

*The Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta Vocation Group invites you  
and your family to read the story of one person who made a difference.  
Why not read this story around the family dining table?*

## Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne

What does the first female saint west of the Mississippi River have to do with the Potawatomi Indians who were forcibly marched from Indiana to Kansas in 1838? Many people have never heard of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne. She is a relatively new saint, having been canonized in 1988 by Pope John Paul II, but her work at the Sugar Creek Mission near Centerville, Kansas, endeared her to the Potawatomi. They gave her the name of “Kwah-kah-kum-ad,” *the Woman who Prays Always*.

Born in 1769 in Grenoble, France, of a wealthy family, Philippine learned political skills from her father and a love of the poor from her mother. She entered the convent at 19 and lived there until the convent was closed during the French Revolution. At that time, Philippine began taking care of the poor and sick, opened a school for street children, and risked her life helping priests in the underground. She joined the Society of the Sacred Heart in 1804 under the leadership of Mother Madeleine Sophie Barat. In 1818 at the age of 49, she arrived in America and assumed responsibility for five struggling convents – three in Missouri and two in Louisiana.

In 1841 the Jesuit fathers asked the Society to join them in a new mission with the Potawatomi Indians in eastern Kansas along Sugar Creek. The Jesuit priest working with the Potawatomi, Father Petit, had contracted typhoid fever and died in St. Louis in 1839. Philippine had heard of his death and often expressed outrage at the government’s treatment of the Indians. She desperately longed to help them, but at age 71 she no longer had the strength to work. Father Verhaegen insisted that Mother Duchesne be allowed to go, insisting that her prayers would assure their success. He said, “Her very presence will draw down all manner of heavenly favors on the work.”

She commented on the faith of the Potawatomi Indians and how they cared for each other and gathered daily for Morning Prayer, Mass, catechism, and Evening Prayer. The Potawatomi loved the “good old lady” and brought her all kinds of gifts from fresh corn to sweet clean straw for her pallet. The story is told that when they went to sleep at night, the Indians saw Rose Philippine praying and the next morning she was in the same position, still praying. Wondering if she really was praying all night, they put little pebbles (or acorns or leaves) on her long robe. The next morning the pebbles were still there, indicating that she did indeed pray all night.

She lived with the Potawatomi for only about one year. Her health could not sustain the regimen of village life, so in 1842 she returned to St. Charles, Missouri, although her heart never lost its desire for missions. She died on November 18, 1852, at the age of 83. She was a model and inspiration to those around her, facing all the hardships of pioneer work. Her feast day is November 18.

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## P R A Y F O R V O C A T I O N S

*Promoting vocations is the responsibility of everyone.*

One person CAN make a difference!



Blessed Mother Teresa