

Blessed Marie-Léonie Paradis, p.s.s.f. (1809–1890)

Élodie Paradis was born on May 12, 1840 in Acadie, Lower Canada, the only daughter of a family of six children. When she is nine her mother sends her to a boarding school in Laprairie, run by the sisters of Congrégation Notre-Dame. The same year her father leaves for California to look for gold. Having heard from a neighbor, Camille Lefebvre, about a community of nuns within the Holy Cross family, Élodie presents herself at the novitiate of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross in Saint-Laurent, near Montreal, on February 21, 1854. She is not yet 14 years old. When her father comes back from California, he tries to bring her home, without success.



In 1856 she teaches at Sainte-Scholastique (Mirabel) and on August 22, 1857, she makes her vows. She works as a teacher, a monitor and a secretary to the mother superior at Varennes, Saint-Laurent and Saint-Martin (Laval) and in 1862 moves to New York where the Marianites had opened an orphanage. Eight years later she is sent to Indiana (U.S.A.) to teach French and needlework to the novices and in 1874 she is chosen to direct a group of novices and postulants at a college in Memramcook, N.B., founded by her friend Camille Lefebvre. There Élodie Paradis feels a special call: to be an auxiliary and assistant to the Holy Cross Fathers in the mission of educating young Acadians. Several factors confirm this call: the precarious situation of the college in the absence of support personnel, essential to its smooth operation; the Acadians' low level of education; and the lack of institutions for young women who wish to enter religious life. Fourteen Acadian girls receive the habit on August 26, 1877.

In 1880 the general chapter of the Holy Cross Fathers accepts the idea of a new foundation for the needs of the colleges, the Little Sisters of the Holy Family. Mother Marie-Léonie dies on May 3, 1912. She is beatified in Montreal on September 11, 1984, during Pope John Paul II's visit to Canada.

QUOTATION:

« Let us work, my daughters, we will rest in heaven! »