

Dear Sisters and Associates/Companions -- Today, on this seventh week (February 26) of our 2024 Global Coordinating Group calendar, we are invited *to listen to the heart of the world* and hold in prayers the Sisters and Associates serving in **Canada** as well as all of the people in that nation.

In 1851, four Sisters of St. Joseph led by Mother Delphine Fontbonne arrived in Toronto from the United States to care for orphans, the sick, poor and vulnerable. Their work quickly expanded to include education, health care and social services. Soon afterwards, new diocesan Congregations of Sisters of St. Joseph were established in Hamilton (1852), London (1868), Peterborough (1890), Pembroke (1921), and



Sault Ste. Marie (1936). Over the years, the Sisters' ministries have spanned the creation of large institutions to grass-roots missions and included the founding of hospitals, schools, social agencies and numerous community initiatives. In 2013,

the Hamilton, London, Peterborough and Pembroke congregations merged to form the in Canada Congregation. Today, the three Congregations that comprise the Canadian Federation – Sault Ste. Marie, in Canada, and Toronto - are present in various communities in Ontario and beyond (including Peru), serving in both vital community service programs as well as working collaboratively with other organizations on human rights, environmental, and anti-poverty efforts. In 2017, all three congregations as well as the Federation became [Blue Communities](#) in order to 'protect water as a shared commons, sacred gift, and human right'. (Image: Leadership Board of the Canadian Federation, October 2023)

In addition to the Congregations which comprise the Canadian Federation, in 1903 – as a direct consequence of the French Combes Laws which closed the schools of religious communities – another group of St. Joseph Sisters left France and arrived in Quebec to establish local schools, hospitals, houses of Prayer, and residences. The [Sisters of St. Joseph of Saint-Vallier](#) continue to serve in Quebec as members of the French Institute.

Today, we share a special greeting from the President of the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada, Sr. Mary Jo Radey (first row, second from left in image above):

“In this time of such a need for our charism of ‘unity and reconciliation’, may we all use this Season of Lent to deepen our awareness of the “dear neighbour” in all the spaces around us. The privilege of living in this nation of Canada is one for which we are grateful, and pray that we are sensitive to how we can share God's abundance with all!!

Country Background: While Canada is the second largest country in the world geographically (after Russia), it is one of the most sparsely populated with just over 39million inhabitants (2024). The land was



originally settled between 12,000 – 60,000 years ago with archaeological evidence and oral traditions pointing to 12 major language groups among the first-peoples living in what is now called Canada: the Algonquian, Iroquoian, Siouan, Athabaskan, Kootenaian, Salishan, Wakashan, Tsimshian,

Haidan, Tlinglit, Inuktitut, and Beothukan. Norsemen arrived on the eastern shores (in L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland) around the end of the 10th century, followed by other European explorers. Canada was confederated as a nation in 1867, and today has 10 provinces and

three territories. Economically, it is no longer exclusively a resource-dependent economy and is now the ninth-largest in the world with a high standard of living in terms of income, education and health care. However, despite its national wealth, one in nine people in Canada live in poverty with some sectors (such as persons with disabilities, children, recent immigrants and First Nations peoples living on reserve) disproportionately affected. In fact, while poverty had been decreasing (6.4percent in 2020), since 2021 it has stood at 7.4percent – with Food Banks Canada also reporting that 18.4percent of Canadians are now food insecure. Considered a national shame, Canada has also begun to confront its historic mistreatment of Indigenous peoples through formal apologies and restitution – with much work still to be undertaken in terms of truth, justice and reconciliation. (Sources: Britannica, Canada Crossroads, Congregational websites, Food Banks Canada, Wikipedia, World Data, Worldometer)



United in prayer, the Global Joseph Family, 7850 Sisters, 5700 Associates, 34 Agrégées in 45 countries, listening to the heart of the world.