



A Woman for our Time

Celebrating Marie Madeleine ... and Gardens

A newsletter issued by the Faithful Companions of Jesus Gumley House Generalate London UK February 2022

Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Houët, Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, appreciated the beauty of mountain, hillside and meadow and loved gardens of all types.

Some childhood years were spent hidden with her family, in the depths of the French countryside as the Revolution raged. Here, she experienced the protection of family and the bounty of the earth. In fact, her whole life was marked by the cycle of planting, growth and harvest. Annually, she went to her vineyard near Bourges for the grape-harvest, her arrival there a source of delight both for the local people and herself. Her letters teem with advice about gardens and we could claim, without hesitation, she would stress the importance of **Care for our Common Home**.

Between 1820 and 1858 Marie Madeleine established twenty houses and having an adequate garden was a priority. 'You say it is very beautiful with a lovely garden. You must write me the details and tell me how large the garden is, citing something I know, at Camon or at Amiens'. A92398/275

Writing to Carouge from Paris in 1848: 'We will need a kitchen garden like yours. I beg of you, quickly send us the lay-out of this kitchen garden, the length, the width and the depth, then the different plots with their exact measurements...so many feet wide, and depth to dig.' 1848 10 19 Paris A92434 59

As the gardens matured, plants were shared and there are numerous references to the transportation of seeds, cuttings and plants between houses. From Italy to Switzerland: 'Although you have not yet thanked me for my 460 rose trees. When I get the opportunity, I shall send you 400 other shrubs, rose-trees, jasmine, and two fine oleanders, and a rare flower whose name I have forgotten.' ref: A92432. 'The rosebushes leave (Turin) tomorrow and will be in Carouge on TuesdayTry to go and get them from the diligence when it is passing. I will try to add two or three orange trees.' 1838/04/07 Carouge. In a letter to Oughterard, in the west of Ireland, she praises the garden at Nantes 'the flowers are beautiful. Sister Reine, would be very happy if you could send us some seeds at the first opportunity, do not fail to send them to London. They will be sent on to us.'

In October 1844 writing to Oughterard, but this time from Limerick, 'ask the novices to tell their parents that we 'have just bought a house here in the most beautiful position with gardens and meadows'. The latter eventually became the pitches that nurture the superb Laurel Hill Schools' hockey teams!

Ever the shrewd business woman, in 1838: 'It seems to me that you are paying too many expenses for the garden, and it is useless to buy dahlias.' Carouge A 92432 /15

Gumley House to Carouge in 1844, 'You can't imagine the beauty of the garden, all kinds of very beautiful birds and waterfowls. There are rhododendrons 20 feet high, ... In the midst of the wood a lovely hill with a hermitage. ... there are lime trees over a hundred feet highand another beautiful flower which opens the 1 May in the morning, and lasts the whole month of May, so it is the flower of the Blessed Virgin. ... You have no idea unless you have seen it. I don't think I have ever seen anything as pretty and pleasing.' 1841 05 24 Carouge A92433/123. However, Oughterard was healthier: 'I will be so happy to see the children running in our large garden. It is more than twice the size of the one in Isleworth and the air is excellent'. 1844 10 06 Oughterard A92497 18

In 1839 it was thought the pupils in Carouge were getting headaches from sitting in the shade of walnut trees, and advice comes from Bourges: 'I was telling myself. What if ... someone constructs a sort of tent ... in the back of the garden, covered with straw, with curtains made from thick fabric or drill cotton, like those of the shops? ... I wish I could send you half of our shade.' And last but not least, 'Transplant the intrusive chestnut tree, don't cut it down.' We can only hope it was not too big.

Marie Madeleine is a Woman for our Time and would surely love the Garden Project in Calgary!

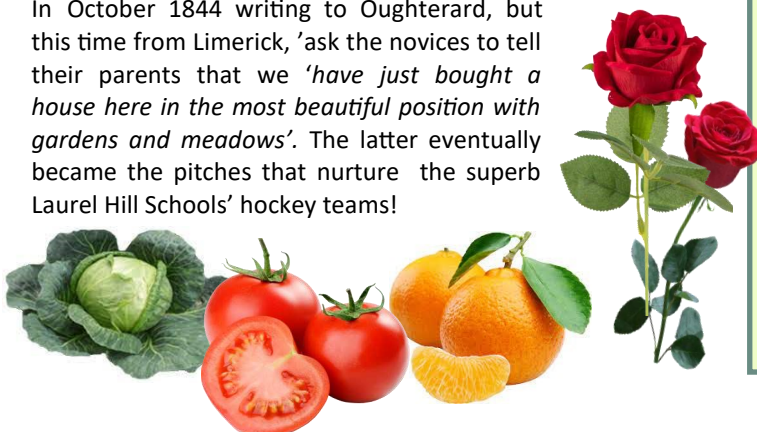
**This newsletter honours
Marie Madelene d'Houët
and pays loving tribute to Ms. Denise DeNeve**

Denise was the **Director** of the FCJ Christian Life Centre in Calgary. In 2021 she wrote an article about the Centre's Community Garden project and was asked if it could be used in a Marie Madeleine newsletter. Her affirmative reply came on November 28 with the suggestion to 'feel free to edit as needed.'

To the intense shock of family, friends and colleagues, Denise passed away unexpectedly on December 14 2021.

We give thanks for the wondrous gift of Denise's life and pray for her family and friends who mourn her death.

Her lovely, unedited article is shared overleaf.



FCJ Christian Life Centre Community Garden

by Denise DeNeve

Imagine engaging in a sustainable way for your family to enjoy fresh organic fruits and vegetables, saving money on grocery shopping all while learning about science, composting, food preservation and healthy habits. Basically, about “care of our common home”. This is not a dream; it is happening in Calgary and around the world: it is called a “community garden.”

The **FCJ Christian Life Centre** began a Community Garden on their grounds in 2016. The impetus behind this was the notion of building a community hub, a vibrant living environment that offers a positive space to support the community needs. Community gardens are part of the sharing economy. They make it possible for many people to enjoy a resource – in this case, land for gardening – that they couldn’t afford on their own. However, it’s not just the gardeners themselves who gain from community gardens – the benefits extend to the rest of the neighborhood and even to society as a whole. For example, the Centre offers the “*Feed the Hungry*” diocesan program free rental of several garden beds to grow food for their clientele. “*Feed the Hungry*” has been in existence in the City of Calgary for over 25 years. It is a non-denominational service in the community that addresses one of the key needs of Calgarians experiencing poverty and marginalization — a healthy, high-quality meal in a friendly atmosphere of safety, respect, and family.

Community gardens are a response to food insecurity and food price increases, loss of community networks and isolation. In Canada, the first community gardens appeared along railway lines initiated by Canadian Pacific Railway in 1890. Their use declined after 1910, but since 1965, more community gardens in urban centres have been established throughout the country as a response to and as an indicator of the increasing awareness of ecological and food security issues.

The gardeners at the **FCJ Centre** are offered garden beds to grow what they wish. Each year a callout through email, the FCJ Centre website and social me-

dia, is made near the end of March. People connect with the Centre regarding availability. Assignment of a garden bed is then processed for rental at a nominal cost, which is used for maintenance of the beds. We have 12 beds available. The responsibility for the upkeep of the plot, watering, weeding etc. is that of all the gardeners. We have several social gatherings each year beginning with a potluck supper. At the end of the growing season, we encourage people to engage in a harvest gathering and celebration.

The **FCJ Christian Life Centre** is a Centre that is very cognizant of the urgent need for the “care of our common home”. *Laudato Si’* is the second encyclical of Pope Francis. The encyclical has the subtitle “*on care for our common home*”. In it, the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take “swift and unified global action.”

A community garden can help to educate on the importance of green space in each and every community. *Laudato Si’* teaches us how to create a more just and sustainable world together.

Community gardens provide many benefits including: sustainability, recreation for all ages, beautification of neighborhoods, healthy food production, community building, places to share gardening knowledge including the idea of care of our common home, and experience.

Gardeners who work harmoniously ... witness to the life-creating presence of God in the world.

The **firm foundation for the FCJ Centre** community garden is the ability to provide a way of relating to creation and to the God of people’s understanding. “Gardeners who work harmoniously work among the processes of life and death, and in their work witness to the life-creating presence of God in the world. This means that besides vegetables, flowers, and fruit, gardeners are themselves undergoing a spiritual cultivation into something beautiful and sympathetic and healthy. A caring, faithful, and worshipping humanity is one of the garden’s most important crops.”

- *Food and Faith – A Theology of Eating* by Norman Wirzba

