



OBITUARY NOTICE



SISTER DENISE COUSINEAU
MARIE-DU-SAINT-ESPRIT

Entered eternal life on December 4, 2020
At the age of 86
And 64 years of religious life.

+2821

"He must become greater; I must become less." (Jn 3:30)

Denise is about five years old when Sister Saint-Hector asks her one day, "What are you going to do when you grow up? Without hesitation, Denise answers: "A Sister, like you". Her childhood's wish comes true. After teaching for three years at the Sacred Heart Academy in Hawkesbury, Denise finds herself at the postulancy of the Grey Nuns of the Cross at 27 Bruyère Street on August 14, 1954.

Born on December 7 according to her mother and on December 6 according to the Ontario government records, Denise is taken to Saint-Joachim Church in Chute-à-Blondeau on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, to be baptized under the first names of Mary, Sara, Denise. She grows up in a Christian home where life is good.

In September 1939, the school board of the parish's school refuses to admit her to the first grade because of her age. She's only five years old. Her entrance to elementary school is postponed until September 1940 when she's six and a half years old. She makes up for lost time by skipping two classes in elementary school to end up in grade 11 at Hawkesbury High School. In 1951, she receives her teaching diploma from the University of Ottawa Normal School.

Denise is happy teaching while staying at her parents' home, but she feels the call to dedicate herself totally to God in religious life. The invitation to follow Jesus is pressing. How can she be sure that this call comes from the Lord? Denise begins to pray. The answer came from the Parish Vicar who asks : "Have you ever thought about religious life, what are you waiting for? ". Denise sees this as an answer to her prayer.

The novitiate is a time of adaptation, of questioning and of formation with companions who pursue the same goal. The motto she chooses *He must become greater; I must become less*: she makes it her life program.

On July 15, 1956, Denise commits herself, under the name of Sister Marie-du-Saint-Esprit, to live poverty, chastity and obedience in the following of Jesus Christ. She seals her commitment to the consecrated life in a definitive way after three years of teaching at Saint Pius X School in Ottawa.

In September 1960, with a fellow Sister, Sister Monique Cousineau, she enrolls in the Bachelor of Arts program at Laurentian University in Sudbury. The Sons of St. Ignatius are demanding. So, in the morning, on their way to university, they would regularly reach out to Heaven: *St. Ignatius, temper your sons!* says Sister Monique. And Sister Denise replies: *Saint*

Ignatius, heal us. In 1963-1964, they both benefit from a year of formation in pastoral ministry and catechesis at the Lumen Vitae Institute in Brussels, Belgium.

In 1964, she returns to teaching, marked by three obediences to the formation of scholastics. The Rideau Street Convent and the Mont-Saint-Joseph High School in Ottawa, Rivière-des-Français High School in Noëlville and Notre-Dame College in Sudbury benefit from her services mainly in catechesis and French.

Let's take extracts from the testimonies of her students. One of the 6th grade students, upon learning of her departure for the convent, says: *She will make a kind and gentle Sister.* To a test question on the testimony of a successful life, a Grade 12 student from St. Joseph's Convent, Ottawa, answers: *...When she talks to us about God, we feel, in her words, that God is truly in her circle of friends, a comforting friend. Not only is God in her life, but her life is given for others. She sees only the good side of people.* In June 1972, the grade 12 students at Notre Dame College of Sudbury present her with a plaque with this inscription: *To Sister Denise whose words and heart are of gold, we engrave here our love.*

The summer of 1979 marks a turning point in Sister Denise's life. She receives an obedience for Africa. What a surprise! She is called to replace Sister Rachel Rivard, Principal of St. Monica's Secondary School, a boarding school in Chipata, Zambia. She is 44 years old. Her total trust in the One who calls her brings her great joy.

Sister Denise arrives in Chipata on September 7, 1979. There are many challenges. Gradually, the Missionary discovers a new culture with its traditions, its riches, its values. Zambians become friends.

Until July 1997, Sister Denise gives the best of herself to the education of young Zambian women. How many doctors, nurses, engineers and teachers are proud of their sound education!

In 1997, she leaves her Principal position at St. Monica's Secondary School to serve as Secretary at the Major Seminary of Philosophy in Kachebere, Malawi. The following year, she replaces a teacher on sabbatical leave. She teaches catechesis to first-year philosophy students for five years.

Sister Denise considers it a grace to end her teaching career at Kachebere Seminary with students eager to learn for the purpose of church ministry.

While on leave in Canada in 1999, she's diagnosed with early Parkinson's disease. In June 2002, Sister Denise leaves Africa, but her heart remains attached to her African family by strong ties.

From distant Africa comes new testimonies from her students. *I admire Sister Denise for her courage and competence as Principal of our boarding school; for her love for us; for her concern for our well-being; for her big heart, always ready to forgive and show us the right path; for her concern to ensure success in our studies; for the smooth running of the school and the maintenance of our vast campus.* An email from Nindi Malawo praises her and all the Sisters she has known: *You were very special in Africa. You are even more special to us because we are now adults hopefully a bit wiser. God knew the African girls were special. Hence, He sent special people to add the pool of talents to help us to prepare for adulthood.*

Back in Canada, Sister Denise is invited to join the Missio group which meets at Carrefour Bruyère once a month. She volunteers to help students with learning difficulties and animates times of prayer with the elders at the Centre Guigues.

In the summer of 2004, she's diagnosed with colon cancer. After surgery, she underwent chemotherapy. She moves from Elizabeth House to St. Luke's Convent and resumes her volunteer work.

In August 2014, Sister Denise fractures three metatarsals on her left foot and then Parkinson's disease progresses. From now on, the walker becomes a precious aid for her movements. She continues her work as librarian and chronicler at Saint-Luc Convent until it closes in April 2016. This date marks the beginning of a new phase of her life in the local community of Our Lady of Fatima at the Mother House.

To express her state of mind, she borrows these few lines from a poem by Didier Rimaud: [*The new day is dawning. The day known to you, Father; may your Son in man complete the victory of the cross!*]

Her last wish is expressed as follows: *May the Lord make the last years of my life an act of adoration to his most holy will.*

