

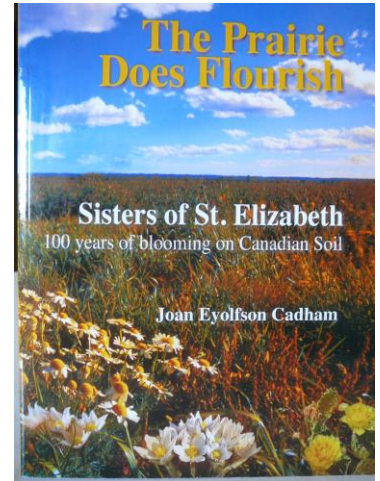
The Prairie Does Flourish – Sisters of St. Elizabeth

100 Years of Blooming on Canadian Soil

by Joan Eyolfson Cadham

INTRODUCTION by Marie-Louise Ternier-Gommers

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
(Isaiah 35:1-2)*



Turning 100 years old makes heads turn and lands reporters on your doorstep. There is something about being an entire century old that makes others feel they are in the company of greatness. And so it should be.

After two harrowing weeks of travel, Sisters Augustina, Gabriela and Philomena arrived in Muenster on May 14, 1911 and took upon their resolute but fragile shoulders an enormous challenge. As I first learnt of and truly absorbed the magnitude of their challenge, the image of the dead and bald prairie reared itself up in my mind. My oh my, I thought, did the dear sisters have any idea what did they had come to? Upon seeing the bald prairie, did they wonder how anything could grow on those dry and bare lands, literally and figuratively?

As the years unfolded, the sisters adapted, persistently planting seeds of hope and care in the hearts of the early settlers, laying down their lives to care for the sick and dying, and braving storms, setbacks and hardships of all kinds. And behold, the lifeless land began to bloom. As the prairie surprises us with the crocus, the cactus flower, the lily and the wild rose, so the Sisters' efforts, planted in dry land and watered with the prayers and efforts of our pioneers, began to bear fruit. Several hospitals, nursing homes, home care organizations, a retreat centre and countless domestic services later, the Sisters of St. Elizabeth can be safely credited with laying the foundation for health care in our province and in our country.

The story in the pages of this book is a sacred story. Someone's life story becomes "sacred" when her/his witness takes on a perennial quality. It's the kind of quality that inspires subsequent generations to give their lives to a wider vision, for the sake of bringing God's reign of justice and peace that much closer to reality.

The Sisters' witness falls into that category, showing us in very concrete ways how to take seriously the line in the Lord's Prayer: Your will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven.

Every spring the crocus surprises us; just when life seems gone forever, the tiny purple flower shoots up quietly and quickly from the middle of dry clumps of grass, throwing its mighty little smile across the fields as far as it can reach. The cactus gives birth to its flower amidst its hostile prickles, as does the wild rose. The prairie lily crowns the prairie landscape with its glowing orange. Those who have eyes see the prairie land dance with life.

The prairie does flourish. The indelible mark and roots of love which the Sisters of St. Elizabeth have left in the prairie-ground will continue to bear the fruit of the Gospel, fertilized by their solid and courageous beginnings in this land.

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.
(John 15:13)*