

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## **Mother Madeleine Chollet, First Superior General of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word of San Antonio, 1846-1906**

It was 1846, Texas's first year of statehood, when Louise Chollet was born in faraway Roanne, France. In 1867 she entered the Monastery of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament in nearby Lyons, where she received the habit and the name Sister Marie St. Madeleine of Jesus.

Within months she and two other youthful nuns set sail for the diocese of Texas at the behest of Texas Bishop Claude-Marie Dubuis. She professed her vows to a new order, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, founded by the bishop for the three sisters from Lyons. Fairly soon thereafter he sent them to the frontier village of San Antonio, where a hospital was being built for them, but just as they left, they learned the structure had been destroyed by fire.

Nevertheless, the women persisted through the rough 24-day, 280-mile stagecoach trip, perhaps practicing what Sister Madeleine later required of other nuns, "when traveling not to use mended or torn gimpes...and to be provided with a change.... It is not proper for anyone to see the Religious Habit soiled."

In San Antonio the sisters labored side by side with workmen to build Santa Rosa Infirmary on a muddy street near the town's polluted river. With long hours of work and adequate response from their regular urgent appeals for financial aid sent to the newspaper, they were able to move into their living quarters in October, and on December 3 they opened the first private hospital in the city to have a nursing staff—themselves. Eight of their nine beds were filled the first day.

Serving first as superioress, Mother Madeleine Chollet became a skilled business executive, answering pleas from Fort Worth, Amarillo, Corpus Christi, and Paris, Texas, to establish hospitals and staff them with nuns. By the time of her death in 1906, the order numbered 452 sisters, and they had established 12 hospitals, 34 academies, and four residences for orphans or the aged in five states and Mexico.

### Quotation

*We depend on you all, my dear Sisters, to aid us both by your prayers and by being as economical as possible that every cent may be put to profit for the continuance of our work.*

### Photo

University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio.

### Sources

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