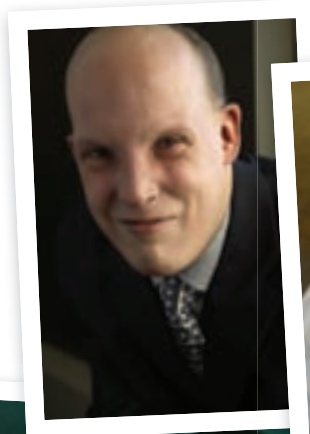




The Founding of Mary Centre



A History

The Writing Of This History.

On November 9, 2005, Tom and Gwen McGrenere met with some of the founders of Mary Centre at St. Michael's Cathedral rectory in Toronto. Tom was a current member of the Board of Directors of Mary Centre and Gwen had volunteered to coauthor a history of MC based on Tom's research and the memories recounted at this meeting. Tom had prepared for the meeting by reading through the MC records and developing a timeline of events. He invited those present to fill in the story with their personal recollections. The meeting was hosted by Monsignor Sam Bianco who had been personally involved in the religious education of children with developmental challenges in the '70's and 80's. Also present were Helen Dionne and Ellen Ballantyne, mothers who advocated in the 1970's for inclusion of their children in the sacramental life of the church; Tom McNulty, Past President of the Board of Directors of Catholic Charities and Doreen Cullen M.S.W., Executive Director of Catholic Charities 1983-1993.

As a result of the frequent references during the meeting to the contribution of Sister Mary Hamilton, CND to the religious education of the developmentally challenged in the Toronto Archdiocese in the 1970's and 80's Gwen subsequently arranged a meeting with Sister Mary Hamilton at the Notre Dame Residence in Kingston to discuss her memories and reflections. Sister Mary Hamilton was in her 90th year. She was delighted to share her story as well as a variety of documents from her personal archives related to the Church's response to the developmentally challenged. She stated that the fundamental inspiration for her commitment to disabled persons was her perception of a call from Christ through meditation on His Gospel.

In this account of the origins of Mary Centre the memories of the founders are inset in italics at appropriate points in the narrative.

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Foreword

To begin a history of any kind it is helpful to have an understanding of what history is, how a history is actually constructed. So I open this effort to write the history of Mary Centre with an insightful quotation from *Transcendence and History* by Glenn Hughes:

History, to be precise about the term, is not everything that has ever happened, but the remembered and recorded past, the past judged worthy of reflection and narration. A “history” is a story comprising, not all events, but significant events. The weight of significance is something to be determined by the person trying to make sense of the flow of events, and the result is a tale, a story worth narrating, a pattern of the significant and essential....

However, professional historians and biographers are not the only people who construct histories. We all do, to the extent that we fashion into narrative wholes stories of our own lives for telling to ourselves and to others. Our personal stories, we realize, are embedded in ever broader contexts of meaning that include family histories, national histories, and civilizational histories, all of which we interpret in some fashion; these ever more embracing histories are in the end embraced by the overarching drama of humankind.

The story of how Mary Centre came to be is definitely a “story worth narrating”. It is a tale that includes the very moving personal testimonies of several Toronto families who had children who were developmentally challenged. Because the families are Roman Catholic their stories are embedded in the broader context of the Roman Catholic parish life and social welfare structures in the Archdiocese of Toronto.

However, the even broader context of this local story is the overarching drama of disabled persons globally: In the late 1950s the United Nations’ focus on disability issues shifted from a welfare perspective to one of social welfare. A reevaluation policy in the 1960s led to de-institutionalization and spurred a demand for fuller participation by disabled persons in an integrated society. In 1956, the International Social Service Review was founded, one of whose objectives was

to raise awareness of disability issues and emphasize rehabilitation programs around the world. The United Nations Declaration on Social Progress and Development, adopted on 11 December 1969, affirmed the fundamental freedoms and principles set forth in the U.N. Charter and emphasized the need to protect the rights and welfare of the disabled and the physically and mentally handicapped.

In the 1980’s there was a full flowering of the seeds planted in the 1960’s. After two decades of preliminary studies and reports, the United Nations designated 1981 as The International Year for Disabled Persons. Conferences and symposiums focusing on this issue were held in several countries including Austria and Spain. International NGOs attended the First Founding Congress of *Disabled Peoples International*, in Singapore. 1983-1992 was declared the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. The General Assembly encouraged Member States to use the Decade to implement the World Programme of Action. Disabled persons were to be recognized as agents of their own destiny rather than as dependent objects of governments.

As we met to tell the story of the founding of Mary Centre in the fall of 2005, *Disabled Peoples International* in Columbus Ohio was preparing for an April 2006 conference. The organizing theme of their sixth annual conference was “Personal Perspectives & Social Impact: The Stories We Tell”. The goal was to encourage presenters and participants to reflect on “how personal experiences create and transform social, cultural, and legal realities”. The conference underscored the value of narrative and testimony. This emphasis reflected our own perception that the history of Mary Centre should include the personal stories of the founding members as well as the conventional historical data associated with Mary Centre as a functioning, evolving institution

The story of the Toronto families helps us to understand “how personal experiences create and transform social, cultural, and legal realities”. The larger story includes the Archdiocesan response to the United Nations initiatives on behalf of disabled persons globally as well as the clergy’s awareness of and response to the needs of persons with developmental challenges in their parishes.

The Preamble: Religious Education for the Developmentally Challenged

In the early to mid 1970's the issue of the developmentally challenged was raised in Toronto's Roman Catholic community at the parish level. Catholic parents expressed the strong conviction that their children with developmental challenges should receive religious instruction in order to make their First Communion. Ultimately the parents wanted their children to be integrated into the full sacramental life of the Church. Initially their concerns were directed to a sympathetic parish priest, Father Jean Marc Gagne.

At this time there was no government funding for children with developmental challenges to attend Catholic schools so they were educated in the public system in segregated schools for the 'trainable mentally retarded'. Sister Mary Hamilton who had been a teacher, a principal and a Religious Education Consultant for the Metropolitan Separate School Board was asked to write a complete religious education program for these children. Realizing that the scope of this assignment required a thorough background in both Religious Education and Special Education Sister Mary Hamilton requested permission to attend Cardinal Stritch College run by the Franciscans in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1973 she completed the 14-month MA program in Special Religious Education in Milwaukee and returned to Toronto. This Franciscan program provided both the theory and practical formation for development of religious education programs for various age levels of persons with special needs.

Metro Public Schools and Metro Separate Schools ["MSSB"] made an arrangement by which MSSB could send itinerant teachers into the segregated schools for the purpose of religious instruction. At that time all of the trainable mentally retarded of both Protestant and Catholic families attended segregated schools. Sister Mary Hamilton was involved in the selection and training of a group of the MSSB teachers who went into these schools on a regular basis to implement a religious education program. The spirit in the segregated schools was one of mutual respect between the non-Catholic school board and the itinerant teachers. Sister Mary Hamilton chose the teachers carefully, then trained and supervised them so that the

best pedagogy was followed in providing religious content appropriate for the learning capacity of the individuals. The teachers were regularly monitored by the representatives of the public school board.

At the same time Father Gagne and Sister Mary Hamilton conducted Sunday school classes and liturgies in a variety of Catholic parishes. By 1976, Father Bianco, then associate pastor of Holy Rosary Parish, assumed the role of Father Gagne in the liturgy program. In 1977 he became Archdiocesan Director of Religious Education for Mentally Handicapped Persons. This committee convinced the Archdiocese to set up committees in each parish to deal with the religious education of the developmentally challenged and their inclusion in parish life. As well the parishes were strongly urged to consider setting up a home for the disabled in each of the parishes. The latter suggestion met with little or no enthusiasm by the parishes. There was a denial of a need for such a parish home. The opinion expressed by a parish priest was that they did not have a need for such a home because there were no persons with developmental challenges living in the parish. The committee responded by noting that just because they were not visible in any particular parish did not mean that they did not exist. This argument was fully supported a short time later when surveys indicated that many persons with developmental challenges lived in the Toronto Archdiocese.



Marg, first resident

Msgr. Bianco: *I remember being involved about 1976. At that time it was argued that it was discriminatory that Catholic developmentally challenged children did not have a chance to go to Catholic schools which is what their parents wanted for them. A group of parents said that "our kids ought to be able to make their First*

Communion and be integrated in the sacramental life". So Sister Mary Hamilton and Father Gagne did liturgies and conducted Sunday school classes in a variety of parishes like St. Peters with the parents kind of pushing them. Sister Mary Hamilton wrote a whole religious education program to prepare developmentally challenged children for First Communion. It was Mary Hamilton and her happy band of five teachers who did religious instruction and arranged liturgies in various schools with me participating. At this time as we became aware of developmentally challenged parents getting older we had the idea of a parish home or centre for outreach to handicapped persons. We somehow convinced the diocese that they should have a committee in each zone, in each parish to respond to the needs of families with a developmentally challenged person. The idea was that each parish should take responsibility. As Helen Dionne will tell you, our great idealism re a parish home wasn't realized.

Helen Dionne: One of the great obstacles was that we were busy people who were fitting this initiative into our already busy lives. We didn't have anyone at the helm to keep our project moving and there weren't any dollars being made available for it. We were traveling to all parts of the diocese on the days we were free or the evenings we could manage, speaking to priests and their representatives. We spoke to parishioners as well, because we wanted this to be a grassroots project. My daughter Carolyn, now 43 years of age, received her First Communion at what I call was the back door of St. Michael's, in the chapel. However, as a result of the new religious instruction initiative, the families of developmentally challenged children came together and began having their own liturgies. It was a safe place to come with their son or daughter who had a disability and it didn't matter if your child spoke out loud or wasn't able to sit still. Our children were accepted and there were very few places where those who had any kind of behaviors outside the norm were accepted. It was a wonderful time for families to become connected with each other and to recognize that they weren't alone, that there were other

families in the same situation. The movement at St. Michael's introduced masses for the developmentally challenged every month. There would have been about 450 people attending. It grew quite large and went on for years. I think this was the very beginning of Mary Centre.

Ellen Ballantyne: Father Bianco gave our son John, now 37 years of age, his First Communion at the first big Christmas mass we had at Blessed Trinity. I still say that was the most beautiful Christmas mass I have ever been at. John was past the age of making First Communion because I insisted that he first come to mass before he received the sacrament. However, that Christmas mass Father Bianco had the whole congregation around the altar while serving the Eucharist. Mass has been an event for John since then.

Sister Mary Hamilton: As a result of frequent requests from parents, pastors, members of the Office of Religious Education and members of the School Board, a meeting was called to present a formal request for a method of including these children in Religious Education programs. We found that the representatives of other Boards were very cooperative, sensitive to our needs and willing to attempt a trial project. Consequently, a program was prepared, submitted and accepted and itinerant Religious Education teachers were chosen to visit these special schools, in order to instruct the catholic students during "released time". Many children who had been



Leyton residence, first home



Our Lady of Victory, supported independent living facility.

denied access to the Sacraments were prepared for their Sacramental Life. We noticed that Religion and Music were very important to them. We were constantly reminded of Vanier's slogan: "Once a handicapped person meets Christ he is no longer handicapped". This became so evident as the children's happiness became so apparent. At that time Catholic religious education was the only religious education in segregated schools. Occasionally the public school teachers observed our classes and made very positive comments about our program.

Catechism classes in church basements and in public schools led to the participants receiving their First Communion. Initially some parish priests had great difficulty accepting that the developmentally challenged were capable of understanding the religious instruction sufficiently well enough to be included in the sacraments, but with the passage of time all priests and parish representatives were convinced that such understanding was sufficient and they supported the program. With the passage of Bill 82 in 1980, which legislated full government funding for Catholic schools, the program became unnecessary. However some of the parish groups continued to meet, and still do to this day.

Papal Encouragement: Document of the Holy See for the International Year of Disabled Persons

As noted in the foreword, the United Nations declared 1983-1992 as the Decade of Disabled Persons. The official Roman Catholic response to this initiative came in the form of a Vatican document and, locally, a statement by the Ontario Catholic Bishops.

The Vatican document was released in March 1981. Sister Mary Hamilton provided a copy of *The Catholic Register* May 30 1981 which included the following excerpts from the papal statement:

From the very beginning the Holy See received favourably the United Nations' initiative of proclaiming 1981 "the International Year of Disabled Persons".

The Church fully associates herself with the initiatives and praiseworthy efforts being made in order to improve the situation of the disabled, and she intends to make her own specific contribution thereto. She does so, in the first place, through fidelity to the example and teaching of her founder. For Jesus Christ showed special care for the suffering, in all the wide spectrum, of human pain.

The Holy See, conscious of the heroic strength of mind required of those families that have generously and courageously agreed to take care of, and even adopt, disabled children, wants to assure them of its appreciation and gratitude. The witness which these families render to the dignity, values and sacredness of the human person deserves to be openly recognized and supported by the whole community.

His Holiness applauds the various initiatives that will be undertaken on the international level and also those that will be attempted in other fields, and he urges especially the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church to give an example of total generosity. Entrusting the dear disabled persons throughout the world to the motherly protection of the Holy Virgin, he repeats his hopeful trust that, under Mary's maternal gaze, experiences of human and

Christian solidarity will be multiplied, in a renewed brotherhood that will unite the weak and the strong in the common path of the divine vocation of the human person.

In concert with the growing international advocacy on behalf of handicapped persons, the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops ["OCCB"] issued "*One in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Statement about Handicapped Persons among us* [1980]. Sister Mary Hamilton was on the committee chosen by the bishops to prepare this statement. *One in Christ Jesus* essentially supported the position of then Archbishop Pocock who maintained that every person had a right to receive the sacraments. The purpose of this statement was to raise awareness of the Catholic community about the existence and needs of persons with handicaps in their communities. The statement presented a survey of Catholic insight concerning the disabled beginning with both the Old and New Testaments. The bishops pointed out that the theme of "disablement" was addressed during the Second Vatican Council in the Church's recognition of Jesus "in the poor and the suffering". This recognition became "more explicit" when Pope Paul VI "invited us to be one with our handicapped brethren" in his message to handicapped pilgrims ("Faith and Light," *Osservatore Romano*, November 6, 1975, p.10):

"In spite of well meaning declarations of principles and of much good work that is being done, there is a great risk that our society continues to marginalize the weak: to marginalize those whose insertion into society requires greater imagination, and more selfless love and hope. But let us be in no doubt that such insertion is the most authentic sign of a truly human family and of a truly civilized society. Even more is it the sign of a truly Christian Church. These handicapped people, let us not forget, have their hands outstretched to us but they also have a message for us."



Loblaw's Fundraising BBQ

One in Christ Jesus exhorted the Catholic community to remove obstacles to the full inclusion of people with handicaps into community worship. The statement offered practical recommendations to achieve this goal at both the diocesan and parish levels. It recognized the role of government and society in ensuring the basic human rights of handicapped persons as a matter of justice and recommended collaboration with all those working to this end. The bishops noted that "If 1981 is going to be a meaningful year for those who are disabled, then we must act as believers and consider their situation and demonstrate fresh interest and tangible support, and we must not wait for others to initiate action".

Msgr. Bianco: *After I inherited the work from Jean Marc Gagne I attended a meeting of parents of developmentally challenged in the basement of Holy Rosary Church announcing that we were expanding our program and stating that Archbishop Pocock wanted every person to receive the sacraments. We all stood up and cheered wildly because that was the first public statement that the Church was committed to the idea that every person, no matter what his or her disability, had a right to catechesis and a right to receive the Sacraments.*

Talk But No Action Toward Residences And Respite Programs

In 1981 Cardinal Carter wanted to elicit a response from the parishes to the pastoral statement. In order to achieve this he established the Archdiocesan Committee for the Handicapped. The Committee, chaired by Mrs. Helen Dionne, was to study ways to implement the *One in Christ Jesus*. The committee was comprised of representatives from various Catholic organizations including Social Action, Catholic Charities and other community groups.

The archdiocese was composed of three regions: Pickering under the leadership of Bishop Clune, Mississauga under Bishop Lacey and Central under then Bishop Ambrozic. The Archdiocesan Committee for the Handicapped studies of pastoral, educational and community action needs resulted in the following recommendations:

1. to establish an advisory committee in each region subject to the bishop of the region
2. to establish an archdiocesan advisory committee of representatives from each regional committee
3. to form parish committees to plan and coordinate parish activities which would raise awareness, assist parents in presenting their needs and help parishes to develop programs to include handicapped persons.

In June 1981 the Archdiocesan Committee for the Handicapped submitted its report to Cardinal Carter. He referred the committee to the regional bishops.

Bishop Ambrozic formed a parish committee and advertised this to adjoining parishes. Catholic Charities provided staff support to the committee and recruited volunteers. The committee focused on strengthening community support and studied housing, respite and a circle of support within the parish boundaries.

Between 1981 and 1984 a considerable effort was put into establishing the parish committees but there was very little achieved with respect to residences for the developmentally challenged or a respite program for their parents.

In June of 1984 Catholic Charities formed a committee of parents, representatives from Catholic agencies, the office of Social Action and CORE. For two years the committee examined possible ways to help people with developmental challenges and their families. It looked at:

1. programs to train developmentally challenged persons for jobs
2. respite care to be provided by parish volunteers
3. needs of multicultural groups for support, other agencies, especially Family Home Program of Metropolitan Toronto Association for Community Living ["MTACL"]
4. residential alternatives.

While residential alternatives were to be a consideration of this committee, the founding members of Mary Centre do not believe that the issue was actually given very serious consideration at this time.

In 1984 Ellen Ballantyne, the mother of a daughter and a son, the youngest of which [John] had been diagnosed with Downs Syndrome at birth, spoke with Father Bianco with respect to the need for a residence for persons with disabilities who were being cared for by aging parents. Father Bianco encouraged her to write to Bishop Ambrozic concerning the matter, which she did. Her letter resulted in an invitation to meet with Bishop Ambrozic to discuss her concerns.



Christmas at the Billinger home

At the meeting she was advised that things would change. However there was no concrete proposal put forward by the bishop at that time.

Following Ellen Ballantyne's meeting with Bishop Ambrozic she contacted Isobel Ricci, another concerned mother of a developmentally challenged child. Ellen and Isobel were disappointed and frustrated at the lack of response to their inquiries and initiatives regarding alternative residential facilities for their children.

Ellen Ballantyne: *I told Bishop Ambrozic the situation in the community as I knew it. He said that Father Bianco had been trying to tell him this for years, and that he thought it might be an exaggeration but that he understood that there was a need and that things would change, but not overnight. So I contacted Isobel Ricci and told her what Bishop Ambrozic had said. Since she was a better letter writer I asked her to write to him to give him the facts and the figures, something she is very good at. Isobel wrote to Bishop Ambrozic, and later to Cardinal Carter.*

Stirred Up Feelings Around The Papal Visit

1984 was the year of John Paul II's first papal visit to Canada. Father Bianco had initiated a program involving concerned parents and leaders of various organizations to organize a rally at which the Pope would meet with the developmentally challenged at Nathan Phillips Square.

It was to be a public gathering of developmentally challenged of all faiths. However this meeting was cancelled at the last minute so that the Pope could bless the new Eastern Orthodox Cathedral in Markham Ontario and visit the Peace Gardens. The developmentally challenged were offered the consolation of front row seats at the papal mass at Downsview.

Msgr. Bianco: *The Pope was supposed to meet all of the handicapped children of any race, background or religion. Everyone was so excited that the Pope was going to come and have this special meeting and fill Nathan Phillips Square. This wasn't just a Roman Catholic event. We had a full committee, including secular organizations for the disabled. At the last moment*

they cancelled the gathering. Everyone was just enraged. I remember the headline in the Toronto Star, "Pope's Meeting with Handicapped Persons Cancelled". And that was a big setback for all of us because it was supposed to have been the 'Canada Meeting with the Disabled'. The Pope would link all the people of no religion and some religion in Nathan Phillips Square. There had been meetings with Community Living on Bloor St. This was a secular agency whose representatives were also excited that the Pope would come to affirm the dignity of handicapped persons. Alternatives were suggested including a possible meeting with some of the handicapped persons at Midland but we couldn't get our people up there. Ultimately the consolation prize was that the developmentally challenged could have front row seats at the papal mass. The change in itinerary did offer a good message because it highlighted the Pope's support for the people behind the Iron Curtain. But for the organizers of the gathering of the handicapped it was ultimately a great disappointment and it exhausted a lot of our energy.

Ellen Ballantyne: *We didn't begrudge the Pope's first visit to Toronto. We didn't begrudge Covenant House. But we wondered why there was money for these things and there was no money for our kids. We even jokingly considered getting a mickey and a joint for Isobel's son David and our son John and sitting them outside Covenant House. And we jokingly discussed putting David and John in a boat in Lake Ontario as a reminder for parishes offering financial support for boat people that our children also needed such support. Isobel received a letter from a representative of the archdiocese in response to her letter to the bishop. The letter stated that the Catholic Church was not a social service. That made her say there and then that she would write to the Pope and the media. Shortly before she died Isobel showed me the letter she had received. We decided that it would be best to destroy the letter because we thought it was explosive, that it showed the archdiocese in an unflattering light.*

A Catalyst For Action: Isobel Ricci's Letter

After many months of seeming inactivity on the part of the archdiocese, Isobel Ricci wrote to Cardinal Carter in her capacity as one of many parents concerned with the future of their developmentally challenged children. The letter is strongly worded, and while it speaks on behalf of all concerned parents, Isobel made it clear that the views she expressed were her own. At the time of writing the letter Isobel was 60 years of age. Her developmentally challenged son David was in his teens. Isobel expressed concern about her ability to keep her son at home and at the same time she expressed a very strong view that she would like to see him settled in a "Catholic group home". She noted that at that time there was only one such home in the archdiocese which at that time was being operated by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The principle mission of this home was to accommodate the disabled persons who had been living at Pine Ridge Hospital before the government closed it.

Isobel noted that other than the recent program for religious education of the developmentally challenged, the Catholic Church did not provide any services or assistance for the disabled. She recounts that she had written to Bishop Ambrozic and had been invited to meet with him to discuss her concerns in April 1985. She learned shortly thereafter that the bishop and his committee were not able to offer any hope for a solution to her problem.

Isobel outlined that she had spoken to "Doreen Cullen of Catholic Charities, to Mary Partham of Family Services and to Joe Taylor of the St. Vincent de Paul Society but in each case no help or even any hope was forthcoming". She recounted that in March of 1985 she had sent letters to the *Toronto Star*, to *Profile* [North York division newsletter for the developmentally challenged] and to the *Catholic Register*. The *Toronto Star* and *Profile* published the letter but for reasons unknown the *Catholic Register* did not.

Isobel further recounted that in April 1985 at the suggestion of Father Bianco she wrote to Bishop Lacey and to Mr. Garnet, the head of Share Life, to express



St Bernard's Respite

her concerns. She went on to say that she did not receive a response from Bishop Lacey and that Mr. Garnet had responded by providing an explanation about the purpose of Share Life and suggesting that she seek support from Catholic Charities. She had already written to Catholic Charities but wrote once again to repeat the overtures.

Doreen Cullen, executive director of Catholic Charities, arranged a meeting between Isobel and Dougal McDonell, a representative of Catholic Charities, who spoke to her at considerable length on the phone and subsequently visited her. But Isobel's frustration continued and she recounted, "I came away feeling even more depressed and deeply disappointed since it is clear to me that there will be no help from the archdiocese in the foreseeable future hence my frustration in writing to you".

Isobel expressed strong resentment at the lack of support from the archdiocese and stated, "I'm appalled by the fact that no funds from Catholic Charities go to provide services of any kind for the mentally handicapped. However funds were made available to open and maintain Covenant House for the 'Street Kids'". Isobel compared the plight of the developmentally challenged who through no fault of their own were born into the world disabled to the plight of street kids who had exercised some free will to help put them in the position of requiring the services of Covenant House.

Isobel took considerable issue with the archdiocese protesting lack of funds, stating "I keep hearing about the lack of funds and I cannot accept that as the reason for the lack of services I am referring to. It is not necessary to have the funds right in your hands. Rather the cause can be identified first and the fund raising follows. Money can and always will be found when the demand is loud, forceful and important enough. Often those making the decision as to whom to assist do not have all of the facts and don't see the importance of the issue."

Isobel then draws a comparison with her request for funding and the funding that was achieved for the papal visit. She notes "Had the archdiocese waited until it had the over 4 million spent on the Pope's visit we would not have been able to receive him in the manner befitting him when he announced his decision to come here. I feel we could have received the Pope with far less expense. He did not nor do we have at the present time the money to pay for his visit. I point out to you that when Jesus spoke to the multitudes he had no elaborate altar and other props. Yet it is obvious that he must have reached many thousands of people since there are so many Christians in the world today."

Isobel made it clear that notwithstanding her comments regarding the expense of the papal visit she supported and welcomed his attendance in the archdiocese and said that it would be very sad if he had been unable to visit because of lack of funds. She noted "his Holiness spoke out frequently for human

rights, dignity and social justice for all and to my way of thinking this includes the mentally handicapped".

Isobel related that her son had received very good care at Surrey Place and from the Reena Foundation. He had spent happy summers at Camp Reena. While she was very laudatory of what the Reena Foundation provided, she nevertheless expressed her strong view that she wanted her son to find permanent residency in a Catholic group home.

Isobel continued:

The day has long past when we can continue to call the mentally handicapped 'the holy innocents' and look at them as subjects to be pitied and merely pray for them. Pity is not necessary and prayers are not enough. In all good conscience we can no longer avoid the issue and shut them away in institutes, out of sight and far from their homes and families. It is our Christian duty to provide accommodation, work and support services for them so that they can live fruitful lives to the best of their ability in peace and with dignity in their own community as is their God given right.

I mean no disrespect to you or the Church however it is becoming more and more obvious to me, as each day passes that I cannot depend on my church for the help I need. God has entrusted this special, precious son to my care and it is with pride and determination that I am willing to go to any lengths to see that he reaches his potential and lives his life with dignity in a Catholic environment. I shall keep on fighting verbally and by any other means necessary in order to see him settled and well provided for in my lifetime, when I can no longer do it. To meet this goal I am prepared to write or speak to anyone including the Pope or any news media. I shall approach any source which may be able to get, for my son and thousands like him, the necessary services.

I have been open, sincere and honest in expressing my needs and feelings to you. I hope that you will be diligent and sincere in your efforts to find the needed solutions to the problems facing the mentally handicapped and their families. Services for them from whatever source, including the Catholic Church, are urgent and



Day activity crafts

imperative and I feel that the Church is failing in its Christian and moral obligations toward him. Parents should not be made to feel that they are begging for what they have a right to expect from the Church. It is your duty as Cardinal to do all in your power to insure that the mentally handicapped are no longer ignored and merely tolerated as members of the Church. Their future lies in your hands. I hope your heart and your hands are open to receive and assist them.

Cardinal Carter responded promptly by sending Mrs. Ricci's letter to Father Massey Lombardi who was director of Social Action for the archdiocese, assigning the matter of the developmentally challenged to him. Father Lombardi in turn contacted Doreen Cullen, in her capacity as Director of Catholic Charities, and discussed a plan to involve the Ministry of Community and Social Services ["MCSS"]. Doreen Cullen was very familiar with the concerns of Ellen and Isobel as she had received many calls from both of them.

In September 1985 a meeting took place with Father Lombardi and Doreen Cullen and group of parents of children with developmental challenges. It was originally anticipated that only a few parents would attend. In fact, 25 or more parents attended and were very vocal in support of what Ellen and Isobel had been proposing and urging on all who would listen. As a result of the strong message of all of these parents at this meeting, Father Lombardi and Doreen Cullen took the initiative to set up a meeting with MCSS.

In October 1985 Father Lombardi and Doreen Cullen met with representatives of MCSS. They conveyed the very strong views of the concerned parents and they learned from the Ministry that there was a very long waiting list for residential and community support programs. The Ministry was favourably disposed to supporting the proposition of establishing Catholic group homes. Dougal McDonell of Catholic Charities had contemplated that if government approval was obtained, a new agency would have to be formed to accommodate the operation of housing and other programs that would be allied with the homes. The Ministry confirmed that a new agency would be a necessity.

The Challenge of Creating a New Agency

While the vision of integrating the developmentally challenged in to the Catholic community had come in to sharper focus as a result of the earlier efforts to integrate them into catechetical and sacramental programs the real work of creating group homes and respite programs was just beginning.

Following the October meeting with MCSS, Catholic Charities created a task force to address key objectives:

- a. to provide suitable accommodation for disabled persons, located as close as possible to each person's family and neighbourhood,
- b. to enrich the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual welfare of the developmentally challenged,
- c. to provide a place of welcome for parents and other persons interested in each of the disabled person's development,
- d. to provide a limited number of emergency and respite places,
- e. to provide the necessary training and support to enable each person to develop a spirit of independence,
- f. to provide the necessary training and support to enable each person to live in a meaningful way in their local community,
- g. to develop the necessary community awareness to facilitate the establishment of the prospective new residences,
- h. to develop and access local and generic specialized services to meet the individual needs of each person, including dental, medical, physiotherapy etc.

As well as representatives from Catholic Charities and MCSS, the new task force was to be comprised of representatives of the families of the developmentally challenged, the Chancery Office, and service providing professionals. The task force was charged with the responsibility:

- a. to develop a formal proposal and budget to the MCSS with the object of getting funding from MCSS for 1986/87 fiscal year,
- b. to prepare a time line schedule on the basis of one residence to open in September 1986,
- c. to initiate a process of non-profit status paperwork,
- d. to recruit a board of directors.

In December 1985 a group of Catholic Children's Aid Society ["CCAS"] foster parents of developmentally challenged children over 18 years of age attended a Catholic Charities meeting to advocate on behalf of their foster children. They presented a brief in support of similar initiatives to those set out above but with a specific objective of seeking support for children in the foster care who automatically lose their CCAS support at age 21 and thus require some other vehicle for governmental assistance. The executive director, Doreen Cullen, wrote a letter to John Sweeney, then minister of MCSS, on behalf of the CCAS foster parents but took no further action with respect to their request. In Mr. Sweeney's reply of January 1986 he referred to the October meeting with MCSS staff and encouraged Catholic Charities to develop plans with MCSS for a residential service for adults who are developmentally challenged.

Catholic Charities invited Dr. Francis Turner, then chairman of the Department of Social Work at York University, to chair the task force. The board of directors of CC wished to have a chairman of the task force committee who was not aligned with any of the interest groups to be served by the new agency. Dr. Turner was chosen for his qualifications and the respect with which he was held in the community.

In April 1986 the organizational meeting of the "task force for developmentally handicapped adults" was held. Among those attending were Dr. Turner as chairman, Doreen Cullen, Tom McNulty, then president of the board of directors of Catholic Charities and Joanne Nugent. The committee retained the consulting services of Frances Knoll MSW, LLB. The task force ultimately included: Dr. Frank Turner, Doreen Cullen, Gerry Drechsler, Dan Healy, Father Massey Lombardi, Tom McNulty, Joanne Nugent and Frances Knoll. The task force terms of reference were:

Major Responsibilities:

1. to oversee an assessment of needs of adults with developmental handicaps in metropolitan Toronto and to determine priorities for services to be provided under the auspices of Catholic Charities,
2. to develop a comprehensive plan and budget for a residential program which includes provision of day program activities and support services for the potential users of services as determined under (1) above,
3. to develop a formal proposal and budget for the total program for submission to the Ministry of Community and Social Services for funding in the 1986-87 fiscal year.

Specific Tasks

4. to prepare a work plan and timetable based on the opening of a residence in 1987,
5. to oversee and assessment of needs of developmentally handicapped adults in metropolitan Toronto as a basis for determining service priorities,
6. to determine admission criteria for users of the proposed services,
7. to determine staffing needs for the proposed services,
8. to design a structure for the organization and administration of the proposed services,
9. to develop a plan for incorporating a not-for-profit organization with a suitable board of directors to assume responsibility for the provision of the proposed services.

In the early stages consideration was given to whether or not CCAS "graduates", i.e. those reaching their majority at age 21 while in foster care should be the target group serviced by the proposed agency as compared with developmentally challenged children of aging parents. Catholic Charities decided that they would maintain a specific focus on assisting the developmentally challenged children of aging parents.

In June 1986 Frances Knoll wrote a letter to each of the parents who had attended a meeting in February. In

her letter she invited these parents to give their input concerning the specific needs of potential residents in order to formulate the type of program to be provided. As well, she invited them to attend a meeting with the task force on July 7, 1986.

Meanwhile the task force completed a Needs Assessment. It documented that as of June 1983 there were 4854 developmentally challenged adults between the ages of 18 and 65+ living in metropolitan Toronto. The numbers in the three oldest groups were: 1458 aged 35-54, 439 aged 55-64, and 276 over 65 years of age. The needs data report revealed three categories of disabled adults who required housing or some form of remedial care:

1. the residents of government services institutions such as Huronia Regional Centre that required care as a result of eventual closings dictated by the government,
2. the maturing children or “graduates” of the CCAS program reaching their majority at age 21,
3. developmentally challenged individuals in the community under the care of “aging parents”.

The report included detailed statistical information regarding the developmentally challenged persons who needed care immediately and those who would need care in the future.

The Task Force Report and Recommendations

The task force reported to the board of directors of Catholic Charities on November 20, 1986. In their report they acknowledge that the impetus for the project arose from the urgings of a group of aging parents who expressed concern about what would happen to their child once they themselves passed away.

The report states that research indicated that adults with developmental challenges show signs of aging at age 50, and that this group present needs that are significantly different from those of younger adults. Those over 50 require residential services and programs focused on recreational and social skills; younger adults require life skills and vocational training as well as residential services. Furthermore, community programs for senior citizens had not welcomed seniors with developmental challenges and there were few

appropriate available community supports for this group. The task force determined that identifying this older population as a target group for service provision would serve a group with special needs for whom few services already existed. The final recommendation was: “that the service program to be developed by Catholic Charities focus on servicing aging persons (over age 50) with developmental challenges living with their families in the community. Criteria for service should reflect the needs of the individual in relation to his/her parental caregiver to provide continuing care.”

The committee made the following specific recommendations:

- a. residential spaces for 12 adults (3 homes with 4 spaces each),
- b. day program for up to 20 persons to provide programs for residents and for adults still living with their families;
- c. support services for families with aging developmentally handicapped members who need residential care.

The committee noted that the target population would require a relatively high staff support ratio particularly as the residents became older. It recommended that “Catholic Charities undertake to inquire through the Catholic Religious Conference of Ontario whether a religious order might be interested in participating in this residential service program”.

The board of directors considered both capital costs and operating costs and recommended that the task force proceed to develop the proposal for submission to the MCSS on the basis of seeking:

1. a capital grant to cover all cost of purchasing and readying 3 houses to provided residential care for 12 developmentally handicapped adults,
2. 100% funding for operating costs of residential program, day program (20 spaces), and support services to families in connection with applications for residential services.

In November 1986 the board of directors for Catholic Charities approved the final proposal of the task force. In January 1987 Catholic Charities submitted a proposal to MCSS articulating the recommendations of the task

force and specifically seeking approval for 3 group homes, a day program and a family support worker.

Mixed Reaction of the Parents

In February 1987 a summary of the proposal to the MCSS was sent to the parents outlining the rationale for choosing the developmentally challenged over age 50 for a first program of the proposed agency. The parents were invited to contact Catholic Charities for more information and they were assured that the parents' group would be kept informed on a continuing basis.

Many of the concerned parents received the news with mixed reaction. On the one hand they were pleased that their advocacy had brought about concrete results in that some disabled individuals would receive care and housing that would not otherwise be available to them. However parents of adults in their teens or 20s with developmental challenges, including Helen Dionne, Ellen Ballantyne and Isobel Ricci, regretted that the proposed program did not provide the specific relief that they were seeking on behalf of their own children. They felt great disappointment and frustration that their efforts on behalf of their children were unsuccessful noting that they faced the unlikely prospect of living to seeing their children meet the age criteria for admission into the proposed program. Other parents responded by suggesting that admission of younger adults would inhibit much roll over in the group homes and make it difficult for aging persons with developmental challenges to attain residency.

In the spring of 1987 MCSS gave approval in principle to the Catholic Charities proposal but did not allocate funds at that time.

The New Agency

Both Catholic Charities and MCSS had agreed that a separate agency would have to be set up and incorporated to deliver the services proposed and to develop a client profile. The client profile was necessary to define services more precisely as a base for determining a funding formula, i.e. to justify the high staffing ratio for the group homes and programs. In July 1987 Catholic Charities organized a steering committee to create a board for the proposed new agency. The steering committee was composed of:

Tom McNulty, Chairman, recently retired from the board of Catholic Charities after having served for 7 years, the last 2 years as president of the board.

Robert Giroux had retired from the board of CC where he had served as treasurer for 10 years.

Helen Dionne had had experience on a number of committees related to improving services for the developmentally challenged. In 1981 she was chairman of the Archdiocesan Committee for the Handicapped. At the time of her appointment she was a committee member of the Ajax/Pickering/Whitby Association for the Mentally Retarded.

Laurel Hamilton was a social worker who had 10 years experience working with the developmentally handicapped.

Father Sam Bianco, described by Doreen Cullen and Helen Dionne as the "unofficial chaplain" for the developmentally challenged in the diocese, had been an effective advocate on behalf of the developmentally challenged for over a decade.

Doreen Cullen, executive director of Catholic Charities.

Frances Knoll, the consultant earlier identified who continued as staff.

The minutes of the steering committee meeting of June 22, 1987 reflect that the client profile was publicized in the CC spring newsletter and a notice was sent to all parishes for inclusion in parish bulletins. As well there was a notice in the Catholic Register.

The response to this outreach was minimal. Helen Dionne had mentioned that in previous studies it had been found that many families with children having developmental challenges had stopped attending church and so the notices in parish bulletins might not have reached potential client in parishes. A broader dissemination of the original publicity notice was undertaken.

Frances Knoll was retained to provide a draft organizational plan for the proposed corporation as well as to prepare the relevant bylaws.

Naming and Incorporating the New Agency

Just prior to the incorporation, the steering committee deliberated over the name to be given the agency. Helen Dionne had felt very strongly that the name 'Mary' should be included in the name. Father Bianco felt equally strongly in that regard, stating that "Mary readily identified with mother". He suggested the name "Mary's House". Because the agency was providing services for persons with developmental challenges outside the Catholic community, Helen Dionne felt the name "Mary Centre" would be more appropriate. (While there is no reference made by the founders at this time to the Pope putting the disabled under the care of "the Holy Virgin" in the March 1981 document it could be supposed that his reference did have some indirect influence on the naming of the new agency.) The steering committee unanimously endorsed the name "Mary Centre".

Mary Centre was incorporated in January 1988. It commenced operation with seven directors. This number was increased to twelve in June 1989, with the stipulation that the majority of board members were to be Roman Catholic. It was also suggested that two members be representatives of the Parent Advisory Committee.

Unanimous approval for the name "Mary Centre" did not endure. As early as March 1991 the Board's communication committee was deliberating changing the name. At that time the committee reported that the name of the agency did not accurately reflect the reality of the organization or its mission. Other concerns were:

- a. the name 'Mary' with 'Centre' suggests a home for women or girls, or unwed mothers,
- b. the word 'Centre' creates the image of an institution separate from the community-at-large, contradicting the mission of assimilating people with developmental disabilities into neighbourhoods and parishes,
- c. the name suggests a single residence, i.e. people refer to the Leyton home as Mary Centre,
- d. people also refer to the agency as Mary Place or Mary House,

- e. people confuse Mary Centre with other existing agencies.

The advantages of the name were also considered:

- a. the name was easy to remember,
- b. people saw the organization as a Catholic organization,
- c. because the name had existed for a few years the board's colleagues in similar organizations, as well as those funding MC, recognized the name,
- d. the name was highly regarded by ShareLife,
- e. the name was chosen by the founders of MC.

The communications committee was ultimately unanimous that the name be changed but they could not agree on an alternative. Some concern about the name still resonates to this day.

The Development of Mary Centre 1989-1992

There were five initiatives on behalf of persons with developmental handicaps that were the focus of the founding board of directors of Mary Centre: housing, supported independent living, respite, integrating seniors and parish outreach programs.

In the late spring of 1989 Bob Lomax was hired as the first executive director of Mary Centre. His first major responsibility was to oversee the opening and operation of Mary Centre's first residence for developmentally challenged adults. The purchase and development of a group home for the disabled was a new experience for the directors of Mary Centre, but notwithstanding their lack of experience they moved rapidly, with the assistance of Bob Lomax, to fulfill the task. A residence at 109 Leyton Street in Scarborough was purchased.

Immediately after he was hired, Bob Lomax retained a consultant to develop a policy manual for 109 Leyton Street and Mary Centre as a whole, with specific reference to admission and housing policies. On July 25, 1989 the Municipality of Scarborough granted approval for Mary Centre to operate the Leyton Street residence as a group home for the developmentally handicapped. The home was designed to accommodate five disabled persons. Seven staff were

hired and the exploration of possible day programs commenced immediately.

Within three days of the municipal approval of the group home, the decision was taken by the Board to admit two developmentally challenged women and a tentative decision was made to admit a third female who was a resident of the Huronia Regional Centre. As well, the Board considered the applications for admission of two men. These decisions were taken in accordance with Mary Centre policy. However the members of the Parents Committee felt little enthusiasm because the first admissions did not reflect what they had perceived to be their primary purpose in starting Mary Centre, specifically their need for a group home for their own children with developmental challenges in their 20's.

By September 1989 four of the applicants had been admitted to the Leyton Street residence and ongoing consideration was being given to the admission of a fifth applicant. In October the Board held an Open House to celebrate the opening of the residence. The fifth client was admitted in December. At this time the Parent Advisory Committee went on record to express concern that the needs of their children were still not being met and that there was a need for more housing options.

In fact, in October the Board was already giving serious consideration to the purchase of a second home and possibly some apartments in Brampton. Long term priorities were set concerning residences, a day program for seniors which would involve hiring a project person for Brampton and a community worker, a volunteer program, and the expansion of the role of advocacy.

At that time the Ministry of Housing granted approval for capital funding to purchase a second home with a target date to open in December 1990. The Ministry of Community and Social Services agreed to grant operating funds. The Board had been actively attempting to locate a second suitable home for a number of months.

Mary Centre was then notified that the Ministry of Housing would require Mary Centre to develop sufficient housing to serve twelve developmentally challenged residents, by March 31 1991. Because of the

short time frame, the Ministry took the position that supportive funding did not have to be in place before additional homes were purchased. In order to fulfill the Ministry's objective the Board endeavored to purchase four additional homes. One real estate agent had already been hired to assist in locating another home in Scarborough but given the government's time line it became necessary to hire a second agent.

It was the Board's intention to accept developmentally challenged applicants from the community over the age of 50. However in February 1991 the government announced significant funding cutbacks. The effect for Mary Centre was that the Board found itself under a great deal of pressure to accept residents who were being released from institutions. Having to accept these residents would obviously alter the original intention of Mary Centre and even further diminish the hopes of the Parent Advisory Committee for timely admission of their own children.

Five Group Homes In Quick Order.

Although both the MCSS and the Ministry of Housing had given general approval for funding to purchase more homes, written approval was required for each specific home. Given the very tight time frame for Mary Centre to execute the Ministry's directive to create 12 new spaces, the Board proceeded with the purchase of 4 Redcastle in March 1991 without having received formal written approval. After waiving its own requirement for written approval, the Ministry ratified the purchase.

The Board continued its efforts to locate and purchase three additional homes, both in Toronto (8 Whitecap) and in Brampton (15 Aberdeen and 8 Greenbriar). Along with the many issues associated with this task the Board had to deal with neighborhood problems and municipal restrictions. A neighbour of the Redcastle home had raised a number of questions concerning the opening of a home for the developmentally challenged on her street. She expressed concern about the effect of such a home on surrounding property values. As well she felt that the neighbours had not been given sufficient information. Tom McNulty, then president of MC, proposed that representatives of the agency meet with the neighbours to reassure them as to the moderate use to which the home would be put.

At this time, the Board also had to deal with overarching municipal issues. Municipal zoning approval was required for each home. In pursuance of this objective Tom McNulty met with representatives of the City Council of Brampton and Planning Committee. Brampton's City Council imposed the condition that an information sharing session with neighbours had to be held before any residents could move into the group home at Greenbriar.

The Board also faced the hurdle of meeting the Provincial Ministries' specific requirements to ensure compliance with all of the applicable group home standards and the necessary documentation in support of same. Green & Nogue Architects and Consultants were retained to guide Mary Centre through the maze-like process of dealing with these Ministries.

Each of the homes was renovated and modified to accommodate four full time residents with the required supervision as well as additional facilities for respite and emergency use. The Board had the additional help of a part time project manager hired for the period March-November 1991. The contract position was for 15 hours per week with responsibility for the startup of the four new properties. The Ministry of Housing agreed to fund the cost of the project manager.



Isla preparing a meal

Residency Issues Continue

Mary Centre advertised the availability of its facilities in part through providing Catholic parishes with the relevant information. As a result a number of applications were received from that community. As has been stated, Mary Centre had chosen persons over 50 years of age with developmental challenges as its primary target group. As has also been stated, this age group was contrary to the intention and expectation of the Parents Committee. Their hopes were further thwarted when the Ministry required MC to include at least one former institutional resident. When the Greenbriar home was opened in September 1992 this issue was compounded even further by the fact that MCSS now stated that it had no funding for a resident from the community but rather the requirement was now that all of the placements were to be for persons from institutions. The Greenbriar home had been obtained at the request of MCSS in the fall of 1991 at which time the MCSS had specifically required that MC open a home to accommodate four persons to be released from one of the institutions that the government was closing. The Board was not happy with the position taken by the MCSS but agreed at that time to proceed with the development of the home on the understanding that MC would have to accept only three persons from institutions and that the fourth position could be filled by someone from the community. The Board was very concerned about meeting its objective of helping aging parents in the community. While MC had no practical alternative to accepting the government's revised position that MC accept 4 institutional residents at the Greenbriar home, the Board's acceptance of four residents was stipulated as conditional on the government eventually funding a replacement resident from the community.

Supported Independent Living

The Board initiated the Mary Centre Supported Independent Living Program ("SIL") in early 1990 with the aid of consultant Joan Davies who was retained principally to advise the Board on the development of MC's Respite Program.

In late 1990 Mary Centre was granted the use of four apartments for developmentally challenged applicants in a complex built in St. Mary's Parish in Brampton under the auspices of the Archdiocesan

Housing Project. The area office of the Ministry of Community and Social Services in Mississauga agreed to provide funding for a part time caregiver to support the residents in St. Mary's on the condition that MC accept a resident from Oaklands Regional Centre. The residents moved into the apartments in January 1991, thus becoming the first clients of MC under the SIL Program.

A similar type of complex containing 65 apartments was developed in St. Peter's Parish in Woodbridge for occupancy in 1992. Tom McNulty had initiated discussions in 1990 regarding the possibility of MC obtaining and operating residences in the complex. He eventually arranged through Fr. Borean at St. Peter's for four apartments to be made available for developmentally challenged persons. The MCSS area office in Barrie provided funding to support rental and living expenses for the residents. This venture marked a breakthrough in the Woodbridge area which did not have facilities for persons with developmental handicaps prior to this time.

In 1990 the Archdiocese of Toronto began the development of a mixed unsegregated building complex which would house active seniors, single parents, 14 persons with developmental challenges and 13 persons with physical handicaps. This was named the Our Lady of Victory Project. The complex was completed in August 1992 and was composed of 125 non profit subsidized units. The Reena Foundation had been allotted 14 units but offered 7 of the units to MC as the result of discussions between the executive directors of the respective agencies. The number of Reena units offered to MC was reduced to 4 at the time the complex opened because the allocation of units to Reena had been reduced. Eventually Reena transferred a total of 9 units to Mary Centre.

New government funding was not available for this project but the Board elected to proceed with the project on the basis of clients paying what they could afford with MC funding the balance. The Centre looked to volunteers to provide additional caregiver services.

Prior to MC committing to the Our Lady of Victory Project considerable discussion had taken place concerning the viability of MC participation. As well as the Board's concerns about ongoing funding, there were concerns about the general operation of the

complex. The Board's primary concerns related to how clients with developmental challenges would fit into a non-segregated apartment complex, and how the Centre could provide necessary and effective supervision of MC clients. A committee was formed to gather more information and to examine the viability more closely. Ultimately a decision was taken that led to a very comfortable and secure environment for a number of senior DH, but not before the Centre underwent a few growing pains.

The Board gave consideration to expanding the SIL Program in Toronto but given the uncertainties of funding, the administration problems and the difficulties of finding suitable properties the Board elected not to proceed. Considerable effort had been expended to find a duplex or similar property in East York, Scarborough or North York adjacent to Scarborough. Some properties were workable but not acceptable in that they were illegal duplexes. An opportunity did present itself to develop a property in the Queen and Pape area. However some Board members raised concerns about the suitability of the property for MC clients. Helen Dionne spoke of her concern both as a Board member and a parent of a son with developmental challenges that the property was not close enough to public transportation or other facilities and that persons with developmental challenges might not experience ready acceptance by some of the neighbours. After other Board members visited the premises under consideration, the decision was made not to proceed.

The Respite Care Program Is Launched

Respite Care has been described as "an interval of rest or relief for the purpose of providing a break to the primary care giver(s) of the person who is developmentally disabled. The period of respite may be for as little as a few hours a day or as much as two to three weeks at a time. Respite care can be provided during the day, over night, over weekends or for longer blocks of time."

While the Board of Directors of Mary Centre had intended from the outset to institute a Respite Program, a greater sense of urgency was introduced concerning this issue by the members of the Parents Committee. They had experienced great frustration when the criteria of admission to Mary Centre

residences did not include their sons or daughters in their teens or twenties. The frustration increased with the realization that their children might never qualify for admission during the parents' lifetime.

In late 1990 the Board hired Joan Davies, a consultant and expert in the subject area, to develop a respite program for seniors. Ms. Davies presented various models for consideration. She recognized that certain models would not meet the needs of all parents. Some parents showed a greater interest in day or weekend away with peers than in Host Family or in home programs. At this time the only available respite programs were summer camps which had drawbacks in that the camp schedules often interfered with or curtailed the parents' vacation times.

Davies recommended hiring a part time person who would develop a model which would focus on respite for day and/or weekend away. She recommended that the parents work with the school boards for activities during the school break. This had limited value for some parents whose children with developmental challenges were no longer in school. Another recommendation was for the parents to work together to create and/or utilize situations of mutual support i.e. providing each other with opportunities for respite. She further suggested that the Board give consideration to a respite house or apartment which would have to be purchased or rented and would therefore require greater resources than the other models she had introduced. This last option would necessitate government funding which the Board sought at this time but funding was not forthcoming.

After the four MC residences were operational, one bedroom in each facility was reserved for respite purposes for overnight or longer stays, at a modest daily charge.

A more fully developed respite program which would go a greater distance in meeting the needs of the community, and more particularly the members of the Parents Committee, would have to await the availability of increased resources and funding. This would take a number of years into the future to achieve.

The Parish Outreach Program

The Parish Outreach Committee was formed to assist the developmentally challenged in becoming involved in parish life and activities, as an extension of the religious education program developed by Sister Mary Hamilton. The chairman of the committee, Father Hockman, envisioned a committee composed of two community volunteers and a developmentally handicapped person. (However, there is no indication that a person with developmental challenges ever served on the committee.)

By April 1991 the committee had active volunteers in the parishes of St. Bernadette's in Ajax, St. John's in Newmarket, and St. Gabriel's in Toronto. Groups of volunteers were working with persons having disabilities to facilitate contact with the parish community. In July 1991 the board of directors sponsored some members to head up a program at St. Michaels College titled "We Are One Flock". It was an educational program designed to discuss and plan an inclusive Eucharistic Liturgy to facilitate the full integration of developmentally challenged persons in parish life. This program brought together six teachers from both separate and public school systems, two parish volunteers, two parents, several with developmental challenges and staff.

The program was making sufficient progress for the Board to consider hiring someone to conduct the project. Father Hockman who was resigning from the Board was chosen because of his knowledge and interest in the objectives of the Outreach Committee. He recommended that the position be shared with a volunteer, Marge Munhall, who could cover the Durham region.

By April 1992 the committee had been expanded to include Fr. Don Downer, an Anglican priest and the coordinator of the Jewish Reena Foundation. This allowed MC to share ideas with others who were committed to having persons with developmental challenges included in the community life of their church or synagogue.

The committee was active in four Catholic parishes and was expanding the number of volunteers who were assisting the developmentally challenged in participating in parish activities, including providing transportation



Baseball on the front lawn

to church services and related events. Funding for the outreach program had been provided by an anonymous donor.

Efforts to expand the program continued. A further educational session was planned for October 21, 1992 at the Beth David Synagogue. Speakers from various religions and two institutions, a parent and others working in the community were invited to speak about their experiences in working to include people with developmental challenges into their church or synagogue.

In June 1991 members of the Outreach Committee met with representatives of parishes in Ajax and Newmarket which resulted in the formation of new parish outreach committees in those communities. The Outreach Committee also worked with the Catholic Women's League in formulating and passing two resolutions: the first requiring education of all parishes to a better understanding of the developmentally handicapped and their needs; the second stating that "The Catholic Bishops of Ontario encourage pastors and laity to initiate and become actively involved in those programs which will promote the integration of persons who have a mental handicap into the spiritual and social life of the parishes".

Integrating Seniors

Shortly after the purchase of Mary Centre's first residence the Board began considering the need of its residents to become integrated into existing seniors day programs.

Early attempts to integrate MC's residents into these programs met with limited success. They were also well received at library visits which took place monthly. They also welcomed at a weekly arts and crafts group at Calgary Baptist Church. Every second Friday they attended alternate community centres in Scarborough. However, although MC residents were able to attend churches of their choice attempts to partake in seniors' programs resulted in the residents being excluded or segregated. They were refused participation at Harbourfront Seniors Program and at the West Scarborough Seniors Centre. It was obvious that there was a need for more advocacy to develop a more hospitable reception for seniors with developmental challenges.

The directors of Mary Centre worked with representatives of St. Vincent de Paul to retain an expert to assist in drafting a proposal to the MCSS for funding a program and a worker to assist persons with developmental challenges in integrating into seniors programs. The partnering with St. Vincent de Paul was discontinued months later when the St. Vincent de Paul House changed its criteria for residents to persons under the age of 50. MC proceeded on its own and submitted a proposal to the MCSS. As a result the MCSS provided funding for a coordinator for the MC seniors program.

The coordinator who was retained developed an understanding of the needs and wishes of MC residents and gathered information about the various programs in place in the community. She didn't restrict her search for programs for MC residents to seniors programs but researched other programs as well. As the process evolved the coordinator connected the residents with programs of their choice and attempted to introduce them to other suitable programs when the residents chose not to return to the programs they themselves had chosen. She was also instrumental in setting up a volunteer program to engage volunteers to assist the residents in participating in the programs.

The Circle Closes. The Parents Committee Disbands.

The story of the origins of the Mary Centre ends in part where it began, i.e. with reference to the group of parents who were the motivating force behind the founding of MC. In a relatively short time after its

incorporation the parents saw the new agency develop group homes, apartments for independent living, the initiation of programs for outreach and integrated living. All of this support was for adults over age 50. While some of the needs of the broader community were indeed satisfied, the very specific needs of the parents of much younger developmentally handicapped adults were not addressed as they had hoped. In spite of pressing and cajoling the leaders of the Church, including the Cardinal, for resources and services for their children within a Catholic context their children's needs were not made a priority of the new agency.

Some of the parents had been active participants in the steering committee and the task force set up by Catholic Charities to initiate the process of developing an agency for the developmentally challenged. When Mary Centre was incorporated and operational the parents group was formalized and named the Parents Advisory Committee.

The committee broadened its interest to include the exploration of alternative services in the community, advocacy, and continuing support of Mary Centre.

After Mary Centre began operating, the anger and fear experienced by these parents because of the uncertain future of their disabled children gradually gave way to disillusionment about there being any prospect for Catholic group homes for their children. As noted above, the respite program was intended to meet the needs of these parents, as well as the needs of the general community, but with all of the growing pains, as reported above, this program also fell short of providing much assistance to these parents. Notwithstanding the absence of initial success in fulfilling their primary need for residences the group met faithfully for a time. But as it became more and more clear that their needs would not be met the number of parents attending the committee meetings began to dwindle with the result that the committee was eventually phased out.

Today, almost twenty years after the incorporation of Mary Centre, it is a strong and vital organization that serves the needs of dozens of adults with developmental challenges and their families. All those who stimulated the initiative and built a strong foundation for the future should be very proud.

Addendum

Mary Centre: The Mission Statement

August 16, 1990

The purpose of Mary Centre of the Archdiocese of Toronto is to express the Catholic community's social responsibility by responding to the needs of adults with developmental disabilities, and to the needs of their families.

The goals of Mary Centre are:

1. To provide residential and community care in an environment that reflects Catholic values
2. To advocate public recognition and acceptance of the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities to be part of the community
3. To involve parish communities and volunteers in advocating and taking part in the establishment of relationships that (in the spirit of the gospel) give love, understanding and support to people with developmental disabilities and their families
4. To provide excellent care and to encourage research into its improvement.

The objectives are:

1. To establish a Catholic multi-faceted agency for persons with developmental disabilities
2. To provide quality care through professional staff
3. To involve the Catholic community in active support of the goals and objectives of Mary Centre
4. To involve the residents; their families; other individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in future planning.



Mary Centre of the Archdiocese of Toronto

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