



Discovering Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne

The woman who prays always

Philippe

A resource for pupils and teachers



Table of Contents

Introduction 04

Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne—Her Story..... 06

The Power of Friendship..... 11

The Challenge of Frontiers..... 14

Displacement—The Everlasting Social Problem 16



This teaching and learning resource marks the bicentenary of the arrival of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne and her companions to the New World in 1818. Philippine, a Sister of the Society of the Sacred Heart, set sail from Bordeaux with four companions on a ship called ‘Rebecca’. Having sailed in difficult conditions for ten weeks, they arrived in New Orleans on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, May 29, 1818. Some weeks later they sailed up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Missouri in a steam boat, a trip of forty days, arriving on August 22, 1818.

Philippine founded the first free school west of the Mississippi. Today, because of Philippine’s mission and her deep friendship with Sophie Barat, the Founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart, the Society is a global organisation with a presence in forty one countries.

There is much written and many resources available on Philippine and Sophie. This resource for teachers and pupils aims to capture the character and courage of Philippine, her deep faith, her humanity and her persistence in times of adversity.

Philippine and Sophie were pioneering women who were also great friends. They lived through the horror and violence of the French Revolution and faced many challenges in the New World, crossing frontiers that had never been crossed with deep faith, humility, conviction and compassion.

By studying the story of Saint Rose Philippine, her long and enduring love and friendship with Sophie, the many challenges of the time, the frontiers she crossed and the displacement she witnessed, our teachers and pupils will gain insight into their time and life as it was 200 years ago.

The [Four Calls of the Chapter of the Society of the Sacred Heart 2016](#), for us to ‘live more humanly’, ‘to embrace silence’, ‘to cross new frontiers’, and ‘to become one body’, are all reflected in the story of Philippine and in her friendship with Sophie.

Philippine was a woman of deep faith who displayed great humanity.

The Potawatomi people named her the ‘woman who prays always’.

Her crossing of frontiers to the New World reminds us of the many frontiers we face in our lives today.

A Note for Teachers

The Activities listed after each section are intended to be used as indicated i.e., as questions that can be put to individual pupils or to groups and also used for discussion or to debate topics.

There are also many cross-curricular possibilities associated with the material, especially in the history, geography and social areas.

These provide the opportunity for different learning modes such as ‘inquiry based’ and ‘cooperative learning’.

For example, pupils might be asked to carry out research on Native American tribes who were displaced and write an essay, complete a project or discuss findings with colleagues.

In cooperative mode, pupil groups might be asked to read different parts of a section, such as the Friendship section.

Then a representative of each group would ‘teach’ the other groups what has been learned.

“Five goals of Sacred Heart Education: Faith, Intellect, Character, Community and Social Awareness.”

Sacred Heart Schools

There is an opportunity to explore the story, themes and activities in the context of the five Goals of Sacred Heart education, Faith, Intellect, Character, Community and Social Awareness, and any of the above mentioned methods can be adopted.



Mississippi River, Louisiana, 1800s

Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne *Her Story...*



A Young Girl Decides her Future

In 1787, an eighteen-year-old girl left her parents' house in Grenoble in the Kingdom of France. She was with her aunt and they were going to visit the Visitation Convent at Sainte Marie-d'en-Haut.

The girl came from a privileged family and had been a student in the school there six years before, when she was twelve. At that time, she had told her parents that she wanted to join the Visitation Sisters. When her father heard this, he removed her from the school.

During the visit with her aunt she decided to stay there and join the Sisters. She knew her parents were totally against this, so she sent her aunt back home to give them the news.

In 1818, this same girl, now aged 49, left France on a three-month sea trip to America. She stayed until she died in 1852 aged 83. The schools of the Society of the Sacred Heart which she founded then formed the foundation for the twenty four Sacred Heart schools which are in the United States and Canada today.

She lived through a time of great social and political change. She has been described as severe, lonely, stubborn, strong willed, impetuous, generous, kind and holy. Her name is Rose Philippine Duchesne and this is her story.

Revolution causes great change

Less than two years after Philippine entered the convent, the French Revolution began. Lasting from 1789 until 1799, it was a period of far-reaching social and political upheaval. The Visitation Sisters were forced to leave the convent at Sainte Marie.

Philippine returned home and risked her freedom and her life by nursing prisoners, bringing priests to the faithful, and teaching and feeding poor children.

Following the end of the revolution, she took over the building at Sainte Marie and established a boarding school there.

Meeting a lifelong friend

In 1800, Madeline Sophie Barat had founded the Society of the Sacred Heart. She was from Burgundy, in France, very well educated, a leader and organiser. Father Joseph Varin was an advisor and spiritual guide to Sophie.

He also knew Philippine and told Sophie about her, describing her as "a great and generous soul". He suggested that Sophie should make the journey to Grenoble to meet with her. She did and, from that day, Sophie and Philippine became lifelong friends.

Such was Philippine's admiration for Sophie that she handed over the convent to the Society of the Sacred Heart in 1805. She and her six companions became Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

In 1815, Philippine was sent to Paris to establish a Convent of the Sacred Heart and a school. She was then elected the first Secretary General of the Society. This put her at the centre of the Society's activities.

A childhood dream comes true

During her childhood, Philippine had heard many stories from missionary priests, of life in Louisiana in 'New France'. Philippine had long felt a desire to serve the Native Americans who lived there.

The opportunity came in 1817 when William Dubourg, Bishop of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Two Floridas, visited Paris. He wished to recruit nuns who would establish schools for the Native Americans and French children in his diocese.

Sophie was about to send Bishop Dubourg away empty-handed, when Philippine knelt before her and beseeched her, "Your consent, Reverend Mother, do give your consent!"

This dramatic gesture must have been convincing. Sophie promised to allow some of the Sisters to travel in the Spring.

Sailing to the New World

Philippine (now aged 49) parted from Sophie after fourteen years of close friendship. She sailed from Bordeaux with four companions on a ship called 'Rebecca'.

They were ten weeks at sea. They endured violent storms, seasickness, spoiled food, cramped conditions, and even pirates.



Philippine aboard the 'Rebecca'

They arrived in New Orleans on the [Feast of the Sacred Heart](#), May 29, 1818. Some weeks later they sailed up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Missouri, a trip of forty days, arriving on August 22, 1818.

In September that year, Philippine opened a school in a log cabin in nearby St. Charles, Missouri. This was the Academy of the Sacred Heart, the first free school west of the Mississippi.

It opened with three students. The frontier conditions were a challenge, but even more so was the limited population. Philippine was forced to close the school after one year and open a new one in the nearby town of Florissant.

Philippine lacked a gift for languages and speaking English was a lifelong trial. She undertook the most menial of chores: tending livestock, chopping wood, gardening, mending shoes and clothing, nursing the sick and making soap and candles.

She often slept in a small closet under the stairs so she could slip in without disturbing others after her all-night prayers in the chapel. She survived challenging conditions and yellow fever but suffered persistent feelings of failure.

Persistence and Humility

While Philippine was not a natural leader, she was persistent. She chose to live life with humility, doing the best she could and trusting in her relationship with Jesus and her pupils. She faced battles, took risks and trusted. She wasn't beaten by discouragement.

She had a lot of illness, experienced great hardship and challenges to her leadership. She once asked Madeleine Sophie to release her from her leadership duties and Sophie did not agree.

“But, times are changing and we too must adapt and change.”

Sophie Barat to Philippine Duchesne
Paris, 30 November, 1831



Philippine and the Potawatomi

Philippine was subsequently responsible for five convents in Missouri and Louisiana. Her schools were the first in St. Louis to educate children of colour. She also opened the first orphanage in St. Louis.

With the Potawatomi at Sugar Creek, Kansas

In 1841, the Jesuits asked the Sisters of the Sacred Heart to join them in a new mission at Sugar Creek, Kansas, in order to establish a school for Potawatomi girls. [The Potawatomi](#) are a Native American people of the Great Plains.

At age 71 and frail, Philippine was not selected for the mission. However, Father Verhaegen, the Jesuit priest who was leading the mission said,

“She may not be able to do much work, but she will assure success to the mission by praying for us.”

Philippine is finally to realise her dream of life among the Native Indians. Unable to master their language, she was not able to teach, so she would spend long periods in prayer.

The children named her 'Quahkahkanumad', which translates as 'Woman Who Prays Always'. Although she was in Sugar Creek for just a short time, she made a deep impression on the Potawatomi people.

Philippine's final years

In 1842, having spent a year among the Potawatomi people, Philippine's health had deteriorated. She returned to St. Charles and spent the last 10 years of her life there, nursing children in the infirmary and praying.

Philippine died on November 18, 1852, aged 83 in her little room in St. Charles and was buried in the convent cemetery.

Later, her remains were removed to a shrine build in her honour at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, St. Charles. She was beatified in 1940 and canonised a Saint on July 3, 1988 by Pope John Paul II.

Philippine felt deep in her heart that her mission and purpose was guided by God. This faith made her courageous and strong. It drove her capacity to love and to serve with determination.

“We cultivate a very small field for Christ, but we love it, knowing that God does not require great achievements but a heart that holds back nothing for self. The truest crosses are those we do not choose ourselves... He who has Jesus has everything.”

Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne, 1782

Activities related to Philippine's Story

These activities may be used as questions to individuals or groups or as discussion or debate topics.

- I. What type of social changes did Philippine experience (a) in France and (b) in America?
- II. The story tells us that Philippine 'has been described as severe, lonely, stubborn, strong willed, impetuous, kind and holy'. Can you describe your own personal characteristics?
- III. What, would you suggest, were Philippine's major challenges during her time in America?
- IV. Can you identify some of Philippine's strengths and weaknesses?
- V. Philippine did not see herself as a leader but Sophie would not relieve her of the role. Why do you think Sophie made that decision?
- VI. Why did Father Verhaegen argue that Philippine should be allowed to accompany him to Sugar Creek?
- VII. Philippine was known by the Potawatomi as the 'woman who prays always'. Write a prayer asking that everyone you know will enjoy joy and peace.
- VIII. France was not the only European country to have colonies in America. Can you identify the others?

Do the things you have learned about Philippine remind you, in any way, of the five Goals of Sacred Heart Education: Faith, Character, Intellect, Community and Social Awareness?



Mount Anville School, Dublin, Ireland

The Power of Friendship



'The Visitation', by Ann Davidson, RSCJ

What is a friend?

We may know many people but we may not see every one of them as a friend. A friend is something more than a colleague or an acquaintance – we feel closer to a friend.

We will share our thoughts, feelings, emotions, likes, dislikes and challenges with a friend. This sharing is considered to be a characteristic of friendship.

Openness and honesty are key factors. We know our friends will understand. This relationship is mutual. Our friends will similarly share with us.

Philippine and Sophie's friendship

Friendship can develop very quickly but can last a lifetime. Friends may not see each other for many years but their friendship remains steadfast.

Saint Philippine first met Sophie in 1804 when Sophie visited Sainte Marie-d'en-Haut, the Visitation Convent at Grenoble.

Sophie had heard of Philippine's work and was hoping to establish a new community for the Society of the Sacred Heart in Grenoble.

Philippine knew that Sophie had founded the Society and admired her very much. She expressed this admiration falling at Sophie's feet, saying, "How lovely on the mountain are the feet of those who bring the gospel of peace".

This was a quote from the Book of Isaiah. Sophie remarked some years later. "I was utterly dumbfounded at the sight of such faith and humility, and I did not know what to say or do."

They seem to have become friends immediately. Philippine joined the Society in 1805. One notable incident brought them even closer together.

Sophie was ill with cancer and spent time with Philippine who nursed her. Sophie later wrote about this experience.

"You know the state I was in when I left you. I was still in Lyon when all symptoms had disappeared. All disappeared in a night. I am completely healed."

Sophie Barat to Philippine Duchesne, Poitiers, 1 August, 1806

Philippine's mission with the Society was directly under the leadership of Sophie until 1818. Then she departed to America on her mission to educate Native American and French children in Missouri.

From then on Philippine and Sophie's only possible means of communication was by letter. They never saw each other again.

Friends may be very different

Friendship does not depend on similarity or agreement. In many ways Sophie and Philippine were very different personalities.

Sophie was responsible for the whole Society and Philippine was in charge of the Society's mission in Louisiana.

Philippine was never attracted to the role of leadership while it seems that Sophie was a natural leader. The conditions and cultures they were experiencing were very different. Inevitably, their views were often different.

For example, Philippine wrote to Sophie and asked her if the Society could accept black women into their community. This was a radical request in 1818 when most black people in America were slaves.

Sophie told Philippine that it would not be wise to do so at that time, as it could damage the Society's progress.

However, Sophie understood Philippine's urge to include them, promising that,

“Later on we will see what we can do for the black women.”

Sophie Barat to Philippine Duchesne, Paris, 5 November, 1818



Sophie and Philippine Stained Glass Window

In response to Philippine's description of the social and cultural differences she was experiencing, Sophie wrote,

“I understand that you cannot follow all our customs to the letter and that we have to take into account place and circumstances. But at least we have to tend towards uniformity...I sense your pain and how much you must be suffering now. If only we could actually meet, then we would be able to talk about your cherished plans with the love we all have for your community and especially for you.”

Sophie Barat to Philippine Duchesne, Paris, 16 April, 1820

Both of these remarkable women lived through the horror and violence of the French Revolution but never gave in to adversity.

From 1818 until Philippine's death in 1852 they spent their lives far apart. Their friendship remained intact throughout.

Activities related to The Power of Friendship

These activities may be used as questions to individuals or groups or as discussion or debate topics.

- I. Assume a friend has asked you to describe friendship, how would you describe it?
- II. Think of a friend you have, in what ways are you similar and different?
- III. Do you think it is difficult to be friends with a person who is different from you?
- IV. Assume a friend has asked you to describe the friendship between Sophie and Philippine, how would you describe it?
- V. In what ways were Philippine and Sophie different?
- VI. Philippine did not see or meet Sophie in the last thirty four years of her life, why do you think this did not affect their friendship?
- VII. Philippine was known as the 'woman who prays always' by the Potawatomi, write a prayer asking that everyone you know will enjoy joy and peace.

How do you think Philippine's and Sophie's relationship and friendship link to the five Goals of Sacred Heart education: Faith, Character, Intellect, Community and Social Awareness?



St. Catherine's College, Armagh, Ireland

The Challenge of Frontiers

What is a frontier?

The word 'frontier' comes from the Old French word 'fronter'. In ordinary usage it implies a geographical boundary or border between countries. In the America of Philippine's time it referred to the area between the land settled by colonies from Europe and the unknown, undeveloped territory to the west.

Since then, the 'Wild West' has gained mythical status. Pioneering frontiersmen, such as Daniel Boone, Davey Crockett, Kit Carson and Wild Bill Hickock have been made famous by novels, comic books and films. All of these men were active during Philippine's time in America.

The frontier was seen as an obstacle or a challenge, calling on great courage and commitment to overcome it and prevail. A challenge may be physical, intellectual, emotional or spiritual. Sometimes it can be a combination of these components. Philippine faced many such frontiers in her lifetime.

Crossing the frontier

In everyday life many challenges arise. Crossing the frontier to meet the challenge requires us to take appropriate action. We cannot forecast a guaranteed outcome with total certainty so, we must draw on our internal resources to navigate a way through.

Bravery, commitment and persistence may be necessary. We must deal with disappointment and lack of certainty. We may often feel lonely. In many ways we must be stubborn. It is no coincidence that Philippine has been described as 'severe, lonely, stubborn, strong willed, impetuous, kind and holy'.

In her determination to join a religious order she defied her father's instructions, confident that she was making the right decision. Later, she risked her life to help those suffering under the rule of the Revolution. In the early 19th century, she sailed from France to America.

This was an extremely hazardous journey. Her steamboat journey along the Mississippi was also dangerous. Her ambition was to educate the Native American Potawatomi people, but she couldn't speak their language.

Nevertheless, she managed to build a close relationship with them that is still recognised today. She lived through illness and disease and never ceased to pray.



Steamboat Mississippi River, 1800s

How did Philippine deal with her challenges?

Philippine pursued her own vision and mission in spite of her own negative perceptions of her abilities. She drew on values based on her absolute belief in God, Jesus and the Sacred Heart. The power of prayer compensated for any perceived shortcomings and fears of failure.

Activities related to The Challenge of Frontiers

These activities may be used as questions to individuals or groups or as discussion or debate topics.

- I. What does the word frontier mean to you?
- II. How many different types of frontier can you suggest?
- III. What kinds of frontiers did Philippine cross in her life?
- IV. What personal characteristics did she need in order to cross these frontiers?
- V. Why do you think Philippine faced the challenge of going from France to the United States of America?
- VI. What strengths of character do you think Philippine depended on in order to face her challenges?
- VII. In what ways do you think prayer helped Philippine face her challenges?
- VIII. What challenges do you think foreign people who come to live and work in Ireland face?

How do you think the issues raised in the Challenges to Frontiers topic link to the five Goals of Sacred Heart education: Faith, Character, Intellect, Community and Social Awareness?

Displacement

The Everlasting Social Problem

What is displacement?

The term *displacement*, in the context used here, refers to the forced movement of people from their local area or region to another.

In general, when people are displaced, they end up in unfamiliar places with no opportunity to earn a living. The following quote from the [United Nations High Commission for Refugees \(UNHCR\) tells the story.](#)

“...persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee, or leave, their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, and habitual violations of human rights, as well as natural or man-made disasters.”

The statement above applies to *internal displacement* which means that the displaced people do not cross international borders to another country.

Those who are displaced to another country are known as *refugees*. Displacement is a serious social problem, with millions of people of all ages suffering on a daily basis.

Philippine's time

Philippine (1769 - 1852) lived in a period of dramatic social and political change. She lived through the French Revolution which started in 1789 and lasted for ten years.

The Revolution caused the violent displacement of the ruling aristocracy in France and influenced political change in many other countries.

While Philippine was a young woman, dreaming of getting to America, the thirteen British colonies there were winning the War of Independence with Britain (1775–1783), having founded the United States of America (USA).

These colonies and other settlers had displaced many of the Native American people, who were then known as Indians. This continued through Philippine's lifetime, as the settlers moved further west.

After she died (1852) the series of battles known as The Great Sioux War took place (1854 - 1890), including two of the most famous, namely Little Big Horn and Wounded Knee. Both have been the subject of much research and many books and films. The displacement of the Native American tribes is still a troubled topic of discussion.

Before Philippine arrived in America, the Potawatomi tribes had expanded their lands by conflict with other tribes. However, they began to lose land as the number of white settlers increased. In 1830, the Indian Removal Act was passed. This allowed the government to relocate Native Americans in the east to regions west of the Mississippi River.

The Potawatomi were no exception, leading to the infamous Potawatomi Trail of Death in 1838. This was the forced displacement of many of them from Indiana to Kansas.

They were accompanied by Father Benjamin Marie Petit on the journey. He became ill on the return journey and died at the age of 27. There is a Potawatomi Trail of Death marker in Saint Philippine Duchesne Park in Linn County, Kansas in his honour.

There were many other displaced peoples in America. Most black Americans (African Americans) were slaves in Philippine's time and many Irish people were indentured labourers with few rights. Slavery was legal until 1865 when the 13th Amendment of the American Constitution was passed.

In Ireland

During its complex history, Ireland has experienced displacement caused by violence and natural disaster. Philippine would probably never have heard of the conflict between the Gaelic Ulster lords and the British Crown in the late 16th Century.

This war resulted in two famous events—the Battle of Kinsale (1603) and then, the Flight of the Earls, as the lords escaped to Europe (1607). Following these events, the Plantation of Ulster took place. The land of the displaced Irish Catholic landowners was occupied by settlers, also known as *planters*, from Scotland and England.

In the last decade of Philippine's life the Great Famine, an Gorta Mór, occurred (1845 – 1852). The Famine resulted in starvation, poverty and eviction from homes. It is estimated that around one million people died and a million more were forced to emigrate, many to America.

Although the Famine also affected other European countries, Ireland was affected the most because of the large number of people totally dependent on the potato crop. The population of the country was reduced by almost twenty five percent.



Deserted famine cottage, West of Ireland

Activities related to Displacement *The Everlasting Social Problem*

These activities may be used as questions to individuals or groups or as discussion or debate topics.

- I. What does the word displacement mean to you?
- II. Do you know the difference between an internally displaced person and a refugee?
- III. What kind of displacement was taking place during the French Revolution in Sophie and Philippine's time?
- IV. What displaced peoples did Philippine encounter in the United States?
- V. Can you identify any displacement occurrences in the history of Ireland?
- VI. Research the history of the European potato blight. Find out the size of the population of Ireland before and after the Great Famine.
- VII. What do you think governments should do to assist refugees?

How do you think the issues raised in Displacement-the Everlasting Social Problem topic link to the five Goals of Sacred Heart education: Faith, Character, Intellect, Community and Social Awareness?



Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne
1818-2018
 *200 Years*
CROSSING FRONTIERS 