

Marguerite Bourgeoys was born on April 17, 1620 in Troyes, then in the ancient Province of Champagne in the Kingdom of France. The daughter of Abraham Bourgeoys and Guillemette Garnier, she was the seventh of their thirteen children. Marguerite came from a middle-class and socially connected background, as her father was a candle maker and coiner at the royal mint in the town. Her father died when she was very young, and her mother died when Marguerite was 19. On October 7, 1640, during a procession in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary, she decided to dedicate herself to the service of God. She was a French nun and founder of the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal, in the colony of New France, now part of Québec, Canada. Before February 1653, Bourgeoys accepted the assignment to set up a congregation and a mission in New France. She set sail on the *Saint-Nicholas* from France, along with approximately 100 other colonists, mostly men. They had been recruited and signed to working contracts. She traveled to Fort Ville-Marie (now Montreal), where she developed the convent and educated young girls, the poor, and children of First Nations. In 1657 she organized the formation of a work party to build Ville-Marie's first permanent Church - the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Counsel. She was provided with a vacant stone stable in April 1658 to serve as a schoolhouse for her students. This was the beginning of public schooling in Montreal. Soon after receiving the stable, Bourgeoys departed for France to recruit more women to serve as teachers for the colony. She combined this goal with housing and caring for the "King's Daughters," (orphan girls sent by the Crown to marry and create families in the colony) upon their arrival from Europe. Bourgeoys and her four companions were also responsible for interviewing the male settlers who came to the settlement seeking a wife. After a second trip back to France in 1672, Marguerite returned with the wooden statuette of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours for the chapel, the one in the reliquary on the left side-altar.

~ The Tomb of Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys ~ In 2003, celebrations marked the 350th anniversary of Marguerite Bourgeoys' arrival in Montreal. And in 2005, the 350th anniversary of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours was especially joyful when the "Mother of the Colony" returned to the chapel in Montreal's historic district where she had lived as a beloved friend and valued counselor to all. Her remains were placed in the left side-altar below the statue of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours. The educative and apostolic efforts of Marguerite Bourgeoys continue through the commitment of the members of the community that she founded. More than 2,600 Sisters of the Congregation de Notre-Dame work in fields of action according to the needs of time and place - from school to college or university, in the promotion of family, parish and diocesan endeavors. They are on mission in Canada, the United States, Japan, Latin America, and Cameroon, and most recently they have established a house in France. She is also significant for developing one of the first uncloistered religious communities in the Catholic Church. On November 12, 1950 Pope Pius XII beatified Marguerite Bourgeoys. Pope John Paul II gave the Canadian Church its first woman saint, canonizing her on October 31, 1982.

