

**Venerable Jeanne Mance
(France/Canada) 1606-1673**

*Lay missionary and immigrant to New France,
landing in Montreal, Quebec, in 1642.
Served as the first nurse in New France, working with the
sick in her home and then founding Hotel-Dieu Hospital,
the oldest hospital in Montreal in 1645
and directing its operations for 17 years.¹*



Jeanne Mance, nurse, co-founder of Montreal and founder of Hotel-Dieu hospital. The daughter of an attorney, Jeanne was born in 1606, and baptized on November 12, 1606 in Langres, France. Her mother died prematurely, and Jeanne cared for her 11 brothers and sisters. “She is thought to have developed nursing skills working with charitable local societies during the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648).”² She cared for the victims of the war and the plague in her town.

Once her siblings were older and her father had passed away, Jeanne decided to become a missionary to Quebec. She joined the Societe de Notre-Dame de Montreal which was created in Paris in 1640 to found a colony on the Island of Montreal. “The group had acquired Montreal Island with a view of turning it into a missionary hub for converting indigenous people to Catholicism. Their plan was to push westward past the existing settlement at Quebec and set up a wilderness mission astride the trade routes of the powerful Haudenosaunee (Iroquois).”²

On the voyage, she provided nursing care to people on board the ship. Once in Quebec, she helped families clear land to build their homes. The Canadian Encyclopedia describes these initial days:

In May 1642, Jeanne Mance and her companions arrived on Montreal Island. There they pitched tents and began living in woods. Fifty five of them (including 10 women) remained on the Island as winter fell. The next year Mance set up a small hospital within the fort’s palisades. The hospital quickly attracted ailing Wendat (Huron), who were allied with the French. They became Christian converts as well as patients. Some beds had to be reserved for French settlers wounded by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) warriors resisting French encroachment on their trade routes.²

Jeanne Mance oversaw the initial construction of Hotel-Dieu Hospital in Montreal whose doors were open to everyone in 1645. In 1649, she returned to France to revive support for the settlement. When the Jesuit mission of Saint Marie des Hurons collapsed in 1649, Montreal became the front-line in the Franco-Iroquois conflict. Greater than one third of the colonist were killed and most moved into the fort in an effort to survive. By mid 1651 only 17 militiamen were left to face 200 Iroquois warriors.

Jeanne Mance convinced co-founder and governor of the colony, Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve, to return to France and secure the permission of their major benefactor, Madame Angelique de Buillion (widow of a French finance minister) to use the hospital’s endowment to recruit colonists. This event, known as the Great Recruitment, is believed to have saved the colony. They arrived in 1653.

Among the 177 colonists recruited was Marguerite Bourgeoys who became Maisonneuve's and Jeanne Mance's partner in the administration of the colony. (Canonized on October 31, 1982, St. Marguerite Bourgeoys founded the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, an uncloistered community, an innovation at the time, which received its civil charter from Louis XIV in 1671 and canonical approbation by decree of the Bishop of Quebec in 1676 with its constitution approved in 1698. They were a teaching order with the apostolate to promote the family, parish and diocesan endeavors).⁵ Jeanne Mance was a lay nurse being neither a nun or religious sister. She served as the colony's official treasurer, director of supplies and hospital director.

Jeanne Mance returned to France in 1658, after a fall on the ice that caused her to lose the use of her right arm. The next year she returned to Montreal, her arm miraculously cured. She brought with her the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph who cared for the sick at Hotel-Dieu, the hospital that Jeanne Mance oversaw for the rest of her life. Before she died, in 1672 Jeanne Mance laid one of the first stones of what would become Montreal's Notre Dame cathedral.

She ran the hospital for 17 years. Jeanne Mance died of illness in Montreal, New France (current day Canada), on June 18, 1673, when she was 67 year old. In 2014, Pope Francis recognized Jeanne's heroic virtues and declared her venerable. Her tomb is conserved today (2021) in the chapel of the Musee des Hospitalieres de l'Hotel-Dieu on Pine Avenue in Montreal.⁶

*"There is nothing in the world that I would refuse to do
to accomplish the divine and all-loving will of God.
It is the only desire and love of my heart. Therein is my passion,
all my affections, my only love, and my sole paradise."*⁷

Reference:

- 1) "Venerable Jeanne Mance". CatholicSaints.Info. 13 March 2020. Web. 8 December 2021.
<<https://catholicsaints.info/venerable-jeanne-mance/>>
- 2) Jan Noel (2021). Jeanne Mance in The Canadian Encyclopedia.
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/jeanne-mance>. Accessed 13 Mar 2022.
- 5) Vatican News Service. Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700) foundress of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame.
https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_19821031_bourgeoys_en.html (accessed 16Oct2021).
- 6) Pointe-A-Calliere. Jeanne Mance, co-founder of Montreal. <https://pacmusee.qc.ca/en/stories-of-montreal/article/jeanne-mance-co-founder-of-montreal/> (accessed 16Oct2021).
- 7) Challenge: Catholic Youth Ministry. Saint of the Month: Venerable Jeanne Mance. Accessed 16 October 2021. <https://challengeyouthministry.com/saint-of-the-month-venerable-jeanne-mance/>

Note: This biography is for all desiring to grow in holiness and follow His Holiness Pope Pius XI address to 2000 nurses assembled at Castel Gondolfo on August 27, 1935 for the II World Congress of Catholic Nurses (www.ciciams.org / www.nacn-usa.org): *to first and foremost bring the Christian supernatural, Christ to our patients, bring salvation to souls*. May it also help nursing students with your Nursing History course. Source: Diana L. Ruzicka (2022). *The Book of Nurse Saints*. Available at www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka