

Saint Marguerite d'Youville

(1701-1771)

Mother of the Poor

Catechetical Activity

Ages 9-11

Saint Marguerite d'Youville (Mother of the Poor, 1701-1771)

Materials Needed: Saint Marguerite d'Youville's biography (short version), copies of the activity sheet (1 per child), copies of the biography (1 per child), pencils, pencil crayons, markers, etc.

Gathering:

1. Have the children gather around and sit quietly for a moment.
2. Let the group know that Saint Marguerite d'Youville was known as the 'Mother of the Poor'. Ask the kids to think about their own community for a moment, and reflect on the poor and less fortunate; who takes care of them? Who makes sure they have food, clothing, shelter, etc?

Listening:

1. Read the biography on pages 3 and 4 to the group. You may find it beneficial to paraphrase some parts.
2. Ask the children to recall specific things from the biography that Saint Marguerite d'Youville did for the poor. Ask for volunteers to share some examples with the group. Now, ask the group to share some examples of things that they /their family /their community do for the less fortunate.
3. Have a discussion with the group about what it means to 'pay it forward' and how small acts of kindness can change the course of someone's day. Ask the children to think about why, when you have the means, it is important to assist those that are less fortunate, sick, needy, and struggling in life - as Saint Marguerite d'Youville did.

Doing:

1. Have the students use Saint Marguerite d'Youville's biography to help them complete the crossword puzzle on page 5.
2. You may wish to have the children work individually or with a partner for this activity. An answer key is provided on page 7.

Going:

1. Read the prayer on page 6 aloud to the group.

Saint Marguerite d'Youville (1701-1771)

Mother of the Poor

Feast Day: October 16th

Her Life

Marie-Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais was born in Varennes, Québec, on October 15, 1701. Her father had come from Brittany, France in 1687. The eldest of six children, Marguerite was only seven years old when her father died.

Thanks to the help of her great-grandfather, Marguerite was able to study at the Ursuline boarding school for girls in Quebec City for two years. At 12, she returned to her family to help teach her brothers and sisters. On August 12, 1722, she married François d'Youville. A fur and alcohol trader, he was unreliable and rather selfish. He died in 1730, leaving Marguerite, who was pregnant for the sixth time, with two living children and a lot of debt.

In 1737, she rented a house in Montreal where she gave hospitality to women in need. She and three companions made private religious vows. Because they broke social barriers by taking in the needy, the women were scorned, slandered and persecuted. Marguerite was accused of trafficking in alcohol with the First Nations people as her husband had done, with, it was said, the collaboration of the Sulpicians.

In 1747, Marguerite was put in charge of the administration of the Charon Brothers Hospital. When her term was up in 1750, she wrote to France for help and offered to pay the hospital's debts. The King, Louis XV, confirmed her as director of the hospital on June 3, 1753, and authorized her to form a religious community which was approved by the Most Rev. Henri-Marie de Pontbriand, Bishop of Quebec, in 1755.

To meet the financial needs of the hospital, Marguerite used her administrative talents and started up various activities such as needlework, dressmaking and tailoring, and the manufacture of military flags, clothing for Native people, hosts and candles. She also ran a tavern, sold tobacco, lime, building materials, and sand. The hospital welcomed a wide variety of people, including the poor, epileptics, lepers, battered women, and sick priests. During the wars leading up to the Conquest of 1760, her door was open to prisoners, the sick and the wounded of both sides. Beginning in 1754, Mother d'Youville also took in abandoned children.

In 1765, the General Hospital burned down. It took four years, but she got it rebuilt. On December 9 and 13, 1771, she had attacks of paralysis and she died on December 23. She was canonized on December 9, 1990 by Pope (now Saint) John Paul II.

Her Spirituality

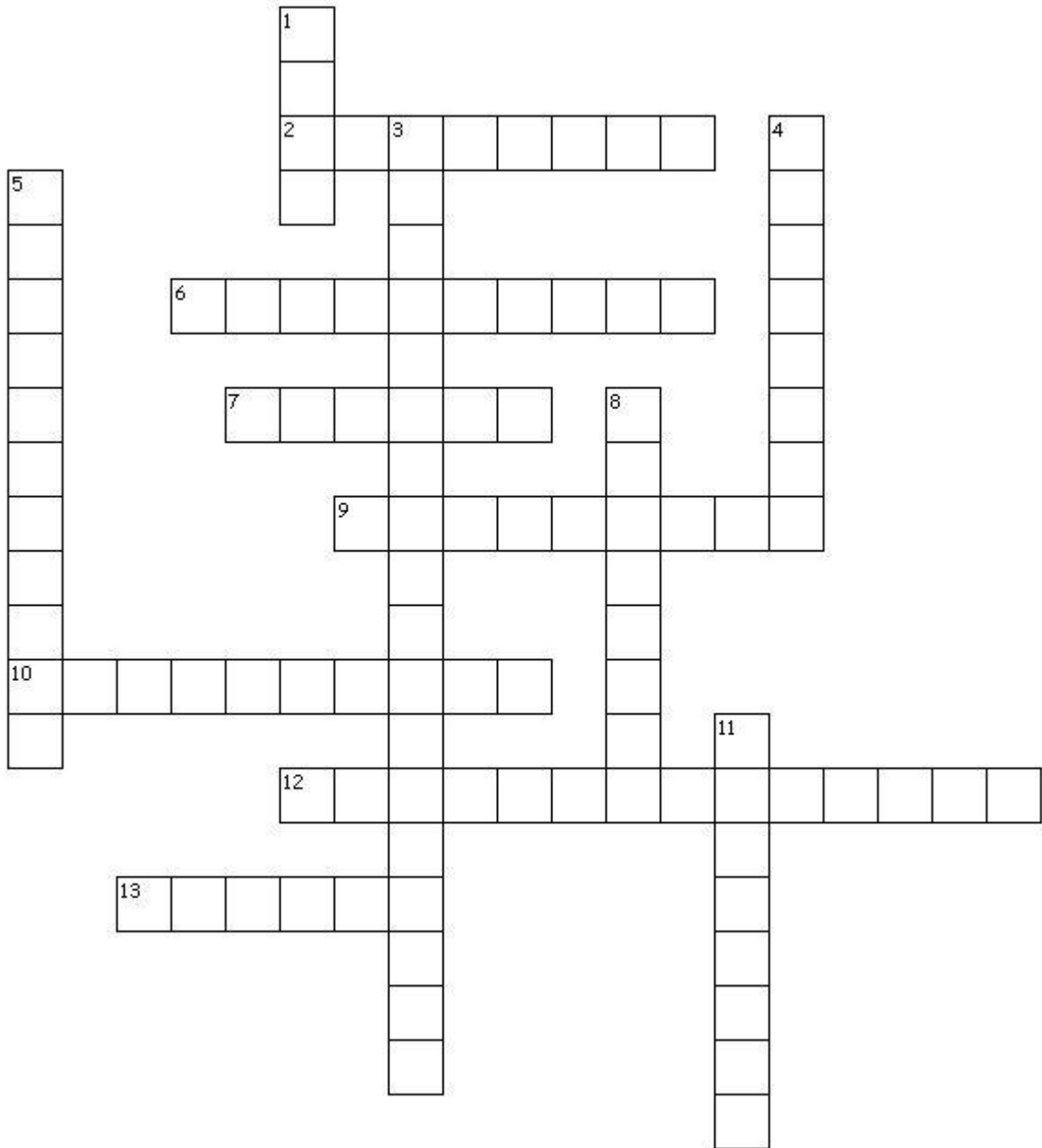
With the Ursulines, Marguerite grew in the practice of the apostolic prayer of Marie of the Incarnation who had founded the girls' school in Quebec City a century earlier. She was intelligent and she had good judgment and a well-developed sense of responsibility. She was strong and hard-working and she was a teacher who "knew how to be respected and how to be loved."

When she was 27, her heart broken by the scandalous life of her husband, she was struck by the revelation of God's personal love for her. After his death, she had to provide for her family while his estate was settled. At the same time, she visited the poor, the prisoners and the sick, and begged for funds to provide a proper burial for criminals who had died.

In 1737, still looking after her children, she formed with three companions an association of "young women, secular in habits, but religious in their hearts" who consecrated themselves "in perpetuity to the service of the poor." In the memoir that she wrote in 1752, she said, "Providence and our hard work are the resources we count on to carry on the work." She took in "found" children in order "to preserve them body and soul, to offer them a Christian education and help them prepare to earn an honest living." After a fire, which destroyed her building in 1765, she and her Sisters prayed the *Te Deum* and said, "The Lord gave us everything, the Lord has taken everything away, may his Name be praised forever." At the end of her life, she said, "We have always been on the verge of losing everything, but we have always had what we needed."

Within the community, Marguerite wanted "perfect union, with one heart and one soul, always considerate and supportive of each other in our weakness, knowing that we need a greater love to bear our own." To obtain that, the Sisters should "draw from the Divine Paternity the feelings of love, tender solicitude, and compassion that will sustain them in helping the poor, the sick and the orphan."

Marguerite d'Youville's spirituality can be summed up in three words: "Father, Providence, Poor". Her love was universal and adapted itself so well to every kind of distress, that it was common for people to say, "Go to the Grey Nuns. They will never refuse to help you."



Across

2. The town in Quebec where Saint Marguerite d'Youville was born.
6. Marguerite d'Youville's spirituality can be summed up in three words: "Father, _____, Poor".
7. She begged for funds to provide a proper _____ for criminals who had died.
9. Her husband worked as a _____.
10. To meet the financial needs of the hospital, she started up various activities such as _____.
12. In 1747 she was put in charge of the _____ of the Charon Brothers Hospital.
13. Saint Marguerite d'Youville also ran a _____ and sold tobacco, lime, building materials, etc.

Down

1. Saint Marguerite d'Youville had _____ siblings.
3. King Louis XV authorized her to form a _____ on June 3, 1753.
4. Saint Marguerite d'Youville died in this month.
5. One of the other activities she started up to meet the financial needs of the hospital was _____.
8. In 1722, she married a man named _____.
11. Saint Marguerite d'Youville studied for two years at a boarding school in _____.



Image: "Mother d'Youville teaching the Catechism in Châteauguay in 1766" 1942, by Flore Barrette, sgm [1897-1984]. Courtesy of the Grey Nuns of Montreal (1974-A-092).

Prayer

Saint Marguerite d'Youville,
we turn to you in humble prayer
because your life speaks to us
of goodness, compassion and love
in a world of suffering, anguish and pain.
It is not unlike the world you knew
as you went about doing good
with a great love for the human family,
with preference for the poorest of all.
Your dream of universal charity
became a mission in the Church.
We give thanks to you for the
inspiring vision that is ours today
as your dream lives on.

May we learn as you did the life-giving power of love,
the profound peace of unfailing trust,
the deep mystery of suffering and pain,
the comfort of prayer.

Saint Marguerite, teach us to listen,
in the silence of our hearts,
to the God of Mercy and Compassion,
that we, too, may be signs of God's love
to all people of our word.

Amen.

Crossword Answer Guide

Across

2. The town in Quebec where Saint Marguerite d'Youville was born. **Varenes**
6. Marguerite d'Youville's spirituality can be summed up in three words: "Father, **Providence**, Poor".
7. She begged for funds to provide a proper **burial** for criminals who had died.
9. Her husband worked as a **fur trader**.
10. To meet the financial needs of the hospital, she started up various activities such as **needlework**.
12. In 1747 she was put in charge of the **administration** of the Charon Brothers Hospital.
13. Saint Marguerite d'Youville also ran a **tavern** and sold tobacco, lime, building materials, etc.

Down

1. Saint Marguerite d'Youville had **five** siblings.
3. King Louis XV authorized her to form a **religious community** on June 3, 1753.
4. Saint Marguerite d'Youville died in this month. **December**
5. One of the other activities she started up to meet the financial needs of the hospital was **dressmaking**.
8. In 1722, she married a man named **Francois**.
11. Saint Marguerite d'Youville studied for two years at a boarding school in **Ursuline**.