

In 1983, **Sister Bernadette O'Reilly** (Sisters of Sion) and **Sister Lesley Sacouman** (Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary) became Executive Co-Directors after Sister Gerry became too ill to continue.

“It was difficult to think of anyone other than Sister Mac leading Rossbrook House- but she ensured a succession that would keep her much loved street educated staff on a good path by asking Sister Lesley Sacouman, who was running Eagles Circle School, and Sister Bernadette O'Reilly who was running the Rising Sun High School Program, to take over Rossbrook House as executive co-directors. It was a steep learning curve for both sides, but when the staff presented each of the Sisters with beautifully beaded moccasins in their first year, it was symbolic that they would walk side-by-side through thick-and-thin.

The Sisters made Rossbrook House a more welcoming place for young women as well as younger children, and the staff grew and blossomed with new programming initiatives. Sister Bernadette and her fellow Sion sisters often spent evenings after their workdays, building community as they sat around tables beading and telling stories - laughter filled many lonely places. Sister Lesley was always ready to respond to participants' emergencies (which were never ending) and build wider communities of supporters to make the work possible. Both Sisters put Rossbrook on the map through their advocacy of social justice and reconciliation issues and the compelling speeches they made throughout the city and beyond.”

-Phil Chiappetta, Retired/Former Executive Director

Sister Bernadette O'Reilly

Sister Bernadette came to Winnipeg in 1979 from Toronto. With three of her Sisters of Sion, she answered the call to create a community in the inner city of Winnipeg. In 1979, she brought her passion for teaching to the off-campus junior high school *Eagles' Circle* and, at the request of the graduating students, created the high school *Rising Sun* in 1982.

Sister B (*as she is affectionately called at Rossbrook House*) helped to shape and guide Rossbrook House. She and Sister Lesley Sacouman became Executive Co-Directors, a position Sister B held until her retirement in 2006. At that time family members created the Sister Bernadette O'Reilly Post Secondary Scholarship and several students receive the Sister Bernadette O'Reilly scholarship at the annual Open House.

In 2019, Sister B moved to Saskatoon to live with the Sion community and continue the meaningful work that she so loved. In 2023 she received the Order of Canada at a ceremony held in Saskatoon.

Sister Lesley Sacouman

Sister Lesley helped to initiate a number of projects. In 1990 she helped start Anishinaabe Oway-Ishi, an education/employment program for Indigenous youth. In 1997, she initiated Esther House, a safe and supportive home for women in recovery from addiction and in 2004, she founded Holy Names House of Peace, a refuge in the heart of the city that empowers newcomer women to begin anew. In 2024, she retired from House of Peace and is presently living at The Salvation Army in Sarah's Place, a program for vulnerable women who have been human trafficked.

"I taught for 17 years. Eight of those years were in Catholic schools and I was very happy. However, when we moved into the inner-city, I wanted to teach the youth who were coming to our home. I applied to Winnipeg School Division No 1 and began teaching at Hugh John MacDonald in 1975. In 1976, it was evident that many of the youth coming to Rossbrook House were not attending school, so, Sister Gerry and I went to the WSD Board to request opening an alternative junior high school within Rossbrook House. Our dream was approved and in late April 1977, I walked up and down the streets looking for my first students. We named our school Eagles' Circle. Little did we know then that Wi Wabigooni and Rising Sun were in the que.

Three years later, the Sisters of Sion returned to Winnipeg and Sister Bernadette O'Reilly became my teacher's aid. In 1983, when Sister Gerry became too sick to continue working, the Chair of the Board asked me if I would be the Executive Director. I had no administrative experience and didn't feel I could do it alone. Fortunately, Sister Bernadette was available, and we became Executive Co-Directors. Gerry mentored both of us and introduced us to key players in the political and professional realms. "Life is a daring adventure or it is nothing," said Helen Keller. "Ditto," said Bernadette and I.

In 2001, after 25 years, I had a two-month sabbatical and went to live and work with people in a shelter in New York City. When I returned, I knew I wanted not only to work with people but to live with them also. In 2004, property became available and I started Holy Names House of Peace, a home where newcomer women could begin life anew. In 2006, I retired from Rossbrook House.

God has always used me to start things- Rossbrook House, Esther House, House of Peace. But at 80 years old you do not start something new, so I did not know what the future held. One day a friend of mine, who works with The Salvation Army, visited. She was all excited because she had just opened a transitional home for vulnerable women who had been sexually exploited and human trafficked. God was not finished with me yet! Today I live at Sarah's Place.

We are the sum of all our relations. I am grateful to all of my transformative life educators, my mentors -who brought me to my knees, enlarged my heart, and emboldened me to go the distance and not count the cost. Many of them are the resilient children and youth of

Rossbrook House whose lives bear witness and continue to cry out for Truth and Reconciliation.”

-Sister Lesley Sacouman, SNJM, Former Executive Co-Director, Rossbrook House