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MJosephToBishopBourget1858Dec18

During December last year, I took the liberty of addressing some words to Your Grace to give an account of our mission. I do not know if that letter reached you because so often with us the mail is at fault. Urged once more by sentiments of duty and confidence, I come again, my Lord, animated by most profound respect, to offer you the review of the humble works of our institution.

I shall pass in silence the happy voyage and the arrival of our sisters being persuaded that your Grace has already been informed of this, but I pray you, My Lord, to accept our gratitude for the interest you have deigned to show our mission in sending them to share our work. They are edifying and generous. I hope that they will not regret having become missionaries.

I would also evince our humble gratitude for the great good you have done our dear community in having put the finishing touches to our holy rules. We have received them with inexpressible respect and affection, seeing them affixed and approved by your Grace. Above all, your pastoral letter filled us with the most ardent desire to put them into practice.

You know already, My Lord, that some months after our arrival we were forced to open an English school, and to receive in it boarders. That was neither easy nor agreeable for us. But that was the most urgent work as well as one which could sustain itself; we have not found it without difficulty though there are compensations. The children respond to the care of their teachers, our little Catholics begin to love piety, our Protestants teach themselves and destroy their prejudices without perceiving that they do so as they assist at all the religious exercises and instructions. One among them is preparing for her first holy communion with much fervor, after having obtained the permission of her parents. But, my Lord, to gain the interest of Protestant families something glamorous must be used. It is that which induced the Bishop and the vicar

general to add music to our teachings which in other instances we have kept as simple as in our Canadian schools. It is necessary that we are able to teach grammar, geography and arithmetic thoroughly; nearly half of our pupils are young ladies who have attended school, with Protestant teachers. It would be very prejudicial if they felt themselves to be more advanced than their teachers. That is what we still fear regarding mathematics. Sister Peter has not sufficient time to prepare the lessons which she must give to the children.

As to the music, my Lord, I confess that it is not without apprehension that we teach it; and we shall be very happy to be able to bide by your advice before beginning it. I keep from worry about that in the meantime in that the Bishop having taken the rule into consideration finds nothing contrary to that which forbids advanced teaching, music not being so regarded in their country where it is taught in the lowest Protestant schools. His Grace found it painful, and we too, my Lord, to see many children and especially our Catholics acquiring their education in disorderly education in disorderly institutions because of not having found with us that music which their parents demand so urgently. In spite of those considerations, my Lord, he has told me that he will be ready to have us stop it at the next vacation if it does not meet with your approval. We have, my Lord, some prejudice to surmount, our ignorance openly spoken of in our first year, especially among outsiders who proclaimed that our school was not any good except for beginners. That pleased me; I hope that this little humiliation is good for us. The school now enjoys a good reputation. I think it is useful in doing good especially among outsiders some of whom still frequent the boys' school as a result of their first impressions.

Moreover, my Lord, I believe that we must exert ourselves to become capable of teaching until the population becomes greater, and feels more the need of works of charity. It is only by means of the small revenues of our boarding school that we can sustain a few poor. Although we are not large, we endeavor to get as many children as present themselves. We have twenty-nine boarders, four or five externes [day

students], five orphans, girls, three orphan boys, eight boys who are students at the college and one seminarian. The boarding school of the one sustains the others, and is sufficient to cover our current expenses and the cost of furniture; the improvements in living quarters are done with the small rental and the money which His Lordship has given us for building, the actual lodging must remain the bishopric which is destined to be a college. The bishop has taken possession of his little palace situated several steps from the church. His Grace comes with the priests to take their meals in his dining room, the pupils of the college take theirs and everybody goes home.

We have had much consolation in having begun a small hospital. It was during the month of St. Joseph that Father Brouillet had the thought. Quietly aware of my strong feeling on the subject, he believed it necessary to begin the work although there was little likelihood of success. In the first week of the month, he called an assembly of ladies to organize an association of charity. The ladies, though a majority were Protestants and Jews, entered thoroughly into his views. Their first collection was applied to the preparation of a room and some beds. They have since set up a pharmacy. They assemble on Wednesdays to sew, since they are not numerous and have little means they are only able to take care of the sick poor of our county. But they allow ten dollars a week, the price which seems set up as that for board in this country. We bear only the expenses of those who cannot pay. There are usually three or four patients, fifteen have been taken care of, three have died. The first had the happiness of preparing there for holy baptism having for twenty-four years been not much concerned with religion; several weeks after his arrival at the hospital, he began to realize the truth of the Catholic religion; as he became more feeble, he urgently asked on the feast of St. Vincent de Paul to be baptized. It is true that for several weeks he had been preparing himself but the persistence of his request on the morning of that day made us believe that our good father wished to manifest to us his protection on our dear patients. The second was a little Indian who had known the sisters and wished to have their medicine. This poor child who died after having received Extreme Unction [Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick] one

Wednesday after the first to die had taken the name of St. Joseph, whom we look to as the promoter of the hospital. Unfortunately we have had the sorrow of having the first president of the association of charity die there without any preparation. She belonged to the Episcopalian sect and never regained consciousness after she was brought to us. Her minister came to visit her, and made a long exhortation which she could not understand. With a thousand promises that she would go to heaven, so it is that our poor separated brethren are deceived. I found myself embarrassed in her last moments. I did not know if I should kneel and pray during her agony and after her death. Please, my Lord, tell us how we should conduct ourselves in such circumstances, as well as in those in homes when we assist Catholics under the eyes of Protestants.

I hope, my Lord, that we shall later have a room for invalids who leave the hospital. In the meantime we are keeping an old paralytic in the patients' room. This good old man has given us about a hundred dollars worth of property for the care which we are to give him until his death. We have also an infant a few months old whom the hospitaler keeps in her room next to the patients. It is not very convenient but the poor little one, born of an Indian woman, was so abandoned that we could not refuse to take it in. Father Brouillet who gives himself with all his heart to our works of charity hopes that this will be the beginning of an asylum for poor abandoned little ones. I should like to know from your Grace if the sisters, without offending the delicacy of the virtue, may give all the care called for by the feeble, innocent ones. I know, my Lord, that your advice will settle all the small disturbances of conscience which arise out of this subject.

Here, my Lord, is the very imperfect picture of the humble works of our institution. We love them and devote ourselves to them, it may be imperfectly, but will our hearts. We make up for the difficulties of the boarding school by the thought that the children are given instruction and that it gives us the opportunity to do something for the poor. According to appearances, works of charity must be established slowly and in a small way until the population increases. While waiting we endeavor to give help to our neighbors in all the occasions which present themselves.

We are honored to continue to care for the church and the sacristy. We are in the midst of preparations for the great feast of Christmas. With His Lordship's permission we took up a collection to pay for a carpet for the sanctuary, and exceeding our expectations the officers of the military post have been so generous that we have almost three hundred dollars. The General is very well disposed toward the Mission and is to come to Midnight Mass. We exert ourselves to meet their liberality by making the best preparations we can. We make up for the absence of the holy image of our Lady of Sorrows by having that of the Immaculate Conception, which we honor greatly; we also have one of St. Joseph and a beautiful picture of the Sacred Heart, those being the ornaments of the three altars. It is at their feet, my Lord, that we find some consolation for having left all.

However out of place here, I cannot conclude, my Lord, without giving you a few words on the conduct of my sisters. They are all in good health and very devoted to the duties of their offices and I believe they are sincerely animated by the desire to become holy. This is the assurance given me about them by our superiors. I fear at times to tax their devotedness in overloading them with work; some have told me this; but my Lord, they, like me, have not been able to refuse help when the need of it presented itself. The difference in age, sex, and condition which characterizes our establishment multiplies the work many times, and without this condition we could do little for our neighbor; it seems that this is the means Providence uses to attract the attention of the public to works of charity. But the two older sisters are not always ready to accept this view, which sometimes makes me oppose their opinions. I do not think that we can wait for these works to be organized as they are in the east in communities of long standing. It seems to me that we must be happy to suffer inconvenience to do good; and (this the sisters must understand) these little miseries are not extreme.

I would be pleased, my Lord, if you would give us some advice and encouragement on this subject. There has been much change for the better since we are under the direction of the Vicar-General Fr. Brouillet. He

knows so well how to reconcile his direction of us with that of His Grace, and he is so careful to restore harmony among the sisters. Since I understand him so well, I am glad to have his counsel for the direction of my sisters, and for the direction of all our affairs. His Grace is very good to us but his age and his sickness prevent him from contributing much more than good will to the progress of the establishment. Nevertheless, I do nothing of the least importance without his advice which I respect submissively. Most of the time His Grace agrees with the opinion of the Vicar General to whom he sends me.

I hope we shall soon have the advantage of being incorporated. Father Brouillet has presented the bill to the House [state legislature] in the form adopted by the law of the land; if it is approved without change, we can manage our affairs with great liberty. I shall be glad of its success so that we can be dispensed from those acts to which we had to put our particular names.

I wish to add to this present letter the list of the points of the rule which are not regularly observed and those which we believe must be exercised with exemption. I ask you, my Lord, to make your observations to us on those which may be abuses or prejudicial. I add also the prospectus of our boarding school, in case it proclaims an educational program contrary to the spirit of our institute. Please signify if we should suppress it next year. I shall summarize, my Lord, briefly all the counsels which I have taken the liberty to ask in this letter.

- a) What should we do when near Protestants during sickness, especially during their agony and after death, and when we are with Catholics whom we assist in the midst of Protestant families?
- b) Is it proper for sisters to care for small children?
- c) Should we continue the music, and how long?

d) Advice to encourage us to do good in spite of inconvenience; although it seems to me that the rule is imbued with this spirit of devotion, a few words from you applied to our circumstances would do much good.

e) I pray you also, my Lord, to add a few words to forewarn us against the dangers of our contact with Protestants. It is so hard for us not to become penetrated by their cold indifference.

f) We are preparing to begin the confraternity of the Infant Jesus. May Protestants who desire it be admitted? Is it contrary to the spirit of the rule to admit into the boarding school young ladies who wish to be instructed? You know, my Lord, that in the United States, they remain in school longer. Yesterday we received a young lady who was divorced from her husband. We took her as a pupil. The parents told us nothing about it. Another has been with us a year. Her husband is a soldier; last year he was transferred from the post, and confided her to us for instruction. She always followed the ordinary routine of the pupils, except in a few small matters, and she complied with the little exactions. She has never had a family. Her husband has now returned. He sees her in the parlor like any other student, he is respectable; during the time he was at a distance he came every fifteen days; he withdrew with her to a boarding house. I give you all these details in case they merit some attention.

I must end this although there are still many things to say. Truly, I am embarrassed to be so long explaining so few things and also at the unseemliness of my letter. There are many copies which I have crossed out, but one is as bad as the other. Please forgive me, my Lord.

All my sisters join me in offering humble wishes and greetings of the new year which comes to us, and may it be pleasant and may it be spent under the hands of our Divine Mother. We all cast ourselves at the feet of your Grace to beg your blessing. I terminate, my Lord, in subscribing myself with the most profound respect your humble and obedient daughter and servant.

Sister Joseph of the Sacred Heart