



**Nano 300th Anniversary Reflection
for St. Paul's and St. Francis of Assisi Churches
Weekend of February 3rd/4th, 2018
~ Sheila Leonard, PBVM, NL Canada**

First of all, I thank you, Father Clem, for this opportunity to share with you, our Parish Community, some personal reflections on Consecrated Life by briefly sharing our story as Presentation Sisters.

As we begin, I invite you to reflect on the nature of your own consecrated life consecrated by your call in Baptism ... your own call to faith, your call to be light for others, your call to be of service, your call to offer a loving presence to the world wherever you find yourself, and how you live that out.

PAUSE FOR A FEW MOMENTS ... what is stirring in you?

This year as Presentation Sisters throughout the world, we are celebrating the 300th anniversary of the birth of our Foundress, Nano Nagle, pictured here on the table, and so this is a very fitting moment to share with you a little of her story. HER STORY THEN ... OUR STORY NOW. Perhaps her story ... our story ... will stir something more in you of your own story...

Calendar copies ... for Clem and each Parish Church ...

Our Presentation story goes back to 1718 in Ballygriffin, Ireland with the birth of our foundress, Nano Nagle. Nano was born during the time of the harsh penal laws in Ireland when it was against the law for Catholics to openly practice or even teach their faith, at peril of losing everything, including their lives.

Nano's family being well-to-do secretly arranged to send Nano to France for her education. While in France Nano lived a very exciting social life and was perhaps the belle of the ball. After one such evening Nano was coming home in the early hours of the morning and noticed a group of poor people huddled outside a church door. She was told that they were waiting for the church to open so they could attend Mass. Something stirred in Nano ... a turning point in her life as she was reminded of the plight of her poor Irish people. So moved was she that she went back to Ireland. **PAUSE ... what is stirring in you as you picture Nano's story?**

Nano was overwhelmed by the plight of the poor when she came back home to Ireland. Slowly in Cork she set up what came to be called hedge schools, hidden in out-of-the-way places, where she would gather the children to teach them their faith, as well other basic skills such as reading ... a very dangerous undertaking on her part which could have cost her and her family dearly if she had been discovered.

Nano's sister, Ann, was a powerful inspiration to her in her own love and care for the poor around her. One day Nano was looking for some silk she had for making a dress, only to find Ann had sold it to help the poor. Nano was deeply touched. **PAUSE A FEW MOMENTS ... what is stirring in you as you hear that story ... who has inspired you ... or whom have you inspired?**

Nano eventually spent everything she had on her schools, all done in secret for a very long time. Her dream was of providing education as a way of raising her people out of poverty and

restoring their freedom. Her dream attracted others who gathered around her to help keep the dream alive. With the gradual lifting of the penal laws, the schools soon spread from Cork to other parts of Ireland.

In 1775 Nano gathered a small group of companions around her to help guarantee the schools would continue after her death. Together they formed the beginning of what was to later become the Congregation of the Sisters of the Presentation. At the time of Nano's death there were only four of them remaining. Amazingly, their numbers grew and the number of schools continued to increase throughout Ireland and eventually beyond Ireland. Nano is often quoted as saying, "If I could be of service in any part of the world ...".

In 1833 long after Nano's death in 1784, our own Bishop Fleming from St. John's who had connections with the Irish Sisters, saw a need for a school just for girls in St John's. He was inspired to go to Ireland to ask if any of the sisters would be willing to come to Newfoundland. Many of the Irish had already come and settled in Newfoundland so it seemed a fitting request. Four courageous, faith-filled women said yes, not knowing where they were going or what lay ahead. They came in faith, they stayed, and many others followed after them. The rest is history, as we say. Newfoundland became the first place outside of Ireland where our sisters actually went. Today we as Presentation Sisters serve in numerous ways in 27 countries and on five continents ... an amazing story. Her story then ... our story now ... as we continue to respond to the call to care for all God's people, all of creation, with special care for the Earth.

Nano's is but one story ... a woman who dared to be led by God, powered by love, open, listening, and trusting in God's loving, wise and faithful care.

PAUSE again for a few moments ... What is stirring in you ... is there something new which God is inviting you to in your own life ... a deeper faith, a new way to serve, a new way to be a loving presence to others right where you are?

In concluding, let us together offer our gratitude for our own individual vocations, yours and my own, as we thank God for the faithful contributions of the many men and women religious in our own province in particular over the years, and throughout the world, as we mark the World Day for Consecrated Life. (Present NL 300th Anniversary calendars to Parish representatives.)

