqualified and discovered gifts we never knew we had. We had a vision of how things would unfold and what happened was not even close to what we planned. We thought we had the answer to the problem, only to find ourselves back at square one. Much to our dismay, we learn the disappointment and disillusionment are part of the picture. And so also, to our delight, are unexpected treasures, revelations and wonderful surprises.

Who could have imagined the circumstances in which we find ourselves today – a global pandemic, situations of social isolation, changes in all aspects of our daily lives from liturgical worship to celebrations to recreation and rehabilitation?

In the midst of all this, goodness, resiliency and adaptability radiate among us and in our friends and neighbours. Hope and help come from both expected and unexpected quarters. New paths are walked and new opportunities are revealed.

The pioneering spirit of the bold women who came before us is alive and well. We remain rooted in Christ who is the constant in our lives, attuned to the Spirit who speaks unceasingly in our hearts, grateful for the example of our ancestors in faith and for the companionship of those who journey with us.

We pray together those familiar words that have become our mantra in these unexpected times:

Give us the grace to soften our edges, bend and move along with the natural rhythms of our lives, change with evolution itself.

Lead us deep into the mystery of Life so that we may discover there that true strength which comes from flexibility of spirit.

Guide every step of our sacred journey so that we may create a future full of promise for all we collaborate together.

Happy Anniversary!

Sheila McKinley

