

Unique 'School for the Children' Founded, Operated by Two Women

There's a great deal more to starting a new school than finding classrooms, a group of pupils and competent teachers.

Mrs. Murray G. Ballantyne and Mrs. John Howlett of Montreal can vouch for this. The two women were instrumental in the establishment of the Priory School in Montreal nearly 13 years ago.

It was, they said in an interview, a full-time job in the initial phase. "It took us six months to get the Priory School going at all," Mrs. Ballantyne said. "At first we had to give pretty well all our time to the school."

After 12 full years of operation "the school still demands a great deal of our time," Mrs. Ballantyne said. She gives two hours a day to sharing the responsibilities of principal with Mrs. Nelson Potter, who joined the two women after the school had operated about 18 months. Mrs. Potter is the school's managing director. She lives in residence and is in charge of all internal operations of the school.

The Priory is the only school of its kind in Montreal. It is unique in that it is the only private and independent school which operates for Roman Catholic boys and girls between the ages of five and 12 years.

By SHIRLEY McNEILL

One of the reasons the school was started is explained in its

Woman's World

brochure. "Independent schools have freedom of organization. They offer a wide range of classes. Within the classes, small numbers permit not only more individual attention to the child, but also the use of more flexible and advanced techniques."

Mrs. Howlett explained further: "It is a school for the children. We were opposed to the idea of 'children for the school'. We had seen evidence around us that children had too little interest in their studies and we wanted a school where pupils would want to learn and would enjoy learning."

Mrs. Ballantyne and Mrs. Howlett had known each other for some years and were aware of each other's interest and concern in matters of education.

Mrs. Ballantyne had made a

comprehensive study of education and one of her chief interests was the curriculum. She was also concerned, with Mrs. Howlett and later, Mrs. Potter, in engaging teachers prepared to use advanced teaching techniques while providing a traditional program of studies.

In consultation with an educator, she chose textbooks. The criteria of selection was good presentation of material, good English, and cultural value. Mrs. Ballantyne evaluated the books according to the soundness of the writers' educational and cultural background and knowledge.

The spade work for the school was over in the fall of 1947 and the school opened in several rooms above St. Victor's parish hall in Notre Dame de Grace. There were 25 pupils. About a year later the church required the premises so the school had to move.

A house was purchased on the Boulevard and the Priory established itself in the premises it still uses. It was one of the financial outlays for which Mrs. Ballantyne and Mrs. Howlett and board members, all parents at that time, had prepared themselves.

"We had assessed the financial risk before the school

ever opened," Mrs. Ballantyne said. "Both Mrs. Howlett and I felt that, for a short while, we could assume the risk."

84 Pupils

Today 84 pupils attend the school. They spend eight years in the school and when they graduate they are ready for high school. They are accepted by all high school in the city, Mrs. Howlett said. Children work at their own speed and since classes are kept small by design, each pupil gets considerable individual attention.

Mrs. Potter explained: "A child who learns quickly will not necessarily be advanced to the next grade when he completes the work required of him. This has been done but what we try to do is give more depth to what he has already learned."

The school's approach to learning is "active", Mr. Ballantyne said. "We feel children learn by doing." They also hold the theory that what a child learns in school should be related to his life and learning outside the school. "We want to add to the experience he gains outside," said Mrs. Potter.



A class at the Priory School has a visit from Mrs. Murray G. Ballantyne, standing at right, Mrs. Ballantyne and her colleagues, Mrs. Nelson Potter and

Mrs. John Howlett, make occasional visits to classes to see how pupils are progressing.

(Gazette Photo Service)