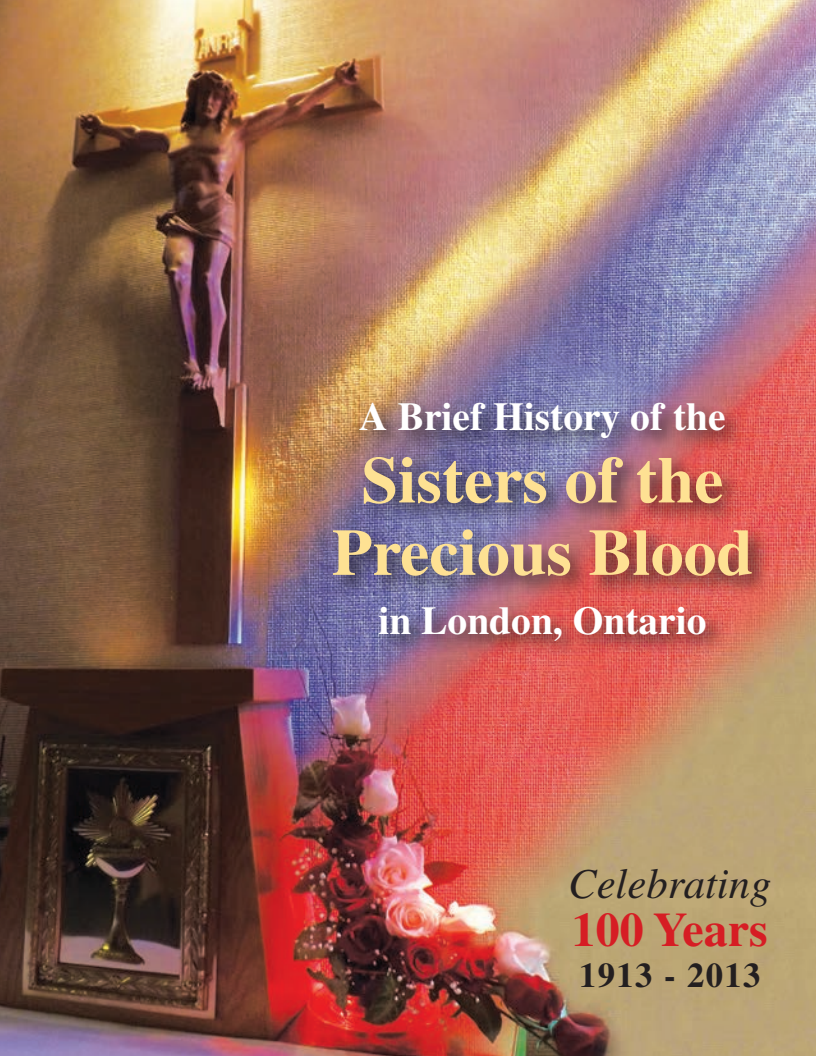


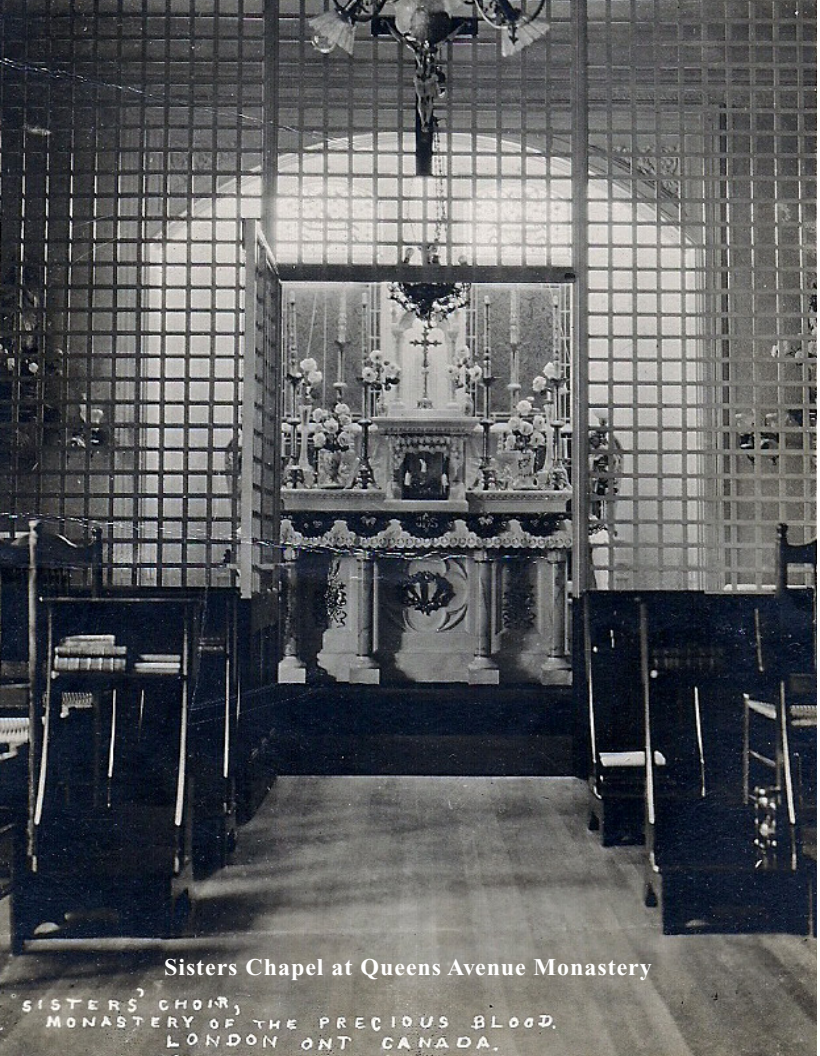
A Brief History of the Sisters of the Precious Blood in London, Ontario

Celebrating
100 Years
1913 - 2013

"Ours is a Ministry of Prayer,
within contemplative community life.
While praying always for the Church universal,
we must be especially mindful
of the local Church in which we live,
the faith of its people,
the holiness of its priests,
the cares of its bishop."

These words from our Constitutions describe the heart of the life of the Sisters of the Precious Blood from the very day we arrived in London, and shortly after celebrated our first Mass on May 1, 1913.

Founded by Mother Catherine Aurelia Caouette in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec in 1861, the early years of our Institute were marked with poverty and great hardship. Yet new members continued to come to share this life of prayer and sacrifice for the salvation of all people.

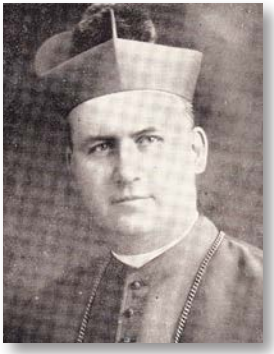


Sisters Chapel at Queens Avenue Monastery

New foundations were being made from St. Hyacinthe, the first being in the City of Toronto in 1869. There too, the community grew and by the early 1900's there was no further room to accept new candidates. Once again, God's Providence intervened. Plans were already underway for the community in Toronto to make a new foundation.

In 1912, as St. Peter's Seminary in London was just opening, the rector, Father John V. Tobin, contacted the Monastery in Toronto as a possible resource to have cassocks made for the seminarians.

On this visit he learned of the plans for a new foundation of Precious Blood Sisters in the United States, but obstacles were preventing its realization. Father Tobin quickly approached Bishop Fallon with the news and hopeful request that this community be invited to London.



Bishop Michael Francis Fallon

Father John Vincent Tobin

Bishop Fallon responded most favourably to the request and wasted no time to invite the Sisters to come to London, but he emphasized that he wanted the blessings of a community of prayer in his Diocese.

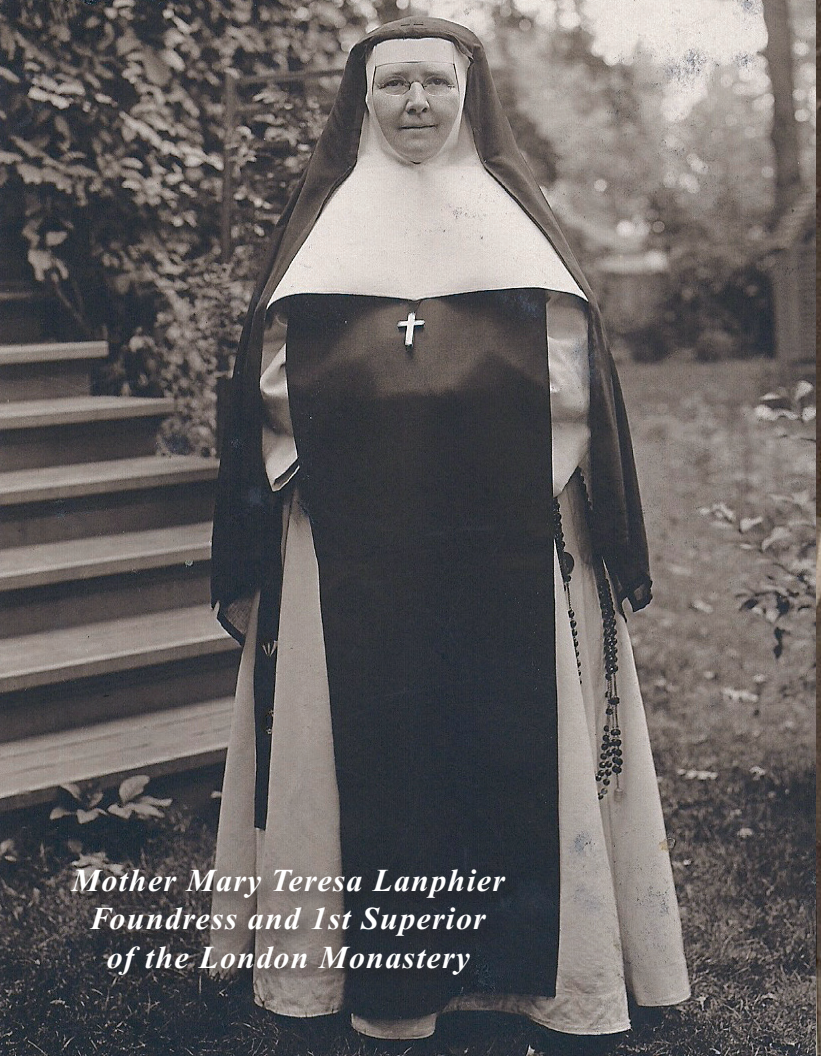
Excitement at this news grew in the Toronto Monastery and the customary preparations got underway in earnest.

Much had already been done for the planned foundation in the United States which did not materialize at this time.

Of greatest importance was the selection of those who would be the Foundresses of this new Monastery of the Precious Blood in London, Ontario. Only those who willingly volunteered would be asked to go.

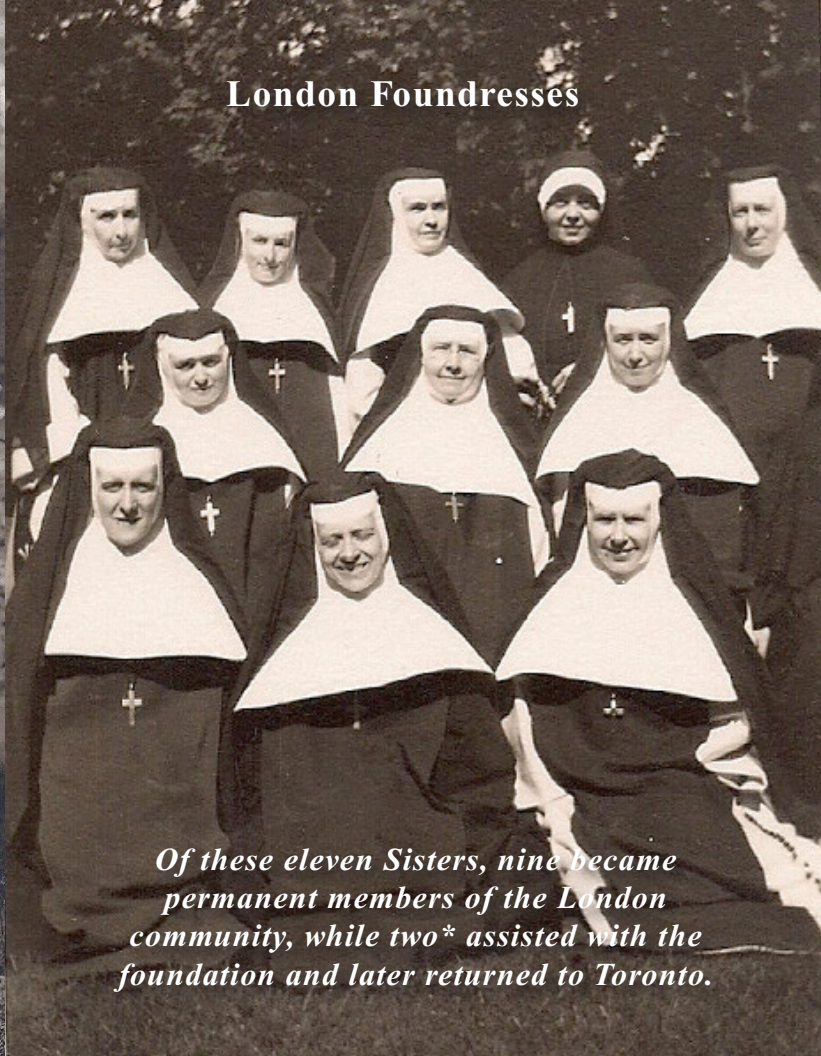
On the appointed day, a sealed box was left in the Chapel and all were left perfectly free to place their name in the box volunteering for the new foundation. After the time allotted, the Superior and Council reviewed the names submitted and selected those chosen for the London foundation:

Mother Mary Teresa Lanphier, Superior
Sister Mary Agnes Fullerton, Assistant
Sister Mary of the Eucharist Hersog, Mistress of Novices
Sister Immaculate Heart McGuire*, Bursar
Sister Mary Joseph Madden
Sister Mary of the Precious Blood Lanphier
Sister Mary St. Patrick Doyle
Sister Mary St. Anthony Summers
Sister Mary Gerarda Higgins
Sister Mary Augustine Lee*
Sister Mary Dolorosa



Mother Mary Teresa Lanphier
Foundress and 1st Superior
of the London Monastery

London Foundresses



Of these eleven Sisters, nine became permanent members of the London community, while two* assisted with the foundation and later returned to Toronto.

The first Monastery building for the community was located at 451 Ridout Street. Bishop Fallon arranged for the purchase of this building along the banks of the Thames River. It had been vacant for some time and required much repair and cleaning... most of which the Sisters undertook themselves as finances were not available to hire workers. Interestingly, at this writing, the Ridout Street building is still in use as the Nancy Campbell School in downtown London.

A current photo of 451 Ridout Street... our first Monastery in London.

On the opening of the Novitiate on June 13, 1913, Bishop Fallon used the occasion to make clear his intention in bringing the Sisters of the Precious Blood to London:

"An erroneous idea has gone abroad about my intention in calling you to this Diocese. It is reported, even in the press, that I brought you here to sew for the seminarians ... Now, I want to say that such assertions are not true...
It seems strange in one way that the inspiration to call you here came so suddenly and was accomplished so quickly. It simply amounts to this: I realized the need of a house of prayer and reparation in my Diocese and I thought your Community would just fit the need.
I brought you here solely and only to obtain blessing for myself and my Diocese through your life of prayer, adoration and expiation.
You may do, certainly whatever works you are accustomed to for your support, during the hours assigned you by your Rule for this purpose."

(Annals 1913)

First Novitiate group in June, 1913

[Not all those in this photo can be identified, but of the three at the back, left is Sr. Aloysius Cope, then Sr. Mary Francis Connoy, Touriere Sister. The professed Sister in centre is Sr. Mary of the Eucharist, Novice Mistress. The other three postulants at the time were Sr. Sacred Heart (Clarke), Sr. St. Michael (Hickey) - 1st to be buried in the London Cemetery, and Grace Landy.]

Soon the Ridout Street location was no longer adequate as new members were entering the community steadily. In 1918 a larger building at 572 Queens Avenue was purchased and became our home for several years.

Our second home in London at 572 Queens Avenue

Growth continued and plans were drawn up to build a Monastery specifically designed for the life of prayer and solitude to which the Sisters were called.

This new Monastery at 667 Talbot Street was constructed and the Sisters moved in on July 31, 1923. This was our cherished home for 54 years.

Talbot Street
Original Altar

667 Talbot Street

Exterior of building and Chapel Sanctuary - first photo taken while grille was up, separating Sisters' choir from public chapel.

Talbot St - Sanctuary in mid 1960's

The photo at the right shows a view of the Sanctuary after the grille was removed in the late 1960's.

Back row: Sisters Germain, Mary Leonard , St. Peter, Mary Dolores, Mary Virginia, Mary Phyllis, Mary Fidelis (Linda Thompson), Mary Christina. **Front Row:** Sisters Mary James, Mary Dolorosa, Josephine Marie (Bernadine Uhlenkott) Novice Mistress, Mary Elfrieda,, Mary Leo (Eileen Mary Walsh)
Centre Front - Karen Bennett, Postulant

During this time the world experienced the ravages of two World Wars, the years of the Great Depression and the increase of materialism, violence and injustice - along with this there were wonderful advances in so many areas and new life in the Church inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council. We shared all of these in our community life and were united very closely, from experience, with those who turned to us for prayer and compassion during times of struggle and transition.

By the mid 1970's the Talbot Street Monastery was too large and very costly to maintain. At the same time, vocations to Religious Life were declining throughout North America.

The Ursuline Sisters graciously offered us a beautiful plot of land behind Brescia College and the Sisters of St. Joseph welcomed our General Council to live with them for almost two years while a new, smaller Monastery on Ramsay Road was being built.

301 Ramsay Road

As much as at the time of our foundation - if not, more so - our world needs the support and witness of lives of prayer and faith lived in community. We commit ourselves anew to heartfelt living of this call as we begin the next hundred years of our London Precious Blood Monastery, 'Mount St. Michael'.

All through our changing years the rhythm of prayer each day continues to be motivated by the mandate of our Foundress,

"I would like hearts to return him (Jesus) love for Love, to make up to him for the neglect, indifference and impiety of sinners; hearts that will unite to pray, make reparation and suffer in union with the Holy Victim who really knew how to love, obey and suffer for the happiness and salvation of souls. ... The Sisters of the Precious Blood will pray for the sanctification of all races of people."

('Sitio' - motivational document of the Institute)

Current Community Group Photo

Back (L-R) Srs. Claire, Linda, Tran, Carol, Jeaneth, Arlene and Alicia **Front (seated)** Bich Huong, Srs. Benedicta, Vicky and Eileen Mary.

Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the generous and faithful support of so many friends and benefactors over the past 100 years. We would not be here today without them - and you, who today continue to bless us with your friendship, generosity and encouragement.

We will never forget you and we make the prayer of St. Paul our own... "I thank my God, each time I pray for you, and when I pray for you, I pray with joy!"

Phil. 1:3

We invite you to contact us at any time, sharing your concerns and intentions. It is a privilege to unite with you in faith as together we hold your needs in prayer each day in our community and personal times of prayer. God Bless you always,

Your Precious Blood Sisters

"We beseech you, O Lord, help your servants, whom you have redeemed with your Precious Blood."

(from the 'Te Deum')

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