“Spirit Seeking Light and Beauty,
Hearts that longeth for Thy rest,
Soul that asketh understanding, only thus can you be blest.
Through the vastness of creation though your restless heart may roam,
God is all that you may long for,
God is all (His) creatures’ home.”

This verse from a beloved hymn by Janet Erskine Stuart, speaks to the person of Mother Xavier, foundress of the Chatham Ursulines, as it does to every human heart. In Margaret Pray’s, *Vol. 1 of Pilgrims in Service*, we learn that her “deep love for God, unwavering trust in Divine Providence and a firm adherence to basic Christian beliefs gave substance to her spirituality.”

In her early life in Brittany she was attracted to the Ursuline way of life - particularly to the monastic traditions which for her were the means of deepening her relationship with God through contemplation and service. And she faced challenges before reaching that goal. When she felt the draw of the Spirit to minister to people in a new land, she responded wholeheartedly. Her travels and arrival in North America were marked by uncertainties, disappointments, hopes and dreams. In all, Mother Xavier, a seeker, knew that in all of life’s changing and challenging moments God’s home was in her and within all of life and life’s circumstances.

When Mother Xavier arrived in Chatham it was after a very long, winding journey carrying a dream within her. Her desire was to gather other women who would accompany her and serve the needs of this new community.
In her hopes for “The Pines” she wanted to provide a space that could facilitate deepening the contemplative spirit through the celebration of the Eucharist and the monastic cloister. Connecting with the natural world was also necessary for the human spirit to grow. The location of the convent/school must have sufficient outdoor reflective garden space as a source of beauty and inspiration as well as provide a healthy environment and space to grow food.

Mother Xavier’s desire to serve led to establishing a school for young girls by providing education in academics along with beauty cultivated through arts and music. In these aspects of her life and the growth of the Ursuline Community, it was that longing for the Divine and God’s home in each of the people and the day-to-day moments of life that were her inspiration. This encompassed a life-time of seeking, taking her to unexpected places and situations. And it was “a long, slow process”!

Remembering our Ursuline roots, planted by Mother Xavier in 1860 in Chatham, may we, too, be attentive to the enticement of that same Spirit within and among us today. As we follow God’s path in our times, may we recognize the “One of our longing” who makes a home within each of us, in all of creation; the One who lures us in our pain, our impatience, our disappointment, our inspiration, to be a community of hope today in our world.

For your reflection: How is the “One of our Longing” making a home in you?

Reflection prepared by Sr. Kathleen O’Mara

With love and wishes for a joyful celebration,

Theresa M., Karen, Marian, Jean Ann