

THE URSULINES

FIFTY YEARS

IN THE DINOSAUR VALLEY



WOMEN  
SENT  
FORTH

Sr. Marguerite Neville

## BEGINNINGS

September 1935. The city of Drumheller lay under a film of dust in the mellowing fall sunshine. It had been left parched and brown by the drying winds and the searing heat of yet another rainless summer. Onto this disheartening scene arrived four Ursuline Sisters, their long black robes in keeping with the sombre backdrop. In sharp contrast, their countenances reflected the eagerness and optimism with which they approached the unique mission entrusted to them. They would not, as would Ursulines the world over, enter classrooms this September. They had come here in the capacity of catechists and social workers which was a radical departure from the established custom of a religious order devoted exclusively to formal education. It would, however, have met with the approval of the congregation's foundress, St. Angela. Four centuries before, to the year, she had advised her newly formed community to change when necessary to meet prevailing needs.

Angela Merici, born in the latter part of the 15th century, in the little town of Desanzano, Italy, had been moved by the sad plight of young girls of her day to found a confraternity of women known as the Company of St. Ursula. This she did in the city of Brescia. Young maidens who joined the confraternity lived in their own homes and met monthly for spiritual instruction and moral support and encouragement. Before the close of the century, from this small beginning, there

developed the teaching order of St. Ursula named for a popular patroness of youth. Its work spread rapidly throughout Europe and her daughters imbued with the intrepid spirit of Angela, who herself had journeyed to Rome and to the Holy Land, set sail for America in 1639. In New France they gathered around them for instruction the daughters of both colonists and natives. Throughout succeeding centuries new beginnings were made across Canada from France, Germany and Belgium. One from France took root in Chatham, Ontario in 1860 and it in turn sent Sisters to Calgary, Alberta in 1922. From this community had come the small band that, in 1935, took up residence on Third Street West in Drumheller.

The Sisters were not strangers to the city. In the two previous summers Ursulines, had, at the request of St. Anthony's Parish, conducted vacation school for as many as two hundred children. This had brought to partial fulfilment a cherished dream of Drumheller's Catholics. So anxious had they been to have religious education for their families that as early as 1920 property had been purchased for the erection of a Catholic school. The realization of this undertaking proved to be too much for the fledgling parish and with the onslaught of the Great Depression all hopes were dashed. Nevertheless with characteristic zeal and under the leadership of their dedicated pastors, Reverend P. J. Cosman and Reverend N. R. Anderson, a substitute was found. The former home of the Hawkins

family was purchased for a convent and the Sisters took up pastoral duties in the Valley.

Within a month of their arrival the Sisters launched programs of home and hospital visiting, catechetics and music. Every Sister was involved in religious instruction and in visiting. Over the years these two activities took precedence over all others sometimes necessitating a reduction in the number of music lessons taught.

Mother Fabian the first music teacher was initially without pupils but this was soon remedied through the efforts of devoted women like Mrs. John Meagher, then president of the Catholic Women's League. She remained a loyal and supportive friend all the years she lived in Drumheller. Music fees were the convent's only source of income but these were generously supplemented by gifts of meat, eggs, vegetables, bread from the weekly baking or a cake brought to the convent by both Catholics and non-Catholics.

The nuns reciprocated with like sharing of their talents and their meagre resources, as demonstrated by an incident which occurred one frosty Sunday morning in early winter. Before leaving for Mass that morning Mother Ethelbert had put in the oven of the kitchen's coal range a roast of beef destined for the Sister's table at noon. On returning she checked and found that all was well with the roast so she removed it from the



oven temporarily and made gravy. That done she returned the roast to the oven to keep warm. Just as she was about to leave the kitchen a knock sounded on the back door. Mother Ethelbert opened it to a lady whose poverty was well known to the Sisters. She brought the lady inside and went to get Mother Bernice, Superior of the convent. Leaving the two in the kitchen Mother Ethelbert went about her own business upstairs. When she returned, to her dismay, the roast was about to go out the back door. The lady held the wrapped roast while Mother Bernice was busy searching for a container to put the gravy in. Interrupting the procedure Mother Ethelbert beckoned Mother Bernice into the hallway where she pleaded on behalf of the Sisters, asking that the gravy be kept to flavour the potatoes. This was agreed upon and the lady departed with the roast while the Sisters sat down to their meatless Sunday dinner.

Mother Ethelbert had joined the original four Sisters in the spring of 1936. During the many years she spent in Drumheller she undertook various tasks. Besides providing nourishing meals she taught catechism and became a regular Friday afternoon visitor to the hospital. She laundered the church linens and, along with Mother Fabian, contributed beautiful needlework to the annual fall bazaar and to the adornment of the church. Mother Ethelbert and Mother Paschal, both now living in Chatham, Ontario, are the only surviving members of the Drumheller Ursuline community of 1935-36.

Given the circumstances, the task was formidable. She had to recruit her cast from among the young girls of the parish, most of whom were still strangers to her. Memorial Hall was reserved for after school practices while on weekends Mother Fabian gathered a choral group in the convent parlour. Practice sessions rarely conformed to the classroom discipline to which the nuns had been accustomed. These often broke down amidst fits of convulsive giggling. One such outburst was triggered by confusion over a family name. The name Mennegozzi, that of a local Italian family, was well known to all. Unfortunately one of the main actresses insisted on substituting it for that of the heroine's aunt, Mrs. Beancosi. The humour of the situation was lost on Mother Bernice who, bewildered, struggled to maintain self-control.

Showtime, the night of December 3, was no exception to this atmosphere of near calamity. A shipment of nuns' habits, to be worn by the choral group, arrived from the Calgary convent too late for rehearsal. Consequently it was a very unnunlike troupe that stumbled onto the backstage tripping over their long skirts while trying to balance the cumbersome headdress and keep their nun's beads from rattling. In spite of these vicissitudes, on stage the story unfolded smoothly and the performance was enthusiastically received. Mother Fabian, screened off from the audience, accompanied the vocal numbers.

The nuns soon became a familiar sight throughout the

Valley, always two together, their black skirts grey with the dust of unpaved streets and shale sidewalks, their veils whipped by the whirlwinds that pushed the tumbleweed along in front of them. Having made the acquaintance of the city parishioners, they travelled on foot further afield to the mining hamlets adjacent to the city. This took them first to the Newcastle river flats and to scattered homes tucked back in the coulees south of the railroad tracks. Here their task of identifying the Catholic families became more challenging. The coal industry had drawn to itself peoples not only from Eastern Canada and the United States but also from all European coal mining countries. Many of those from the latter did not speak English and most were strangers to one another on arrival in the Valley. Fortunately there was one among the Sisters, Mother Hyacinth, who shared the heritage of the Europeans. She could converse in Belgian and German and her heart went out to her compatriots who, like herself, had left their homelands after World War 1.

The Sisters decided that the best way to attack their problem of locating the Catholic families would be to call at all homes and make inquiries. For the most part they were greeted with genuine hospitality by those on whose doors they timidly knocked. To some however they were still an oddity.

One afternoon in late spring Mother Hyacinth, with Mother Ethelbert as her companion, left the main road to



follow a trail which led to a one-storied, tar-papered home nestled back in a coulee. The occupants of the dwelling were obviously hard working in their effort to be self-supporting. Hens with broods of chickens dusted themselves in little mounds of dirt from the well-swept dooryard. Animals grazed on the dry prairie grass of a knoll beyond the house.

As the Sisters took all this in they saw, with some relief, that they would not have to knock on a closed door here. Husband and wife had come down the short path to the gate and stood waiting for them. A girl of about three years clung to her mother's skirt while an older sister looked on with shy interest. A tall boy, pail in hand, stopped beside the chickens' watering pan. All remained motionless as if in pantomime. Mother Hyacinth strode eagerly forward her countenance aglow with the warmth of the greeting she proffered.

In return she received a not unkindly but somewhat subdued reply. She explained her mission, emphasizing that she was primarily interested in having Catholic children attend religion classes. Her offer met with stolid rejection. The couple was not interested.

At this point Mother Hyacinth felt a decided tug on her long flowing veil and presumed that Mother Ethelbert was urging her to leave. This she had already decided to do and was gracefully bidding farewell to the couple whose placid countenances registered no cause for a



hurried departure. Slightly vexed at what she considered to be Mother Ethelbert's excessive timidity she turned. Mother Ethelbert was not at her side. She was standing in wide-eyed distress several feet down the road. Glancing down to discover the source of the tug on her veil Mother Hyacinth saw the family goat munching on this dubious delicacy. The family, unmoved except for a faint smile on their faces, left Mother Hyacinth to extricate herself and make a hasty retreat.

The end of the first school year saw the Sisters well established and prepared to conduct vacation classes in Drumheller, Newcastle, Midlandvale, Nacmine, Rosedale and Wayne. More nuns from Calgary joined them to help with this work. Thus while the character of the new pastoral apostolate was being formed and consolidated it was also steadily expanding.

In October of 1936 one of the young girls of the parish, Marguerite Neville, joined the community and travelled to Chatham, Ontario to make her novitiate. The following fall the work of the community included a kindergarten class. This necessitated partial excavation of the basement of the convent to build a classroom. Until it was finished in November Mother Bernice taught her class of thirty-four in the convent parlour. This work was taken over by Mother Leonore in 1939.

Along with the joy and satisfaction attendant on the Sisters' ministry there were also hazards and sor-

rows. Two months after Mother Leonore's arrival she accompanied Mother Bernice to the home of a dear and faithful parishioner. The nuns were concerned because the lady had not been seen at church of late and her children were not attending classes regularly. Unknown to them the lady's mental condition had deteriorated. Once in the house they were threatened by the lady with a raised broom. Mother Leonore escaped unscathed but Mother Bernice's knitted shawl caught on the door knob and she received a frightful gash on the head.

Another tragedy brought to a close the life of a devoted friend. Mr. Jim Rice, a bachelor from Midlandvale, was struck by a train. His last of many gifts to the nuns was a Thanksgiving dinner to which the Sisters in Rockyford had been invited.

### SETTLING IN

By the fall of 1940, five years after the foundation had been made, all members of the original community had been replaced. By this time too, in general, the work program in which the Sisters would be engaged until the opening of St. Anthony's School in 1960 had been put in place.

Music lessons were taught before and after school hours and in the evenings on week days as well as all

day Saturday. Soon the music school expanded not only in teaching hours but also in the variety of instruction offered: piano, vocal, guitar and cello, accompanied by lessons in all levels of music theory. As early as 1942 the convent was designated an examination center by both Toronto and London conservatories of music.

Over the years the music department reached out to the parish and to the Valley community at large, contributing various forms of entertainment. Besides the offerings of individual talented pupils there was group participation by the junior rhythm band, the orchestra and the Senior Glee Club. On one memorable occasion the last mentioned entertained in the theatre on behalf of the war effort. Pupils from the school competed in the Music Festival each year and they also presented a yearly spring Recital.

Orchestra practices could often be quite painful not only for the teacher and pupils but also for other occupants and visitors in the house. In fact so discordant were the sounds which sometimes issued forth from Saturday morning practices and so delightful the concert performances that, on one occasion, a priest of the parish suggested that Mother Fabian must have removed the strings from the instrument of one violinist on concert night.

Outside of music instruction time the teachers were busy with church work, visiting homes or teaching



catechism. The home visiting and catechetical programs were interdependent. In this way the Sisters kept in close touch with the family life of the children they taught. To the needy they distributed food and clothing, a work which sometimes had its own frustrations. Subsequent to a visit by Mother St. Austin in which she had provided a family with warm sleepwear she had sewn, the Sisters returned to find one of the little boys in the yard wearing his new pyjamas over his overalls.

Eventually the Sisters were assisted in this work of clothing those who were in need by a substantial donation from the Community Chest. As well, they received many boxes of clothing from individuals and from schools across Canada where the Ursuline Sisters worked.

According to convent rules of the day the nuns were never allowed to eat outside their own dining room. However, some of the Italian ladies of the parish felt under no obligation to observe convent regulations in their homes. Early in a visit, under some slight pretext, they would slip out to the kitchen and put on the kettle. Shortly afterwards a tray of cakes and coffee would be placed before their guests.

Besides these visits to homes of the pupils, there were regular calls to the sick and shut-ins to bring a few words of comfort and often some reading material. Included in these was the weekly trip to the hospital on Friday afternoons.

Customarily, only the patients listed as Catholic were visited and the Sisters were received with gracious gratitude. It sometimes happened that on the death of a patient whom the nuns had been visiting for some time they would be the chief, or perhaps only, mourners at the funeral.

Not all those who admitted to their Catholicity cared for a visit from the nuns. With some of these even Mother Francesca, who was especially devoted to this work, had to admit defeat. One day when an occupant of a ward turned his back on her she offered to pray for him and was met with, "It's up to you!". Immediately the others in the room, all non-Catholics, greeted her cheerfully and solicited her prayers.

It would appear that the visits were as much with the hospital staff as with the sick. When Mother St. Austin came down with a bad dose of "flu" so solicitous were the nurses that, ignoring all cloister rules, they invaded the convent kitchen to squeeze oranges and make toast which they brought on a tray to Mother's bedroom. Ostensibly, they had little confidence in the nursing expertise of the Sisters. One of Mother's visitors was Miss "Bonnie" Bonagura who has remained a dear friend of the Ursulines over the years.

As was noted, religious education, always the top priority of the Sisters' work, had been launched before the nuns took up residence in the city. The summer

catechetical classes, begun in 1934, continued three years beyond the building of St. Anthony's School. The final such class was conducted at the school in July heat of 93° F..

Vacation school catechetics had been initiated at the request of Bishop Monaghan in the thirties. All religious orders contributed Sisters to teach in parishes where there were no Catholic schools. Accordingly some of the Drumheller Sisters carried on in the outlying areas of their parish while others went as far south as Claresholm or east to Oyen. They always met with the most generous hospitality in the homes they shared.

Many times they were called upon to cope with contingencies for which their semi-cloistered life had little prepared them. In the days of train travel through Drumheller, one Sister, destined for Oyen, met up with her companion in Calgary where the two procured berths on the evening train which would arrive in Oyen sometime in the early morning hours. Once settled on the train they slept soundly until they were awakened abruptly by the porter's voice calling "Get up! Get up quickly!". As they were gathering up clothes and belongings they became aware that the train was backing up. In the aisle of the sleeping-car the porter kept alternately urging them on and reassuring them that all was well, while the Sisters called across to one another to make sure that nothing was left behind. They dismounted from the train with headdresses aslant,



grateful for their long voluminous skirts which hid even their untied shoelaces. Only one who has accomplished the feat of getting into nun's clothing in a train berth can appreciate the gymnastics required for such a performance under pressure. The travellers, beads and belts in hand, were greeted by the pastor who had met the train and was on his return journey when he saw the train shunting back into the station.

As will be demonstrated, travel by car was scarcely less hazardous. During the spring of one eventful year the priest in charge of the east end of the parish spent long hours and covered many miles visiting farms beyond Dorothy. In homes where there were children, he announced a proposed catechetical program which would culminate in the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation. In due course the school at Bull Pound was procured for the first two weeks of July and the priest and Sisters were billeted with the Simons family who lived in the C.N.R. section house situated beside the railroad in the river valley. Father drove the Sisters and the Simons children to and from the schoolhouse each day. The other children in the class came on horseback or in a horse-drawn cart. The days began with Mass and then after classes got under way, Father would usually leave in the car to attend to other parish business. Often following the afternoon dismissal the Simons children and the nuns had a long wait before his return. When the Sisters had finished saying their prayers they would

while away the time shooting at gophers, if Father left them his rifle. It is unlikely that the little rodents had much to fear.

Towards the end of the summer session Bishop Carroll administered Confirmation in the Dorothy church and afterwards joined the congregation for a picnic lunch. This was followed up on the last day with a picnic and races at Bull Pound.

So elated was Father by the success of this venture that he suggested that a return visit be made at Thanksgiving. Accordingly late Sunday afternoon of that weekend Father and two Sisters set out for Bull Pound. They planned to stop at one family home on their way. Without incident they arrived there just after nightfall. Here they saw evidence of a heavy rainstorm that they were told had just passed by. They were also warned that water in the creek they would have to ford would be very high. The visit was prolonged and they left the farm in utter darkness under a cloudy sky. The infinite prairie stretched out before and around them but all they could see was the dirt road immediately ahead, deceptively smooth in the beam of the headlights. The recent rain had turned the road ruts into troughs of mud. The travellers had gone not more than a quarter of a mile when the car settled down and refused to budge. There was nothing to do but go for help. Father returned on foot to the farm house. Mr. Doran came with two young men who were visitors at his home. These two cowboys

dressed in their Western best, their boots polished to a shining glow, viewed with evident disgust the task before them. With one concerted lunge the car was dislodged and the heroes departed with clods of mud clinging to their fine attire.

On their way again the travelling trio edged their way along, the car straddling the ruts. In spite of this cautious pace the wires got wet several times and they were forced to linger in that vast emptiness.

Alas, as they approached the brow of the hill which they must descend, the car lights slowly dimmed and died. One of the Sisters, carrying a flashlight, guided the car to the edge of the river valley. Then in the darkness the car picked its way very gingerly down the rock strewn slope. On reaching bottom intact the travellers' first reaction was immense relief but presently they contemplated before them the last hurdle in their path, the creek. It had indeed risen to such a height that taking the car through it was out of the question. Abandoning their vehicle they did, by dint of ingenuity and great effort, reach the opposite bank and trudged wearily towards the little home beside the railroad tracks whose black outline was barely visible.

Their knock on the door was answered by a distressed Mrs. Nellie Simons who had abandoned all hope of their arrival. When her relief at their safe



deliverance had passed it was replaced by consternation as to how they had crossed the creek. The travellers, too exhausted to offer an explanation asked to be allowed to retire. The next morning Mr. Simons' vintage Ford plunged through the still swollen creek to carry family and visitors safely across on their way to the school house "on top".

Lest one might conclude that this was an isolated incident of coping with the unpredictable on the road, be assured that the regular weekly journeys had their own brand of peril. On the way to East Coulee each Tuesday it was necessary to cross the river at Cambria either by ferry or in winter on the ice. In early spring and late fall, when the ferry lay abandoned on the river bank, it was a toss-up as to whether to risk the ice or make the longer trip across the prairie above the valley.

It so happened one spring day that the parish car was brought to a stop at the brink of the flowing waters which covered the river ice. A heavy truck pulled up alongside the car. Two truckers got out to assess the situation and to discuss it with the driver of the car. The three came to no conclusive estimate of the thickness of the ice. The truckers then suggested that the logical ones to test the ice were the priest and the Sisters, they being the better prepared to die. Ironically, when the priest put the car in reverse, having decided that to be the more prudent course to take, the vehicle refused to retreat up the river bank.

Father Inched the car forward into the water. The truck followed in its wake and the ice held.

When the river broke up in the spring, flood waters often isolated catechetical centres. The flood of 1948 washed out bridges between Rosedale and Wayne. For three weeks the highway was impassable. When classes were resumed in Wayne the car had to be left some distance from the village and Father and the Sisters walked down the railroad tracks. On their return they were given a lift on the section man's speeder.

Winter brought its own problems but seldom were the travellers held up for long by snow or icy roads. The trunk of the car was always equipped for such emergencies. Coping with the cold was another matter. On occasion someone would forget to "fire up" and teachers and pupils would be greeted with a pall of frigid air which hung over the interior of the building. When the fire was lit in the potbellied stove everyone would huddle round it, freezing on one side and roasting on the other. In small quarters, such as Doctor Tolmie's office at Cambria or the church vestry at Rosedale, one had to be most circumspect not to come in contact with the stove. In the convent annals it is recorded that on January 21, 1943 the temperature dropped to -58° F..

In the 1940's the priests and Sisters were instructing twenty-one weekly religion classes with pupils

ranging from kindergarten to high school age. For these, at Christmas 1948, the parish prepared 430 bags of candy.

Often the religion classes were supplemented by a number of other services. In Drumheller a lending library was established and friends of the nuns from near and far generously contributed books to it. The music school formed a rhythm band for the junior classes. For the intermediate girls there was a club whose activities over many years included dramatics, singing in the church choir and enjoying weiner roasts and skating parties.

Tribute must be paid to the lay catechists who laid the ground work for the nuns' endeavours in religious education and who continue in this ministry to the present day. For many years before the nuns came young ladies of senior high school age and older assisted the pastor with Sunday School. Some of these were often a Sister's companion to the different centres in the ensuing years. Nor were they the only ones involved. From the time of the first summer school, board and room was supplied gratis by such families as the William O'Neil's whose daughter, Sister Ursula, had joined the Ursulines of Calgary several years previous.

Then there were those who assisted in and supplemented the nuns' work after the latter had been permanently established in the city. Some of them continued to be involved in the catechetical program over a number of years. Names that come to mind are those of



Miss Lillian Doblsh of Midlandvale and Misses Teresa McLellan (Trentham) and Eileen Lennon. The latter, a longtime teacher in the Newcastle Schools, gathered around her the Catholic boys and girls to whom she gave unstintingly of her time and resources. To quote the convent annalist of 1955: November 1, All Saints' Day- 7:30 p.m. High Mass and a fine attendance. Miss Lennon rounded up the children from Newcastle and brought them in taxis. - unquote. The Sisters taught in the Newcastle Schools every Wednesday after school. As Christmas approached they looked forward to the school concert rehearsal at which they were the guest audience.

Too much cannot be said of the generosity and support of the parish. The introduction of the nuns to Drumheller had been a parish project and for many years the parishioners continued to see it as such. The priests, too, were ever solicitous for the Sisters' well-being. In the upkeep of the parish house which the Sisters occupy they have turned their hands to everything from excavating the basement and pouring cement to insulating the attic and all odd jobs in between such as painting, plumbing and carpentry. Until recent years both priests and parishioners provided transportation for unnumbered trips.

Gifts and services to the nuns from individuals and families are far too numerous to mention. From Valley businesses have come coal, meat, repairs and installations of all kinds. Garden and farm produce

have been offered in abundance by such as the Mraz family which has contributed throughout the fifty years of the convent's existence. Among others must be counted those who gave generously of their time and labour. The first convent cupboards were built by Mr. Joe Lefebre and the first set of music stands for Mother Fabian's orchestra was made by Mr. Charlie Chiarieri. Many a coat of paint the women have applied. All has been received by the Sisters with deep gratitude and appreciation.

Convent life in 1935 was still a somewhat modified form of the cloistered contemplative way lived by religious women in 1635. Some concessions had been made as nuns became more and more involved in the active life of the Church. Those engaged in teaching and nursing were permitted to substitute shorter prayers for the Divine Office. They were permitted to go outside their convents when work or study required it and, with special permission on a few other occasions. Nevertheless the Constitutions of religious orders retained as their basis one or other of the four major rules drawn up by doctors of the Church. The Ursulines followed that of St. Augustine written in the fifth century. Any diviation from the rule was considered a dispensation not an adaptation.

This attempt to synthesize the life of the cloister with the new forms of active apostolate was made the more difficult in Drumheller because of the nature of the Sisters' ministry here.

The Sisters' day began with 5:30 a.m. rising. Half an hour later they assembled in chapel for prayer. This was a bit of a difficulty for the Sister who had to light the kitchen stove and stoke the furnace. She was compensated by being able to rush from the frigid upper regions of the house to the comparative warmth of the furnace room. Morning prayer concluded with the community Mass which was followed by breakfast and a second Mass at the church. In the winter months this second Mass was held in either the convent chapel or the kindergarten. Following this the Sisters went about their tasks in silence except when speaking was a necessity. Meals were eaten in silence except on great feasts of the Church. The day was structured within rigid guidelines. Of necessity the pastoral workers and the music teachers had separate times for afternoon prayer. Everyone gathered at fixed hours for meals. It was not uncommon to see two Sisters jogging hurriedly towards the convent gate from some remote part of the parish as the noon Angelus was ringing. An hour's recreation each evening was obligatory and quite generally appreciated. Bedtime was 10 p.m. and all lights must be out when the curfew blew.

In spite of this exacting routine, life for the Sisters on Third Street was seldom dull. Many and diverse were the experiences encountered in touching so closely and, in turn, being touched by the lives of the people. Nor was humour lacking. Much of this was provided by the children's wit and wisdom so familiar



to all teachers. The following is a gem with some local colour. A Sister who was teaching the six-year-olds was trying to impress on them God's omnipresence. She told them that if they went to the top of the hills God would be there and if they were to go far down into the coal mine God would be there too. At this point Johnny, in great agitation, waved his hand and without waiting burst forth with, "Oh no! He can't, he has his good clothes on!"

The humour of some situations was perceived and relished only in retrospect. Such was provided on one occasion by two zealous but misguided Sisters in Eastern Canada. The two had visited a clothing factory in Montreal. They saw scraps of sheepskin being discarded and asked the management to ship them to Drumheller as they were sure the nuns could make use of them there. In due course Mother St. Austin opened the door to the C.N.R. freight delivery man who presented her with a huge carton. On it were C.O.D. charges of somewhat over four dollars, a considerable sum at the time. Reluctantly Mother accepted the parcel and great was her chagrin when she saw its contents. To appreciate the implications of such a gift, a cause for amusement among those who knew Mother St. Austin, one must know something of her character. She was extremely proud of her MacGregor Scottish ancestry and of its reputation for frugality and endurance. It wrung her heart to have paid for something that appeared absolutely useless. She determined that she would get her money's worth from it and prepared to make a comforter with the wool. Night after night the nuns raised blisters

on their hands cutting wool from the scraps of leather at recreation hour.

There were other well meant gifts received which had to be discarded, of such were rosaries put together from bits and pieces of all shapes and colours. That these were never distributed to the children is indicative of the great sensitivity shared by the two first superiors of the convent, Mothers Bernice and St. Austin. Their simple life style and their esteem of persons endeared them to the people they served.

To digress a little, there is a humorous anecdote told with respect to Monsignor Anderson's and Mother St. Austin's Scottish pride. Monsignor, accompanied by Mother St. Austin and Mother Leonore O'Rielly took Communion to Grandma Cramer who, like a great many others had the "flu". Mother St. Austin and Monsignor agreed that it was probably due to their Scottish blood that they had been spared. At this point the forbearance of Mother Leonore, whose gentle and retiring nature can be vouched for by all who knew her, reached breaking point and she declared, "I'd rather have the "flu" than be Scotch!".

Many times it was the people with whom the Sisters worked most closely who brightened their days and brought a smile to their faces. Mr. Jack O'Dwyer who, on his retirement, took over the care of the church and convent was most adept at this. Late one evening he

appeared at the kitchen door disguised as a transient and asked for a handout. Mother Agnes, weary after a long day's work, paid him little attention but asked him to sit on the steps while she prepared his meal. When she returned with his sausage sandwiches Mr. O'Dwyer, chuckling, revealed his identity. Mother Agnes joined in his mirth but, not to be outdone, she insisted he take his meal along with him. Mr. O'Dwyer brought his good humour to many an event such as the time, dressed for the occasion, he acted as chef at a dinner party for the Girls' Club.

Someone else who worked around the convent for years and faithfully assisted the nuns in many capacities was Miss Isobel McLellan (Schouvenberg).

Some major events which can be recalled as interrupting the nuns' daily routine are: the convent fire of January 1942; two of them taking up residence in the annex of East Coulee Church for the duration of Vacation School 1952; additions made to the convent in 1958 and 59 as well as the many times they gathered with other Sisters' communities of the diocese for celebrations.



## THE SCHOOL AND VATICAN II

As early as mid-century there were rumblings of unrest within the Catholic Church. Many voices spoke for the need of change. Simultaneously with this, an ambition of Drumheller Catholics, long dormant, was roused - a Catholic school for the children of St. Anthony's Parish. Both the changes in the Church and that in the educational system of Drumheller, when they came, were to give a new and definite stamp to the life and work of the Drumheller Ursulines.

The earliest signs of the nuns tentative steps towards adaptation came from the felt need for independent mobility. They had concluded that they could accomplish more by having their own car to use as need arose rather than having to wait to be fitted into someone else's schedule. On the basis of faith and hope alone, one Sister got a driver's license. She began to drive short distances with cars of friends. One of these friends, Mr. Ted Paetz, not only loaned his car but in times of difficulty came to their rescue. One such occasion could well have proved disastrous to their plans for increased mobility.

In 1958 the Ursuline Superior General made a visit to the convent. She had been made aware that the Sisters were doing some driving. As her visit came to a close the Sisters cautiously suggested that they drive her and her secretary over to Rockyford. To their satisfaction she consented. When they reached the top of the

hill the travellers decided to make a little detour and show the Easterners the Horseshoe Canyon scenery. They had gone about five miles when the car stalled. Since the possibility of getting help was nowhere in sight two Sisters set off across the fields towards the highway. The cows in the pastures they crossed made evident their disapproval of the strange looking creatures from "their outer-space". When the Sisters reached the highway they "thumbed" a ride into town and sought out Mr. Paetz with their sad tale. He returned with them in a station wagon which was accompanied by a tow truck. The nuns who had been left behind had waited three hours. The journey was resumed in the borrowed station wagon and to their pleasant relief the Superior General's comment was, "Buy yourselves a car and don't be borrowing from the neighbours".

Possession of their own car was still a long way off for lack of funds but very soon the rest of the nuns started taking driver's lessons. Besides these limited experiences with driving, there began other very modest changes in the strict order of things. On a few occasions the Sisters were allowed to eat in public. Then came the day when they put aside their restricting headdress and long skirts for a habit of modified style. This would prove to be just a transition to modern dress which they adopted in the late sixties.

When the school opened in 1960 two Sisters took up duties there. It was situated at what was then the

eastern limits of the city. The Principal, Mother Anna Marie, a lifetime big city dweller, was horrified when the students took to the fields to snare gophers over the noon hour. She was to stay in the school many years and to see the city stretch far out beyond it. From the time of the school's beginning several other Sisters have been on the teaching staff. Of these, the two who were there longest were Sisters Rita Harrigan and Rose Marie Blonde.

Meanwhile the general turmoil of the sixties and the call for renewal in the Church made their impact on the lives of religious women. There was an exodus from their ranks and a dirth of religious vocations. In society at large young people were abandoning traditional life styles. Within religious orders this meant fewer teachers and nurses. Also, many Sisters within the orders chose to work in ministries comparable to those in which the Drumheller Sisters had been engaged for their first twenty-five years in the city. Communities began reaching out to far-flung areas that were in urgent need of their ministry.

The personal lives of the Sisters underwent dramatic changes. They used community-owned cars in their work and took regular holiday trips. They purchased their own clothing with a modest monthly budget. More important, their spiritual life was enriched by the Church's liturgical renewal and by the trust placed in them, by their communities, to



deepen their individual lives of faith and prayer.

In summation, perhaps one brief excerpt from the convent annals may demonstrate the magnitude of the change that has taken place within the last twenty-five years. To quote: November 3, 1962 - The C.W.L. of Drumheller held their annual bazaar in the parish hall. The nuns were each given 50¢ to spend as they wished. - unquote.