



# Echoes of Emilie

Volume 43, No. 2 - November 2020

## The fight against epidemics

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For more than six months now, we have been living these uncertain times caused by a global pandemic. COVID-19 has affected everyone and has made us aware of the fragility of life. We must face new challenges every day and embrace a "new normal". We have had to change our daily routines to be in solidarity with one another, in order to stop the spread of this pandemic, not only to protect ourselves, but above all, to protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Despite the lockdown and closing of borders, we have found ways to stay in touch and to continue helping those in need. We have found new ways to stay connected because we realize the importance of social contact in our lives and especially in the lives of others.

The Sisters of Providence, guided by the charism of their Foundress, which is to respond to the urgent needs that arise, have often been part of what we know today as "front-line personnel", fighting different epidemics at different times.

Called to respond to the many needs, since their foundation in 1843, Bishop Bourget decided to send the first novices, each in turn, to the Religious at the Hôtel-Dieu in Montreal to be trained in the care of the sick.

At a time when an epidemic was one of the factors that plunged the population into panic about its very survival, the Sisters of Providence responded to the call and became "Guardian Angels" to those who needed them.

At different times and in various geographical locations, these Sisters visited the sick in their homes, were involved in the founding of large hospitals and nursing schools, worked in sanatoriums, dispensaries, and outpatient clinics.

In Montreal alone, we owe them the following hospitals: *Hôpital de Verdun*, *Centre Hospitalier de Lachine*, *Hôpital du Sacré-Cœur de Montréal*, *Hôpital Rivière-des-Prairies*, and *Hôpital Louis-Hippolyte-Lafontaine*.

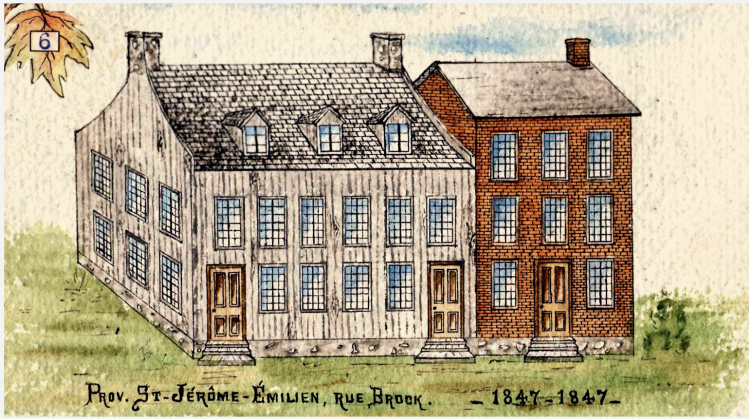
Their first "nursing" school was founded in 1892 at St. Vincent Hospital and Medical Center in Portland, Oregon,



United States. Subsequently, more than thirty schools specializing in nursing, psychiatric nursing, medical technology, and radiology were opened in the hospitals of the Congregation.

Moved by this new reality that we are living today, I would like to share with you a brief summary of some epidemics that the Congregation has had to face at different times in history:

## Typhus



### Saint-Jérôme-Émilien Hospice, 1847

Welcomed children that became orphans during typhus epidemic.

In the spring of 1847, the prospect of a typhus epidemic in Montreal prompted the authorities to undertake the construction of buildings, called "sheds". The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Sisters of the *Hôpital Hôtel-Dieu* were the "first responders" to the care of the sick. Lay people, men and women were hired to assist the Sisters. That summer, a heat wave accelerated the spread. Bishop Bourget asked the Sisters of Providence to go and replace the Sisters who had been taking care of the sick for a month already. The chronicles of the time tell us that when Bishop Bourget asked the Sisters which of them would like to go and care for these patients, all wanted to go. François Tavernier, the doctor of the congregation and Emilie's nephew, chose twelve Sisters that he considered strong enough to go there.

The thirteen hangars (sheds) built in Montreal, at Pointe St-Charles, were not sufficient to house the large number of sick people who arrived daily. Each evening, after returning from the sheds, the Sisters took special measures of cleanliness to avoid contracting or transmitting the disease. If they returned sick from the sheds, Mother Gamelin applied all the sanitary measures known at the time to avoid any contagion. On July 19, 1847, the Sisters took a vow to burn seven candles every Friday and to practice seven virtues, in honor of Our Lady of Seven



### Candleholder and Vow

In 1847, Bishop Bourget, praying for the protection of the young congregation from the typhus epidemic, promised, in the name of the Congregation, to burn seven candles every Friday in front of a picture of Our Mother of Sorrows.

This tradition continues today in the Community. The candles are a symbol of the virtues that the Sisters of Providence must practise in order to imitate the compassion of Mary: **simplicity, humility, obedience, confidence in Providence, abnegation, generosity and charity.**

Museum of the Sisters of Providence - Montreal, Canada.

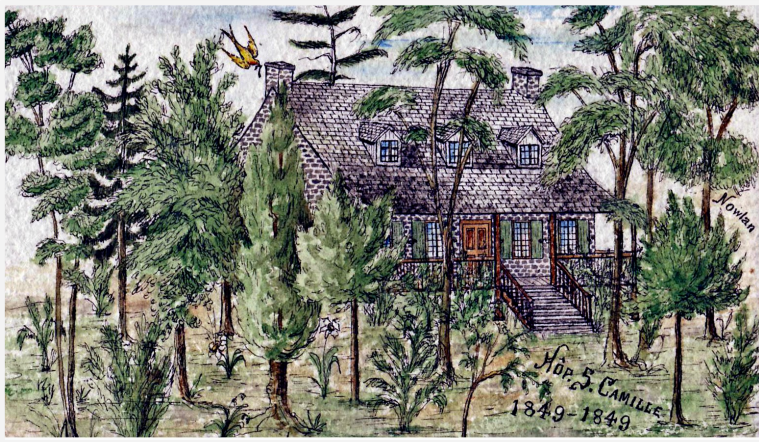
Sorrows, to ask that the young congregation would be spared from typhus. Of the 32 infected Sisters of Providence, three died from the disease.

This epidemic also generated the most extraordinary actions of solidarity. Emilie exercised her leadership to the benefit of collateral victims as well. An emergency shelter, under her direction, began in her cousin, Agathe Perrault-Nowlan's home, to help the children of Irish immigrants, whose parents were either sick or had died. The improvised hospice, named *Saint-Jérôme-Émilien* in honor of an Italian priest who died while treating the victims of the plague, received 650 orphans in the first five months.

## Cholera

In 1849, as soon as the first cases of cholera appeared in Montreal, Mother Gamelin asked to go and treat the sick herself. The permission was denied so as not to expose her to the risks of the epidemic. Since the municipal government of the time did not believe in the risks





### Saint-Camille Hospital, 1849

(In Mrs. Nowlan's home)

Welcomed people who had contracted cholera.

associated with an epidemic, they delayed putting the necessary safety measures in place, thus home care and in provisional hospitals -provided by the Sisters of Providence- began to increase.

Two hospitals were opened temporarily, one of which was in Agathe Perreault-Nowlan's home, which had welcomed the orphans during the typhus epidemic. While treating cholera patients, the Sisters were isolated from the rest of the Congregation. They had to follow the doctor's instructions to prevent and fight the disease. During this epidemic, the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of Providence made more than 800 home visits to take care of the sick without any discrimination of race or religion.

At the end of August 1851, cholera reappeared in Montreal. Emilie Gamelin, victim of her charity, died of this disease on September 23 of that same year. Her spiritual legacy will motivate the Sisters and will guide them thereafter in their various ministries throughout the world.

### Spanish flu

A new epidemic made its appearance in Quebec in September 1918. Still skeptical and not believing that the disease could be worse than a "common flu", the health authorities took their time to declare a state of emergency so did not take the appropriate actions to minimize the damages. The extremely contagious nature of the Spanish flu, from which European countries had suffered since the spring, meant that it spread very quickly across the country.

From the beginning, the Sisters of Providence assisted the sick. Whether these were Catholics, Jews or Protestants, day and night the Sisters were at their bedside to nurse the sick and to assure their social, spiritual and human well-being.

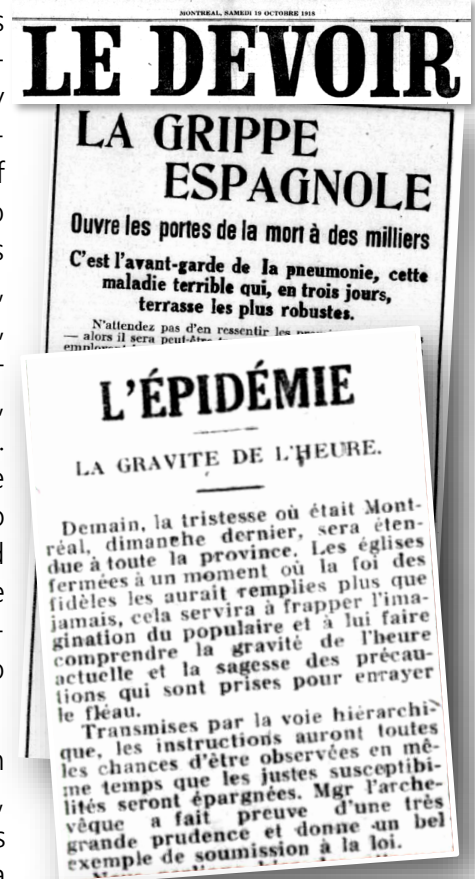
Due to the epidemic, municipal and medical authorities closed schools, universities, cinemas, theaters, dance halls and bowling alleys. Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, cancelled most religious worship and services. On October 19, 1918, a journalist from *Le Devoir* wrote "...The churches [are] closed at a time when the faithful would have filled them more than ever..."

At the request of the municipal authorities, the Congregation organized a temporary emergency orphanage to assist the children, victims of the ravages brought about by this pandemic.

The Motherhouse of the Sisters of Providence in Montreal counted 102 cases of influenza. The sick Sisters were isolated at Saint-Vincent house, which was used as an emergency hospital. In addition to the care provided, relics of Mother Gamelin were distributed to all the Sisters affected by the disease.

Most of the missions of the Sisters of Providence were severely affected by this pandemic. The Sisters of Montreal had to go and help their Sisters in Saint-Johnsbury, Haileybury, Timmins, Lachine, Joliette, Shédiac and Sainte-Anne, among other cities. The Sisters there were succumbing to the heavy workload brought about by the large number of patients they had to nurse.

This epidemic, which was truly devastating, made the governments aware of the need for a public health system. Major pandemics almost always occur in two waves, sometimes three. In the spring of 1920, Quebec was one of the few places on the planet to suffer a fourth occurrence, still very deadly, of the Spanish flu.

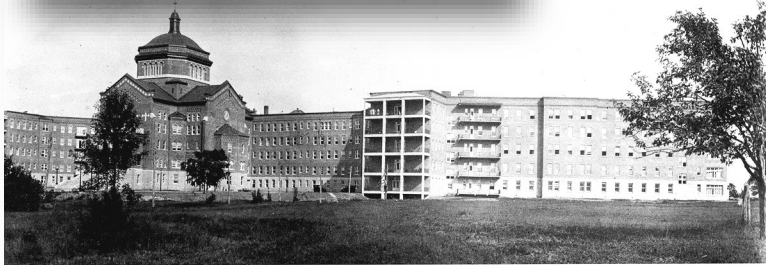






▲ **Des Incurables Hospital, Montreal, 1920.**

◀ **Care of the sick at the Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, 1926.**



▲ **Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, 1926.**

## Conclusion

The practise of medicine in that day had precarious means, and was often not very proficient in dealing with epidemics. They had no vaccines, no antibiotics, no antiviral drugs and skeptical people. More than a hundred years later, we find ourselves once again facing the same challenges in the fight against an invisible virus, which is causing such devastation.

What would Emilie do if she were a woman of our time? She would surely take concrete actions, according to her possibilities, and she would encourage us to do our part to keep our society healthy.

With great trust in Providence, she would pray for all the frontline staff, and for all the people.

Now is the time to think about others... each one of us, let us do what is right and we will overcome this challenge together!



**Nancy Prada**

Coordinator | Emilie Gamelin Centre

## Tuberculosis

In 1867, tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in Canada. In response to the growing challenge posed by this epidemic, some provinces opened special hospitals, called sanatoriums, to provide care for people with tuberculosis, called the "incurable" (which means "those who will never recover").

In Montreal, the *Hôpital des Incurables* (Hospital for the Incurable) made its debut in 1898 thanks to Sisters Georgiana and Léontine Généreux. Mgr. Bruchési, Bishop of Montreal, entrusted the work to the Sisters of Providence in 1899. A large construction to accommodate more patients was built. In 1923, a fire almost destroyed the hospital and the Congregation had no choice but to rebuild it. Some land on the outskirts of the city, on Boulevard Gouin, was chosen. The inauguration took place in 1926 under the name of *Hôpital du Sacré-Coeur-de-Montréal*. Treating patients with tuberculosis became the specialty of the hospital, which was considered a sanatorium. This hospital became the most important educational center in Quebec in the field of pulmonary diseases.

## Sources :

- *La santé publique: Une histoire Canadienne (Public Health: A Canadian History)*, by Christopher Ruddy, Ph. D, and Sue C. Sullivan
- *Le petit journal de la Providence (The Little diary of Providence) (1918 - 1919)*
- *Le Devoir (newspaper), 1918*
- *Biography of Emilie Tavernier-Gamelin, by Denise Robillard*

**The Museum is presently closed to the public due to COVID-19 pandemic.**

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# In the wake of a pandemic...

## Under the protective gaze of Blessed Emilie

For more than five months now, we have been living an extremely uncommon situation that we could never have imagined.

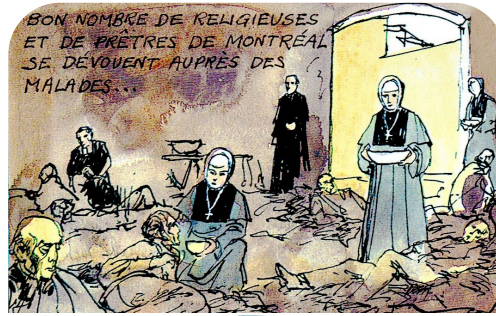
A virus began to spread in China and we had chills as the media reported the havoc being wrought in such a short time... but this was happening over there, in China!

But then, at the beginning of March, the virus reached Canada and later Quebec, at a vertiginous pace. It almost created panic... we had to confine ourselves to our homes, to observe social distancing, to avoid all gatherings and... even to close churches and all places of worship... For how long? Days, weeks, months? No one could answer that question!

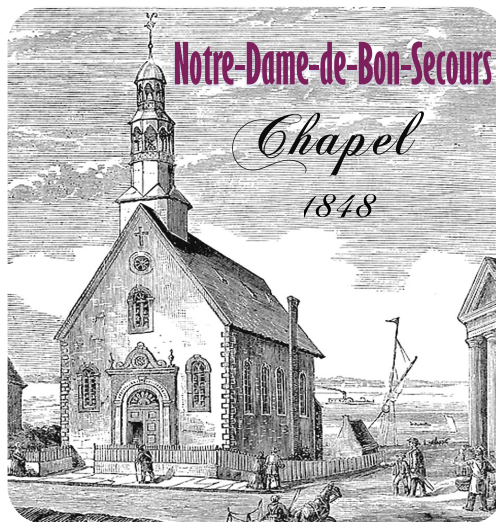
The Sisters of Providence immediately thought about their blessed Foundress, Emilie Tavernier Gamelin. Why? Because she witnessed deadly epidemics during her very short life: Cholera in 1832 and 1834, typhus in 1847, and cholera once again in 1849 and 1851, a disease that she herself contracted and that took her life within twelve hours, on September 23, 1851. Let us recall a few facts:

When the cholera epidemic broke out in Montreal on June 20, 1832, the young widow assisted the victims, whose number rose to a hundred a day. Her biographer tells us that, "One day, while Madame Gamelin was, in a humble home, assisting a woman as she drew her last breath and whose husband was lying dead just beside her, a public officer arrived and removed the two corpses. Six little children... were left crying broken heartedly. Madame Gamelin's own tears mingled with their sobs. She took them to her shelter and cared for the children there until they were old enough to be adopted".<sup>1</sup>

Then in the spring of 1847, the fear of a typhus epidemic spread among the population. The first Irish immigrants began to arrive in Montreal at the beginning of June. The editor of the *Mélanges religieux* newspaper wrote on June 18, 1847 "their skeletal bodies give us chills". On June 9, eight Grey Nuns, volunteers, began to work in the



**The typhus epidemic in 1847**  
Graphic history book "Emilie Tavernier-Gamelin",  
from "Les grands moments de l'Église canadienne,  
1986" collection.



**Engraving made from a watercolor painting  
by Father Félix Martin**  
Source: *Congrégation Notre-Dame*

shelters with five other devoted women.

By the end of June, eleven Grey Nuns had contracted typhus and Bishop Bourget proposed to replace the Grey Nuns with the Sisters of Providence. On June 26, twelve Sisters of Providence went to care for the sick in the "sheds" and later on, twenty of the twenty-six professed sisters, twelve of the seventeen novices and three of the six postulants went to the "sheds" or to the hospice for orphans to assist the typhus patients. In total, fifteen professed sisters,

ten novices and two postulants contracted the disease.

When the Sisters returned sick from the "sheds", Mother Gamelin applied the methods known at that time to prevent further spread of the illness. She had the laundry disinfected, established a special infirmary for the Sisters and had more fortifying food prepared for them. Dr. François Tavernier the doctor of the Asile of Providence and nephew of the foundress, ordered that the Sisters should go to the countryside to recuperate, either at the house of Longue-Pointe, or at Agathe Perrault-Nowlan's, on Côte Ste-Catherine's Street.

Even though he was aware of the situation, Bishop Bourget did not consider it appropriate to postpone the annual retreat planned for July 12, and which ended on July 21 with the profession of vows of seven novices. At the end of the retreat and with the consent of Bishop Ignace Bourget, the Sisters made a promise to burn in perpetuity seven candles each Friday in honor of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, to pray that the Community be protected from typhus.

As well, on August 13, 1847, the Bishop of Montreal vowed to re-establish the pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Bon-Secours to obtain the end of the epidemic. He also promised to exhibit in ex-voto, in the chapel, "a painting representing typhus seeking to spread throughout the city" and being stopped through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

Then behold, new cases of cholera were reported at the end of August 1851. Despite the risks related to travelling, Mother Gamelin went to Ste-Elisabeth on September 10 and stayed there for three days. She expressed her concerns about cholera to the community, as *the Chronicles* tell: "She told them, contrary to her usual equanimity, - that she was afraid of getting sick - and added: I may not see you again". Before leaving, she said to the Sisters "I prayed that you would always love the poor and that peace and union be always with you."



Without realizing it, Emilie led for the first and last time the Council for the admission of novices to profession on September 22, as Bishop Bourget had replied that he would not attend.

The following night, Mother Gamelin was suddenly awakened by intense abdominal pain. Toward four o'clock in the morning of Tuesday, September 23, she woke her roommate, Sister Joseph-du-Sacré-Cœur (Esther Parizeau), saying "I have the cholera! I am going to die!" She asked the Sisters to take her to the infirmary. Her pain was such that she found it difficult to climb the stairs, even with the help of the Sisters. She begged the doctor not to give her any medication that would deprive her of her faculties. She asked for the sacrament of the sick, made her confession to Canon Prince and received Communion serenely from the hands of Bishop Bourget who had rushed to her bedside. Her daughters gathered around her, wanting to hear her speak one more time. In one last burst of energy, she found the strength to articulate the words humility, simplicity, but her voice failed and she could not finish the word cha... ri... ty, that same charity she had recalled so insistently the day before and which she had practiced so heroically throughout her life. Victim of this charity ... the "Mother of the Poor" breathed her last...

How can we not thank Mother Gamelin for her heroic courage and for the protection we have all received during these past months! Indeed, we were invited to pray the novena to our Blessed Emilie that we be preserved and, to date, no death due to COVID 19 has been recorded in our large international Congregation.

Thanks be to God  
and to our Blessed

Mother Emilie Tavernier Gamelin!



Sister Yvette Demers, SP

Vicepostulator  
Cause of Emilie Gamelin

<sup>1</sup> "Vie de Mère Gamelin"... [1900] (Life of Mother Gamelin) by a religious of her Institute, pages 36-37

Sources :

Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin, by Denise Robillard, Éditions du Méridien, 1988, pages : 106-107 ; 230-236 ; 301-304.

## "Le Typhus": A painting that recalls the end of epidemics.

*Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours Chapel, Montreal*

### History of the painting

When Bishop Ignace Bourget became titular bishop of the diocese of Montreal, in 1840, he deplored the fact that pilgrims had deserted the chapel.

A dramatic event, however, allowed him to revive the practice of pilgrimage there. In 1847, a terrible epidemic of typhus struck Montreal. This epidemic was the sad consequence of the massive immigration of the Irish people that had to flee the famine and the fever that ravaged their country, in extremely inhuman conditions. They crossed the Atlantic starving and piled with the sick in poorly built ships, often unseaworthy and in unsanitary conditions... known as "coffin ships". Once they arrived in Montreal, the disease spread quite quickly...

Bishop Bourget, himself a victim of the disease, went to the Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel and promised to fulfill the following three vows if the epidemic would subside: revive the practice of pilgrimage to the chapel, offer the chapel a statue of the Virgin Mary and commemorate the end of the epidemic by means of a votive painting.

Bishop Bourget survived the disease and, the following year, began to honour his promises. In 1848, he gave to the Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel a statue of the Virgin Mary, which arrived at the chapel with an impressive pilgrimage. In 1849, he gave the painting, "Le Typhus", commissioned from the painter Theophile Hamel by Bishop Bourget himself.

Lorena Otero

For the Bureau of the Cause of Emilie Gamelin

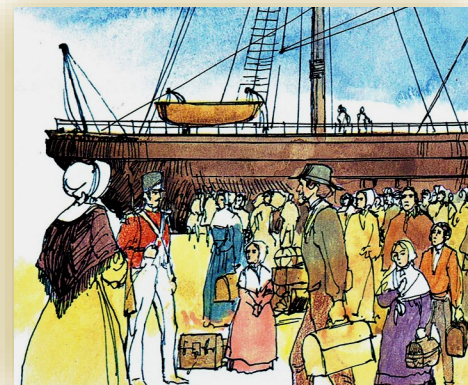
Sources :

*Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours Chapel and Ville de Montréal Archives*



**Le Typhus, 1848**  
by Théophile Hamel

In this painting the distress of the sick is striking. At the very top, the Blessed Virgin casts a benevolent regard over the sick and the sisters caring for them. In the distance, the towers of Notre-Dame Church indicate that the action is taking place on the peripheries of the city, in Pointe-Saint-Charles, where the sick were crowded into sheds. The three sisters represented are, from front to back, a Grey Nun, a **Sister of Providence** and a Religious Hospitaller of Saint Joseph. Close to the latter, a priest administers the Sacrament of the Sick to a dying person.



**The typhus epidemic in 1847**  
Graphic history book "Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin",  
from "Les grands moments de l'Église canadienne,  
1986" collection.





# Gratitude to Emilie



## A litany of thank you's to Blessed Emilie... Thank you, Emilie!

A special thank you to Mother Gamelin for my son's successful year at University.  
C.L.B., Paspebiac, QC

We are grateful to Mother Gamelin for her assistance during difficult moments in our family.  
G.G., Santiago, Chile

Following a financial settlement, please find a donation for the Cause of Mother Gamelin.  
R.R., Montreal, QC

Thanks to Emilie for the sale of a house and a car.  
C.R.L., L'Original, Ontario

Please find an offering to thank Mother Gamelin for the renting of a house.  
C.B., Montreal, QC

Thank you for the gift of health obtained for my family.  
M.C.P., Parksville, B.C.

Thank you for your prayers and for Mother Gamelin's intercession; I found a precious object lost during my moving.  
E.S., Ottawa, ON

Thanks to Emilie for solving a delicate financial situation that had been pending for long-time.  
E.D., Montreal, QC

My daughter was in danger of losing her sight. After praying Mother Gamelin, her eye sight is completely healed.  
L.V., St-Raymond, QC

I would like to thank Mother Gamelin for protecting us during the pandemic.  
L.G., Joliette, QC

Thank you to Blessed Emilie. I prayed to her that my daughter could give birth to her child without complications.  
M.C., Edmonton, AB

Following a novena, thank you for helping me during these difficult times.  
L.D., St-Tite, QC

My daughter had cancer. After praying to Emilie, she has completely recovered.  
R.R. Pincourt, QC

I come to thank Mother Gamelin for being present in my life. I always

pray to her when I have important decisions to make. C.B., Beloeil, QC

Thank you for the health obtained for my 18-month-old grandniece.  
H.L., Louiseville, QC

I prayed to Emilie and obtained selling my house. I feel that she continues to take care of my family. Thanks so much!  
D.L., Terrebonne, QC

Following the sale of a house, I enclose a Mass stipend for the canonization of Mother Gamelin.  
C.D., St-Gabriel, QC

Thank you to Emilie for assisting our family through difficult times.  
L.A., Trois-Rivieres, QC

Daily I give thanks to God and to Blessed Emilie for healing my son who has suffered a lengthy depression.  
R.A.G., Joliette, QC

I promised this contribution to Mother Gamelin while entrusting my son to her; Shortly he will be undergoing a 4th surgery. I have great confidence.  
L.A., Arthabaska, QC

A prayful thought for my sister currently hospitalized would be appreciated; also, pray for me who has to comfort her...  
T.L.A., St-Amable, QC

I prayed a novena to Emilie to assist in the situation of a cousin undergoing a divorce procedure. Thanks be to God everything has turned out for the best.  
E.L.C., Mayabeque, Cuba

Gratitude to Emilie for the protection she has given to my family.  
R.A.L., St-Hyacinthe, QC

I come to thank Mother Gamelin for helping me overcome some difficult trials.  
J.D., Joliette, QC

For many years, I have invoked Blessed Emilie Gamelin for different reasons. I always obtain positive results.  
G.R.A., Trois-Rivieres, QC

Thanks to Emilie. She is truly my son's protector. She is always there,

every day. I have confidence that she will continue to protect him.  
M.M., Shawinigan, QC

A thank you to Emilie for the realization of two life projects.  
Anonymous



Blessed Emilie Gamelin is truly attentive to those who pray to her...

- L.T., Boischatel, QC
- G.R., St-Jean-de-Matha, QC
- L.P.C., St-Antoine, QC
- D.G., Boucherville, QC
- A.L., Chandler, QC
- J.L., Quebec, QC
- G.D., St-Edouard, QC
- G.F., St-Leonard, QC
- J.M., Longueuil, QC
- M.G., Drummondville, QC
- T.L., Montreal, QC
- L.G.S., Joliette, QC
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- G.R., North Bay, ON
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Blessed Emilie Gamelin,  
 intercede for those  
 who are confident in you!

Sister Yvette Demers, SP  
 Vicepostulator  
 Bureau of the Cause of Emilie Gamelin



## Mary, Mother of Sorrows

our loving mother and model,  
 guide us in the following of Jesus.  
 On Calvary, you suffered with Him;  
 you saw his body bruised,  
 mangled and dying.

Today, you still see his members  
 forced to endure pain because of sin.

Help us to see your Son Jesus  
 in his suffering members.

He calls us to respond as you did:  
 to compassionate

and to be present in service

and to concern for those who are afflicted.

Teach us the art of reading in another's pain  
 the solace that will soothe and heal.

Mary, Mother of Sorrows,  
 make us true witnesses  
 of compassionate love  
 in the broken world of our times.

Amen.

Approved by the Archbishop of Montreal N.P. 24/1984.  
 Sisters of Providence - Montreal



When you receive this Echoes of Emilie edition, dear readers,  
 we will already be on the threshold of a New Year.

From now, receive our best wishes for the year 2021, which we have  
 already entrusted to Providence, asking our Blessed Mother Emilie  
 Gamelin to continue protecting you so that the 365 days to come  
 may be bearers of divine blessings for you, your families and all  
 your loved ones.

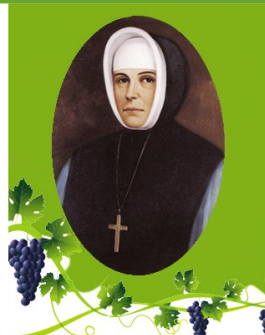
The Sisters of Providence | Montreal - 2020

### Gratitude to Emilie

Please address all favours obtained to:

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To Blessed Emilie  
 we confide  
 all the intentions  
 that you carry in your hearts,  
 both spiritual and temporal;  
 she will certainly know  
 how to lend an attentive ear  
 to all your needs.