

Over the next few months the logo, Love the Driving Force: 400 Years 1609 – 2009, will become familiar right across Canada. It will appear on letter head, brochures, fliers, posters and banners. It connotes a celebration of 400 years of life and ministry inspired by the charism and mission bequeathed to the world by Mary Ward, 1585 to 1645, Founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary familiarly known as “Loretto”. We will come together to remember our history, celebrate our ministry and pray for the courage to ensure that the charism and mission of the Institute continues.

This is not just a celebration of Mary Ward’s life, but a celebration of the vision and challenges she set before her companions in the early 17th century, a vision and challenge that still draws young women. We want to celebrate, not alone, but with others, remembering our story and identifying the values that will drive us into the future. We want to celebrate in cooperation and collaboration with those with whom we have lived and worked in the past and with those with whom we live and work today.

Mary Ward founded her Institute to educate girls in the Catholic faith so that it would be passed on to future generations. Loretto Sisters came to Canada from Ireland in 1847 to provide Catholic education to the children of Irish immigrants. That eventually involved all levels of education – elementary, secondary, and post secondary. In the years since 1847 Loretto Sisters taught in many schools in Toronto, Stratford, Guelph, Hamilton and Niagara Falls. Robert Dixon in his recent book credits the Loretto Sisters with being founders of the Catholic educational system in Ontario.

We will reach out to individuals and groups – school boards, parishes and other Institutions - to remind them of our past and present connections and invite them to join with us in co-sponsoring an activity or event that reflects shared work and shared values. For example, Loretto Abbey, Loretto College School, Mary Ward, and Mother Teresa High Schools in Toronto are planning programs and events including a Student Service Learning Trip to Loreto sites in India in March 2009. Through Loretto College, our women’s residence at the University of Toronto, another trip is planned for May 2009. There is potential for similar trips to Loreto ministries in Kenya in summer 2009. An insert in the Catholic Register in January will list all events scheduled so far.

400 years after our founding, we Loretto Sisters world-wide, commit ourselves to promoting dignity and liberation for all – especially women and children; challenging unjust systems and structures; standing with those on the fringes of society; and showing reverent care for the earth and all of creation.

These are challenging days for Catholic education in the Province of Ontario. Perhaps looking at our roots which are 400 years deep will guide the way to ensuring that young people will continue to benefit from the best that Catholic education has to offer. Please celebrate with us.

Evanne Hunter, Provincial, IBVM in Canada