

PUBLIC RELATIONS
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Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News: Our history from cover to cover!

INTRODUCTION

Hello everyone,

On behalf of the *MIC Missionary Press*, it brings me great pleasure to present to you a rare view of Montreal from the pages of a missionary magazine.

“Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News - our history from cover to cover!” seeks to share a historical retrospective of our city through the major themes at the heart of our impressive collection. Before exploring this, allow me to share with you a bit about *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News*.

PART ONE: PRESENTATION OF: *LE PRÉCURSEUR* AND *MIC MISSION NEWS*

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Le Précurseur and its English counterpart, *MIC Mission News*, are journals that have been in publication since 1920 and 1923, respectively, by the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate-Conception, known as the “MIC.” This collection is comprised of more than 1,000 issues which have all fulfilled the same goal throughout the decades: to inform its readers about the apostolate of the nuns and to awaken the missionary spirit in all of us. The history of this community shows us that the goal of evangelization through the publication was particularly important to its Foundress, Délia Tétréault.

The current circulation, more modest than in the past when the annual number of prints was more than 170,000 copies, remains significant compared to many other religious-interest magazines that either closed down or moved toward the digital age. *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News* has, without question, evolved and adapted. The different directresses heading the *MIC Missionary Press* have always been sensitive to the needs and challenges of their time. The format of our enduring content has adapted to technological advances and ways of thinking.

PART TWO: THEMATIC HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE

It therefore seems appropriate to begin this corpus with a historical review of our dear city as well as its surroundings. Thanks to this mission magazine, the various themes presented here provide a broad portrait of the reciprocal influences of the Montreal society and the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate-Conception.

1. ECHOS OF QUEBEC SOCIAL CONTEXT

For centuries, literature has proven to be an indispensable resource of socio-historical information. Through words and images, the stories of yesteryear and today tell, more or less implicitly, the facts and customs of a given time. The choice of vocabulary, style of writing and even the subject matter highlight the peculiarities of the testimonies of those living at that time.

Each new publication digs deep into the lives of certain populations, particularly **women**, demonstrating the ever-evolving mentality about women and their roles within their families and communities. Page after page, we notice a more definite style of dialogue and opinions expressed with tact and diplomacy. Many other issues are discussed in *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News*, including homelessness, education reform, identity and generational crises that have grown over the course of the last 50 years.

The MIC Sisters equally featured in their magazine the significant events which occurred in our city. For example, **the influenza epidemic of 1918, the 1976 Olympic Games, the 1967 World Expo and the Quebec referendum of 1995**. Sensitive to the progress and changes that took place in their work environment, the Sisters captured the opportunities to share the missionary spirit of their people. Far from living in a world removed from reality, they were able to preserve a touching and honest reflection of Montreal through their writing, diligently highlighting each of the city's anniversaries, including the **375th**.

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2. SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE MONTREAL CHURCH

Let us remember that, in the past, these festivities had a singularly religious tone. From the year 1942, *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News* detailed the celebrations of Montreal's 300th anniversary, including the **Pontifical High Mass** on May 17th, and a gathering of the most notable Christians in the city. The committee for religious festivals played an undeniably important role; they took the opportunity to highlight the origins of the city, traditionally called "Ville-Marie," as well as to organize a **Missionary Exhibition** at Saint Joseph's Oratory. This tri-centennial reflected a time when the Catholic religion and "Church community" held a special place in the lives of citizens. Half a century later, the winds had already changed. In 1992, the historical aspects of the city had already replaced religious and cultural expressions.

In the aftermath of this progressive abandonment of the Church, how did a missionary magazine manage to survive? Like the nuns, it adapted. The accumulation of accolades and descriptions of visits from notable ecclesiastical figures from the publication's first decades gradually faded in favour of testimonies offering an intimate portrait of religion and spirituality. The directresses of the magazine were always concerned with remaining transparent with their readers. A desire to shed light on the state of religion resulted in various articles addressing the increasing popularity of atheism and the secularization of our society. Despite this, the magazine continued to offer various perspectives on Catholicism, offering recollection days, retreats, missionary camps and other activities for those who felt called to the

challenge or simply to satisfy their curiosity. The forward-thinking and *avant-garde* spirit of the MICs work has repeatedly earned them prizes, mentions and commemorative plaques.

Without detours, the Sisters gave us an inside look into their community life and special events. Along with them, subscribers to *Le Précurseur* and *MIC Mission News* experienced the Vatican II and took to heart its many repercussions. Because there was a new way of being a Christian, there was also, to a certain extent, a new way of living as a consecrated woman. Photographs in the publication show **changes in attire**; however the articles continued to offer an international perspective. Although “calls” are becoming rarer, the content of the written publication is going strong, rooted in our multicultural reality.

3. CONTINUOUSLY RENEWED MISSIONARY SPIRIT

Even today, *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News* proves to be a significant evangelization tool, both in Canada and around the world. Not so long ago, there was a time when nuns went door to door to collect donations, renew subscriptions and inform the families of their their work across the five continents. Indeed, Délia Tétreault, the Foundress of the community, was convinced, well before her own time, that the missionary spirit was asleep within the hearts of people. The magazine was first established with the hope of **incorporating the Quebec population** in this major project. And the first step was to open people’s minds to the world.

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A number of readers, now in their fifties or sixties, remember the famous “**25 cents for the Chinese children.**” The children of that generation had taken care to help their Asian friends who, despite living half a world away, seemed so close...The MIC had a gift for sharing their experiences, describing customs from other cultures and narrating their Sisters’ adventures in these foreign places. Gradually a missionary and humanitarian concern was awakened within the population thus showing the true colors of the people of Montreal.

In other words, since 1920, *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News* has made the mission accessible for everyone, more than 40 years before Vatican II. As propagandists and preachers, the nuns served as intermediaries, interpreters and models for demystifying certain prejudices against religion, finding allies and faithful collaborators and even awakening the call to a missionary life. Throughout the decades, pages of the magazine have been filled with articles written by lay people hoping to become involved in this noble cause, that is: the communion of peoples and the support of diversity.

What’s more, the MIC Institute, through its written work, has succeed in showing its readers the importance of solidarity, helping others and sharing, all paramount values in the multi-religious, multi-ethnic society in which Montrealers live and grow. The abundance of opinions and the richness of the testimonies forged the missionary character of our collective identity, constantly proving itself in the face of waves of immigration over the last century.

4. A PLACE FOR EVERYONE UNDER THE SUN

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Foundress of the MIC Institute took the immigrant issue to heart. The **Montreal Chinese mission** is part of this mandate; a mission which holds a very singular place in the community's history. The very first publications of the magazine included stories recounting newcomers' living conditions, difficulties, hesitance to the Catholic religion, the efforts made by the Sisters to connect with these communities and so many other stories about immigrants' daily lives. One of the difficulties immigrants faced, unsurprisingly, was the spread of disease. In 1918, a terrible flu epidemic necessitated the opening of a makeshift hospital run by the nuns of the Institute. In the years that followed, the small free clinic was replaced by a larger establishment. Following this, a chapel and school were established in the Montreal neighbourhood known as *Chinatown*.

Unfortunately, the widespread ministry of the MIC in Quebec is too often forgotten. Another example of their work is the **PROMIS** organization, located in the Côte-des-Neiges/Notre-Dame-de-Grâce neighbourhoods. Still operating today, the organization helps by offering a range of services to immigrants and refugees of various origins. Open dialogue and peaceful coexistence seems, at all times, to be the way to integrate these people into their new environment.

Of course, the term "dialogue" implies the presence of two or more parties. In order for exchanges to be possible and fulfilling, a climate of listening and empathy is necessary. The MIC Sisters learned long ago that social change is brought on by education, and children and adolescents are particularly susceptible to these changes. The Outremont neighbourhood reflects the nuns' investments. For several decades, the **École Délia Tétreault** stood there; it is now the University of Montreal Architecture department's facilities. In addition to their countless visits to schools across Quebec, the Sisters were actively involved in many associations, including the **Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique**, **Jeunesse du Monde**, and the **Legion of Mary** as well as **Mond'Ami**, formerly known as the Association of the Holy Childhood. Through these associations, young people were able to contact other children around the world and to share values such as justice, respect, openness to others and social peace.

The outreach of such initiatives reached deep into the homes of Montrealers. Touched by the MICs mission, many lay people invested themselves in this work as much as they could. Makeshift workrooms and sewing groups were created for mothers who came together each week to make clothing for Asian and African children in need. Others, both men and women, participated in promoting the magazine in their neighbourhood, proudly bearing the title of "zealot." Others chose to contribute by becoming lay missionaries, while some became involved as MIC associates, adhering to the Foundress' spirituality.

5. MEDIA AND ART SERVING MANY PURPOSES

No matter in what capacity they participated, lay people were always encouraged to work closely with the nuns. Some of them even worked directly for the Institute and

up to this day, many lay people are involved. We cannot deny that help from those outside the MIC Institute has become necessary for the community over the years. To continue publishing *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News* and updating the magazine's format and content, the MIC Missionary Press has sought out the expertise of individuals sensitive to the spirit of the community.

However, the communications sector, developed with a certain *avant-gardism* by the Foundress and her successors, were not content using only the print media. Many forms of artistic displays or performances were created to convey the congregation's universal missionary message to the rest of the world: **kiosks** were carefully assembled at various missionary exhibitions, an audio-visual service was set up by the Mond'Ami organization, **plays** were performed, benefit concerts played, interviews on the **radio** and **television** took place... Nothing seemed to extinguish their ardour, not even age. This was evident most recently in May 2017, when the MIC established a new museum in Laval: the *Délia-Tétreault Museum*.

By a thousand and one different means, the MICs have known how to reach the people of Montreal. The fact remains that their **magazine**, dating back nearly 100 years, has proved to be an invaluable tool in the sharing of Christian and social values; their written words and photographs have preserved the traces of the past.

CONCLUSION

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With this impressive collection, the *Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception* has undoubtedly left us an important legacy. Considered to be a part of our Quebec heritage, these thousand issues hold a wealth of often underestimated information related not only to our religious identity but also to our social concerns— issues that have affected Montrealers, either directly or indirectly. Through their written and spoken testimonies, the Sisters have forged bonds with their communities, between families here and abroad, paving the way for lay missionaries followed by humanitarian aid.

Here is a non-exhaustive overview of **places listed** in *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News*, places where the MICs worked, in the short or long term, around the Greater Montreal area. Among their list of activities, they recently decided to delve into the world of electronic media.

Officially available online since November 8, 2016, the ***Virtual Center of the MIC Historical Memory*** is the new website for the MIC Missionary Press. It includes an archive portal where subscribers to our journal can access all previously published issues in French and English, free of charge. Since the summer of 2017, a partnership with *Bibliothèques et Archives Nationales du Québec* has allowed us to improve the site's navigation of our vast collection by adding full-text search.

Through this, the Institute hopes to hold on to part of its archives while also making nearly 100 years' worth of publications easily accessible to readers all over the world. The streamlined and dynamic interface joins history lovers, our loyal subscribers and academic and scientific communities together. Although the magazine addresses the

mission in its many forms using a religious and spiritual framework, we hope that *Le Précurseur/MIC Mission News* has succeeded in communicating much more than that to our readers. Thus the possibility of discovering our great city of Montreal in a whole new light...

We thank you kindly for your interest!