

Transforming Catholic Women's Education in the Sixties: Sister Catherine Wallace's Feminist Leadership at Mount Saint Vincent University¹

Transformando la educación católica de las mujeres en los años sesenta: el liderazgo feminista de la Hermana Catherine Wallace de la Universidad Mount Saint Vincent

Transformer l'éducation des femmes catholiques durant les soixante: Le leadership féministe de Sœur Catherine Wallace à l'Université Mount St. Vincent

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ABSTRACT

Sister Catherine Wallace (1917-91) was president of Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), Canada's only degree-granting women's post-secondary institution, from 1965 to 1974. Wallace's appointment coincided with a transformative era not only in the North American post-secondary landscape, but also in the Roman Catholic Church and the women's movement. Wallace was acutely aware that this combination of factors would require a transformation of MSVU itself for the institution to survive the next decade. Wallace ultimately strengthened MSVU's identity and gave it a more outward-looking vision by embedding many of the goals of second-wave feminism, including the recommendations of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1970), in the University's renewal. She also gave the university a more national profile through her work on the executive of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), including in 1973 as their first woman president.

Keywords: Catherine Wallace; Post-secondary education; Mount Saint Vincent University; feminism; Royal Commission on the Status of Women

RESUMEN

Sister Catherine Wallace (1917-1991) fue la presidenta de Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) desde 1965 a 1974. MSVU es la única institución pos-secundaria canadiense para mujeres que da grados académicos. El nombramiento de Sister Wallace coincidió con una era transformadora no solo de la educación pos-secundaria en América del Norte, sino de la Iglesia Católica misma, además del impacto del movimiento feminista. Wallace era muy consciente que esta combinación de factores requería una transformación de MSVU para que la institución sobreviviera en la siguiente década. Wallace fortaleció la identidad de MSVU y emprendió un proceso de renovación, una visión abierta al mundo al abrazar muchos de los objetivos de la segunda ola feminista, incluyendo las recomendaciones del Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1970). También le dió a su universidad un perfil más nacional a

través de su trabajo en el ejecutivo de la Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), de la cual fue la primera mujer presidenta en 1973.

Palabras clave: Catherine Wallace; educación post-secundaria; Mount Saint Vincent University; feminismo; Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

RÉSUMÉ

Sœur Catherine Wallace fut présidente de l'Université Mount St. Vincent (MSVU) de 1965 à 1974, l'unique institution post secondaire féminine octroyant des diplômes. La nomination de Wallace co- incidait avec une ère transformative non seulement dans le paysage nord-américain, mais aussi dans l'Église Catholique Romaine et le mouvement des femmes. Wallace était vivement consciente que ce concours de facteurs exigerait une transformation de l'identité de MSVU même, pour que l'institution survive la décennie suivante. Par la suite, Wallace renforça l'identité de MSVU et lui donna une vision plus orientée vers l'extérieur en implantant dans le renouveau de l'université un grand nombre des objectifs du féminisme de seconde vague, y compris les recommandations du Rapport de la Commission Royale sur le Statut des Femmes au Canada (1970). Elle donna aussi à l'Université un profil plus national par son travail à l'exécutif de l'Association des Universités et Collèges du Canada (AUCC), y compris comme première présidente féminine en 1973.

Mots-clés: Catherine Wallace, Éducation post-secondaire, Mount Saint Vincent University. Le féminisme, La Commission Royale sur le Statut des Femmes

From 1965 to 1974, Sister Catherine Wallace (1917-91) was president of Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU). Almost simultaneously with her appointment, the school ceased to be Mount Saint Vincent College (MSVC), the only degree-granting women's college in Canada, and became the only women's university in Canada, complete with Board of Governors and Senate.² Her appointment coincided with a transformative era not only in North American post-secondary education, but also in the Roman Catholic Church and in the women's movement. Wallace was convinced that MSVU must adapt to these revolutionary social forces if the institution were to flourish in the future.

Wallace built on sure foundations. The Sisters of Charity of Halifax (SCH)—the largest English-speaking congregation of women religious (sisters) in Canada, with houses in the United States—had long been devoted not only to serving the poor but also to educating young women. They had founded the original Mount Saint Vincent Academy, a girls' private day and boarding school, in 1873, and a normal school in 1905; between 1914 to 1940 they offered first and second year courses which could count towards a degree granted by Dalhousie University and in 1925 they opened Mount Saint Vincent College, with a charter and the right to grant degrees. The college was elevated to university status in 1966, just a month after Wallace's installation as president. From the beginning, in addition to providing a post-secondary, liberal arts education and several professional programs to lay women, the college educated the dozens of young women who entered the religious congregation every year.³ It was expected that the university would do more of the same, in an expanded fashion, during Wallace's presidency.

Student and faculty protests, new funding models, pressure to revitalize curricula, and increased competition in student recruitment created turbulence on college and university campuses in the 1960s.⁴ The new president needed to modernize MSVU in light of the issues common to all universities, as well as issues specific to MSVU, including the loss of its niche as

Halifax's only Catholic post-secondary institution that accepted women once Saint Mary's became co-educational in 1968. She would also need to integrate second-wave feminism into the institution's mandate in a way that would satisfy diverse stakeholders, including students, faculty, the broader public, and the Sisters of Charity, who continued to subsidize the institution. How she negotiated these issues was crucial. Wallace ultimately strengthened MSVU's identity by embedding many of the goals of second-wave feminism, including the recommendations of the Report of the *Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (1970), into the process of renewal. She gave the university a national profile by becoming, in 1973, the first woman president of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Her actions arose from her commitment to serve all levels of society, and especially to improve women's economic, social, and political status. Her strong legacy is tied to her uncanny ability to understand a problem and convince others of the particular solution she believed was needed.

By all accounts bright, charismatic, well-spoken, and determined, Wallace was the ideal choice for president. The child of Scottish and English working-class immigrants to the United States, Wallace had direct experience of the hardships and challenges experienced by poor people seeking an education. Just as the Great Depression began, Wallace's father, a Massachusetts textile-factory worker, became ill. He died in 1931, forcing his wife to take a cleaning job to support her two youngest children.⁵ At the time of her father's death, Wallace was 14 and attending St Patrick's school in Lawrence, Massachusetts, which was one of the schools in the United States run by the Sisters of Charity, Halifax. Three years later, at the minimum age requirement of 17, Wallace herself entered the Sisters of Charity.⁶ During the Depression, the convent may have held more appeal for women because it provided an education that many families could not afford and, certainly, the Sisters of Charity did experience an increase in entrance rates in the early 1930s.⁷ Wallace did not make this connection in her own case, however. She stated that her motivation for becoming a nun was to serve the poor, thereby making a connection with the earliest purpose of her congregation. Nor did she ever abandon that desire.

With characteristic humour, Wallace described her first two-and-a-half-years as a Sister of Charity as "absolute brainwashing," but added that this occurred "for the right reasons."⁸ She meant that religious congregations at the time reinforced the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience by encouraging corporate identity and worship and by suppressing individuality. That ideal existed in contrast to the changes that the Second Vatican Council encouraged in the 1960s, changes which Wallace came to support wholeheartedly. Having distinguished herself academically as a young postulant, Wallace was among a handful of young Sisters of Charity sent to study at Dalhousie University, where she completed a BA in 1939, at the age of 22.⁹ From there she received teaching assignments in the American schools run by the Sisters of Charity in Roxbury, Massachusetts for one year, and in New York City for three years. She then taught business classes for 10 years in Patchogue, New York. During the summers Wallace completed her MA and PhD in literary criticism at St John's College, Brooklyn, New York, before being made principal of a new, co-educational high school in Vancouver from 1952 to 1958, and then a professor in the English Department of MSVC from 1958 to 1966.¹⁰ In the summer of 1964, she served at the Centro Intercultural de Documentación, an educational centre in Cuernavaca, Mexico for missionaries. The Centre was run by radical priest, Ivan Illich, who personally asked Wallace's superior if Wallace could return in 1965 to become director of the humanities program. The mother general refused the request because she was about to appoint Wallace president of MSVU.¹¹

Wallace received her appointment as president of Mount Saint Vincent in January, 1965, in the way that before Vatican II, most male and female religious received their assignments: she

did not apply, she was not consulted, but was simply informed of her new position and given little room to refuse.¹² Even though she was a faculty member in MSVC's Department of English, and was regularly consulted by the superior of the congregation, Mother Irene Farmer (1913- 2003),¹³ Wallace was shocked to receive her presidential appointment. In 1991, she reflected that she had hoped to return to Cuernavaca in 1965 and then to join the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), where she could fulfil her call to serve the poor. In her own words, "[I thought] I was finally going to be able to work with the poor [in Cuernavaca] and meanwhile I was asked to be President of the University and work with the rich."¹⁴

Her existence as president would be lonely. In addition to her personal reservations, as incoming president of MSVU, Wallace would have to deal with serious challenges that threatened the existence of the institution, and she would have to deal with these challenges without making the situation known to other members of the congregation at the time or later.¹⁵ She would frequently feel isolated from other members of her congregation during her years as president. Such experiences must have contributed to her subsequent decision to leave the congregation. And that decision of course further complicated her relations with members of her community. It also meant that where there might have been institutional celebration and an institutional record of her achievements, there is only silence.¹⁶ This article constitutes an attempt to get beyond that silence.

Updating Mount Saint Vincent in the 1960s

Many university students and faculty across Canada embraced such 1960s social causes as anti-authoritarianism, pacifism, secularism, feminism, and civil rights. Students demanded changes, especially to the hierarchical structure of universities, which often treated them as children.¹⁷ These demands—voiced through teach-ins and other demonstrations—forced universities to reconsider their curricula, governance, and student codes of conduct. As Paul Axelrod and Catherine Gidney affirm, the liberal arts curriculum and the code of moral behaviour of most Canadian universities had not evolved for several decades. Axelrod explains that for the most part, "Universities could offer compulsory, demanding, and traditional courses of study ... on the confident assumption that all graduates—in the arts and elsewhere—would be absorbed into ... a growing economy."¹⁸

MSVU students did not protest the outdated curriculum or the political conservatism as students at Dalhousie University and the University of New Brunswick did, or as students did at Mundelein College, the largest Catholic women's university in the United States.¹⁹ However, President Wallace recognized that MSV's liberal arts and professional curricula needed updating to become relevant to the 1960s socio-economic context and to establish a stronger identity for the institution. MSVU's liberal arts curriculum had not changed since the 1930s, when Latin and Greek were only occasionally replaced by social science courses, and even Home Economics students were required to study theology, philosophy, biology, and English.²⁰ In 1964, on the eve of Wallace's appointment, the MSVU *Calendar* emphasized the moral benefits of MSV's liberal education program: the program would develop "all the faculties of soul and body and to train the mind and will to clear thought and action."²¹

MSV's buttressing of morality through a strict code of student behaviour was similarly out of step with the 1960s, and may have repelled rather than attracted students. Before Sister Catherine Wallace became president of MSVU, the expectations of womanly behaviour and faith practice were as strict as those in Protestant women's residences described by historian Catherine Gidney, requiring regular church attendance and a pre-approved list from parents regarding who their daughters were permitted to visit. The "General Regulations" section of the 1964-65 MSVU *Calendar* explained:

Conduct that gives evidence of womanly dignity is expected of every student, both on and off the campus....The religious services of the College viz., daily Mass, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, frequentation of the Sacrament, the Annual Retreat, etc., are opportunities afforded for the practice of religion, which no right-minded Catholic would neglect.... Social activities are always subject to the sanction of college authorities. Parents living a far distance from the college and who are not able to have their daughter home to visit, must supply a list, to the Dean, of such persons they allow their daughter to visit."²²

In the unlikely event that the written rules were unclear, individual Sisters of Charity enforced the rules by living alongside students in residence. Women religious (sisters) themselves were required to conform to extremely strict and uniform customs—including enforced silence, supervised recreation, and mandatory lights out regardless of their age—and anecdotal advice suggests that they imposed similar expectations on students in residence. The presence of women religious in their habits would have reminded students of their expected behaviour.²³

Under the presidency of Sister Wallace, revisions to curricula, governance, and sectarianism were swift. These changes emanated not only from Wallace's wish to modernize MSVU, but also to attract students in an increasingly competitive market, to satisfy the non-sectarian requirements of public funding, and create a more distinct identity for MSVU. In the first issue of the student newspaper, *The Picaro*, in 1965, Wallace was quoted as saying, "The Mount must be noticeably different than other universities. It is not and so it must change."²⁴

Wallace's first presidential report suggested that an emphasis on morality and Catholicism had led to isolation at MSVU, which interfered with "excellence" in women's education. Wallace pursued an agreement for MSVU students to take Dalhousie courses. She explained, "it was important for the Catholic girls at the Mount to go to Dalhousie for programs, where they would be out of the protected element."²⁵ In the same vein, that year's student calendar made special reference to Old Testament and New Testament courses being "open to non-Catholics."²⁶ The following year, in 1966-67, sectarianism was no longer part of the university's "purpose," according to the student calendar:

- a) to promote the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge;
- b) to further the total development – intellectual, social and physical – of those participating in the life of university;
- c) to serve in the betterment of society.²⁷

Similarly, moral suasion around strict faith practice was replaced with "encouragement": "Catholic students are encouraged to make participation in the Eucharist Liturgy and other religious observances a habit of their lives but such participation is not compulsory."²⁸ While it is hard to know how much the behavior of Catholic students changed, by 1971 half of MSVU students were *not* Catholic.

The modernization of MSVU under Wallace's leadership led to increased student enrollment, governance restructuring, and greater public funding. Between the academic years 1964-65 (the year before Wallace assumed the presidency) and 1973-74 (her final year), the number of full-time students more than doubled, from 507 to 1,179, which paralleled university enrollment in the province.²⁹ The Nova Scotia provincial government began funding university operating budgets in 1960, and in 1965, a royal commission recommended significantly increased federal government funding to universities.³⁰ MSVU competed successfully in this expanded public funding environment, receiving a six fold increase in government grants during Wallace's presidency, from less than \$200,000 in 1965 to 2.2 million in 1973.³¹ Within the first year of her

presidency, in order to satisfy the granting of the new university charter by the provincial government, university governance shifted away from the control of the governing council of the Sisters of Charity, to an eighteen-member, predominantly lay board that included two students. This was closely followed by the creation of an academic senate with significant lay faculty and student involvement in 1967-68.³² Finally, the expectations for student behavior relaxed with the introduction of new residence rules in 1967-68, which allowed students “considerably more freedom with regard to activities in the buildings and with regard to leaves.”³³

Confronting Challenges at Mount Saint Vincent

In addition to the reforms of governance and curricula common to many universities in the 1960s, Catherine Wallace mounted a program to deal with challenges specific to MSVU. These included addressing their lost niche as the only Halifax Catholic post-secondary institution that accepted women, integrating second-wave feminism into the College's mandate, and negotiating the Sisters of Charity's increasingly contentious ownership of MSVU. How she confronted these issues was pivotal.

Wallace began her presidency just as the Second Vatican Council was finishing. As a religious sister and the president of a Catholic university, Wallace was doubly invested in Vatican II. The convening of approximately 2,500 “fathers” in Rome to bring the church “into the modern world,” was considered the most monumental event in the Roman Catholic Church since the Council of Trent four centuries earlier. Combined, the sixteen documents promulgated by the Council brought overt changes for lay and vowed Catholics alike.³⁴ Perhaps most noticeably, the language of the mass changed from Latin to the vernacular, and during the mass, the priest faced the people. In calling for a fundamental reconsideration of the purpose and governance of religious congregations, Vatican II had an enormous impact on women religious.³⁵ On the positive side, these changes allowed much more personal and professional autonomy for individual sisters and made it easier for those not suited to religious life to leave. On the negative side, the loss of a corporate purpose and identity adversely affected recruitment.³⁶ Many disillusioned women religious in Canada sought dispensations from their vows, and very few young women entered religious life. In the decade after Vatican II, the number of women religious fell by almost a third, from 66,000 to 44,127.³⁷

Sister Catherine Wallace was among the many women religious who welcomed the potential of Vatican II to allow them to realign their goals with the needs of the modern world, and to enjoy more central roles in their Church. Wallace is a good example of the “new nun” of the post-Vatican II era. She embraced the unprecedented and deeply consultative process of renewal that instituted many changes in the Sisters of Charity, including a significant decrease in hierarchical governance, the participation of sisters in individual and group counselling and consciousness raising, and a stronger connection with the laity. She also came to prefer secular dress to the habit she had worn for her first two decades as a sister. Of course, not all Sisters of Charity were as optimistic as Wallace. The rapidity of change shook many sisters to their very cores and produced a crisis of identity and purpose for the congregation. Among the unanticipated consequences was the permanent departure of four hundred Sisters of Charity from the congregation between 1965 and 1975, and the decision of those remaining to withdraw from most of their schools and hospitals to work more directly with the poor as the Council had encouraged.³⁸ These outcomes, which were in keeping with those of other North American congregations, transformed MSVU, and it fell mainly on Wallace to negotiate how—and even *whether*—MSVU would continue as a university for Catholic women. The biggest questions were whether MSVU

still fit the Sisters of Charity's post-Vatican II mandate, and if the congregation could still afford its financial subsidization of MSVU.³⁹

The University had become a growing source of controversy among the Sisters of Charity. As Canada's only degree-granting women's post-secondary institution, MSVU was in many ways the congregation's flagship institution; the president of MSVU (always a Sister of Charity until 1978) was also the only female president of a Canadian degree-granting post-secondary institution, and thus the only woman member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Sister Francis d'Assisi, MSVU president from 1954 to 1965, had been the first woman to serve in this capacity and Wallace was the second. This nationally-recognized leadership in providing high-quality education for Catholic lay and vowed women was a source of pride and good publicity. MSVU was invaluable to the congregation both as the main source of recruits to the congregation, and as the main training ground for new entrants. There were, however, many demands on religious congregations, and difficult choices had to be made. For example, the congregation had never sent missionaries to Africa or Latin America despite receiving requests to do so, which disappointed some sisters who believed the congregation should spend more resources assisting impoverished people locally and globally. Some sisters considered the subsidization of the University's operating expenses unjustifiable. A third issue was frustration within the University among sister-professors who felt too restricted, doubly 'supervised' by the president of the university as well as by other congregational authorities. In the early 1960s, sister-professors complained that the lay students and lay professors had disproportionately more freedom.⁴⁰

Wallace was sympathetic to some of the criticism of the university from within the congregation. She ultimately believed, however, that in the turbulent post-Vatican II era, MSVU held an important leadership role for the congregation: the success of the university and the congregation were interdependent. Moreover, educating lay women in the late-1960s' post-Vatican II and feminist eras could be highly propitious. Wallace was excited by the potential of MSVU to raise women's societal role through personal development and education. In her personal notes, Wallace wrote: "I believe that how our college goes, so will our [congregation] go. Certainly so will our young sisters go. We cannot work with them in the vacuum that we have now as far as the college is concerned."⁴¹

Wallace was frustrated with members of the congregation who did not appreciate the broad-scale importance of MSVU. She hinted in the conclusion of her 1966-67 President's Report, that naysayers were making her job at MSVU difficult:

The whole future of women's colleges, Catholic universities and the involvement of religious in the administration of institutions of higher education are questions being at present discussed in the public forum. At such a time, when our very existence is being examined and questioned by the world, by the Church, and by the government, understanding and support from the congregation are of crucial importance. These conclusions ... require honest confrontation and clear decisions if we are to continue to assume with joy and faith our responsibilities.⁴²

In 1968, that lack of support for Wallace became clearer when she was shut out of elections to general chapter, which would direct the congregation's governance for the next four years. According to the congregational historian, Theresa Corcoran, SCH, Wallace always had loyal supporters, but for those sisters who felt religious life was changing too quickly, Wallace had become a lightning rod for their anger. This group opposed Wallace's election, "fearful of her persuasive power."⁴³ In Corcoran's words, "For [Wallace] who had never experienced

anything but success, this was at first a bewildering blow, then a demoralizing blow. Here was an open repudiation of all that she had worked for....⁴⁴ Wallace refused to let her name stand for a second term as president of MSVU and made alternate plans to go to Asmara, Eritrea to assist in modernizing a Catholic university.⁴⁵ Because of a civil war in Eritrea, however, Wallace returned to Halifax. Every member of the MSVU Board signed a letter asking for Wallace to continue as president, and, within a few weeks, she agreed.⁴⁶

The tensions between the Sisters of Charity and MSVU continued, however, culminating in 1970-71 when the governing council of the Sisters of Charity *almost* divested itself of MSVU. The Sisters were facing a financial crisis, in part due to outstanding mortgages on many buildings, including the \$7 million, 700-bed motherhouse, which had opened in 1958. With the loss of 400 sisters in the post-Vatican II era, fewer buildings were needed, and the salaries of those sisters who departed (most of whom had public school teachers' salaries) were no longer contributing toward the mortgages. The congregation had to make strategic decisions, especially about the institutions they subsidized, including several hospitals and MSVU.⁴⁷ The issue was first raised with the Board of Governors in 1970, and a year later representatives of the Sisters of Charity reported to the Board that the congregation had decided it must, "divest itself as far as possible of ownership of the major institutions. MSVU is considered a major institution. In light of this ... the Board was asked to recognize the ... necessity of [the Board assuming ownership of MSVU.]"⁴⁸

Devastated that the congregation would consider abandoning MSVU, Wallace provided the Board of Governors with her resignation in a confidential meeting in August 1970. She further requested that a public announcement of her resignation be drafted immediately by the Public Relations Department.⁴⁹ The Board stalled on making such an announcement, however, hoping Wallace could be convinced to stay. She did accept a further three-year appointment in March 1971 when it was decided the congregation would *not* give up MSVU, but trust had been permanently lost between her and the congregation.⁵⁰

Making Mount Saint Vincent "noticeably different"

One of the most serious challenges MSVU faced in the mid-1960s was uncertain enrollments, which were caused by a combination of shifting congregational demographics and priorities as well as increased competition in the post-secondary landscape. The main threat came from Halifax's other Catholic post-secondary institution, Saint Mary's University.

Whereas a majority of MSVU students had been young Sisters of Charity until the 1940s, by the late 1960s entrants to the congregation slowed to a trickle, and therefore the number of sister-students at MSVU also dropped. By 1967, only 85 of the University's 627 students (<14%) were sisters.⁵¹ This could be viewed as a successful transition by MSVU in attracting lay, fee-paying students in a competitive environment—by the mid-1960s Nova Scotia had five other universities that accepted women.⁵² However, the healthy enrolment of lay women students was threatened almost immediately. Just months into her presidency, Wallace was informed by Archbishop James Hayes that Halifax's Catholic men's university, Saint Mary's, was considering coeducation. While MSVU was owned and operated by the Sisters of Charity, Saint Mary's was owned by the Archdiocese of Halifax and administered by the Jesuits. Both parties subsidized Saint Mary's operation, but rising costs were making the arrangement unsustainable. The board of Saint Mary's, of whom the Archbishop was the chair, argued that an amalgamation of Saint Mary's with MSVU would make for one economically-viable institution. St Mary's proposal, however, did not acknowledge the qualifications of MSVU's full-time sister-professors—most of whom had PhDs—or the Sisters' history of financial self-sufficiency. The fifteen members of the MSVU Board of Governors, four of whom were Sisters of Charity,⁵³ refused the amalgamation proposal,

insulted that in the proposed scenario the Sisters' only administrative position would be Dean of Women, and that they could offer degrees only in office management and nursing, while all other degrees would carry Saint Mary's seal on the diploma. As the leader of the congregation said in an interview many years later, the Sisters of Charity, "had invested too much in [MSVU] over the years, and were too highly qualified now to become 'baby sitters and house maids for the Jesuits.'"⁵⁴

The Sisters rightly feared that, particularly in the social climate of the 1960s, most prospective young Catholic women would prefer a co-educational institution to a women-only institution. When the amalgamation proposal with MSVU failed, Saint Mary's began accepting women students in 1968. MSVU, in turn, was pressured to identify a new niche to maintain its enrollment levels, having lost its niche as Halifax's only Catholic university that accepted women. As early as 1965, Wallace had argued (as quoted earlier): MSVU had to be "noticeably different than other universities."⁵⁵ The competition from Saint Mary's cemented her decision.

Wallace set out to build a unique identity for MSVU by embedding many of the goals of the contemporary feminist movement in MSVU's mandate. The Sisters of Charity were already part of the broader feminist movement of the 1960s. According to Sister Geraldine Anthony (1919-2005), an MSVU English professor, women religious were among those "profoundly influenced" by the Women's Liberation Movement.⁵⁶ In fact, as a women-only, self-governing organization, dedicated to women's education, the Sisters of Charity were implicitly feminist from the time of their founding in 1856. The late-1960s combination of Vatican II renewal of religious congregations with the secular feminist movement encouraged a feminist awareness within congregations that often exceeded secular society. For example, the long consultative process that transformed women's religious congregations included study and focus groups that were inevitably "consciousness-raising" for many sisters.⁵⁷ One of the highest profile leaders of the North American feminist movement, Betty Friedan, acknowledged women religious' roles in the movement, stating that the, "emergence of the American nun from the cloister to define and assert her personhood in society" was one of the most significant aspects of the 1960s women's movement.⁵⁸

Catherine Wallace was among the sister-professors at MSVU who believed that Canada's only women's degree-granting post-secondary institution had a duty to be shaped by and even to lead the feminist movement. When she became president, Wallace chose to anchor the university's revitalized mandate in second wave feminism, a decision that addressed several timely and related issues, including strengthening the institution's reputation and identity. This revitalized identity, in turn, attracted new students at a time when some of MSVU's traditional pool of young Catholic women recruits had chosen to attend Saint Mary's. It also engaged the current faculty and attracted new faculty. At the same time, Wallace had to be strategic about advertising *how* feminist the revitalized MSVU would be in order to avoid criticism for "going too far."

Soon after her appointment as president, Wallace developed an agenda that reinforced MSVU's historical commitment to women's education, while updating its tenants to reflect the modern women's movement. Her three pillars were: raising women's consciousness to recognize sexual inequality; educating women for the public and professional positions in which they were so underrepresented; and employing the latest social science research techniques to study women's roles and status. Wallace believed this combination of personal, professional, and intellectual development of women would benefit not only MSVU, but the women's movement more generally; furthermore, she knew she could defend these philosophies for the advancement of women by referring to Vatican II documents. Wallace wanted MSVU to be not just a Halifax-area

Catholic women's university, but a high-profile North American women's university. If successful, she would not just solve the institution's enrollment issues, but give the institution's students, faculty, administrators, and Board of Governors a mandate that would attract national and international attention. Wallace unveiled her three-pronged approach regarding women's personal and academic development in her installation address and implemented it in conjunction with the faculty and board of governors over the next decade.

Wallace's installation on 19 March 1966 signaled MSVU's claim on the regional and national post-secondary landscapes, and aligned its goals with the feminist movement. Compared to previous presidential installments, Wallace's invitation list included many more dignitaries, including local and provincial politicians and the presidents of universities across the country. Several hundred people attended the event, which lasted the entire day, and the premier, Robert Stanfield, gave the keynote address.⁵⁹ As Theresa Corcoran, SCH, noted in the official history of the university, the symbolic draping of Wallace's new, specially-made and "feminine" academic gown *over* her habit was controversial because the habit was still sacrosanct [figure 1], but just a small sign of what was to come.⁶⁰ She was the only woman president of a degree-granting institution in Canada and she was ready to lead in a way no other MSVU President had.

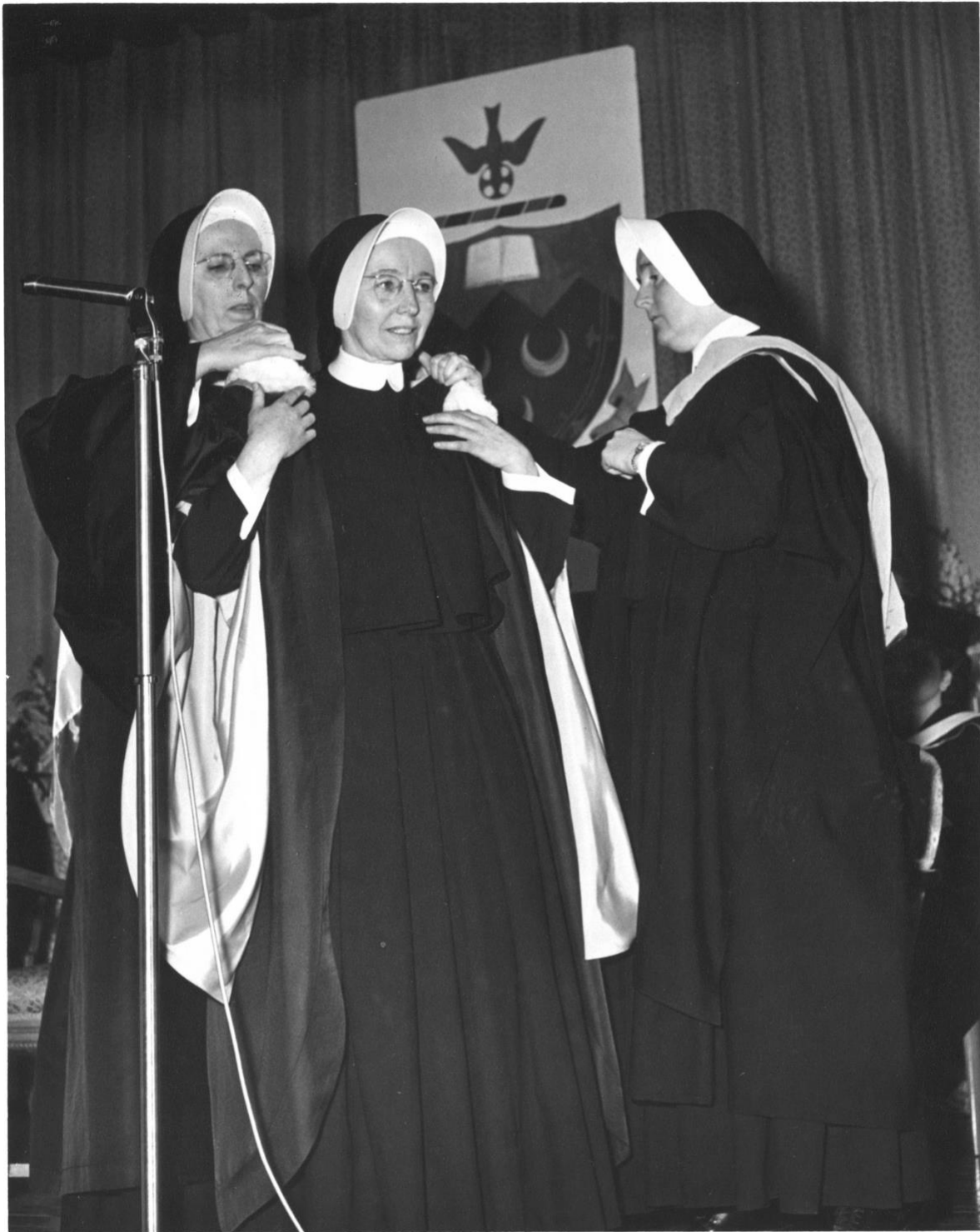


Figure 1: Sister Alice Michael (Catherine) Wallace (centre) being assisted into her robe by Mother Maria Gertrude (Irene) Farmer (left) and Sister Margaret Mary (Anna) Maloney (right) after being installed as the fourth president of Mount Saint Vincent College. March 19, 1966. SCHalifax Archives #45. Photo courtesy of Sisters of Charity, Halifax, Archives.

Wallace's installation address began by highlighting MSV's long history in the Canadian post-secondary landscape, acknowledging the Sisters of Charity's experience in women's education and its mandate to help women enter into the professions and public life. Her description of future plans started with the anticipated acceptance of MSVU's application for university status, recently submitted to the Nova Scotia Legislature and formally accepted in April 1966. Then, she no doubt took a deep breath before continuing to address the large audience, including many male politicians, church officials, and members of her own congregation, with what she referred to as "plans not so simple to describe ... [which] can only be understood against the rather controversial background of women in the world."⁶¹ Citing feminist scholars who deplored women's absence not just from public life but from the historical record, she explained: "the attitude that helped create this situation—that woman is not a natural, essential participant in public life—is an attitude which is of great concern at this moment to our social scientists."⁶² She described the evolution of history that saw women's increasing irrelevance as helpmate to her husband (as the industrial revolution encouraged the single breadwinner model) and as carer of her children (as the state took over education). She argued that increasing the number of women going out to work was only a partial solution to this problem: "But with attitudes and economic conditions as they are, this often results merely in a woman unhappy in two worlds instead of one."⁶³ Now two-thirds through her address, Wallace made her main point:

A first step in this direction..., would seem to be, *to change the attitude of woman herself*. Why not in our vocational schools, technical colleges, and universities, educate women [sic] to view her adult life as a whole from beginning to end. Ordinarily this would consist of three phases, each dominated by a single function: the first phase, by education and training; the second, by child-bearing and family life; and the third by education put to cultural and economic use.⁶⁴

Wallace was employing a tactic that Corcoran has described as, "soft-spoken earnestness that disguised an aggressive determination to succeed."⁶⁵ As such, many in the audience may have missed how revolutionary Wallace's agenda was. She was identifying, and looking to address Betty Friedan's "The problem that has no name": many women were unfulfilled by motherhood.⁶⁶ This common dissatisfaction might explain why married women had increasingly joined the labour force since the Second World War, not that—as Wallace pointed out—economists, politicians, policy-makers, or researchers had really explored the issue. There too Wallace was naming the problem: when married women go to work they are poorly remunerated and unsupported by infrastructure such as day care. Years later, Wallace reflected on her decision to speak about women's structural inequality at her installation: "I knew it was totally non-university style for a president to talk about women.... [E]very installation I've been at had talked about intellectual things. Here I was talking about women. Now [in 1991] these things are old fashioned and I wouldn't believe in most of them, but at the time they were very controversial."⁶⁷ Wallace not only pursued these controversial issues—changing women's attitudes, exploring the three-phases of married-women's lives, and addressing sexual inequality—during her presidency, she also put them on the national agenda through her submission on behalf of MSVU to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

Royal Commission on the Status of Women

Just eleven months after her installation speech, Sister Catherine Wallace and her colleagues at MSVU were invited to integrate MSVU's feminist agenda with the broader feminist movement. Prime Minister Lester Person called the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) in February 1967, in response to public pressure from women, "to investigate women's

status and make recommendations to enhance female equality.”⁶⁸ Many historians consider the commission a “watershed” moment for Second Wave Feminism, even though it has also received criticism for its disproportionate emphasis on middle-class women and liberal feminism.⁶⁹ Part of the rationale for the commission was the same argument that Wallace had used in her installation speech: “that women were lifelong, not temporary, members of the workforce,” and needed “easier access to education and to jobs... especially the mothers of families.”⁷⁰ As such, the RCSW showed how prescient Wallace’s vision was. Wallace believed that MSVU was ideally suited to make a submission. In her words: “the Mount really was terribly important at the time, because clearly we were seeing things, way ahead of things.”⁷¹ Ever the strategist, Wallace used the MSVU brief to the Commission to strengthen her own agenda at the Mount and to position herself as one of the key academic spokesperson when the RCSW published its final report in 1970.

The MSVU submission to the RCSW argued that the institution had relevant insight on women’s status, based on, “recent experience of our continuing education department in encouraging more mature women to return to university studies.”⁷² It expanded on the “controversial” topic to which Wallace had referred in her installation speech: not all women were fulfilled by family life, and they were therefore likely to re-enter the workforce after having children. In addition, Wallace argued, more and more women were pressured for economic reasons to work in paid labour after having children. The brief put forth Wallace’s fundamental feminist principle, “to educate women to see her life as a whole but consisting of three phases—the first, education and training, the second, child bearing and family life, and the third, education put to cultural and economic use in society.... We believe it is the responsibility of the universities, the community, and governments to work to remove the obstacles now in the way of these goals and to provide easier access to education and to jobs for women, especially to mothers of families.”⁷³

As with Wallace’s installation speech a few months earlier, the MSVU brief argued that the best way to motivate women to pursue post-secondary education was through counselling. While young women usually had access to career counselling in high schools, it was less accessible for “mature women.” Doubly important, counselling was “not only for choosing the field of study ... but in overcoming her fear of failure, in coping with family problems that may result, and in helping her to become aware of the jobs .”⁷⁴ Following this step—once more women had been convinced through counselling of the value of post-secondary education—the brief recommended that such barriers as inadequate childcare and financial cost be removed to allow women to enter university, that courses be available part-time and at accessible times, and, most importantly, that women’s paid work no longer be considered “supplementary” but rather essential and appropriately remunerated contributions to the economy.⁷⁵

The MSVU submission included results of questionnaires of MSVU’s current students and married alumni, as well as comparisons of women’s and men’s university attendance and salaries in selected fields.⁷⁶ The combination of statistical evidence and pragmatic recommendations were exactly what historian Joan Sangster argues were most favoured by commissioners.⁷⁷ In fact, in a 1991 oral interview, Wallace noted that one of the commissioners, Doris Ogilvie (1919-2012), a graduate of MSVU who went on to become a deputy judge in New Brunswick, had confided to Wallace that the MSVU submission was quoted so much in the final draft recommendations that the commissioners were embarrassed that one group “took over.”⁷⁸ This is difficult to prove because the final report usually did not reference its sources, however, “Chapter 3: Education,” contains many points that the MSVU brief also made, especially in sections on “Continuing Education,” “Flexibility Needed”, “Financial Support,” and “Educational Television.”⁷⁹

Wallace argued in the RCSW submission that counselling was “the most pressing need in education.”⁸⁰ Whereas she only hinted in her installation address *why* she considered counselling for mature women so important, she was explicit in the RCSW brief. In fact, the final report of the RCSW identified and directly quoted Wallace’s argument that marriage diminished women and therefore counselling was often necessary to help a married woman see herself again “as a total person,”

The president of Mount St. (sic) Vincent University in Halifax spoke about this.... ‘the women who are returning to the university have shown us that there are problems that three years ago we did not know existed.... [T]he married woman coming back to the university is not the woman who left university in terms of security, or aggressiveness, of being aware that she is a person, or an individual who is independent... it is quite evident that during the time away from the university and within the complementary relationship of marriage, the woman has let it do something to her that makes her less a total person by herself.’⁸¹

In some ways, this was one of the stronger statements in the report, surpassing the most common, liberal feminist concerns of unequal pay or access to the professions, with a claim implying that marriage *damaged* women would have surprised many that a woman religious had named this particular issue.

The fact that the MSVU submission was so often quoted by the Commissioners in their final report, and that Wallace presented strong arguments but did not act like a particularly ‘fierce’ feminist, partly explains how she became a nationally-recognized spokesperson for the reception of the RCSW. In 1973 Wallace was invited to give a series of talks at the University of British Columbia, which she titled, “Women in the Just Society: A three year assessment of the implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.” One of her main points was her concern that while 39 of 167 recommendations concerned marriage, they were likely to be misunderstood. She returned to her advocacy for women unfulfilled by motherhood:

[W]hile some women are still content with their role of wife and mother, some are not. The latter are concerned about the dependent role a woman is expected to assume in marriage. They are disturbed that marriage involves more of a change in the legal and social status of a woman than a man. They are perturbed that a woman’s position in society is almost entirely dependent on that of her husband. They are not satisfied that a woman’s satisfactions come merely from her husband’s and children’s achievements. And they are conscious that even their traditional role of child bearing has lost prestige in the eyes of a society concerned about population control.⁸²

Implementing Wallace’s Vision

Wallace had repeatedly identified three goals for a revitalized MSVU:

- (1) raising women’s own awareness through education and counselling about the three phases of life;
- (2) offering education suitable to these three phases, including through continuing education;
- (3) developing a research focus on women through courses, a special library collection, and disciplinary research on women.⁸³

The 1967-68 student calendar showed the early implementation of these goals. Having established MSVU’s credibility through its history, the calendar folded Wallace’s three-pronged plan into its “purpose”:

It offers courses in areas of special interest to women; is concerned about adjusting the regulations surrounding higher education to their special situations.

It is eager to provide them with counselling and continuing education, encourage research in areas of special interest to them and provide the tools and library facilities to carry this on.⁸⁴

Wallace had consistently prioritized counselling for students, especially for married women returning to post-secondary education after having children, who were likely to need counselling after having become “less a total person.”⁸⁵ Early in Wallace's presidency, counselling services were made available to full and part-time students taking either credit or non-credit courses. In the same vein, the first mature continuing education students were provided with coaching by professors or fellow students, as well as study and writing skills opportunities. According to Corcoran, the university embraced the philosophy that helping mature students *adjust* to university was as important as the in-class teaching.⁸⁶ A 1968 article in an Ontario Institute for Studies in Education publication summarized that the MSVU Continuing Education Department as making, “every effort to encourage and assist the mature woman in working out a wholesome compromise among her varied responsibilities.”⁸⁷ The phrase “wholesome compromise,” is a reminder of the sexism that Wallace and her colleagues at MSVU had to constantly negotiate; they regularly reassured the public that mature women students' families would not suffer when mothers returned to post-secondary education.

Wallace usually referred to “counselling and education” together. Several new programs, therefore, encouraged women to understand their historical and contemporary sexual oppression in the spirit of the ‘consciousness raising’ of the feminist movement. New credit and non-credit courses offered through standard degree programs, continuing education, or extension courses addressed women's issues. One popular non-credit course, “My World,” was first offered in 1972-73 as an eight-week course for “the homemaker” with “free babysitting.”⁸⁸ The course, organized by recently-hired Dr Mairi Macdonald of the Continuing Education Department, filled to capacity in its first year and the following year it was repeated and taught by two participants from the previous year. In subsequent years an abbreviated version with four instead of eight sessions was offered in several locations off campus.⁸⁹

The main credit course developed with the intention of consciousness-raising was “Perspectives on Women,” a course that fulfilled Wallace's goal to further research on women's issues. Wallace is reported to have “ordered” departments to provide faculty to contribute to this new interdisciplinary, team-taught, two-semester course.⁹⁰ Wallace herself gave the first two lectures; the first, according to MSVU history professor Frances Early, “discussed the ideals and personalities, past and present, that have influenced attitudes towards women,” and the second assessed the RCSW final report as well as related reports on women.⁹¹ One of the earliest women's studies courses in the country, the success of “Perspectives on Women” led to the development of disciplinary-specific courses focussing on women, which subsequently led to a women's studies minor at MSVU in 1979 and a major in 1982. This is a fine example of Wallace's success in layering several goals, in this case promoting faculty research on women, developing a niche program to distinguish MSVU from other universities, and serving continuing education and full-time students with courses that interested them and that would assist their personal and professional development.

Ten years after Wallace introduced women's studies to MSVU, historian Veronica Strong-Boag proclaimed MSVU's women's studies “experiment” as “unprecedented in Canada, even perhaps in North America.”⁹² Rosemarie Sampson, a sister-professor of

psychology at MSVU involved in the first team-taught course, similarly acknowledged that the course Wallace pioneered led not only to a minor and major in women's studies, but also the establishment of the Institute for the Study of Women, the scholarly women's studies journal *Atlantis*, and the endowed Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies, all of which continue more than five decades later.⁹³

Wallace supported research into women's issues by making MSVU's 1967 Centennial project a women's library collection, a collection of books "by and about women," especially Canadian women.⁹⁴ In consultation with university librarian Sister Frances Delores, Wallace ensured wide publicity for the opening of the MSVU Women's Library Collection by Mount alumna and RCSW commissioner Judge Doris Ogilvie late in 1967. Alumnae financial donations and later corporate donations supported the constant replenishing of the collection.⁹⁵

Of Wallace's three main goals for transforming MSVU, continuing education for women was the one she most often mentioned, and to which she seemed most personally devoted. If MSVU could successfully mount a strong, varied, and accessible continuing education program, the institution would help recognize "the three phases of a woman's life" as Wallace had advocated in her installation speech, and in her brief to the RCSW.⁹⁶ Through continuing education, Wallace intended that married women with children could return to post-secondary education, including classes held on Saturdays and weekday evenings. Such education would help women who felt unfulfilled by being full-time 'at home' mothers, as well as those women who returned to the paid workforce out of economic necessity. For both groups, Wallace advocated the feminist principle that society must stop seeing these women's roles as merely supplementary to their husbands, but rather as long-term and remunerated fairly. Wallace's own mother had been forced to return to work in the early 1930s, but without an education she could only find very poorly remunerated work as a cleaner.⁹⁷ Wallace had also learned a great deal from the experience of mothers whose children she taught over the years, especially those in Vancouver in the 1950s.⁹⁸

In her installation speech, Wallace promised that a study of the needs of continuing education would begin before the end of 1966. She appointed Sister Helen Darte, a professor of French with a doctorate from Laval, to lead the new Department of Continuing Education, which would facilitate completing degrees on a part-time basis outside the usual daytime hours. More novel than its timetabling, however, was its entrance requirements. Having surveyed many Canadian universities about their continuing education admissions policies, the MSVU committee came up with their own, which waived grade 12 for applicants who were 25 years or older, and put them on probation for their first six courses. The successful completion of these six courses gave the mature, continuing education student the same status as other students.⁹⁹ In each of the next few years the required age for applicants was reduced. In 1971, the age requirement was dropped entirely, the new requirement being that the student must have been out of school for five years.¹⁰⁰

Wallace put a lot of resources into Continuing Education. She and Darte, the director, sought advice, including from outside the region and outside academia. In 1967-68, the continuing education program hired Dr. Virginia Senders of Simmons College in Boston, as well as Helen Traynor of the Women's Bureau of the federal Department of Labour, and psychologist Richard Shooter. The three put together a well-attended lecture series called "New Horizons," which helped mature women discern their options for returning to school.¹⁰¹ The continuing education program was deemed a big success. Inquiries for the program exceeded

seat availability 10:1, and in 1969, 55 of that year's graduates had entered through the continuing education program.¹⁰²

Wallace accomplished her modernizing of MSVU with a great deal of assistance from faculty and staff, yet she deserves credit for her clear focus on the three main goals she stated in her installation address, and repeated in the MSVU RCSW brief. By any measure the successful implementation of these goals transformed the university, and for the most part, they remain the broad goals of MSVU today. Less tangible, but equally important was the work Wallace did off campus promoting better conditions and opportunities for women and indirectly raising the status of MSVU as Wallace's own profile grew nationally and continued to grow after she left MSVU in 1975.

Wallace was the only woman president of a Canadian University between 1965 and 74.¹⁰³ Her role on the Board of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) brought attention to MSVU. Wallace served as chair of the AUCC's standing committee on the Status of Women in 1971-72; was elected vice-president of the board in 1972; and was elected president in 1973.¹⁰⁴ As president of AUCC, Wallace was in contact with many politicians and government officials. These meetings and relationships led to more opportunities for Wallace and MSVU. For example, in her role as president of AUCC, Wallace served on the selection Committee for the Order of Canada, through which she met Governor General Roland Michener. Not coincidentally, the spouse of the governor general, Norah Michener, received an honorary degree at Mount Saint Vincent soon after.¹⁰⁵ Wallace's appointments to other boards while she was president of MSVU included the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the Maritime Telegraph and Telephone Company, and the Canadian Development Corporation. She also served on the federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women.¹⁰⁶ Wallace's work on the AUCC no doubt led to her subsequent appointment to the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC), which began as soon as she finished her decade-long MSVU presidency.¹⁰⁷ Wallace's contributions both to the AUCC and to MPHEC are outside the scope of this article but certainly deserve further attention from historians.

Conclusion

Sister Catherine Wallace led the transformation of MSVU between 1966 and 1974 by focusing on two parallel agendas. The first included a modernization platform common to most North American universities at the time: making curricula more relevant to employment, deemphasizing the strict moral behavioural code for students, seeking government funding, and widening the governance structure to include public members, faculty, and students. The second agenda, specific to MSVU, was to find a niche that would distinguish MSVU from other universities and give it a more socially conscious mandate. Wallace's three-pronged, oft-repeated agenda for this second phase focused on education and counselling for women to understand their three phases of life; continuing education opportunities for mature women; and research into women's issues. Given that the university has continued to pursue Wallace's aims, her success seems clear. In fact, the five MSVU presidents who succeeded Wallace, serving from 1974 to 2006, all stressed the continuity of Wallace's vision in their own presidencies.¹⁰⁸

Questions remain about Wallace's approach and strategy. In the tradition to which so many women leaders have been unfairly subjected, journalist Harry Bruce in *Weekend Magazine* in 1973, stressed Wallace's appearance more than her accomplishments. Foretelling the likelihood that Wallace would be elected president of the AUCC, Bruce described her as sometimes having "more male admirers than Raquel Welch," "a remarkably attractive woman ... you feel you can put your arm around," and "one of Canada's least cantankerous ...

champions of the liberation of women.”¹⁰⁹ Surely these were all comments that would have annoyed and embarrassed Wallace. She would have recognized how such comments diminished her accomplishments. At the same time, Wallace herself said she was never a feminist “in the way other people were feminists.”¹¹⁰ Political Scientist Jill Vickers has argued that the Anglophone women’s movement in Canada was largely committed, “to the ordinary political process,” including that “dialogue is useful and may help promote change.”¹¹¹ Wallace’s strategy seems to fit this model, yet her concern for women on the margins (especially working-class and African Nova Scotia women) was too great to categorize her as merely a liberal feminist. Even her good friend and colleague, Henry Hicks, president of Dalhousie University from 1963 to 1980, warned her that, “she talked more about women’s rights and opportunities than was good for her.”¹¹²

Wallace was ultimately a diplomat and a strategist able to work within existing structures but aware that existing structures prevented the level of change that was necessary. Moreover, she was aware that her status as a woman religious, combined with her diplomacy and hard work, allowed her to ask hard questions and confront sexism publically in a way other women may not have been able. She had much in common with Sister Ann Ida Gannon (1915-), president of Mundelein College, the largest Catholic women’s college in the United States from 1957-75, who was also a feminist leader within her institution as well as in the wider American feminist movement.¹¹³ Unlike Gannon, who remained in religious life after finishing her term as president of Mundelein College, Wallace left religious life eight years after finishing her term as president of MSVU.

While Wallace was, as mentioned earlier, a fine example of “the new nun” of the post-Vatican II era, the cracks between her and her congregation widened during her presidency at Mount Saint Vincent. She left the congregation in 1982, at the age of 65. In a 1991 interview, Wallace explained that she left for a variety of reasons, but mainly because she did not feel she belonged anymore, and that she could, “no longer live being tolerated but not approved.”¹¹⁴ As president of a university, president of AUCC, and recipient of countless awards including thirteen honorary degrees and the Order of Canada, Wallace was placed in the limelight as few women religious were. Her celebrity, her feminist advocacy, and her ease with secular society, including the elite, made many members of her congregation nervous, if not downright jealous. Wallace was hurt that some members of her congregation did not seem to trust her judgement, and worse, that the governing council of the congregation were more ready to entertain complaints about Wallace than defend her. Such was the case in 1973 when she was criticized for the dress and jewelry she wore to accept her order of Canada [figure 2]. It is telling to contrast that 1973 photo with her installation photo of 1966 [figure 1] as an example of not only MSVU’s transformation, but Wallace’s own transformation. Wallace’s commitment to a more outward-looking vision for MSVU proved effective, yet many within her congregation condemned her for having abandoned her appropriate role as a Sister of Charity in the 1970s—not that the role of a woman religious could have been easily defined in that tumultuous era. The decade of Wallace’s presidency coincided with the decade after Vatican II when congregations were still discerning their new roles. One of Wallace’s honorary degree citations noted that she brought *aggiornamento*—the “bringing up-to-date that defined Vatican II—to MSVU, and that “that would be her continuing legacy.”¹¹⁵ Transforming MSVU is at least *one* of Wallace’s legacies. Her regional and national legacies within higher education and the feminist movement require more scholarly attention.



Figure 2: Sister Catherine Wallace receiving the Order of Canada, 1972. Courtesy of the Dalhousie University Photograph Collection (PC1), Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

¹ I would like to thank Dr Gillian Thompson, Lawrence Durling, Shelby Simpson, Andrew Horne, Sheilagh Martin, SCH, Lorraine d'Entremont, SCH, Mary Palarty, SCH, and the two anonymous peer reviewers for their valuable advice on this article.

² She was appointed in January, 1965 and installed March 19, 1966. Please note that when she took vows as a Sister of Charity, Catherine Wallace became known as Sister Alice Michael; after Vatican II, like most sisters, she reverted to her given name. To avoid confusion, her secular name will be used throughout this paper. There were several Catholic women's colleges in Canada, including Brescia and Loretto, but all were affiliated with universities that offered degrees. MSVU was the only women's post-secondary institution that granted degrees. Today,

many of the former Catholic colleges have become residences and do not offer courses. While no longer owned by the Sisters of Charity—they gave it to a lay board in 1988—and now accepting a limited number of male students (since 1977), MSVU had an enrollment of 1477 female and 649 male students in 2014.

<http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/aboutus/universityprofile/institutionalanalysis/commonuniversitydata/generalinformation.aspx>

³ The entrants needed training to work in the more than one hundred schools, six hospitals, and other social institutions the Sisters of Charity staffed across Canada and the eastern United States. MSVU offered programs in liberal arts, education, home economics, and office administration.

⁴ See for example, James Pistula, "Competing Ideals: Athletics and Student Radicalism at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus in the 1960s and 1970s," *Sport History Review* 34:1(2003): 60-80 and Patricia Jasen, "Student Activism, Mental Health, and English-Canadian Universities in the 1960s," *Canadian Historical Review* 92:3 (2011): 455-480.

⁵ *Ancestry.com*, 1920 US Census.

⁶ Although Canon Law did not allow taking of religious vows before the age of 18, the six months Wallace spent in the postulancy meant she would take her first temporary vows as a novice at the age of 18. Schools in which the Sisters of Charity taught were the main source of their entrants; several other young women from Wallace's school and with similar working-class, immigrant backgrounds were among the 51 women who entered in the fall of 1934.

⁷ Heidi MacDonald, "Coming of Age in the Convent During the Great Depression," *Changing Habits*, Elizabeth Smyth, ed. (Ottawa: Novalis Press, 2007), 86-103. Wallace did acknowledge that her family would have benefitted from her working and living at home, which her older sister did, but which Wallace said she never thought of at the time. Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), MC 1941, Catherine Wallace Fonds, "Dr Catherine Wallace, Interview 1," 22 February 1991, 3.

⁸ Wallace, Interview 1, 6-7.

⁹ Theresa Corcoran, SCH, *Mount Saint Vincent University: A Vision Unfolding, 1873-1988* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999), 176. Dalhousie University Archives, Dalhousie University Convocation [program], 1939, 2.

¹⁰ Wallace, Interview 1, 8-13.

¹¹ Wallace, Interview 1, 18-20; Wallace, Interview 2, 1; Corcoran, 177. Illich is best known as a critic of Western institutions, including in such books as *Deschooling Society* (1968). "Obituary: Ivan Illich," *Guardian*, 9 December 2002.

Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/dec/09/guardianobituarie.highereducation>

¹² The only exception was the eight sisters on the governing council, who were elected to their positions.

¹³ Corcoran, 175.

¹⁴ Wallace, Interview 2, 2.

¹⁵ In early 2017, I interviewed a former sister faculty member who taught in the Department of Education in the late 1960s and she was unaware that the congregation had seriously contemplated withdrawing from MSVC in the early 1970s because it was such a financial drain on the congregation.

¹⁶ There is a research centre on campus named The Catherine Wallace Centre for Women in Science, but this pales in comparison to other MSVC and MSVU presidents who have streets and buildings named after them.

- ¹⁷ Brian Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 283-89
- ¹⁸ Paul Axelrod, *Scholars and dollars: politics, economics, and the universities of Ontario, 1945-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 103. He was referring to non-denominational universities, but I think this refers to denominational universities as well.
- ¹⁹ Della Stanley, "The 1960s: The Illusions and Realities of Progress," *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, eds E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 441-437-441; Peter Kent, *Inventing Academic Freedom: The Strax Affair at the University of New Brunswick* (Halifax: Formac, 2012); and Robert Aguirre, *Ann Ida Gannon, BVM: A Lifetime of Leadership* (Chicago: Loyola University, 2014), 25-26.
- ²⁰ Corcoran, 212-3.
- ²¹ Mount Saint Vincent University Archives (MSVUA), *Mount Saint Vincent University Student Calendar*, 1964-65, "Purpose."
- ²² *Student Calendar*, 1964-65, "General Regulations."
- ²³ Catherine Gidney, *A Long Eclipse: The Liberal Protestant Establishment and the Canadian University, 1920-1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 34. Mandatory lights out was one of the main complaints of women religious during Vatican II renewal. While the moral code for male university students was less strict generally, in Catholic institutions run by priests and brothers, residences could still be highly regulated. In Nova Scotia's only co-educational Catholic post-secondary institution, St Francis Xavier, even male students were forced to sneak into the washrooms to study to circumvent the austere but mandatory 11pm lights out requirement before changes in the 1960s.
- ²⁴ Corcoran 190, fn 27.
- ²⁵ Wallace, Interview 2, 15.
- ²⁶ *Student Calendar*, 1964-65.
- ²⁷ *Student Calendar*, 1966-67.
- ²⁸ *Student Calendar*, 1970-71.
- ²⁹ University enrollment rose from 5,811 to 15, 820 in Nova Scotia from 1960 to 1970. Stanley, 438.
- ³⁰ Stanley, 440.
- ³¹ MSVUA, "Presidential Reports, 1964-65 to 1973-74," and Corcoran, 228; 354-55.
- ³² "Presidential Report, 1965-66," 2; "Presidential Report, 1967-68," 1; MSVUA, Senate Meetings, January 26, 1970.
- ³³ "Presidential Report, 1966-67," 3. For examples at other universities see, Gidney, 33, 35.
- ³⁴ For example: *Lumen Gentium: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (1964) to *Dignatatus Humanae: On the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious* (1965).
- ³⁵ *Perfectae Caritatis: Religious Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life* (1965).
- ³⁶ Patricia Wittberg, *From Piety to Professionalism and Back: Transformations of Organized Religious Virtuosity?* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 184.
- ³⁷ Marc A. Lessard and Jean Paul Montminy, *The Census of Religious Sisters in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Religious Conference, 1965), p. 274.
- ³⁸ Their decisions for leaving varied from one sister to the next but included believing that Vatican II teaching meant they could fulfil their vocation outside the convent; they never had a vocation and no longer felt guilty about leaving; a desire to marry; and grief for the loss of the

pre-Vatican II church. In 1975 membership had fallen to 1,335, compared to almost 1,700 in 1965. Sisters of Charity Halifax Archives (SCHA), "Governing Board Report, 1972-76, 5, File 1-5-4.

³⁹ The financial crisis in the congregation was caused by three factors: the loss of the salaries of the four hundred sisters whose departures had not been anticipated and the lack of entrants to take their places; the immense costs of retraining another large portion of the congregation for ministries other than in schools and hospitals; and a rising debt load related to a 1950s building campaign, including an 11 million dollar new motherhouse that had opened in 1958. Quite simply, the money formerly used to subsidize MSVU was now in high demand in other areas, especially paying off building loans. SCHA, File 1-5-12, "Chapter 1976."

⁴⁰ Geraldine Anthony, *SCH, Rebel, Reformer, Religious Extraordinaire: The Life of Sister Irene Farmer* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997), 262.

⁴¹ Corcoran, 178, fn 8.

⁴² "Presidential Report, 1966-67," 9.

⁴³ Corcoran, 201.

⁴⁴ Corcoran, 201.

⁴⁵ Wallace, Interview 2, 3-4.

⁴⁶ Corcoran, 202-03.

⁴⁷ SCHA, File 1-3-4, "Memo to the Sisters from Mother Maria, 1 August 67."

⁴⁸ MSVUA, Board of Governor Minutes, 9 December 1971. They ultimately did sell the Halifax Infirmary and St Elizabeth Hospital in Sydney, Cape Breton, to the province in 1972 and 1975 respectively, for a total of \$2,500,000, a portion of their value. (Mary Olga McKenna, *Charity Alive: Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Halifax, 1950-1980* (Boston: University Press of America 1998), 285-8, 293-5.

⁴⁹ MSVUA, Board of Governor Minutes, 20 Aug 1970.

⁵⁰ MSVUA, Board of Governor Minutes, 25 March 1971. See also, Wallace, Interview 2, 19-20.

⁵¹ Corcoran, 353-4, table 2.

⁵² Acadia, Dalhousie, St Francis Xavier, King's, Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, and Technical University of Nova Scotia.

⁵³ Corcoran, 181.

⁵⁴ Corcoran, 166, fn 33. In her recent MA thesis, Bridget Brownlow emphasizes the Sisters of Charity's failure to successfully negotiate an amalgamation with Saint Mary's, an analysis that ignores how much the terms favoured Saint Mary's, or the economic crisis that sparked the need for opening enrollment up to women students. The official history of MSVU, on the other hand, downplays the shift away from single gender post-secondary education in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, American Catholic men's universities Fordham and Notre Dame went coeducational in 1974 and 1971 respectively. Bridget E. Brownlow, "Secularization, Co-education and Conflict Management at Saint Mary's University, 1967-70," Master of Arts thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2012, 30-40.

⁵⁵ Corcoran 190, fn 27.

⁵⁶ Anthony, 139.

⁵⁷ During the renewal period, congregations, especially large ones such as the Sisters of Charity, held dozens of focus groups, workshops, and lectures to discern the future priorities of the congregation. These regularly included feminist topics on the role of women in the modern world. MSVU Education professor, Sister Mary Olga McKenna, identified the renewal process as a turning point: "until the time of Vatican II, women religious were perhaps the most

dependable but at the same time most expendable resources in the Church on the congregational, parochial, diocesan, and even global level,” but after Vatican II they had much more autonomy. McKenna, 194.

⁵⁸ Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister: Organizational decline in Catholic religious orders in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1993), 133.

⁵⁹ Corcoran, 180.

⁶⁰ Corcoran, 179.

⁶¹ MSVUA, Sister Alice Michael, “The Education of Women: An Address by Sister Alice Michael, PhD, on the occasion of her installation as President of Mount Saint Vincent University, 19 March 1966, 2.

⁶² Alice Michael, 3.

⁶³ Alice Michael, 4.

⁶⁴ Alice Michael, 4.

⁶⁵ Corcoran, 175.

⁶⁶ Betty Friedan, *Feminine Mystique* (Norton, 1963).

⁶⁷ Wallace, Interview 2, 10-11.

⁶⁸ Joan Sangster, “Invoking experience as evidence,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 92, 1 (2011): 136.

⁶⁹ Sangster, 138, fn 7; Barbara Freeman, “Framing feminine/feminist: English-language press coverage of the hearings of the royal commission on the status of women in Canada, 1968,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* vol 11 (1995): 11. I don’t think Wallace herself would have counted as a liberal feminist. She was actually very concerned about women outside the middle class—her reason for becoming a nun was to serve the poor—and in 1965 and 1968 she would have preferred to work with the poor in Latin American and Eritrea rather than become university president. Moreover, under her leadership, MSVU made inroads in attracting and supporting African-NS women students.

⁷⁰ Sangster, 139.

⁷¹ Wallace, Interview 2, 10.

⁷² Royal Commission on the Status of Women, Brief no. 350: Mount Saint Vincent University, 12 September, 1968, Halifax, 1.

http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c4882/1?r=0&s=1

⁷³ Brief no. 350, 1.

⁷⁴ Brief no. 350, 4.

⁷⁵ Brief no. 350, 3-5.

⁷⁶ Brief no. 350, Appendix i-vi.

⁷⁷ Sangster 136.

⁷⁸ Wallace, Interview 2, 10.

⁷⁹ *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (RCSW Report)*, 1970, Chapter 3: Education, 104-212. <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pco-bcp/commissions-ef/bird1970-eng/bird1970-eng.htm>

⁸⁰ Brief no. 350, 4.

⁸¹ *RCSW Report*, #107, 188, fn 42.

⁸² MSVUA, Dr Catherine Wallace, SC, “Women in the Just Society: A three year assessment of the implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Royal Commission the Status of Women to be delivered at UBC, 21 Nov 1973, 7-8.

⁸³ Corcoran, 183.

⁸⁴ *Student Calendar, 1967-68*. Unfortunately, the student calendar is not available for 1966-67, Wallace's first year as president. As if to quell potential controversy, the student calendar followed that purpose for MSVU with a *less feminist* purpose "according to the revised Charter of 1966": a) to promote the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge; b) to further the total development – intellectual, social and physical – of those participating in the life of university; c) to serve in the betterment of society. *Ibid*.

⁸⁵ *RCSW Report*, #107, 188, fn 42.

⁸⁶ Corcoran, 186.

⁸⁷ MSVU Archives, Catherine Wallace file, "Continuing Education in a Woman's University," [1968], 27.

⁸⁸ MSVUA, President's Report 1972-3, 8.

⁸⁹ Mairi MacDonald had over 20 years of experience in teaching and counselling in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Britain. Corcoran, 222 and MSVUA, *Insight* vol 2 issue 1 (Oct 1972): 20 .

⁹⁰ Frances Early, "Origins of women's history at Mount Saint Vincent University," *Acadiensis* 33, (2004): 74.

⁹¹ Early, 75.

⁹² Strong-Boag, Veronica. "Mapping Women's Studies In Canada: Some Signposts," *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET)/Revue De La Pensée Éducative* 17, no. 2 (1983): 100.

⁹³ Email Rosemarie Sampson to Heidi MacDonald, 6 June 2017. See for example, <http://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantis/index>

⁹⁴ Corcoran, 187.

⁹⁵ In 1985 Petro Canada endowed the library collection. Corcoran, 188.

⁹⁶ Alice Michael, 4.

⁹⁷ Wallace, Interview 1, 4.

⁹⁸ Wallace, Interview 1, 14.

⁹⁹ Corcoran, 185.

¹⁰⁰ Corcoran, 187.

¹⁰¹ Corcoran, 185.

¹⁰² According to Corcoran, so many sister-professors, including Catherine Wallace herself, had completed their degrees at night, on weekends, and during the summer, that they really knew how to run a successful continuing education program. Corcoran, 186.

¹⁰³ Pauline Jewett (1922-92) became president of Simon Fraser University in 1974. See Judith McKenzie, *Pauline Jewett: A Passion for Canada*, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999.

¹⁰⁴ Corcoran, 234.

¹⁰⁵ MSVUA, "Convocation Address," *Insight* vol 2 issue 1 (Oct 1972) 13

¹⁰⁶ Moira McDermott, "A Tribute to Catherine Wallace," [*Folia Montana*] October, 1991, 13-14

¹⁰⁷ McDermott, 13, and Corcoran, 245. Wallace's work on the MPHEC deserves its own article.

¹⁰⁸ Marilyn Porter and Keith Louise Fulton, eds., "The Leadership of Women: A Conversation Among Presidents of Mount Saint Vincent University," *Atlantis*, vol 24:1 (Fall/Winter 1999): 61-69.

¹⁰⁹ Harry Bruce, "[Catherine Wallace]," *Weekend Magazine* no. 22 (April 14, 1973), p. 23-24

¹¹⁰ Wallace, Interview 2, 16.

¹¹¹ Jill Vickers, "The Intellectual Origins of the Women's Movements in Canada," *Challenging times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, Constance Backhouse and David Flaherty, eds. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University press, 1992), 40.

¹¹² Corcoran, 234.

¹¹³ Aguirre, 11-35. For example, just as Wallace was involved with the RCSW, Gannon was active co-chair of ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) Illinois in the mid-1970s, and also served on many public and private boards.

¹¹⁴ Wallace, Interview 2, 17-20.

¹¹⁵ From Memorial University honorary degree citation. Corcoran 239, fn51.