



# Echoes of Emilie

Volume 46, No. 1 - March 2023

## The Spirituality of Saint Vincent de Paul in the life of Émilie Gamelin and the Sisters of Providence

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For centuries, Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) has inspired men and women, lay people and religious, from all cultures and origins, who share a common purpose: the charitable and social apostolate.

Through the **"founding events"** in Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin's life, we can see the inspiration of Saint Vincent de Paul. In a way similar to that of St. Vincent, Émilie **"became aware of a collective situation and of urgent needs, and she took action"**.

Vincent de Paul was present in Émilie's life in so many ways since her most tender childhood. The precocious nature of her compassion for the poor, a value taught to her by her mother when she was only a child, was particularly surprising. When her mother died, Émilie was four years old and was then cared for by her paternal aunt who lived in a house on Saint-Vincent Street, in the heart of the city of Montreal. Émilie spent her childhood and adolescence there, until she was 18.

Then she moved to her brother François' home to help him. Every day, after she had finished her duties, she visited poor families with a basket of provisions on her arm. Moreover, in the house, she arranged a small room adjoining the kitchen and turned it into a dining room for the exclusive use of the poor who knocked at her door, privileged friends of hers for whom she prepared what she called, the "table of the king".



Saint Vincent de Paul  
Sr. Marie David, SP, 1894

**Saint Vincent, having total confidence in Providence, became himself a Providence for others, for the poor.**

The Ladies of Charity Association was founded in Montreal in December 1827, just a few months after Mr. Gamelin's death. Émilie, then 27 years old, found a consolation in her charitable work and in her faith. As a member of this new Association, she was appointed to visit the homes of the poor and to put them in communication with the distribution services.

While providing the most kindhearted care for her only surviving child, and continuing to



serve as the guardian of Dodais, Émilie was moved by the need to alleviate the suffering of elderly and abandoned women in the city of Montreal. She opened her first shelter for elderly women on the second floor of a school. The first resident of the shelter was a 102-year-old woman.

Émilie visited her elderly guests twice a day, to attend to their needs and to provide devotional reading. In the beginning, this work was very demanding, but Mrs. Gamelin had endless confidence in Providence. Her care and goodwill toward these women moved the hearts of the *Ladies of Charity*, and a few of these ladies welcomed some elderly women to a house where they distributed soup and food to them.

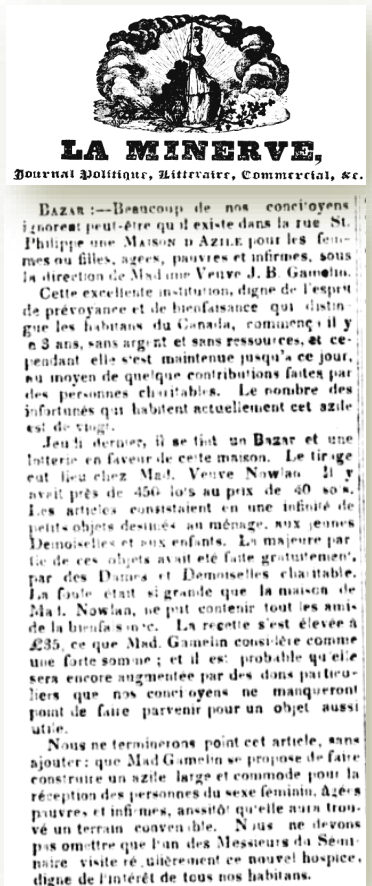
After the death of her last child and Dodais, Émilie became more and more involved in the care of poor, the sick and marginalized persons. She became increasingly known for her compassionate charity and she earned the confidence of all.

Wanting to provide better assistance for elderly women, in 1831, Émilie opened a second shelter, which included two adjoining houses. Mrs. Gamelin was relying very much on the prayers of the poor. Whenever she was short of resources, she would gather them together and invite them to join her in singing her favorite hymn, "O Providence Most Gentle".

One winter day, as on other days, after buying a few cords of wood, Émilie did not have a penny left to buy dinner for her "family", who had eaten the last piece of bread that morning. Deeply worried, she walked into the church of Notre-Dame and, on her knees at the foot of the Tabernacle, she broke down in tears and said: "God, don't you know that your poor have nothing left to eat?" Then, assured that the God of the Eucharist had listened her prayers, filled with courage, she got up, wiped away her tears and decided to go to the market to beg for money. An old man approached her and said, "Aren't you Mrs. Gamelin, the lady that takes care of the poor?" When answering in the affirmative, the man handed her a bill for twenty-five *louis*. He was gone before she could express her deepest gratitude.

After relocating the hospice she had founded, Madame Gamelin decided to form a society of Ladies who could help her with the visits to the poor in their homes and with the daily collections.

On March 30, 1835, the newspaper *La Minerve* reported that a bazaar had been organized to support the shelter on Saint-Philippe Street. Here is an excerpt from the article:



*"Many of our fellow citizens may not know that, on Saint-Philippe Street, there is a home for women which is being directed by the widow, Mrs. J.-B. Gamelin. This shelter is for the care of poor, disabled and elderly women who are without resources. This remarkable institution was founded seven years ago, with practically no money and no resources, and yet, it has been maintained to this day by means of a few contributions made by charitable people"...*  
*"We cannot conclude this article without mentioning that Mrs. Gamelin plans to build a large and adequate shelter for elderly, poor and disabled women, as soon as she finds a convenient site".*

In 1836, Émilie opened a third shelter, in a two-floor house, which had been painted yellow. The shelter would welcome disabled and elderly women and orphaned children. Émilie became a true "Providence" and the "Yellow House", spontaneously became known by the people as "*Maison de la Providence*" (Home of Providence).

***"Let us go, my brothers, and dedicate ourselves with renewed love to the service to the poor, and reach out to the most poor and most abandoned". (Coste XI, 393)***

As an active member of several charitable organizations, Mrs. Gamelin became more and more known throughout all of Montreal, her hometown. Soon, she was called "*the Providence of the Poor*".

St. Vincent de Paul had visited prisoners sentenced to do forced work. Like him, Mrs. Gamelin, then involved herself in a charitable association of ladies that provided work for female prisoners. In 1836, Mrs. Gamelin added visiting persons in prison to her list of charitable activities. The Patriots' rebellion of 1837-38 in Lower Canada had resulted in a large number of people being jailed as political prisoners. Mrs. Gamelin, already known by the prison guards, brought the prisoners food, clothing and news of their families. She became known as "the Angel of the Prisoners", and with the end of the insurrections, her visits to the prison did not end. She continued her work of comforting prisoners of all ages and conditions.

Mrs. Gamelin had long been well known for her love of the poor. Her reputation, influence and dedication made her a synonym for compassion. With the increase of social needs in Montreal, people began to ask for her assistance everywhere. However,

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she continued to rely solely on the help provided by relatives and friends to continue her charitable work.

In 1841, during a mission trip to Paris, Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal was invited to address a conference for the Sisters of Charity. At that time, he expressed to them his desire to have the Daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul come to Montreal, to ensure the continuity of the charitable work begun by Émilie Gamelin. The Sisters of Charity Congregation, founded in Paris in 1633 by Saint-Vincent de Paul and Sainte-Louise-de-Marillac, was unique among other religious congregations of the time. Because they, like Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin, had chosen to serve the poor, it was necessary for them to be both mobile and available to live among the people they served.

On November 6, 1841, the *Asile de Montréal pour les femmes âgées et infirmes* (Asile of Montreal for aged and disabled women), called *Maison de la Providence* (House of Providence), was officially founded as a charitable society. Bishop Bourget had provided the statutes and regulations for this Association which was called "*Asile des Dames de la Providence pour les femmes âgées et infirmes*" (Asile of the Ladies of Providence for the Elderly and Disabled women). The directress of this Association was Mrs. Gamelin. On December 21 of the same year, another Association was founded to visit the poor and provide them with assistance in their homes. This Association was named the *Corporation des Dames de la Providence* (the Corporation of the Ladies of Providence). On the same day, the shelter for the poor, directed by Mrs. Gamelin, was inaugurated at the *Maison de la Providence*, followed by a mass celebrated by Bishop Bourget. He seized this opportunity to give the rules for this new Association, based on those given by Vincent de Paul to the ladies involved in his charitable works. "*By giving you these rules, I believe I am giving you the spirit and the heart of this admirable saint...*" he said to them.



Mother Gamelin and her "dear old ladies", Sr. Marie David, SP, 1896

The creation of this Association inspired a surge of charity in the villages around Montreal. For example, women with social causes at heart joined together to begin a Charity Society in Terrebonne and later, another charity society was founded in Saint-Hyacinthe.

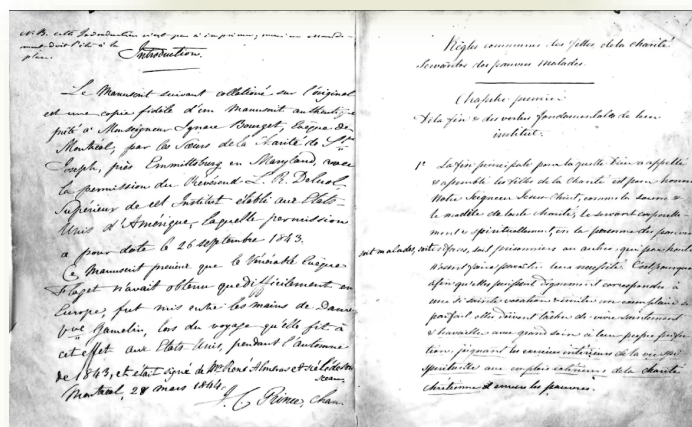
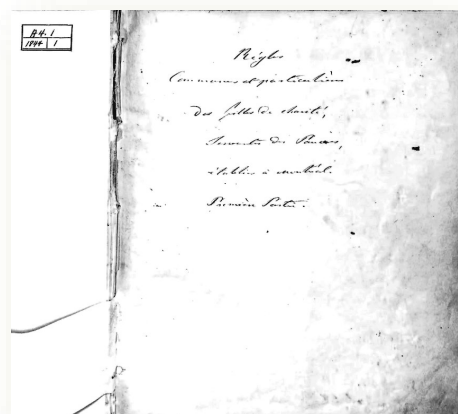
Because of her values and actions of humanity, social action and devotion, Madame Gamelin was often compared to Mademoiselle Le gras (Louise de Marillac, 1591-1660), the foundress, with Vincent de Paul, of the Institution of the Daughters of Charity (Sisters of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul), in 1634 in France.

In 1843, after being informed that the Daughters of Charity from France would not be coming to Montreal, the Bishop of Montreal,

Ignace Bourget, decided to found a diocesan religious community with the principal mission of serving the poor, according to rules based on those of the *Daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul*. Moreover, he wanted this new congregation to bear the name of *Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor*. This title, coming directly from the legacy of Saint Vincent de Paul, applied very well to Émilie Gamelin who, throughout her life, had shown compassion for the poor and the those in need. By a decision of Bishop Bourget, beginning on March 25, 1843, Mrs. Gamelin, while still a laywoman, fulfilled the role of the superior of the novices of the new congregation, the *Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor*.

On July 9, the novices began a novena in honor of Saint Vincent de Paul. A spirit of charity was particularly required of the present and future members of the new Institute. On September 8, postulants joined the community. Émilie Gamelin had long since renounced all forms of vanity in order to devote herself exclusively to the service of the poor. Having been deeply touched by the reading of the Rules of Life of St. Vincent de Paul, and identifying with its spirituality, she was experiencing a strong desire to become a member of the new religious community.

On September 11, 1843, at the request of Bishop Bourget, Mrs. Gamelin traveled to the United States to visit the houses of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul in New York and Baltimore, to learn about their living environment and to bring back a copy of their rules, which would become the basis for the new community being founded in Montreal.



Rules of St. Vincent de Paul, 1844

Upon her arrival in New York, she wrote to Monsignor Prince: "The Sisters of Charity (of St. Vincent de Paul) welcomed me everywhere with open arms... They treated me with great consideration. I walked the streets of New York with two of them, who were kind enough to accompany me and take me to their various houses. They have five homes in and around the city. At their St. Patrick's orphanage, there are two hundred and fifty orphaned girls and boys...". "In Boston, I also visited all the charitable hospices and the state prison or penitentiary, which was very interesting to me. I felt sorry for those poor prisoners...". "...They never talk and work a lot. There are Canadians, among them, three from Montreal. I knew one of them; he recognized me too, the poor man, but he could not even say a word to me".

**"... Notice that the people, having seen what you do and the service that our first sisters provided for the poor, gave you this name, which has been retained as appropriate for your practice." (Coste X, 473)**

On October 8, 1843, Madame Gamelin entered the novitiate. The novices had made her a religious habit during her absence. On March 30, 1844, Sister Gamelin was elected the first Superior of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor, called and known by the people as the "Sisters of Providence".

To accompany the new community on its journey, Bishop Bourget placed it under the protection of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Sorrows, with Saint Vincent de Paul as its first patron. Since the foundation of the community and until today, the first chapter of the book of life for the Daughters of Charity of Émilie has been based on the first chapter of the Rules of Saint Vincent de Paul, dated August 4, 1672.

**"...having for a monastery the homes of the sick..., for a chapel, the parish church, for a cloister, the streets of the city and for a veil holy modesty... and not having any other profession to support their vocation, thus placing all their confidence in in Divine Providence..." (Coste X, 661)**

Although about two hundred years separated the active lives of Vincent de Paul and Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin, when Bishop Bourget confided to Émilie and her daughters the works that "all the other communities could not do", he gave them the *Apostolate of the Sisters of Providence*, which was characterized by the great diversity and scope proper to the apostolates of French religious congregations founded by Vincent de Paul.

***Simplicity: "...our whole life is devoted to acts of charity, either towards God or towards our neighbor. And for the one and for the other, we must go simply..." (Coste XII, 302)***

***Humility: "...tell me how a proud man can tolerate poverty? Our purpose is the poor people, common people; and if we do not adjust ourselves to them, we will not benefit them at all. (Coste XII, 305)***



Saint Vincent de Paul, ca 1888

Author Unknown, from Belgium

The two original virtues in the spiritual experience of Saint Vincent, *simplicity* and *humility*, were two of the last three words Mother Gamelin uttered at the moment of her death. The Sisters of Providence, inspired by their foundress and faithful to the rules of life of Saint Vincent de Paul, keep alive the virtues of simplicity and humility, their living roots, and continue to serve the most needy persons of our time.

**Nancy Prada**

Coordinator, Émilie Gamelin Centre

**Sources:**

- *L'Institut de la Providence (The Institute of Providence):* The History of the Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor, also known as Sisters of Providence.
- Coste : Pierre Coste (1668 - 1747) French theologian, translator and writer. Author of "*Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, conferences, documents*", a collection of 14 volumes (Volumes I-VIII: Correspondence, IX-XII: Conferences, XIII: Documents, XIV)



The teams of the Émilie Gamelin Center and the Bureau of the Cause wish to thank you, dear readers, for your faithfulness.

We invite you to share your comments with us and tell us how you came to know Mother Émilie Gamelin. You can also share the importance she has in your life and favors obtained through her intercession.

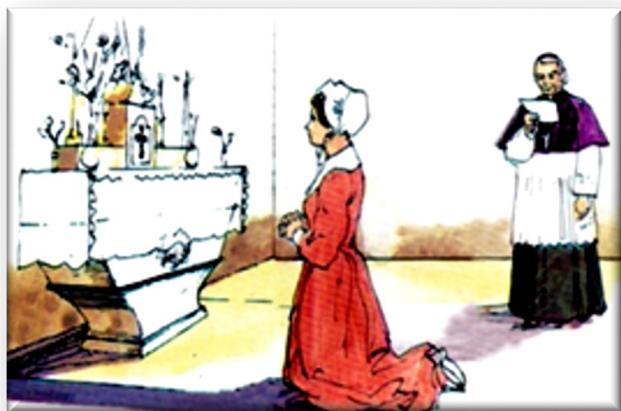
The *Echoes of Émilie* newsletter is distributed in more than 40 countries. In this edition, we would like to extend a special greeting to those who read us in the following countries: **Quebec and Ontario (Canada), U.S.A., Cameroun, Spain, India, Israel, and China.**

# The beginning of a New Year rich in significant events...



## February 2 (1842) – Private vow of Mrs. Émilie Gamelin, Widow

For Mother Gamelin, ever since the permanence of her work had been assured by the coming of the Daughters of Charity of Paris, she had experienced a persistent uncertainty concerning the role, which God was calling her to play. How was she to pursue her activities of foundress and directress of the work? One thing was certain: Émilie was not planning to give up her work. Her dedication to the poor was the expression of a very profound Christian conviction rooted in the double commandment of love of God and love of one's neighbour. For her it was an irrevocable consecration of her entire life, inspired by faith. She was to seal this choice by taking a private vow on February 2, 1842.



After a period of fervent preparation, Émilie went to the chapel and wrote her act of consecration, which she did in the presence of Bishop Bourget, and which had four aspects:

- she promises not to marry again,
- she commits herself to serve the poor for the rest of her life,
- she will avoid all that could look luxurious or ornamental,
- she will be vigilant over herself in her conversations.

## February 19 (1800) – Birth of Émilie Tavernier

On February 19, 1800, was born the fifteenth child of Antoine Tavernier and Marie-Josephte Maurice. The very next day, the father hitched up the horse

and rode along Chemin Saint-Laurent to Notre-Dame Church with Antoine, his oldest son and godfather-to-be, aged 21. The little girl was baptised by Father Joseph Michel Humbert, a Sulpician from Lyon, France. The baby girl received the name of Marie Émilie Eugène. Her godmother was her 15-year-old first cousin, Marie-Claire Perrault, daughter of Marie-Anne Tavernier and Joseph Perrault.



Notre-Dame Church, 1790

*In the background of this watercolor by Paul Sandby Jr, we find the first Notre-Dame Church in Montreal.*

Would this child live? Marie-Josephte's face betrayed the agonizing question in her mind: nine of her fifteen children had died, and the threat of epidemics was ever present. The crops had been poor for the past ten years and no one could forget the epidemics of 1784 and 1789. By leasing Terre Providence from the Sisters of the Hôtel-Dieu in 1791, Antoine Tavernier ensured that his family would always have food on the table.

Years later when referring to Émilie, people would rightly say:

**"A generous soul  
was revealed, a bearer of  
the message of charity"**



**March 25, 1843 – 2023: 180th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence.**

In February 1843, Bishop Bourget convoked an extraordinary meeting of the Ladies of Charity to inform them of the withdrawal of the Daughters of Charity of Paris who could not travel to Montreal to undertake the direction of the Asile of Providence.

There was no question of giving up, not after two public fundraising drives and the resumption of the construction of the Asile. The Bishop decided to immediately found a diocesan community, while hoping that at least two French sisters might come to Montreal to ensure the formation of the Canadian novices to the usages of their congregation. This hopeful attempt had to be abandoned after a letter dated April 29, that announced the irrevocable decision of the Council of the French community: "The Sisters will not be going to Montreal".

News of the Canadian foundation project quickly spread around the city and, on March 13, 1843, a seventh recruit enters the novitiate, Justine Michon, 27, from Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu.

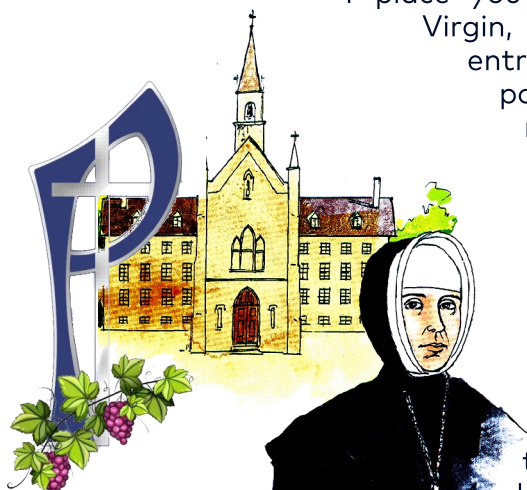
The inspiration of the religious habit came from a painting that Bishop Bourget had brought from France, representing the vision of Catherine Labouré, a novice with the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul.



The Yellow House  
Graphical representation, ca 1900

On Saturday, March 25, Bishop Bourget went to the Yellow House at a quarter after six accompanied by Canon Prince and Mr. Guinguet, Sulpician. Since four o'clock, the novices had donned their habit,

blessed the day before, and were praying in the oratory. "You have no Mistress of Novices, so I place you under the care of the Blessed Virgin, said Bishop Bourget after entrusting them with [the care of the poor and be a mother to them". The next day, he returned to the Yellow House and appointed Sister Magdeleine Durand, Madame Gamelin's illiterate companion since 1835, assistant to the director, the Canon Prince, and gave the novices the daily rules they had to observe.



Although exteriorly self-assured, the Bishop was profoundly worried about the future of this improvised community, as he was to admit later: *"I think the hardest day of my life was when I gave you the holy habit... When I saw you at the foot of the little altar, the very one of your immolation, I was seized with the thought: What will become of these good daughters? Should the work fail in its very beginning, as it is most likely to happen by the looks of human standards, how great the ridicule will subject to them! Even in the eyes of faith, it could well be that this enterprise is either or premature or imprudent"*. (Letter to Mother Caron, April 2, 1856).

**"Fear not, little flock,  
Providence  
will never fail you" .**

**June 4, 1823 – 2023: 200th Anniversary of the Marriage of Émilie Tavernier to Jean-Baptiste Gamelin**

After her mother's death, Agathe Perrault left the house on Saint-Vincent Street and took up residence at number 5, Saint-Antoine Street... Émilie also left this home, where she had spent her childhood and adolescence, and gets closer to her brother's family, François, who lives at number 43, Saint-Antoine Street. The new residents became neighbors of Jean-Baptiste Gamelin, whose house was located at number 3, Saint-Antoine Street. Émilie often had the opportunity to converse with this man, who was very well known of the family. In the spring of 1823, she surprised everyone with the news of her marriage to Jean-Baptiste, who was 50 years old. What brought them together was their common experience of solitude and solid piety, but also the same compassion and generosity towards the unprivileged.

The marriage contract was signed at the home of François Tavernier in the presence of notary Norbert-Benjamin Doucet, on the afternoon of June 4, 1823. Émilie's witnesses were her two brothers, François and Julien Tavernier. Jean-Baptiste's witness was a friend, Augustin Defoy, a merchant who resided in Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

Once the civil formalities completed, the engaged couple and their witnesses left François' residence to go to Notre-Dame Church. Mr. Jean-Baptiste Bréguier, known as Saint-Pierre, Émilie's confessor, was there to greet them, in the presence of Monsieur Le Saulnier, parish priest. All of them were present at the marriage ceremony, along with a few other relatives and friends. The event was reported by the *Gazette du Canada*, *The Montreal Herald*, the *Canadian Courant and Montreal Advertiser*, and *Le Spectateur canadien*. Émilie set up housekeeping in the house which Jean-Baptiste had built in 1797 and in which he was still living.

Bishop Bourget affirmed some time later: *"Charitable hearts recognize each other and become one, and we have evidence of this fact in the marriage between Émilie Tavernier and Jean-Baptiste Gamelin"*.



Wedding ring (left)  
Religious profession ring (right)

*Émilie will keep in her heart forever the memory of Mr. Gamelin, a humble and charitable man. He played an important role in Émilie's life and in the emergence of the first charitable work founded by this "Great Lady of Montreal".*

*The Cross "My Only Hope" (center) is given to each Sister of Providence during her religious profession.*



Sister Yvette Demers, SP  
Vicepostulator, Cause of Émilie Gamelin

## ROSARY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

This Rosary is said using the five decades Rosary bead.

### On the Cross:

Gospel according to St. Matthew, Chap. 6

At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *"Do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides"*.

### On the large beads:

We glorify, O God, your Providence.  
And we accept His will for us.

### On the small beads:

Divine Providence. Have mercy on us.

### Conclusion:

Divine Providence,  
You are our only Hope!

40 days of indulgence  
are granted to those who  
devoutly recite this Rosary.

Permission to print  
† ÉDOUARD-CHARLES FABRE  
BISHOP OF MONTREAL.

*This rosary was recommended to the Sisters of Providence by Monsignor Bourget. He was very proud that the Sisters were honored with a name that suited them more than any other. (Bishop Fabre, a relative of Mother Gamelin).*

Mother House - Sisters of Providence, 1930

Bureau of the Cause of Émilie Gamelin



# Gratitude to Émilie



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

Here is a donation to thank Émilie for a favor obtained. Émilie Gamelin was a Providence to us when the whole family contracted COVID-19. We feared for my husband's health, as he has a fragile condition. Thanks to Émilie's protection, everything went well. L.V., Louiseville, QC

I underwent surgery for a cataract in my left eye. The infection was so intense that I could not see anything. I asked Émilie Gamelin to allow me to recover my eye. Three weeks later, everything was back to normal, thanks to the medication, but also to Émilie. Thank you, Émilie! Here is a small donation in gratitude. A.D., Shawinigan, QC

Please accept this small donation in thank you for answered prayer. M.-C. P. and M. P., Parksville, BC, Canada

Here is a Mass stipend to thank Émilie for her constant protection during a trip. M.C., Edmonton, AB

I prayed Blessed Émilie Gamelin to guide the doctors in finding the cause of my wife's illness (L.M.), and I was granted. Here is a donation in gratitude. R.A., Trois-Rivières, QC

Thanks to Émilie for answering my prayers. I also ask her to intercede for my family, especially my children J. and E., and so that my nephew M.-A., gets a family doctor very soon. L.L., Gatineau, QC

In July 2022, I contracted COVID-19. As a faithful devotee of Émilie, I asked her to protect me. The sickness lasted only one day without any after-effects. Thank you Mother Gamelin! E.D., Montreal, QC

I asked Mother Gamelin to help my son S. I have great confidence in her and I am very grateful to her because she answered my prayers generously. A.G., Trois-Rivières, QC

Here is a small offering for the Cause of Mother Gamelin, as a gratitude for helping me in the sale of my car. I heard about Mother Gamelin when I was a nursing student in a hospital administered by the Sisters of Providence. I am very happy to continue praying to her after all these years. T.J., LaSalle, QC

Here is a donation for favors obtained and to be obtained. I have great confidence in Mother Gamelin. D.T.-N., St-Léonard, QC

Thank you God for answering our prayers. Here is a mass offering to ask Mother Gamelin and the Virgin of Sorrows to intercede before God for the healing of my daughter C., and so that we, her parents, may always have the protection we need. J.V.P., Shawinigan, QC

All our gratitude to Émilie. She helped both my wife and I during the disease and the difficult times of COVID-19. A. and J. Blainville, QC

Thanks to Mother Gamelin for her protection and for a successful surgery. P.R., Île Perrot, QC

Here is a donation so that Blessed Émilie Gamelin continues to act through Providence and to thank her for her faithful presence in my life. T.L.-A., Saint-Amable, QC

So thankful to Mother Gamelin for always being there for us through sickness and difficult times. B.J., Chandler, QC

*We also pray for our faithful donors below:*

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Blessed Émilie Gamelin,  
intercede for those  
who are confident in you!

Sister Yvette Demers, SP  
Vicepostulator  
Cause of Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin



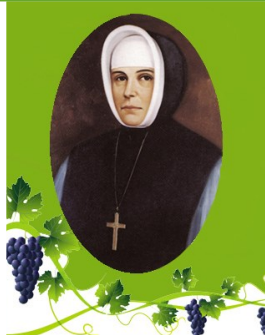
Let us pray  
for PEACE  
in the World!

## Gratitude to Émilie

Please address all favours obtained to:

Bureau of the Cause of Émilie Gamelin  
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Montreal, QC H4J 2J5 Canada

Sr. Yvette Demers, SP Vice-Postulator  
Phone: (514) 334-9090 (Ext. 208)  
[ydemers@providenceintl.org](mailto:ydemers@providenceintl.org)



To Blessed Émilie  
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.