

## Catherine Donnelly, SOS (1884-1983)

The oldest of three daughters, Catherine grew up on the family farm near Alliston, Ontario and was influenced by the community building in rural settlements. Born on February 26, 1884 and educated in local public schools, she began a teaching career at the age of 18 after earning a teaching certificate. Catherine teacher's salary became the sole financial support of the family for 13 years.



Relieved of family duties, she and a teacher friend travelled to Stettler, Alberta in August 1918 to teach. By November, the schools were closed indefinitely when the Spanish flu struck the area. As a volunteer bringing nursing care to the settlers' homes, she was appalled at the poverty and lack of presence of religion. Unsuccessful in interesting two existing women religious congregations to teach in rural Western Canada, she was assisted in creating a new community by the Redemptorists, who were expanding in the West.

On August 15, 1922, the Institute of the Sisters of Service was founded to serve the most abandoned souls as teachers, nurses and social workers in the outlying districts. Two years later after first vows, Sister Catherine Donnelly with a nursing Sister established the community's first western mission in Camp Morton, Manitoba. For the next three decades drawing from her rural background, Sr. Donnelly opened three more teaching missions and taught in eight rural public schools.

Free from monastic restrictions, the Sisters lived in small groups among the people, wearing simple uniforms and using their Christian and family names. Sr. Donnelly imparted an ecumenical and dedicated spirit to the Sisters. During active service, the community opened 35 teaching missions and two rural western hospitals as well as welcoming immigrants at Pier 21 and at eight women's residences. Through their four religious correspondence schools, religious education reached children in isolated regions.

In 1974, Sr. Donnelly was presented with the papal medal of *Pro Ecclesia at Pontifice* in recognition of 50 years of work for the Church. She died at the age of 99 on September 5, 1983. In 2000, she was selected by The Catholic Register as one of 10 people who helped shape the Canadian Church in the 20th century. Sister Catherine Donnelly Catholic School in Barrie, Ontario opened in June 2004.

**QUOTE:** "The spiritual life and the intellectual life have been the same root deep in the unity of the intelligence."

**LINK:** <http://sistersofservice.ca/>