

Catherine de Hueck Doherty (1896-1985)

Catherine was born in Russia on August 15, 1896, to parents of deep Christian faith, who also communicated to her an extraordinary love for the poor. She is baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church, but eventually, in 1920 in England, she will ask to be formally received into the Roman Catholic Church. Over her lifetime, she will integrate both of these great Christian traditions within her own spirituality.



When she is fifteen, she marries her cousin, the wealthy aristocrat Boris de Hueck. During the First World War, she volunteers as a nurse on the German front, while Boris works as an engineer. Then they escape Communist Russia and finally, in 1921, arrive to Canada where their son, George, is born. Catherine works at what menial jobs she can find, to support her infant son and her sick husband. After a time, she finds a well-paying position as a lecturer, criss-crossing North America to give lectures. Meanwhile Boris manages to form his own company, but it goes bankrupt in the Great Depression. Their relationship unravels and their marriage will eventually be annulled by the Catholic Church.

Catherine finds herself being a single parent with a small child to support. Yet she feels the call by Christ's words to go, sell all she possesses and follow Him. With the blessing of her bishop, she goes to live and work with the poor in the slums of Toronto, where she founds *Friendship House*. A few years later she is invited to found a *Friendship House* in New York City's Harlem section too.

Through the years, Catherine becomes well-known for her social justice work with the poor and minorities. She is a forerunner in the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. and a friend of Dorothy Day. As Catherine continues her work with the poor, she meets Edward J. Doherty, a famous Chicago newspaper reporter. They marry in 1943 and in 1947 move to Combermere, Ontario, where they found *Madonna House*, welcoming people who wish to join their life of prayer, work and simple Gospel way of life. At the request of various bishops, Catherine opens field houses in their dioceses around the world.

Catherine dies on December 14, 1985, after a long illness.

LINK: <http://www.madonnahouse.org/>