

SISTER CECILE NORMAND SS.CC.

CANADA

December 31th, 1926 – January 20th, 1982

The life of Sister Cecile Normand gives a glimpse of the real changes which the Sisters of the Congregation have gone through over the last twenty years. (now 40 years...)

Cecile Normand was born in the Canadian town of Eastman on December 31, 1926. Her father was a seaman and her mother had the difficult task of bringing up fourteen (14) children. When Cecile was 23, she worked as a teacher, as a principal of a school, and as a pastoral assistant in a parish. She became acquainted with the life of Damian de Veuster and a further contact with the Congregation confirmed her decision to enter. She was professed in Chambly Canton, Canada on February 2, 1952 and initially worked in education in the boarding school of the Sisters at St. Bruno de Montarville. In 1965 she was asked to establish a new community in Sainte Croix in the District of Lac St. Jean. There the Sisters began to work in the parish school and in a school for handicapped children.

In this new surrounding Cecile felt herself very much at home. Here she was able to make her talents, and her earlier experience available to the people. She started parish choirs, leading and inspiring them with her musical talents. She brought priests, teachers, and parents of school children together and gave them solid advice on aspects of a healthy Christian education. Although active on a variety of levels in the parish, she always put time aside for prayer and reflection. Scripture reading and adoration were her indispensable resources for fruitful pastoral activity. It was difficult for this active woman to adapt her creativity and drive to the directives of Superiors who did not always understand her. Enforced postponement of decisions did not shake her inner certainty and conviction that she was on the right path. It gave her great satisfaction to see the Canadian Quasi-Province give more opportunities to the Sisters to work among people.

After a number of years of active service in Sainte Croix, Cecile Normand was taken ill with cancer and had to undergo a serious operation. After this illness she developed heart disease which needed more surgery. In spite of these setbacks she remained in good humour and continued her work. She also became an enthusiastic member of the Commission for the Constitutions of the Congregation. In 1981 there was another change in her life. She left, with other Sisters for Saint Hubert where she started work in the parish of Saint Jean de la Lande. On leaving she received many tokens of gratitude and friendship from Bishops and priests, as well as from ordinary people. Gratitude was expressed for the fact that she had made so many friends and had given herself so much to form little groups of Christians. These she inspired to be a leaven in their communities. In her usual style she set out to work in her new appointment but on January 20th 1982, she suffered a brain hemorrhage. Within a few minutes she died. Some parishioners with whom she had made appointments continued to arrive after she had died. The dismay among the Sisters and in the parish was great. The funeral liturgy was impressive. Many said that they had never been at such a funeral celebration. It was written of Cecile Normand on that occasion: 'Her life was one living liturgy of thanksgiving!' A few days before her death someone had heard her say: 'The Lord is not asking me to do great things, but He is asking me to give myself totally.' Thus she became in these modern days a daughter of Mother Henriette, who also living out old traditions, found new ways to be of service to God and People.

From: Cor Rademaker "Call to Serve" Dublin, 1988. pp 277-278.