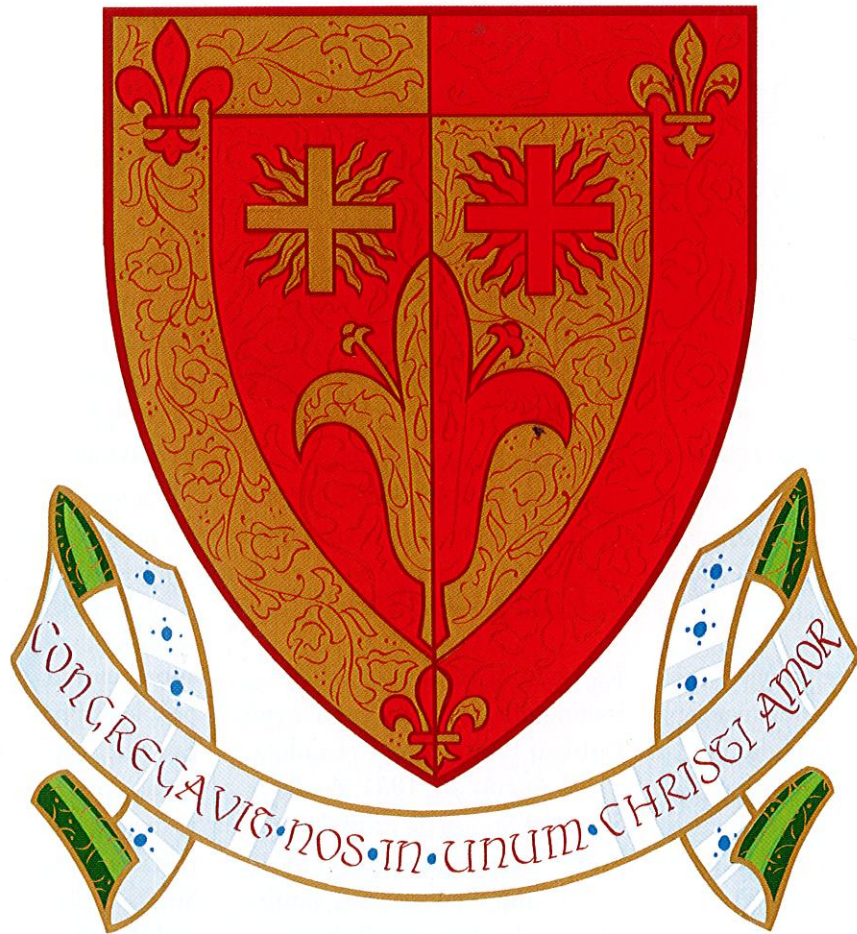


*The Sisters of St. Joseph*



• SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF •  
• SAUL & STE. MARIE •

*Recognizing a Legacy of  
140 Years of Service to the  
Diocese of Thunder Bay*

## The Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie

In every diocese, there are people who play an exceptional role in the building up of the Church and the ministries of the Church. In the Diocese of Thunder Bay, both in the city itself and in its regions, no one has played a greater part in developing ministries and building foundations upon which others can develop than the Sisters of St. Joseph. These congregations of holy women began with minimal tools but with great courage and determination, they laid the foundations for ministries in education, health care and parish ministries in our diocese.

Many people might be unaware that the Sisters of St. Joseph who laid these foundations were from different but related congregations of this order. There



are many congregations of the Sisters of St. Joseph worldwide; the original sisters who started their work in our diocese were from the congregation of Sisters from Toronto. Those who made the greatest impact on education, health and parish ministry however, were the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie. One hundred forty years of ministry is attributable to these Sisters from the different congregations, all under the prayerful guidance of St. Joseph, their patron and the patron saint of Canada.

### Early Beginnings

From humble beginnings in France in 1650 to the many missionary roles throughout the world, the Sisters of St. Joseph have spread the message of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus in their many apostolates. From the first Canadian congregation established in 1851 in Toronto, the Sisters soon spread to Hamilton in 1852 and to London in 1868. When Prince Arthur's Landing became a hub for the lumber and mining industry and with railway construction from east to west in Canada, Bishop Jamot became aware of the desire of the citizens to have a community of Sisters establish a Catholic school. The bishop, with a personal contribution to assist in the ministry of Catholic education, called upon the Sisters of St.

Joseph from Toronto to assist in staffing this school in St. Andrew's Parish at Prince Arthur's Landing.

On August 26, 1881, the first Sisters of St. Joseph arrived at Prince Arthur's Landing on the paddle ship the Frances P. Smith. Also on the ship were Bishop Jamot and Archbishop Lynch and seven sisters, five of whom were to remain for this mission.



The great distance from Toronto and the uncertainty which lay ahead for these missionaries, was undertaken with some

apprehension. However, the people of Prince Arthur's Landing gave the sisters a cordial welcome at the dock followed by Mass at the convent. The Sisters who remained were Mother de Pazzi, Sisters Gertrude, Monica, Vincent and Beatrice.

On September 2, 1881, St. Andrew's School was opened in the church vestry. The Sisters also taught and assisted in the parish. There were only 62 pupils in the school at its beginning, and many were non-Catholic. Two sisters oversaw the school and the other three sisters became involved in the daily activity of a young parish community in the growing area. At the end of that school year, many people gathered with Bishop Jamot to express gratitude to the Sisters for their fine beginning of this school.

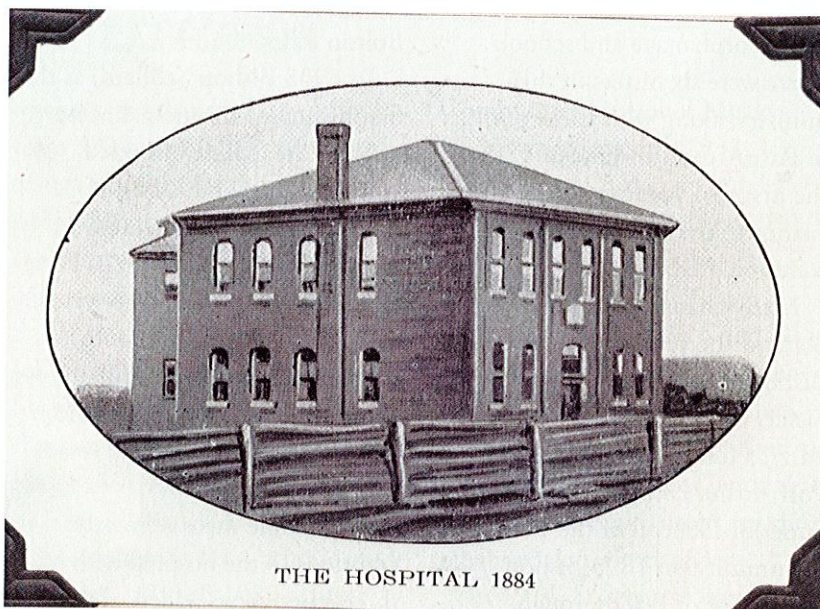




In 1883 Prince Arthur's Landing became known officially as Port Arthur. The enrolment at the Catholic school increased each year and rapid growth in the town provided many challenges for the Sisters who demonstrated the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus through word and work. They were fulfilling the apostolic work first given to them by their founder, itinerant Jesuit missionary Father Jean-Pierre Medaille two hundred and thirty years earlier in southern France.

In 1882 plans for an addition to the convent in Port Arthur were prepared. Initially the new plans called for new classrooms. However, construction accidents and the grave need for facilities to care for the sick prompted the Sisters to seriously consider using at least some of the new addition for a small hospital. As of February 1884, the date the Sisters moved patients from the convent into the newly built hospital, the Sisters have been acknowledged for providing hospital care and more broadly, health care in Thunder Bay and beyond. In the first years of no plumbing or electricity, the Sisters carried water in pails up the hill to the hospital.

The next number of years were to see many changes in the ministry of the Sisters and many developments in the major health care areas that they had established. In 1904 St. Joseph's Training School for nurses was opened in Port Arthur which allowed for the education of many nurses to work in the field of health care. This school continued its work until 1970.



THE HOSPITAL 1884

In 1906 St. Joseph's convent in Fort William was opened for Sister school teachers and Sister music teachers. The Sisters had been living across the street on the second floor of St. Stanislaus School since it opened in 1902. The Peterborough Sisters of St. Joseph who were teaching at St. Patrick's High school remained in this convent until 1948 when the responsibility for the administration of "St. Pat's" was assumed by the Sisters of Sault Ste. Marie.

The Jesuit fathers had established the Indian Mission of the Immaculate Conception in 1849 some three miles up the Kaministiquia River. In 1870, and for fifteen years the Daughters of the Heart of Mary ("Miss Nardines") worked among the people of the mission caring for orphaned children at St. Joseph's Home. In 1885 they were recalled to France, at which time more Sisters of St. Joseph came from Toronto to assume responsibility



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE THUNDER BAY MUSEUM





for the orphanage and school. There were six Sisters in this ministry, along with the seven in Port Arthur. In June of 1885 the first two vocations from Port Arthur to the Sisters of St. Joseph were accepted.

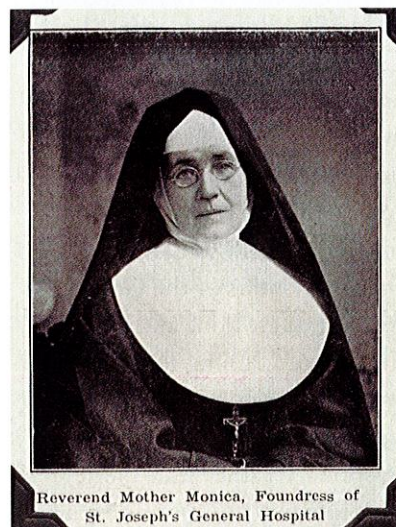
Many changes were to take place in the years that followed. Bishop Jamot, a good friend of the Sisters passed way, and Mother de Pazzi, a founding member of the Port Arthur convent was elected Superior-General of the Toronto community. In 1890 Bishop O'Connor of Peterborough completed canonical arrangements for a number of the Sisters to separate from the Toronto Community and form a similar group in his diocese in which Port Arthur was located; those who remained formed the new Peterborough Sisters of St. Joseph.

With the development of the Grand Trunk Pacific railway in the early 1900's, there were changes in the Kaministiquia mission after the government expropriated the property. The Jesuit community relocated to Squaw Bay and to the foot of Mount McKay. The Sisters on the other hand, decided to re-build St. Joseph's Home and School in Fort William on property that had been donated to the Sisters by Governor John

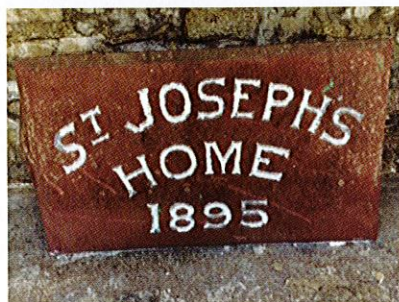
Bolton Silles in 1884.

In 1908 Bishop Scollard, as the first bishop of this new diocese of Sault Ste. Marie, presided at the blessing and laying of the cornerstone for the new St. Joseph's Boarding School in Fort William. The Sisters, who were well established now in both Port Arthur and Fort William continued to care for Indigenous and White children at the orphanage-school.

Meanwhile there were new additions to the hospital with three-story wings added to the east and north side. Mother Monica was one of the sisters who had come to Prince Arthur's landing in 1881 and besides her responsibilities in the convent she had an exceptional zeal to care for the sick. Hence Mother Monica is aptly described as the foundress of St. Joseph's Hospital. Mother Monica laboured in Port Arthur from 1881 until her death in 1931.



In May of 1930 the sisters moved from the first St. Agnes Parish convent to the new one (later destroyed by fire in 1994). In Fort William the Sisters taught at St. Stanislaus, St. Peter's, St. Martin's and St. Patrick's schools as well as ministering at St. Joseph's Boarding school. In Port Arthur the Sisters taught at St. Andrew's, St. Joseph's and St. Theresa's schools, and worked at St. Joseph's Hospital.





## EXPANSION

A new diocesan CSJ community was again formed in 1936 under the leadership of Bishop R. H. Dignan, bishop of Sault Ste. Marie. However, in Fort William some of the Peterborough Sisters continued their work at St. Patrick's School and lived at St. Joseph's convent until 1948 when they were replaced by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie.

The Wiley mansion on Red River Road, Port Arthur was purchased and dedicated as St. Joseph's Manor in 1939 and provided a home for the aged. In 1943 Sisters took up residence and worked at Holy Angels Catholic school in Schreiber. In 1952 the diocese of Fort William was established with its first bishop being Bishop E. Q. Jennings. The Sisters however, remained members of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie. To provide for hospital expansion in Port Arthur, St. Joseph's Convent attached to the hospital was closed in 1957 and the Sisters moved to nearby Conmee House, (the former Nurse's Residence) until 1967. The 1904 convent structure was demolished and the Myles Street convent was also closed in 1965.

An interesting note about the work of the Sisters in education was their teaching in St. Patrick's High School which was founded in 1928 by Fr. Ludgar Arpin SJ, the first pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in Fort William. The St. Joseph Sisters were principals and

teachers in this secondary school from 1928 until 1972, first with Sisters from the Peterborough congregation and then from the Sisters of Sault Ste. Marie congregation. Today the former St. Patrick's High school is Pope John Paul II intermediate school for the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board. The Sisters also established a convent in Manitouwadge in 1963 and were teachers in the Catholic School there until 1989. The communities of Terrace Bay and Nipigon welcomed Sisters to their school in 1968 until 1971 and 1977 respectively.

When Canada celebrated its centennial year in 1967, the Sisters of St. Joseph opened Avila Centre, located between the cities of Port Arthur and Fort William in "Inter-City". Originally and in the spirit of Vatican II, this Centre was to provide spiritual guidance for religious and laity as well as a home for the Sisters. Initially the programs at Avila Centre were rather simple, but in time they were expanded and became a major spiritual catalyst for renewal throughout the new diocese of Fort William and beyond, with programs and facilitators who attracted international applicants.

Since its inception in 1970 the Avila Centre School of Music developed prize-winning musical talents in countless numbers of students. For many years, Sister Immaculata (Greco) was its Director. The Music School formed the basis of the Lakehead

Community School of Music which was formed in 1993.

It is also recorded in annals covering the period 1881 to 1939 that the Sisters worked weekly among the prisoners of Port Arthur jail sharing the Good News of the Gospel with them. When the jail relocated this apostolate was set aside but in 1976, Kairos Community Resource Centre was established by two Sisters for the rehabilitation of prisoners.

In 1974, Sisters also continued their work with the First Nations people in Pic River with a Children's Day Care Centre. In 1978 this ministry ended. However, the Sisters continued their ministry to Indigenous peoples from 1982 to 1985 in Heron Bay, working on the parish staff at St. Francis Xavier Church in the Pic River First Nation community.

As the number of Sisters ministering in Thunder Bay and area grew, so too did their convent homes, located throughout the city. In 1977 the Sisters opened a convent on Cherry Lane in Thunder Bay. Some Sisters also moved to Red Lake where they became parish administrators in this small remote community, once more ministering to Indigenous families with home visiting.

In late 1967, St. Joseph's Manor ceased to be a home for the elderly and a new concept a modern residential complex combined with a nursing home and community center eventually







*St. Joseph Heritage Complex, Thunder Bay*

germinated into St. Joseph's Heritage, which was officially opened in 1979. Here many senior citizens could have their health and spiritual needs attended to with the gentle concern of many caring people.

From simple beginnings in 1881 when Sister Antoinette, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Toronto missioned five Sisters to Prince Arthur's Landing to teach school, the mission of the Sisters grew to 1981 some fifty-five Sisters being missioned by Sister Regina, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie to work in a variety of ministries in the Diocese of Thunder Bay. In the late 90's, through provincial re-organization, St. Joseph's General Hospital moved from acute care to broader rehabilitative care, offering centralized specialized health services to residents throughout the region and to those living in the Districts of Rainy River, Kenora and up to the Hudson Bay Coast, forming the basis for the vast St. Joseph's Care Group. This

network administers residential and out-patient Mental Health Services, the Sister Margaret Smith Treatment Centre for addictions, several Long Term Care Facilities, the Sister Leila Greco Apartments for Seniors, hospice and palliative

care, acquired brain injury, complex continuing care and other important rehabilitative Programs.

The Sister Leila Greco Apartments opened in 2012 as a non-profit seniors supportive housing building located beside Hogarth Riverview Manor on Lillie Street North, overlooking the Neebing River. The 132 bedroom suites are designed for seniors who require some level of support to be able to live independently in the community. The complex was named after Sister Leila Greco, a visionary who was inspirational in establishing the leading-edge care at St. Joseph's Heritage in 1979.



*Sr. Margaret Smith Centre, Thunder Bay*



*Sr. Leila Greco Apartments, Thunder Bay*





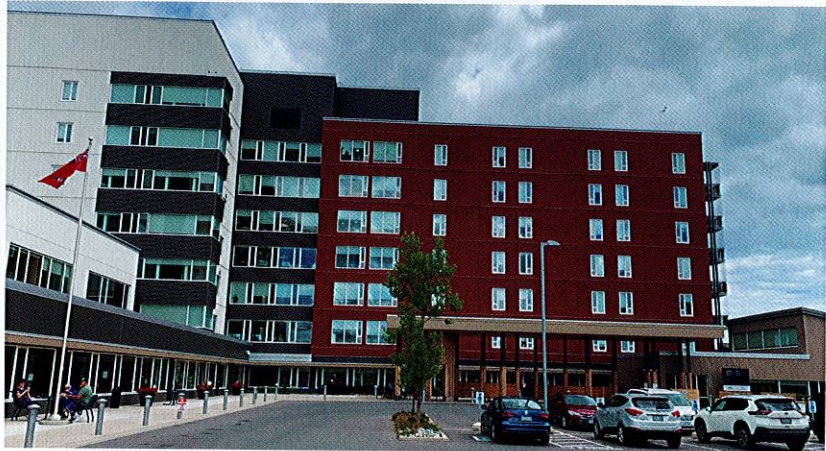
## Legacy

The Sisters of St. Joseph opened the first Catholic School in Thunder Bay in 1881. They then opened St. Joseph's Hospital in 1884. Over the decades the hospital developed new programs as new needs emerged. Many construction projects over the past few years have been completed, with certainly the most visible being the completion of the Sister Leila Greco Apartments, the Hogarth Riverview Manor Expansion and the new east Wing of St. Joseph's Hospital.

In later years, Sisters continued to make significant contributions to ministry in the Diocese of Thunder Bay. Sister Roberta Derochie founded the Dew Drop Inn in 1981 to welcome persons on the margins of our society. Sister Shirley Grexton CSJ worked, first in the Marriage Tribunal, before she became the Chancellor of the Diocese for many years. Sisters Alice Greer CSJ was the chaplain at Lakehead University for over 30 years, and Sister Dolores Turgeon CSJ was very active in ministering to the elderly in the hospitals and long-term care homes. Sister Stephanie Romiti CSJ worked for the Superior North Catholic District School Board as the Faith Formation and Catholicity Coordinator and Sister Cecily Hewitt CSJ, besides her ministry as Watchkeeper at the Mission to Seafarers with her outreach to sailors coming to the port at Thunder Bay was on the board of



*St. Joseph's Hospital, Thunder Bay*



*Hogarth Riverview Manor, Thunder Bay*

St. Joseph Care Group for many years. Each sister was instrumental in their work in enhancing the service given to young and old.

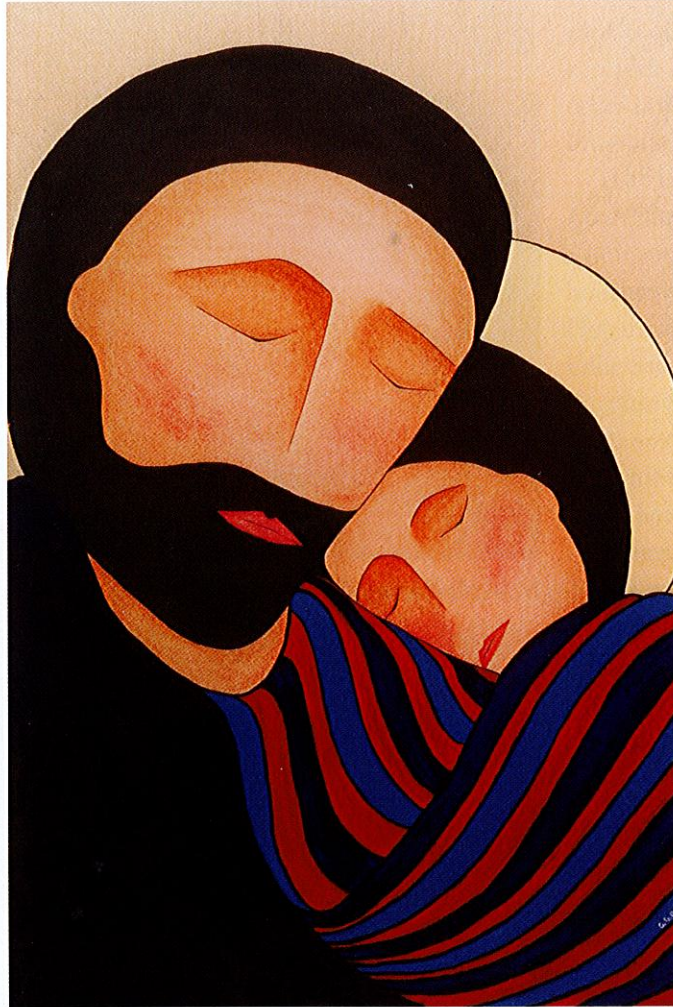
One hundred forty years have passed since the first five Sisters of St. Joseph arrived at Prince Arthur's Landing. These were great women of faith who came to serve the people in God's name, in this remote area of Ontario. They had great courage and great foresight in developing many ministries in education, music, health care and parish ministries that are still

thriving today. They created the foundations for our health care system at St. Joseph's Care Group.

May God continue to bless the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie as they continue their ministry, bringing unity and reconciliation, wherever they are. The spirit that gave them the energy and drive and vision to serve the people of northwestern Ontario in Port Arthur and Fort William, now Thunder Bay, continues in the "City with a Big Heart" today.







## PRAYER TO ST. JOSEPH

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,  
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
To you God entrusted his only Son;  
in you Mary placed her trust;  
with you Christ became man.*

*Blessed Joseph, to us too,  
show yourself a father  
and guide us in the path of life.  
Obtain for us grace,  
mercy and courage,  
and defend us from every evil.*

*Amen.*

*Prayer: © Libreria Editrice Vaticana | Image: Joseph and the Child © Gisele Bauche*

